Dissertation Prospectus: Advertising as Cultural Production

Andrew C Cohen

Department of Sociology – Yale University

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> *Doubtless the Yale School of Advertising is even now taking shape.*
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> – James B Twitchell, *Adcult USA* (1996: 9)

Central Research Question

How do advertising professionals evaluate campaign ideas? How do they generate and identify a creative idea? How do they package and perform these ideas for their clients?

The common sense assumption is that ads are meant to make us want to buy stuff. We believe these ads are made for *us*, put in front of us because some advertiser thinks this is the best way to sell us that product. In short, we believe we are seeing some kind of concerted effort at salesmanship. Furthermore, we assume the advertisements we see are someone else's best ideas, hashed out in an 'ah-ha' moment of brilliance.

But if that's the case, why are there so many bad advertisements, so many boring commercials, so many obnoxious radio ads, so many unremarkable billboards? I discuss this with Cole, a copywriter at an advertising agency in a major Midwestern city. Cole suggests that the client may be more to blame than the advertising agency:

> *Cole (copywriter)*: I used to see ads, commercials, whatever, billboards, and I'd be like, 'oh my god, the agency that did that should be embarassed.' And then I was here for like

six months, and I totally changed my perspective. I would see a shitty billboard and I'd be like, 'I wonder what round one looked like.' I don't judge the agency that much anymore.

This kind of answer reflects only the tip of the advertising iceberg: an industry with myriad moving parts and personnel who collaborate according to institutional logics to produce the advertisements that we as a consuming audience love, hate, or ignore altogether.

My dissertation dives into the world of advertising agencies to explore the day-to-day process of making advertisements. I argue that advertising campaigns are the product of complex social interactions and performances, in which some ideas make it through while many others do not. The processes of making ad campaigns are culturally meaningful ones; that is, the particularities of each campaign are embedded in a more general cultural process of meaning-making which makes some outcomes more probable than others.

Who Cares?

This topic speaks to a major industry in the U.S. economy. In 2013, companies spent more than $170 billion on advertising (Statista 2015a). The U.S. advertising industry itself, which consists of over 100,000 firms of varying types, has revenues of over $140 billion (Bloomberg 2015). That's a lot of money being made by companies supposedly "building brands, creating buzz, and driving sales" (Bloomberg 2015). But what are these companies really *doing* all day? Where do the campaign ideas these agencies produce come from? What shapes the campaigns we see?

And we definitely see advertising campaigns. As a society, we are inundated with advertisements. It's tough to know exact numbers; a classic guess says we are each exposed to 5,000 marketing messages per day, while more conservative measures still suggest 300 to 700 daily doses of marketing materials (What's Working in Marketing 2014). The exact number, of course, depends on what you define as advertising. TV commercials and billboards are obvious

enough, but what about a display in the grocery store? A smartphone app meant to interact with a company? A sponsored music concert? The logo on your clothes? Each of these is an example of the outcome of making an ad campaign.

Depending on which scholars you read, this inundation with advertising messages is either the glue that holds us together or the wedge that drives us apart. Scholars in favor of – and often admittedly enamored with – advertisements contend they provide cultural material for common reference points in modern society (Twitchell 1996); advertisements are the mythology of capitalist society, with Nike, Coca-Cola, Apple, and a slew of other brands constituting the residents of a veritable Mt. Olympus. On the other side, scholars who critique advertising (and the culture industries more generally) raise cries of exploitation and alienation, pointing to the ideologies implicit in advertisements that, internalized, lead to the continued degrading of human beings and societies (Williamson 2002).

But for all the fantastic scholarship around advertisements, such discussions focus largely on the advertisements themselves and their reception. They treat advertising as a thing very much there, a slumbering beast awoken by the all the noise of the industrial revolution, who now trolls the land in search of citizens to corrupt, commodify, and consume.

On the other hand, the hit television show *Mad Men* has offered a different perspective: *ads are made by people like you and me.* The fictional television show, which follows the dramatic lives of the fictional employees of an advertising firm in the 1960s, has been for many the first glimpse into the production process of advertisements. *Mad Men* gave viewers a glimpse of the man (or people) behind the curtain, a brief insight into the social structures and processes of the advertising agency. However, *Mad Men* is a purely fictional account (save the occasional

references to real events in advertising and American culture at the time) – and an outdated one, in a time before several key roles, like account planners and digital designers, were introduced into typical agency models.

How are advertisements made now? What are the guiding structures of social organization and cultural meaning behind advertising production? Why *that* ad, done *that* way, and not any other? In other words, what is the anonymous social machine, the "ad world," behind the anonymously-authored, client-sponsored advertisement?

Prior Literature

Exploring advertising agencies is worthwhile because few social scientists have bothered to do as much. There are a few notable exceptions, of course: Brian Moeran's (1996) ethnography of a Japanese Advertising Agency, Daniel Miller's (2003) forays into agencies in the Caribbean (2003), and Tim Malefyt's (2003) anthropological recollections of his time on Madison Avenue are all noteworthy accounts amongst others. Unfortunately, these accounts are all dated, written prior to the proliferation of digital and social media, which is now commonplace.

Out-datedness aside, the conclusion of these social scientists is fairly straightforward: advertisements and their valuations are the product of social interactions which themselves are guided by structures of meaning in specific cultural and organizational contexts. Two important works have continued along that line of thought in the last half decade, and my project is theoretically informed by each.

On the one hand, Ashley Mears introduced her own work on the valuation of models in the fashion industry (2011). Mears challenges orthodox economics, which cannot explain the imperfect modeling market where values are not directly observable. Her ethnographic work

uncovers the complex sets of social relationships organized around managing uncertainty. Those relationships, she contends, are field-specific; and "the look" – that quality supposedly possessed by highly-value models in the industry – is itself not an individual attribute, but instead a field-specific one. However, her reliance on Bourdieu's rigid field theory places her in an awkward theoretical bind; Mears is attuned to culture, but this theoretical approach cannot handle more than a shallow notion of culture and meaning-making where there is little room for individual agency or overall change.

On the other hand, Moeran returned with an anthropology of worth that explores valuation of creative goods in an array of fields, including advertising, pottery, and fashion (2014). He concludes that creativity is not a property of individuals, but rather should be located "in the material, aesthetic, situational, organizational, symbolic, and economic; in short, in the *social*" (2014: 21). While a thorough and fascinating piece of scholarship, Moeran suffers from trying to merge too many theories together that ultimately don't all quite mesh.[1] Yet his unique reading of creative productions through the lens of Zelizer's circuits of commerce (2010) offers an interesting theoretical avenue that takes production as dynamic, meaningful, and constantly negotiated (Wherry 2012). I argue this is ultimately correct: creative production is not oriented towards individual tastes but rather towards context-specific social relations (Zelizer 2010; Wherry 2012).

Both Mears and Moeran accurately recognize that production and valuation come out of a specific social context embedded in larger overarching structures. Theoretically, however, their

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[1] Like Mears, Moeran cites both Becker's worlds theory (2008) and Bourdieu's field theory (1984; 1993; 1996), when in fact the two theories – according to their authors – are opposed to one another.

weak notions of culture result in unsatisfying results. I argue that their conceptual approach can be improved by three theoretical interventions.

The first intervention comes from Dobbin's (1994) exploration of the development of the railway industry. Dobbin starts with a simple problem: given the same technology and the same goal, why did the United States, Britain, and France all pursue different policy strategies? Rejecting national character arguments and neoinstitutoinalist approaches as deeply flawed, Dobbin insists that it is collective understandings of social order and instrumental rationality that shapes policy-making (1994: 2). He introduces the notion of industrial culture, or the "institutionalized principles of industrial organization and economic behavior" which "consist of practices and associated meanings" simultaneously (20; 18-19). This approach recognizes how both the perceived problems and appropriate solutions are "organized around recognizable logics that have the pragmatic tenor of commonsense" (19). Where Mears contends that participants in her field of fashion are only members insofar as they believe in 'the game,' Dobbin's approach suggests the opposite – that the rules of the game are instead constituted only by collective understandings and the meaningful practices based on those understandings. In Dobbin's approach, participation in an industry is not about competitions for status or reproducing class structures, but rather about pursuit of a morally-oriented rationality and reenacting meaning structures. While both Mears and Dobbin seek to unearth the specific logic that guides industry participation, Dobbin insists the taken-for-granted should not be pessimistically treated as "collaborative misrecognition" (Mears 2011: 25), but instead respectfully treated as collective understandings so commonly shared that they go unquestioned (1994: 12).

The second theoretical intervention is Zelizer's (2010) theory of circuits of commerce, which looks at economic activity as centered around establishing and maintaining social relationships in

particular contexts. Irreducible to simple firms, markets, or networks, Zelizer's circuits are "structure[s] combining [their] own economic activities, media, accounting systems, interpersonal relations, boundaries, and meanings" (2010: 304). This analytical concept is neatly compatible with Dobbin's industrial culture concept, fleshing out the various elements of associated meanings and practices that constitute Dobbin's industrial culture. Additionally, while Dobbin offers a theoretical means of looking at problem-solving and policy-making, the addition of Zelizerian circuits offers a means of analyzing interaction within organizations at a micro-interactional level.

Both Mears and Moeran draw on this notion of circuits, but their application is weak. For Mears, the circuit is little more than a micro-level home for the rules of a field (2011: 250). Moeran, on the other hand, adapts the Zelizerian circuit into a "circuit of affordances," a good-intentioned attempt to bring back values and meaning into the production of culture perspective (2014: 35; Peterson and Anand 2004: 312); yet the circuit of affordances cannot escape the materialist, weak-culture origins of the production of culture perspective. A proper use of Zelizerian circuits must come from the same place as Dobbin's industrial culture – that is, from the view that culture informs not only solutions imaginable but also problems perceived.[2]

The third important theoretical intervention is Alexander's (2004; 2011) emphasis on power and performativity. Mears, Moeran, Dobbin, and Zelizer all understand that economic action takes place along specific lines of logic, but in all of their cases, the failures of individual actors are never more than a failure to abide by these logics. Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics brings an otherwise absent language of dramaturgical performance to the theoretical mix, thus rescuing contingency and agency from overly structuralist modes of thinking; his theoretical

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[2] To the man with a hammer, everything is a nail.

intervention offers a way to make sense of competition within particular contexts, be it the public/political sphere or the private organization (Wherry 2014). Actors may perceive problems and their solutions according to collective understandings, and they may act with an orientation to their relations with others, but this in no way guarantees their ritualistic success in interactions! Collective understandings must be effectively performed by talented actors in conjunction with appropriate settings and props, and those performances must be relayed to the right audiences. Incorporating this theoretical potential for failed performances in organizational settings introduces a way Mears' fashion models, Moeran's creative workers, and my advertising professionals can fail, even while operating by shared codes and narratives.

It is from this theoretically informed position that I begin my empirical work.

Methodology & Case Selection

In this project I suggest treating creative production as an interaction between individuals – real or imagined – in specific social, organizational, and cultural contexts (Dobbin 1994; du Gay 1997). Gathering empirical evidence for such an argument requires observing those interactions, meaning ethnography is a necessary method.

To explore this empirical case, I have conducted – and will continue to conduct – participant observations coupled with interviews. Participant observations allow me to see the creation and track the development of advertising concepts and campaigns – of which only a select few make it beyond the agency to public audiences. The interviews supplement these observations in two ways: first, they provide the advertising professionals' own subjective interpretations and narratives of the advertising process; and second, they provide accounts of cases where I could not observe them myself.

Participant Observation

I spent nine months across 2013 and 2014 in three separate advertising agencies, geographically dispersed across the United States: Pioneer, Alexander + Sons, and CultureShock,[3] located in the Northeast, Midwest, and Rocky Mountain region of the United States, respectively. I alternated between observing the creatives and the account service team at work, regularly sitting in on agency meetings and client calls, and working as an intern on the account planning teams. I was allowed to observe my colleagues and roam the agencies freely, observe confidential creative work in various rounds of revisions, sit in and participate in brainstorming meetings, agency meetings, and client calls and presentations, as well as access training materials and archival files. While some larger presentations were restricted to top-level agency members for presentation purposes,[4] I could observe the agencies employees' interpretations and reactions to those meetings through casual conversations (and later formal interviews).

As per my institutional review board protocol, Yale Human Subjects Committee Protocol #1304011777, my role as a researcher was disclosed to all three agencies and was common knowledge among my coworkers. Before observing and participating at any of the agencies, I signed an agency agreement for nondisclosure regarding the work. My role as a researcher did not interfere with my participation in the daily routines of the agency; in fact, on more than one occasion, after concluding my internship the agency tried to recruit me as a full-time employee.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was able to observe the various routines of the advertising production process, including various meetings where ideas for advertisements and campaign

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[3] All agency names, as employee names and brand names, are pseudonyms. Some product categories have been changed and some job titles have been generalized also to protect participant confidentiality.

[4] In particularly important meetings, including important client presentations and pitches for new business, the agency will present only its best and brightest to its clients or would-be clients. Interns have no place in a meeting meant to show off the agency's top talent.

concepts were introduced, selected or rejected, built upon or stripped down, modified combined

with other ideas. I paid particular attention to how employees framed their conversations about

the advertisements and how they framed the work to be done.

In each agency, I gathered several weeks of observations before beginning interviews so I could

ground each interview in the concrete context of my interlocutors' work routines and probe them

about particular observations. My field notes also let me observe patterns and routines that

sometimes corroborated and sometimes contradicted the explanations my interlocutors gave.

Interviews

During the same periods of participant observation, I also conducted a total of 74 interviews with

70 employees from the agencies I observed, plus an additional 8 interviews with 7 other

professionals who worked at different creative firms that worked with one of my sample

agencies. On average, these interviews lasted just over an hour and ten minutes. I recruited

participants by requesting meeting time with agency employees, scheduling time either with the

employees directly or with the employees' assistants (especially in the case of elite agency

employees). Most interviews took place on-site during the work-day, with a few exceptions of

before- or after-work meetings. Participants included copywriters, art directors, designers,

creative directors, account executives and supervisors, web and app developers, user experience

designers, strategic planners and researchers, ranging hierarchically from interns to CEOs.

Although I did not ask about age specifically, participants' ages ranged from 19 to late 60s. Just

under half the participants were women. Almost all participants were white, with two exceptions;

at least four had national origins outside the United States. Almost all participants had at least a

college education, with a few having master's degrees or having completed some kind of

creative portfolio school (if not both). All interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word with the participants' consent. I asked questions about their day-to-day experiences and their work histories using an open-ended interview protocol, probing for their accounts and evaluations of the advertising process.

Table 1. Description of advertising agencies included in the sample to date

Timing	Agency	U.S. Location	City Size	Interviews
Spring 2013	Pioneer	Northeast	Medium	13
Summer 2013	Alexander + Sons	Midwest	Large	27
[Summer 2013	A+S Collaborators	Midwest	Large	8]
Summer 2014	CultureShock	Mountain Region	Medium	34

As a white male in his mid-20s coming from an Ivy League institution, I was extremely conscious of my identity during interviews and the research process. While my colleagues sometimes joked about my academic background, I was told a few times by colleagues in the advertising agencies that my role as an intern allowed me to ask more questions and take field notes publicly. Similarly, being the same ethnicity and age as (if not slightly older than) many of the entry-level employees (and some above entry-level) helped me to fit in both with my colleagues and around the agencies in general.

Data Analysis

Field notes and transcribed interviews have been and will be entered into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. There I first code for emergent themes. I then focus on discussions of the production of advertising. I then code secondary themes within the production of advertising. Identifying information is removed or replaced as much as possible, along with any information that would violate the non-disclosure agreements from the advertising agencies, which I signed

as a part of the research process and, for the second and third agencies, as part of the employment agreement.

Future Research Trajectory

At the time of this writing, my current intention is to conduct one additional summer of research at an agency in order to meet a goal of 12 months of field work and at least 100 interviews. I have already reached out to nearly a dozen different agencies to explore opportunities. Barring an opportunity for participant observation, I will instead opt for unobtrusive observations, tracking particular projects more closely and conducting interviews without participating in the dynamics of ad-making myself.

Chapters Outlines

Chapter 1: *Introduction*

> *Steve (digital strategist):* A lot of the internal stuff in agencies goes unnoticed, or no one talks about it. No one wants to see how sausage is made.

> I am wandering around the halls of the agency, taking a quick walk to clear my head. I pass by a wall covered in work for one of the agency's clothing clients. Dalton, CultureShock's most senior creative director, is at the wall, reviewing the various tabloid-sized sheets pinned to wall, which have the various comps and concepts made by the creative teams. Four other people are right behind him, fairly close as he reviews each piece in turn. Two women sit further back from the group; one is taking notes in a notebook. Dalton says "Feels a little flat... just white, that's boring," about one of the concepts. He pauses and looks at the wall, moving some of the concepts to different parts of the wall in ways I don't understand. He starts by saying "These *feel* like..." and bounces an idea back and forth with a guy in a black t-shirt and glasses. Dalton begins a critique by asking "Why wouldn't" such-and-such happen? The guy in the black t-shirt replies by saying "What if we...?" and then goes on to describe a commercial concept in which famous scenes of history are depicted with the people just in their underwear, such

as the crossing of the Delaware. Later on another concept, Dalton says "I don't want to get so heavy." He says the campaign is about "giving men permission to be men." He says the underwear is "things you know and trust, you put on..." For another ad, he questions it by saying he's "Trying to think what we're pushing against here." There's not enough attitude in the concept, he says. "I look at this and..." he raises his arm and then drops them, as if the ad does nothing for him. "There's no teeth," he says. [Field Note Excerpt]

Milo, Pioneer's creative director, notes the client typically likes a 'clean' look. He says the client is essentially trying to mimic Apple's more recent marketing, particularly with the iPhone and iPad, but adds that a lot of other marketers are mimicking that style, too. Milo then says, "but, they'll still want lasers and shit" in the ad, to strike some odd balance between clean and tech-y. [Field Note Excerpt].

Davis (copywriter): Ultimately, if you're going to be destroyed every time an idea gets shot down, you're gonna kill yourself after the first week 'cause you're going to be so depressed.

In this chapter – similar to this prospectus itself – I set up the general context of the advertising industry and then outline the project's main research questions. I discuss the relevance of this study to both cultural and economic sociology, reviewing past literature relevant to the topic (e.g., Mears 2011, Moeran 2014). I then discuss my methodology for gathering the necessary empirical data to answer my research questions. Finally, I conclude with an outline of the following chapters.

Chapter 2: *Into the World of Advertising*.

[A]dvertising is anonymous. … The authors are there all right, but we'll never find them. Who knows whose hand first penned "Where's the beef?" "Just do it," "Look, Mom, no cavities," "Does she … or doesn't she?" … and countless other phrases we know by heart (Twitchell 1996: 18).

Andrew: So how do you explain your job to somebody you're meeting for the first time, who has no idea how this industry works?

> *Clarabelle (copywriter):* I usually start with the question, "Do you watch [the television show] *Mad Men*?" If they say 'no,' I say 'good.' And if they say 'yes,' then I say "it's nothing like that."

This chapter presents an analytical description of the history of the advertising industry.

The vast majority of readers have either no clue whatsoever about how the advertisements with which they are bombarded daily are produced, or are at best informed by pop culture depictions – especially those coming from the hit television show *Mad Men* (which concludes its 7th and final season this spring). While the latter is not entirely wrong, it is certainly dramatized as well as outdated; since the 1960s – and during that period as well! – advertising agencies have changed in their typical internal structure, reorganizing some positions and adding many others.

In this chapter, I recount the emergence of the advertising industry to highlight its origins as profession oriented around media sales, with the creative function emerging later as an added service to clients. I then follow the industry in the United States through the 'creative revolution' of the 1950s and '60s, in which a competition between two schools of advertising thought emerges: "the creatives, who believe art inspires consumers to buy; and the pragmatists, who sell based on facts and come armed with reams of research" (Tungate 2007: 48). Figures such as Bill Bernbach and Leo Burnett came to represent the former camp, while Rosser Reeves and David Ogilvy represented the latter. While these figureheads are rarely cited themselves,[5] the two camps of thought loosely align with typical creative-versus-account debates.

However, that model itself is further complicated by the role of the Account Planner, which first appears in the late 1960s and establishes itself as a unique craft through the '70s (Tungate 2007:

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[5] Ogilvy is in fact often still mentioned, but this is mostly because he was a prolific writer; *Confessions of an Advertising Man* and *Ogilvy on Advertising* remain popular amongst advertising professionals, but so do books in the creative camp, such as Luke Sullivan's *Hey Whipple, Squeeze This*.

88). The purpose of the account planner is to bring "the voice and the desires of the consumer into the advertising process" (89), which brought the researchers into the room with the creatives and accounts. Often positioned as a mix of left- and right-brain thinking, the planner (sometimes called strategist) has become a third ideal type totally absent in the dynamics portrayed in *Mad Men*. Together, the account executive, creative director, and account planner constitute the 'trifecta' of the modern advertising process.

This balance has largely stayed through the present, but the process has again been complicated by an explosion of new media. Work from agencies like Crispin Porter + Bogusky challenged the boundaries of traditional advertising; computers and online media brought in digital designers, web developers, and other technical gurus; the emergence of user experience design (more commonly called UX design) and social media challenged the way advertisers thought about advertising.

Drawing on a "worlds" perspective (Becker 2008), I use this history to finally review the many actors – each with different conventions and values – that must collaborate to produce a single campaign, while outlining the generic process of developing an advertising campaign in the present day. In doing so, I set up the order of the next two chapters, which looks at the construction of an audience and the development of campaign ideas.

Chapter 3: *Imagined Audiences and Rituals* [JCR]

> *Janice (Head of Planning):* My job is to say the language that you've used is not going to resonate with that [audience], or the language that you use is going to resonate, or that photo isn't going to resonate or is going to resonate.

John (creative director): But like [our fast food client], the funniest thing I think I've ever heard from the CMO [chief marketing officer] is, you know, we've asked him 'who do you think our audience is?' And he goes, "anyone with a mouth."

Dan [my planning supervisor] tells me he wants to think up a name for the [client] audience – some kind of pithy, telegraphic name that can summarize what's going on and be used in later conversations. Dan tells me that the client did not like the name they had recently introduced: the "new discriminators." The client thinks their audience is more "low-brow," Brian tells me, but Simmons [marketing research] data shows that we're right, he says. [Field Note Excerpt]

Milo (creative director): Some of the bad clients, ultimately end up making that ad for themselves … those are the clients that we bitch about.

One might assume that actors involved in multi-million dollar advertising campaigns would invest heavily in research on audiences. Certainly, scholars critical of the marketing and advertising industries (Cf. Schor 2004, Packard (2007 [1957], Ewen 2001 [1976]) suggest as much when they try to stir alarm by showing how marketers are gathering data on citizens – data then used to transform citizens into consumers. As the above vignettes suggest, however, the process and value of consumer research is not so straightforward. This chapter furthers a discussion about the social construction of an advertising campaign's audience, as well as how that audience is – or is not – used during making the campaign.

The chapter begins by discussing the construction of the audience, continuing a strain of thought on the imagined audience as suggested by Brian Moeran (2003). In Moeran's ethnography of a Japanese advertising agency, noting how the agency must not only "construct an image for the foreign other" for an international campaign, but also how that construction is tempered by the agency employees' understanding of their client (2003: 92). I present ethnographic data to

illustrate the various people – namely, the account planner – and processes that contribute to the construction of a target audience.

The second section of the chapter explores how these audience profiles, once constructed, are used – or not used – in the process of advertising production. In the literature, Moeran concludes that "it was the agency's estimation of what particular individuals within the client companies might think of particular images that counted," rather than the agency's own assessment of those images (2003: 108). Yet critical sociologists have argued that not only is market research present, but shockingly invasive (Cf. Schor 2004), and even Moeran's colleagues in the same anthology discuss their own research on consumers and how it affected the outcome of a campaign (Olsen 2003; Sunderland and Denny 2003), regardless of the client! Using my own empirical data, I show how consumer data is interpreted and used to construct target audiences, which are used to both guide creative production and ritualistically justify that production to clients – with varying degrees of success.

Chapter 4: *Ideas that Fail* [ASR]

> I leave my desk and sit with Aaron, an art director intern. His copywriting partner has already left for the day, and it's well past normal business hours. "We've been working like crazy on concepting, on some way to get a reaction for this [big retailer client] concept. I think we've gone through 7 rounds," Aaron tells me, clearly exasperated. "Today they decided they're not going to do what we were working on. They were just like, 'nope. We're not gonna do that. We're gonna do social posts.'" [Field Note Excerpt]
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> *Clint (copywriter)*: The idea gets watered down by the client. Like with the [particular commercial], we really wanted to go into the spot and shoot it very artistic and then we ended up doing that. We got a lot of great footage. … We wanted to pack the spot just full of that stuff, but at the end of the day it's a 30 second spot and it also got to sell [the product]. So our first edit, I think we pushed the max of all our artistic stuff that we really wanted in there and they were really happy with it. But [the clients] just weren't having

it. They were like, it doesn't show enough of the brand, it doesn't show enough of the [product], it doesn't talk about the offer enough, so by the time the spot went out, we cut the art stuff by like two-thirds. It was a [product] commercial with some art work in it; that's the way we kind of looked at it.

Billy (designer): It happens sometimes with [a particular client], 'cause it's such a big team [on the client's side]. Since it's a start-up, they have all these people contributing and… we'll finalize a design, it's all set, and then they'll talk to an advisor and they'll come back and say 'can't do this, can't do that,' and then it's going through more rounds. It's like a constant process. But that's the unknown with design. You never know who is going to be giving feedback, so you have to prepare for that.

In this chapter, I use empirical evidence to discuss the processes through which ads are made, noting the various points at which a campaign fails to be made, either because it is rejected outright or modified in ways that fails to preserve the original idea intended. I argue these processes of production and rejection or modification are ensconced in more general cultural processes. Advertisements are constructed to be meaningful audiences, but the highly differentiated audiences that constitute the "ad world" introduces challenges to conveying meaning successfully (Alexander 2004). Conflicts arise when audiences do not agree on the meanings of interactions in the advertising production process, leading to some ads not being made at all and some ads not making the final cut in spite of their development.

Drawing on field notes and interviews, I identify several different types of failure, recognizable by the rhetoric with which these instances are treated. Drawing out these narratives in turn points to the broader cultural process in play, in which problems and solutions are performed according to particular types of cultural, industrial, and organization logic (Dobbin 1994; du Gay et al 1997; Wherry 2012). The performances of these logics, furthermore, are sensitive to the ways in which they are materially mediated (Miller 2010; Woodward 2015; Alexander 2010).

Chapter 5: *"Everyone Can Be Creative."*

> *Claude (producer)*: You know, so say Alexander & Sons has got a [hypothetical] client Twinky – so let's get everybody's ideas from Twinky because – the janitor may have a great idea about how to sell Twinky and I never would have thought of that!
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> *Meaghan (social media specialist)*: At the end of the day, it doesn't matter who the idea comes from.
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> …
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> Ford, a senior art director comes to the intern row and invites the creative interns to see a presentation from a visiting production company. Alaina, my planning supervisor, says I should go as well, and tells Ford "planners are creative, too!" Ford sarcastically replies, "eh, to be decided." [Fieldnotes Excerpt]
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> Creatives come up with the ideas. [CultureShock Intern Handbook Excerpt]

Advertising is generally recognized as one of the creative industries (Moeran 2014; Caves 2000; Zukin 1995), but as the above vignettes show, it is not entirely clear *who* is creative or has opportunities to be creative. While there is a discourse that makes creativity seem inclusive, it is in fact exclusive because of the industrial culture (Dobbin 1994) of advertising that assigns the duty of ideation to only the creative department of the agency.

Using my ethnographic data, I suggest creativity is not an individual or product attribute but rather the outcome of social performances; like *mana*, it is the product of a fused social performance in the industrial-cultural setting of advertising (Durkehim 1995 [1912] Alexander 2004; Dobbin 1994). I juxtapose this to suggestions that creativity is a type of "flow" (Moeran 2014), some type of field-specific outcome (Mears 2011), or the product of learning from social networks (Godart & Mears 2009).

I also contend this cultural perspective helps explain changes in creative practices that field theory cannot. Enacting social performances of creative authority draws on the meaning structures of the advertising industrial culture, thus simultaneously reproducing and changing those meaning structures (Sahlins 1981; Alexander 2004).

Chapter 6: *Conclusion*

The concluding chapter of this project summarizes the main findings of the prior chapters and brings them together makes a concerted theoretical point about the necessity of studying economic production from the perspective of cultural sociology, attuned to the roles that codes and narratives play throughout such processes. I discuss the generalizability of the findings and their overall significance to both cultural and economic sociology, as well as for media studies and critical theory. I end with remaining questions and directions for future research.

Billy (designer): I like to think my job's never done, 'cause you can always improve.

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