



7

The Magic of Paradox: How Advertising Ideas Transform Art into Business and the Ordinary into the Extraordinary

Timothy de Waal Malefyt

For consumers, advertising is said to act like magic, turning ordinary commodities into symbols of love, desire, power, or prestige (Malinowski 1965; McCreery 1995; Moeran 2014). Ads for perfume turn women into desired objects, male car drivers into masculine symbols, and energy drink users into vital tribal communities. Nevertheless, ads produced within advertising agencies offer a different view of magic. While advertisements are disseminated across consumer markets and succeed by transforming mundane products into elevated brands that promote inspirational ideals (Lukovitz 2012), they begin in ad agencies as small frail ideas. Advertised ideas come from the enigmatic world of advertising creatives. From such individuals, mere thoughts become “big” campaigns through dubious circumstances. Curiously, famed creative director David Ogilvy (1985: 16) claims “it takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers.” Yet another business giant, John Elliott (1982: 7), states that “ideas are hard to recognize, so fragile, and easy to kill.” Indeed, this is the paradoxical nature of ideas in advertising: they start small but must grow

T. de Waal Malefyt (✉)

Gabelli School of Business, Fordham University, New York, NY, USA

e-mail: tmalefyt@fordham.edu

big to influence many consumers; they come from elite individuals (advertising creatives) but must influence ordinary people to consume; they deal with often mundane products but sell larger ideals; and while great ideas help sell any product, they are also rare, hard to find, and so are sacred. Moreover, fetishized as ideals which other agencies might steal, advertising ideas must also be distributed among agency relations to develop and materialize marketing and promotional efforts. Hence, advertising internally requires a magical process to create and manage the paradox of power; that is, develop sacred ideas and guard them from others yet distribute them at the proper time and place to spur consumption, build relations, and make a name for an agency.

This chapter follows the generation of advertising ideas which begin as transient ephemera and through magical and paradoxical transformations *make durable* in Latour's sense the human relationships and material conditions in and out of ad agencies. I show that ideas are transformed through a network of relations, associations, contradictions, and rituals that assemble for ad creatives in encounters with various other elements in advertising. Magical paradoxes are thus built into the advertising network to transform one phenomenon into another since magic is about transformations that are "eminently effective," "creative," and "do things" (Mauss 1972: 23–24). Furthermore, other types of contradictions, such as magicians concealing magic tricks only to reveal them later under precise conditions (Taussig 2003), or tribal chiefs giving away some objects of value but keeping other sacred items (Weiner 1992), reveal paradoxical ways to hold power mysterious, ambiguous, and elusive and in the hands of elite few. Magic works, we learn, "not despite the trick but on account of its exposure," where ritual serves as its stage so that power flows not from hiding but from skillful revealing, "which masks more than masking" (Taussig 2003: 273). Likewise, contradictions exist in advertising creative idea development and are intertwined in magical modern practices, to conceal as much as to reveal "contesting claims for reality" (Jöhncke and Steffen 2015: 10). Manipulating reality is a key magical feature of power in advertising, both in and out of ad agencies.

As Foucault, Bourdieu, and Weiner affirm, symbolic power and authority are always surrounded by contradiction and ambiguity. Advertising through its symbolic power is especially subject to contradictory relations

since it produces no tangible goods in itself but rather converts commodity objects and services into symbolic images and narratives that are valued and adapted to localized tastes (Malefyt 2012: 219). Advertising begins with a paradoxical premise: it operates both as aesthetic art and business enterprise. Advertising ideas, like other works of art, are favorable to symbolic power (Bourdieu 1993: 33–34). But as a business, advertising ideas are a corporation's most profitable means by which ordinary products are transformed into brands with added value (Malefyt 2018). In this sense, advertising is an ideal modern trope that blurs contested distinctions between commercial reality and artistic ideals or, similar to what Latour notes, between fact and fetish (2010: 11).

The paradox of power, in fact, is particular to the fetishizing and distribution of idea creation within advertising agencies. The magic of idea creation within ad agencies is not an abstract force distributed universally but specific to persons and situations found in the creative director and copy writer on occasions for developing a new business pitch or brand campaign idea for a particular client. Creatives labor hard to develop clever ideas for a client's brand and for a new business pitch. The idea presented must resonate with client and agency, and spur consumption. *Big ideas* therefore are advertising's "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1993), a fetish that inspires the transformation of factual products into idealized branded messages.

Furthermore, the process of enchantment surrounding the network of advertising idea creation is located in Malinowski's (1922) and Mauss' (1972) observation of three necessary elements for magical transformation to occur—the magician, formula, and rite. All three elements form a network and must work together precisely or magic fails. Likewise, within ad agencies, many factors can derail fragile ideas from reaching fruition, so special circumstances (rites) surround idea development (the formula) in which creatives (the magicians) generate great advertising. Managing idea development requires the magician's process of careful concealing and revealing of tricks, defying as well as displaying them to exhibit a "supreme level of technique" that we might dignify creatively as magic (Taussig 2003: 306). As such, ideas, skills, and materiality flow in and out of one another, turning the ad creative's "art" paradoxically into

“business” for the client, while producing its inverse: turning fact-based commodities into fetishized brands for consumers.

The implementation of this magical tripartite network in advertising shows the highest form of paradox at work in processes which allow ideas to be kept separate and nurtured at times and distributed and shared on other occasions. Magic in advertising is thus carefully organized around elaborate practices that paradoxically assure the highest fetishization of artistic ideas, as they also assure their later distribution among agency functions and clients for purposes of reifying consumption. Facts and fetishes thus blend their properties (Latour 2010: 16), and by magical effect of artistic technique, the advertising creative manifests something unique, artistic and creative that, in advertising lingo, no one has ever fabricated before.

I draw from my 15 years of experience working in ad agencies to discuss the ways in which advertising ideas begin as simple artistic thoughts that eventually transform into full-blown materialized campaigns. I also show that an “idea trajectory” assumes paradoxical and magical transformations along the way, such that the symbolic capital of an artistic idea gains economic value, constituting not just the magical “art of change” (Mauss 1972: 76) but the necessary transformation of reality from art into commerce. As ideas develop, they change in magical potential from individual creative thoughts to highly effective commercial realities. Ideas further acquire artistic merit in creative award ceremonies, which later amplify the ad agency’s commercial value for new and existing clients. Ideas thus change in shape, form, and value across time and context of their social life in a “chain of transformations” (Latour 2010). While transforming ideas into art exemplifies what Susan Langer calls the “highest achievement in art” (in Weiner 1992: 103), advertising ideas must also serve agency propaganda, foster durable client relations, and build agency business. In the words of a senior account director, advertising represents that “lovely area where art and business rub up against each other” (in Hackley and Kover 2007: 67), which are also considered “mutually exclusive binary oppositions” of agency life (Hackley 2000: 248). Even as friction may generate instability, the resulting tension is mediated by rituals, which help transform ideas in value and casts an

enchantment over advertising that creates stable client relations within the agency and builds solid consumer relations with branded goods out in the marketplace.

Before discussing the ways in which the network of magicians, formulas, and rites in agencies transform artistic ideas into commercial campaigns, I lay out the organization of the ad agency itself and the specialized roles, practices, and responsibilities, which reveal the conditions under which paradoxical strategies thrive.

Managing Paradox in Advertising Agencies: Separating Sacred from Mundane

Managing paradox is a way of maintaining magical power in the hands of the elite few and is produced through deliberate systems of organization and social division. In the Polynesian culture that Annette Weiner (1992) studied, one set of social relations among Trobriand Islanders relied on the sacredness of magic while the other relied on rational practicality. The native use of magical *mana* not only reproduced magical power to legitimate chieftom authority at certain times but also its “magical properties play a fundamental role in how production, exchange and kinship are organized” (Weiner 1992: 4). Malinowski also discussed the organization of Trobriand Island gardening, which distinguished sacred magic from mundane work. Clear lines of division between work and ritual separated practical from magical activities in the social organization of gardening. Ordinary gardening practices operated under clear-cut conditions, while magical spells were cast for uncertain and adverse influences: “the two roles never overlap or interfere: they are always clear, and any native will inform you without hesitation whether the man acts as a magician or as leader in garden work” (Malinowski 1954: 29).

Inside advertising agencies, similar organization and divisions of social roles and responsibilities are established around creative idea generation. Raymond Williams first noted that advertising is a “highly organized, professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies” (1980:

193). Advertising agencies are organized into a number of divisions that function with particular roles and responsibilities that work independently as well as collaboratively. Specific departments such as the president, financial offices, media buying, account management, and creative services are assisted by various independent vendors that offer support services. From model agencies, film, photographic and recording studios, fashion and hair stylists to digital experts such as website developers and graphic artists are all enlisted for campaign development and execution. Idea generation is also speculated on the division and later unity between advertising-as-art and advertising-as-commerce. In the everyday life of advertising, the work of account management and creative services are distinct in function and task. Account management handles daily “business” chores of client responsibilities, such as brand management, conducting consumer research, setting strategic goals and other pragmatic or “factual” activities. Creative services are assigned to develop brand ideas, images, slogans, and artistic vision for the higher intangibles that fetishize the client’s brand. As Mauss affirms, “contrasts of categories are a distinct functioning idea of magic” (1972: 88). Division in activities assures that “The two roles never overlap or interfere: they are always clear. As far as a society is concerned, the magician is always set apart” (ibid.). Clear divisions are essential to magic’s operation, and likewise in advertising, help legitimate authority and power of the ad creative in idea formation.

To manage such organization and divisions, Mauss divides magic creation into a tripartite system of magicians, magical rites, and magical formulas, describing them as the coordination of “officers, actions and representations” (1972: 23). Malinowski similarly details magic development in terms of an integrated tripartite system:

Magic all the world over ... represents three essential aspects. In its performance, there enter always some words spoken or chanted, some actions carried out, and there are always the minister or ministers of the ceremony. In analyzing the concrete details of magical performances, therefore, we have to distinguish between the formula, the rite, and the condition of the performer. (Malinowski 1922: 403)

As this passage reveals, three elements are necessary to organize, develop, and circulate magic within a society. It requires the work of a specialized person to create something magical; it requires a process of creating the spell or formula to enchant; and it requires particular ritualistic situations in which magic is structured, shaped, and propagated. Brian Moeran first applied this integrated system to the organization of advertising magic:

In the advertising industry, magicians correspond to “Creative” personnel (in particular, Copywriters, Creative and Art Directors, but also photographers, makeup artists, hair stylists, and others called upon to produce advertisements); rites to competitive presentations and the production of advertising campaigns; and formulaic representations to individual advertisements. (Moeran 2014: 122)

I modify this arrangement to explore the magician as creative talent (specifically in copywriters and art directors), formulaic representation as the creative’s “big idea,” and rites to include the cult of creative awards ceremonies and rituals surrounding the production of advertising campaigns in pitches. All three elements of magic must be carefully considered for their relationship to producing ideas internally that are later transformed into ads for consumers. Moreover, I add the notion of a magical *network*, in place of system, because of its porousness and since it operates within paradoxical strategies where the organization and division of creative magicians, creative formulas, and agency rituals are arranged to hide or *keep* ideas sacred at times and reveal or *give* them out other times. Concealing and revealing, in other words, is a strategic variation of keeping-while-giving. Creatives conceal their ideation process to maintain mysteriousness but unmask or reveal their ideas at specific times and places, such as in ritualized agency pitches and ad award ceremonies, to enhance their prowess as one-of-a-kind artists. The following sections discuss the network of shifting relations among magicians, formulas, and rites employed as paradoxical magic strategies within the advertising world, which enables the agency to build fragile ideas into big unassailable campaigns.

The Quirky Nature of Advertising Magicians

Advertising creatives are a mainstream part of all agency life but stand apart as unique individuals within the agency. While account executives (the suits) run the day-to-day “business” side of client relations, creatives operate the artistic side. Since the “creative revolution” back in the 1960s, advertising creatives in US and European agencies have long been valorized for their odd social behavior, long hair, and other idiosyncratic actions (Moeran 2005). They are distinguished from other advertising employees, not only for their work function but also through their personalities, which are characterized as “quirky and insecure, brash and brilliant, and even mendacious” (Hackley and Kover 2007: 63). Their quirky demeanor is considered synonymous with novel thinking, since “artists” may take liberties to generate innovative ideas (Hallam and Ingold 2007) (Fig. 7.1).

Bourdieu notes the charismatic individual is known for discovering “brilliant” ideas that otherwise would remain anonymous (1993: 76). The creative artist is thus venerated above ordinary men for discovering



Fig. 7.1 AOL’s “Digital Creative Prophet” David Shing—Web Summit 2012, courtesy of William Murphy/Flickr, under CCBY license

insights in everyday life. In advertising, the ad creative is highly paid, most celebrated for talent, and on whom the fortunes of an agency depend. Ad agencies, therefore, encourage mystery, concealment, and difference to legitimate creative power, uplifting antisocial behavior and unorthodox practices, apart from others.

For Mauss, magicians are also recognized by certain physical or behavioral peculiarities, which identify a magician from a layperson. Magicians may exhibit “a cunning look, appearing odd, or untrustworthy, nervous and even jumpy behavior” (1972: 36), but while they may be feared and suspected, they are also admired. Set apart from others, magicians often possess political authority. They are highly influential and often important people. “One doesn’t elect to be a magician; one must be chosen into the profession” (p. 37). High social status preordains certain people with magical power, and “it is public opinion which makes the magician and creates the power he wields” (p. 50).

The magician also possesses special qualifications and powers that set him apart from others. Mauss ascribes entire professions with magic, such as doctors, barbers, blacksmiths, shepherds, actors, and gravediggers, because of the mysteriousness of their craft, their use of complex techniques not understood by others and because their work is shrouded in mystery: “It is their profession which sets them apart from the common run of mortals, and it is this separateness which endows them with magical power” (Mauss 1972: 29). Mauss further details mystery and secretiveness as empowering their profession. Whereas collective rites are performed openly in full public view, “magical rites are carried out in secret ... the magician is a being set apart ... so in this way he is reserving his powers ... Isolation and secrecy are two almost perfect signs of the intimate character of a magical rite. They are always features of a person or persons working in a private capacity; both the act and the actor are shrouded in mystery” (1972: 29).

Creatives in advertising, likewise, distance themselves from others both due to “professional insecurity” (Hackley and Kover 2007: 71), but also to preserve secrecy and power over their creative work. Account management and creative services work together, especially in the buildup to a pitch, but their relation may be characterized as based on secrecy and

mutual suspicion. As Hackley and Kover explain, the creatives' relation to others forms a contradiction of congeniality:

Creatives need approval, but they fear that some kinds of peer approval (such as that from clients or senior account directors) might be seen to threaten their professional integrity. Or, if a creative seems particularly close to non-creative workers, this might be interpreted negatively by other creatives. (2007: 71)

Creative teams form a sort of “marriage” relationship between art director and copywriter that is emotionally and functionally important. However, this intense relationship also keeps creatives apart from others in the ad agency, where the marriage offers a source of “comfort as well as insulation” (Ibid.: 72). Indeed, outside the agency, apart from work, creatives rarely socialize with “suits” (ibid.). By keeping close as a creative team but maintaining distance from others, creatives employ a concealing and revealing strategy, sharing ideas with some but not others, to further mystify the creative process. The creative artist thus skillfully blends fact into fetish as “sorcerer,” in what Latour describes as an “autonomous being” who “surpasses us” as a “divinity,” in works and representations (2010: 35).

Maintaining a mystique of power also translates into creatives distancing themselves from ordinary consumers. Advertising folklore locates top US ad agencies and leading creative artists in major metropolises like New York City and San Francisco, since “creative people are more slick, more in touch with the leading edge in fad and fashion” (Kover 1995: 596). Creatives identify themselves as “members of an elite,” whose role it is “to use their fine judgment ... as creative individuals to inspire consumers with visions of consumption” (Hackley and Kover 2007: 68). Still, their elitism brings certain “airs” to their demeanor in which they sometimes “find trouble communicating with more “traditional” consumers” (ibid.). Creative aversion to ordinary consumers is especially apparent during advertising campaign development.

During campaign copy testing, creatives are most averse to consumer feedback, since testing concepts among consumers in focus groups is deemed to “water down” ideas (Kocek 2013: 76). Arthur Kover interviewed copywriters and confirmed widespread antagonism toward consumer research. As one creative states, “It impedes; it does not understand

the depths of what I am trying to do” (Kover 1995: 604). In another instance of apparent disdain for consumers, David Lubars, chief creative officer at BBDO, encourages frequent repetition of advertising messages to consumers, since “Like roaches—you spray them and spray them (consumers) and they get immune after a while” (in Klein 2000: 9). Kover explains this apparent negative reaction to consumer research: “(Research) transforms emotion into numbers; it must, in copywriters’ eyes, distance the advertising both from the viewer and the writer,” and in “losing personal immediacy, the artistic idea is also lost” (Kover 1995: 604). This issue recurs so that copywriters distance themselves from “factual” accounts of their ideas, and deny the value of consumer research to their work. Another copywriter affirms: “You really don’t need research You can’t introduce some kind of scientific analytical method to improve [my] basic process” (in Kover 1995: 604). Instead, as another ad creative claims: “My idea, my dialogue, is not tempered by research” (ibid.). The role of consumer research and copy testing is therefore explicitly peripheral to creatives’ process of idea generation.

Instead of following formal guidelines for transforming consumer facts into insights, creatives stress their own implicit theories for idea generation. Creatives claim “big ideas” are sourced not from market research reports, copy testing, or from consumer descriptions in focus groups but rather from their own internal dialogues (Kover 1995). Copywriters claim they generate compelling ad copy through an imaginary internal conversation with consumers, where brand meaning and potential ad communication are worked out with an “internalized other” who represents both writer and audience. The imaginary conversation lasts only for as long as needed to complete the commercial message. As such, creatives conceal the process of idea making to amplify the ambiguity, power, and enigma of their profession, which adds to the mystery of their skilled practice.

The Formula: Turning Trivial into Exceptional

The celebrated power and paradox of advertising magic is recognized in a creative’s ability to turn ordinary commercial products into extraordinary campaigns. Sourcing inspirational ideas from the material life of consumers

is regarded as magical talent. The problem is big ideas usually must come from ordinary products and relate to consumers' mostly mundane lives. From toilet paper, laundry detergent, pharmaceutical drugs, toothpaste and soda to sanitary napkins, most creative work is rooted in the ordinary. Much of the labor and drama from which creatives develop "big ideas" is therefore quite trivial and uninspiring. In treating the everyday, advertising "attempts to make the insignificant seem significant" (Kottman 2010: 31). Furthermore, filling out client demands for campaigns means bending to restrictions in budgets, media outlets, and timeframes. Mandatory parameters leave little room for novelty and true experimentation. Perhaps ten percent of total output is actually creative and different (Mayle 1990: 58). Advertising creatives thus regularly deal with the trivial, but their work must elevate minor differences among "like" products to make them stand out as exceptional in the minds of consumers. It is here their tricks transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Because they *can and do* transform the trivial into the exceptional, the creative "formula" is a major source of speculation over their creative powers. A managerial approach to marketing might hold the creative formula as a mere *problem-solving* task and implicitly treat the creative function as a "technical input" (Hackley and Kover 2007: 65). But creatives' own approach to the notion of idea generation is purposefully mysterious. The concealed way to transform trick into technique is how knowledge is transformed into power (Taussig 2003). Creatives rarely source ideas from given research measures or managerial inputs and further resist bureaucratic routines and regimented material. Creatives feel their professional needs are not circumscribed by organizational bureaucracy but rather "transcend it" (Hackley and Kover 2007: 70). In interviews with multiple US-based creatives, Hackley and Kover heard the importance of "playing" with ideas and of "getting out of the agency" often. For many, "ideas come to (them) at home" (*ibid.*: 68). And while creatives may draw ideas from imaginary dialogues with fictive consumers, this often occurs outside conventional time and space, apart from the constraints of agency routine (Kover 1995: 602). As such, a query into *how* creative ideas are formulated is perhaps better rephrased as *where* ideas are generated, since creativity appears to occur most often in unstructured, away-from-agency "liminal space" (Malefyt and Morais 2012: 74–92).

The “sacredness of a hiddenness,” Taussig reminds us, is the essential theoretically that “mediates between the real and the really made up,” and which is carried off with no “less importance than that which mediates between trick and technique and therapeutic efficacy” (2003: 287). This guarded mystery is as crucial to the power of the established shaman as it is to the creative in advertising.

Creatives claim their best ideas arrive to them in everyday occasions outside normal agency activities. They say inspiration is triggered serendipitously, apart from regularized schedules in unspecific places and moments (Callahan and Stack 2007). Chief creative director of Ogilvy and Mather, David Ogilvy, recounts his most creative moments occurring away from work such as “when walking in the country, bird watching, listening to music, taking long hot baths or gardening” (Ogilvy 1965: 206–207). Phil Dusenberry, famed BBDO creative director, claims his “eureka moment” for the General Electric (GE) campaign arrived suddenly during a cab ride on the way to a meeting: “As we honked, bounced, and stalled our way through traffic, a beautiful thing happened. Maybe it was the last pothole, but the theme line, full-blown, popped into my head: ‘GE ... We bring good things to life’” (Dusenberry 2005: 4). When asked specifically where his creative insights come from, he comments:

Insights do not adhere to a strict metronomic beat that begins with research and ends with execution. Insights materialize at any point along the matrix. Sometimes they are the product of elegant research and analysis. But just as often they appear because of a casual remark by the client about what he or she really wants. Or in response to a clumsy execution of an ad that is so lacking in insight that it inspires you to fill in the blank. Or sometimes it’s little more than trusting your gut, relying on instinct, feeling moved by a notion and assuming that the rest of the world will be equally moved. (Dusenberry 2005: 19)

Dusenberry’s inscrutable answer here affirms what Taussig notes, that “magic begs for and at the same time resists explanations most when appearing to be explained” (2003: 295). Great creative ideas from masters like Dusenberry resist proper explanation since, like magic, such explanations “appear,” only to be made even more opaque.

Comparatively, the magician in Mauss' account is known to leave the clan to walk off in the forest alone, "taking advantage of the uncertainty" over explanation to their power, "encouraging it as another aspect of the mystery which surrounds their activities" (Mauss 1972: 42). For magicians and ad creatives alike, it appears the "domain of the unaccountable" is where magic proliferates (Malinowski 1954: 29), and also where technique and trickery further mystify the mode of enchantment.

What advertising creatives and magicians share in magical formulation in these off-spaces is the condition of liminality. Turner describes liminality as the subjunctive mode, a means of bending back and exposing the "what if" mode of life, where new possibilities and creative ideas thrive. Renato Rosaldo describes liminal space in terms of "zones of indeterminacy," in which unpredictability and variability mark a certain "open-endedness, which constitutes the social space in which creativity flourishes" (Rosaldo 1993: 256–257). This means situations apart from the ad agency that promise moments of serendipity, and where ad creatives experience ideas from a different perspective, are sources of inspiration and idea generation. Working away from structured routines and apart from established "facts" in ad agencies affords an alternative perspective on consumer life; so, while creatives may eschew direct contact with consumers in copy testing research and programed marketing measures, they do encounter the consumers' world in a reenchanting sense—through cab rides, along long walks, or while bird watching. This is the alternate reality of magic that appears as a form of reasoning itself, "as a strategy for managing uncertainty and gaining control over unknown risks" (Jenkins, Jessen and Steffen, quoted in Jöhncke and Steffen 2015: 18). This also affirms the way ideas, which no one else has ever fabricated before, are supposed to arrive, in what Latour calls, "some magical effect of reversal" (2010: 18). Consumer facts gathered "out there" by the magician are then brought back to the agency as idea fetishes, joining consumption facts with fetish properties in a complex configuration. The magician's irrational process of gathering insights then occurs *within*, as opposed to *against*, modern rationality and further shows how ideas are intertwined with movements that transform the ad creative's exploration and insight into knowledge and power.

Put another way, artistic inspiration at the beginning of the ideation process is formulated by tapping into an uncertain magical reality, which also drives uncertain economic business conditions in which the magical effects of ideas are consumed. Both artistic and economic uncertainty are therefore vital to the advertising process, as economic facts and fetishized ideas blend material and ephemeral properties into successful campaigns. Paradoxically, the business side of advertising attempts to mollify uncertainty by taking rationalizing approaches to commerce, such as regularly conducting market research, gathering consumer facts, investing in account management, and securing stable client relations; but the creative side of advertising celebrates indeterminacy and irrational measures as the means by which creatives develop “big ideas” to enchant clients and consumers. While the idea creation process is *kept* apart as mystical, artistic, and sacred, creatives also regularly *give* to business practices that distribute ideas in the form of rational branded campaigns for sustaining commercial realities. To mediate such keeping-while-giving oppositions, ad agencies turn to rituals in the numerous award ceremonies creatives attend, which paradoxically imbue creatives with more secretive power as artists, as they also help agencies at home expand commercial opportunities for new and existing clients. In rituals of award ceremonies and agency pitches, creative ideas are no longer concealed but strategically revealed in “rites of exposure” (Taussig 2003: 298), which *give* away tricks of idea formation, as they strengthen magic and *keep* the magician’s power intact.

Rites of Idea Consecration

Magic is central to actions of magicians, and rituals are the effective means by which paradox is mediated and magicians perform their tasks. Magic is realized in “rites of exposure” in which, magical rites are “eminently effective; they are creative, they *do* things” (Mauss 1972: 23–24). In advertising, rituals come into play at specific times, for specific purposes, and at regularized occasions such as to celebrate an ad creative in an award ceremony or when an agency competes in a pitch against rivals for a client’s brand. The former imbues the creative with more mystique

and artistic power, while the latter uses a creative's power in a pitch to transform ideas for a client's product into a brand. I first discuss the awards ceremony, which produces the cult of the artistic creative, and then turn to rituals surrounding ad agency competitive pitches.

The Awards Ceremony

In the world of advertising, creatives are esteemed for their role as idea generators. The advertising award system honors and elevates the creative's talent like no other event in the advertising industry (Malefyt 2013: 200). Specifically, the awards ceremony recognizes the "artist" in the creative, distinguishes creative talent among peers and imbues the agency at home with more commercial power. Paradoxically, the awards ceremony venerates creative ideas for their artistic value, apart from their economic capital.

Ad agencies relentlessly compete for clients in the consumer marketplace to gain economic advantage over rival agencies (Miller 1997; Moeran 1996; Schudson 1984). Fierce competition often leads to outright animosity such that agencies are "constantly looking for ways to poach clients from each other" (Miller 1997: 160). Yet apart from agency battles over commercial realities, creatives from rival agencies *collaborate* in the awards ceremonies to venerate each other's work artistically. They cooperate as judge and jury to award the "best" ideas among themselves in the industry. Affirming this distinction, Hackley and Kover note, "Consumers and clients respond to creativity while creative professionals and artists understand it" (2007: 71). Therefore, peer approval of the latter is perceived as far more important among creatives themselves. Creative awards not only elevate aesthetic accomplishments but also return to creatives their status as "artist" and imbue celebrity qualities to their names. As such, creatives develop a certain autonomy in formulating their own set of rules of form and style, in which they elevate their work as "art" (Bourdieu 1993: 112–115) (Fig. 7.2).

The 41 various award ceremonies, such as Cannes, Effies, Clios, Addys and so forth (see Sandiegox 2017), are ritualized in that they occur as regularized annual activities, in designated places, for a discrete period of



Fig. 7.2 The advertising awards ceremony at Cannes, France, courtesy of bayerberg/Flickr, under CCBY license

time, with certain objectives and evaluations carried out. They offer a frame of analysis for understanding specific roles, relations, and divisions in the agency world (Goffman 1979; Malefyt and Morais 2012; Moeran 2005: 43–57). Likewise, rituals in magic require exact strictures and boundaries to work. Malinowski explains: “First of all, magic is surrounded by strict conditions: exact remembrances of a spell, impeccable performance of the rite, unswerving adhesion to the taboos and observances which shackle the magician. If any one of these is neglected, the failure of magic follows” (1954: 85). This ritual framework is essential for magic and for enhancing the aura of an artist. For this, creatives regularly attend award ceremonies to magically imbue their names with power.

What’s in a Creative’s Name?

According to Malinowski, surrounding any big magician, “there arises a halo made up of stories about his wonderful cures or kills, his catches, his

victories, his conquests in love. In every savage society such stories form the backbone of belief in magic.” In other words, magicians strive to build names for themselves, since “Every eminent practitioner ... makes his personal warrant of wonder-working” (1954: 83). In the advertising industry, likewise, magical ideas depend on the “wonder-working” of a big-name creative.

The awards ceremony potentially magnifies a creative’s name wherein every creative practitioner generates a legendary “halo” to his name. In the awards ceremony, the creative artist is venerated in terms such as “initiator” or “catalyst,” and as one who creates “big ideas” out of the ordinary (Malefyt 2013). Perpetuating a “myth” around a magician’s power creates a “living force” (Malinowski 1954), which produces new beliefs and inspires legendary prowess around a creative’s name. Bourdieu elaborates on the “charismatic ideology” as the ultimate basis of belief in the value of a work of art (1993: 76). Such ideology creates *an original* that carries a unique inalienable aura, which cannot be copied, but through distance of time and space gains authentic value (Benjamin 1969). Creatives in advertising are similarly venerated as “originals” by their charisma and distance from other agency people, which adds a unique identity and aura to their name.

Paradoxically, creative names are celebrated singularly even as the agency collectivity participates in campaign and pitch development. The artistic vision of an ad creative is rewarded for his “novelty of exceptional acts,” which is expected of charismatic individuals who achieve something unique and extraordinary against a world of mass conformity and standardization (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5–7). Put differently, the act of creation in advertising, like elsewhere, is celebrated for its “singularity, separateness and disjuncture” (ibid.: 5). Even as other agency members collaborate in a campaign, the creative individual wholly receives singular credit for an idea. For example, in a publically contested spat, BBDO’s chief creative officer, David Lubars, was awarded the highest honor Gold Medal at Cannes for his work on HBO’s 2007 *Voyeur campaign*, even though a digital media company that collaborated with BBDO challenged singular ownership to the campaign idea (see Malefyt 2013 for full story). The aura of the creative reflects the “mythology” of the lone

genius artist and is venerated as a solo act in the creative industry as it is among the work of magicians.

In another sense, a “name economy” (Moeran 2003) operates in advertising, which also represents a potent symbolic means by which the artistic capital of an ad creative is enhanced. Celebrities such as sports figures, movie stars, and fashion models regularly use their names for corporate sponsorship and product endorsements. Creatives in advertising also use their names for their celebrity power to attract clients and enchant brands with charisma and status. Beyond their “well-known” factor, celebrity names carry a unique ability to transfer their celebrity associations *across* distinct cultural, economic, and symbolic categories of society. Names “magically” join other fields of cultural production that are normally distinct (fashion, sports, film) through advertised endorsements with other brands (Moeran 2003: 300). For example, Sean Connery’s rugged yet refined film character allows the luxury brand Louis Vuitton travel gear to advertise its product with his image, joining ruggedness and virility with high status and social class, in ways that could not be achieved without his name endorsement. Celebrity names act as “cultural mediators” (Moeran 2003: 308) that stand out as unique and “magically” connect symbolic and cultural capital across various fields of production.

We see the “name economy” at work in advertising, where the basis for elevating a creative’s name to celebrity status artistically plays into the paradoxical magic of an agency commercially. As the creative award ceremony confers celebrity status to an artist’s name, it also confers economic status to an agency as a commercial enterprise. The creative’s name stature more easily attracts lofty clients, promising the client greater strategic resources from the agency to link a brand *across* a range of media and audiences for commercial purposes. More successful agencies use the creative’s name and agency stature to leverage buying power with media to link a client’s brand across mediums of print, broadcast, out-of-home, direct mail, and digital/interactive channels in one effort. The creative name, then, keeps-while-it-gives, both retaining unique celebrity status for the artist, while disseminating prestige to an ad agency and client for economic purposes, and broader reach across markets and media. The paradoxical feature of keeping-while-giving shows a creative’s artistic ability to

elevate a brand by enhancing its symbolic value, while demonstrating its commercial value to disseminate messages across consumer landscapes.

Rituals of Pitches

Creative services and account management operate in distinct worlds, but join forces in the buildup to a pitch when artistic vision joins business management in an agency-wide roll-out. Rituals function to unite various teams and practices that normally are distinct to create magical results for the client's brand, since it is "magic which unites the various classificatory terms" (Mauss 1972: 102). Rituals are not only useful for understanding agency creative life but also for interpreting and understanding various sets of relationships, both in and out of the agency (Moeran 2005: 63–79). More importantly, pitches are where the creative artist skillfully blends fact into fetish by *revealing* previously concealed ideas that will transform commodity products into idealized brands.

In agency-wide pitches, multiple departments collaborate. Copywriters, art directors, account planners, account managers, and others contribute to the process. Account managers deliver strategic direction for the assignment to agency creative teams, and are concerned with keeping the brand in line with client expectations (Malefyt and Morais 2012: 35–46). Creatives, on the other hand, take pride in their craft and passion for their ideas. Creatives often resist account managers because they feel the purity of their idea will be defiled and their imaginative efforts compromised (cf. Douglas 1966). Given the interaction of these two sides—the account side wanting client stability, and the creative side desiring to distinguish itself with iconoclastic artistic work—the ritual process perfectly mediates the tensions to bring the work to completion (see Malefyt and Morais 2010).

Rituals are needed to mediate paradoxical tensions and join venerated ideas with practical promotions. Like ancient systems of sacred amulets and totemic clan symbols as understood by Durkheim, magic relies on both division and unity of the symbolic and the material, joining sacred and profane, whose properties are authenticated and legitimized in cosmologies of the clan. Performing together in ritual, an agency not only

joins separate departments but collective actions help foster group consensus as a united front. Appadurai affirms that ritual offers a “flexible formula of performances through which social effects are produced and new states of feeling and connection are created” (Appadurai 2004: 79). In the unity of a competitive pitch, ritual underlies the emotional conviction of a worthy “big idea” and gives the agency team a sense of faith in themselves as a clan. As Geertz posits, “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one’s sense of reality” (Geertz 1973: 112).

Nevertheless, it is Turner’s concept of social drama in ritual that reveals a culturally sanctioned *organizing principle* by which social divisions that otherwise create schisms may foster reconciliation (Turner 1987: 37). Turner posits that rituals importantly possess both tangible and intangible properties. He refers to the phenomena articulated in ritual as a polarization of meaning, allowing symbolic values to take material form. He writes, “At the sensory pole are concentrated those *significata* that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings; at the ideological pole one finds an arrangement of norms and values that guide and control persons as members of social groups and categories” (Turner 1967: 28). By combining affect and cognition in ritual action, *symbols gain their significance* in the context of performance. Ritual is performative action that supplies the conditions for the materialization of ideals (Stewart and Strathern 2014; Bell 2009; Handelman and Lindquist 2005). As Stewart and Strathern (2014: 5) posit, “The embodied participation of persons in rituals not only influences them in bodily ways but becomes *the actual vehicle* by which metaphorical meanings are created and credited with efficacy.”

Moreover, the creative’s “big idea” is not only revealed to the client and agency in the pitch but often the creative discusses *how* he came up with an idea. The unmasking, in Taussig’s words, “adds to, rather than eliminates the *mysterium tremenduom* of magic’s magic” (2003: 300). It turns on, in the meeting, “not a question of seeing more or seeing less behind the skin of appearance. Instead it turns on seeing *how* one is seeing” (ibid., my emphasis). Involving this turn of events within the “known unknown,” then “turns on” a whole new attitude. Notably, creative ideas

performed in a pitch assume material form in the subsequent presentation of the roll-out of marketing plans. In other words, not only are ideas revealed at this point, but when creative ideas are set forth in a pitch, they *materialize* in metaphor as well as in artifacts of designed promotional displays, signage, packaging, loyalty programs, and other branded material propaganda that are developed and presented by a united agency team to win a client's brand.

In a corresponding way, creative ideas performed in a pitch not only materialize promotional material for a campaign, but also in Latour's sense, *make durable* the human relationships between the agency and client. "Winning ideas" from a competitive pitch are the symbolic *and* durable foundation to the start of a new relationship with a client. For example, after several ad agencies competed in a pitch for a client, the CEO of a losing agency rebuked the ethics of the winning agency when ideas from his agency were "taken" by the latter and used for the new client-agency relationship. This "idea borrowing" was later discovered when new ideas that were "not their own" appeared in the marketplace for the client's brand. The CEO of the losing agency admonished, "Not much good can come from a relationship where the client thinks that the ideas from two different agencies are interchangeable" (Johnson 2012). In other words, creative ideas are not only sacrosanct of an ad creative's individual talent but are *themselves* the seeds of durable client relations. Ideas performed by an agency are the essence of that agency's self-definition and social body. Ideas therefore *belong* to an agency and cannot "mix and match" with other agency material, since ideas, as the losing CEO affirmed, "relentlessly express [the agency's] vision through all of the touch points that a company has with the public" (Johnson 2012). Latour and Woolgar (1986) remind us that just as social features of "hard" science *assemble* into objective "facts," ideas crafted by agencies and performed in pitches also assume material form when they *assemble* a network of human relations. Only when "actors and points of view are aligned," do we enter a "stable" and "durable definition of society" (Latour 1991: 129). For ad agencies, ideas materialized by human actors in pitches importantly form the foundation of durable partnerships with corporate clients, providing additional proof "that ritual—as an element of magic—is predetermined by collective forces" (Mauss 1972: 73).

Conclusion

This essay reveals the ways in which paradoxes and tensions in advertising, such as keeping-while-giving, concealing and revealing, exceptional versus ordinary, and individual versus collective enchant ideas for change. Organized as a dialectic of agency life, and through a network of magicians, formulas, and rites, advertising ideas entangle the embodied insides—the exclusive thoughts of creative individuals—with social outsides in agency roles and work-related functions, to remake mundane products into branded ideals for consumers. As such, the irrational impulses of an artistic creative are made durable as the substance and form of agency relations and sustained client relations, which then market those branded ideals to consumers.

In another sense, this chapter explores the ways in which advertising agencies circulate magic through a “chain of transformations” (Latour 2010) in which idea ephemera alternate symbolic and material forms. In extended transformations, the symbolic capital of an artistic idea is nurtured into a campaign idea, which enchants the cultural capital of material goods and is circulated in society as a brand to uplift a corporation’s economic value and profit. Concomitantly, ideas return to an agency in the form of revenue, repeat business, and client relations to further enhance the symbolic capital of a creative’s name, and through contagion, reenchant the power and authority of the advertising agency. Two realms—the ephemeral mystical realm of creative ideation and the factual realm of business relations and stable client relations—are thus intertwined as art into business and blend as transformations of each other in a construction *and* version of reality, each a “synonym” for the other (Latour 2010: 24).

Ideas in advertising thus represent essential social, symbolic and durable transformations. Ideas spread ideological value of possible lifestyles and consumption narratives to audiences, while bolstering economic systems of capital for branded corporations that help maintain the life of an agency back home. Transformative ideas are held as agency assets and celebrated of a creative’s name in elite award ceremonies but also disseminated as essential tools for building long-lasting partnerships with clients

and aspirational ideals for consumers. As such, the advertising of ideas presents a paradoxical system of exchange which overlays political strategies of power, knowledge, and authority (Weiner 1992). Advertisers are both producers and consumers of ideas that transform culture—such that ideas are inalienable possessions as well as alienable commodities. Ideas rely on indeterminacy to sustain practices of hierarchy, status, and power inside agencies, as they also play a major role in reproducing culture outside of agencies. The paradox of advertising is that it helps shape culture while it also draws from culture, in and out of ad agencies, through the magical circulation of ideas.

Malinowski's observation of the purpose of magic in society applies here to advertising: "The function of magic is to ritualize man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear. Magic expresses the greater value for man of confidence over doubt, of steadfastness over vacillation, of optimism over pessimism" (Malinowski 1954: 90). Accordingly, the magical purpose of advertising today is not only to become a determiner of our collective self-image but also to optimize and enchant our greatest hopes and wishes in consumption through the circulation of ideals.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun. 1986 [2004]. The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition. In *Culture and Public Action*, ed. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, 59–84. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bell, Catherine. 2009. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1969. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In *Illuminations*, ed. A. Arendt. New York: Schocken.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Callahan, Robey, and Trevor Stack. 2007. Creativity in Advertising, Fiction and Ethnography. In *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold, 267–283. Oxford: ASA Monographs. Berg.
- Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge.

- Dusenberry, Phil. 2005. *Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents from a Hall-of-Fame Career in Advertising*. New York: Portfolio.
- Elliott, John Jr. 1982. Good Advice, in Leonard Safir and William Safire. *New York: Times Books*, p. 7.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Frame Analysis*. Boston: Northwestern University press.
- Hackley, Chris. 2000. Silent Running: Tacit, Discursive and Psychological Aspects of Management in a Top UK Advertising Agency. *British Journal of Management* 11 (3): 239–254.
- Hackley, Chris, and Arthur J. Kover. 2007. The Trouble with Creatives: Negotiating Creative Identity in Advertising Agencies. *International Journal of Advertising* 26 (1): 63–78.
- Hallam, Elizabeth, and Tim Ingold, eds. 2007. *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. Oxford: Berg.
- Handelman, Don, and Galina Lindquist, eds. 2005. *Ritual in Its Own Right: Exploring the Dynamics of Transformation*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Jöhncke, Steffen, and Vibeke Steffen. 2015. Introduction: Ethnographies of the Limits of Reason. In *Between Magic and Rationality: On the Limits of Reason in the Modern World*, ed. V. Steffen, S. Jöhncke, and K.M. Raahauge, 9–39. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Johnson, Phil. 2012. When One Agency's Ideas Show Up in Another Agency's Work. Adage. <http://adage.com/print/234207>.
- Klein, Naomi. 2000. *No Logo*. New York: Picador.
- Kocek, Chris. 2013. *The Practical Pocket Guide to Account Planning*. West Chester, PA: Yellow Bird Press.
- Kottman, E. John. 2010. Truth and the Image of Advertising. In *Advertising: Critical Readings*, ed. Brian Moeran, vol. 4, 29–32. Oxford: Berg.
- Kover, Arthur J. 1995. Copywriters Implicit Theories of Communication: An Exploration. *Journal of Consumer Research* 21 (4): 596–611.
- Latour, Bruno. 1991. Technology Is Society Made Durable. In *A Sociology of Monsters Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, ed. J. Law. Sociological Review Monograph N 38, pp. 103–132.
- . 2010. *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*. Trans. Catherine Porter and Heather Maclean. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. 1986. *Laboratory Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press.
- Lukovitz, Kartene. 2012. Fastest-Growing Brands Are 'Ideal-Driven'. *Marketing Daily*, January 18. <http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/165965>.

- Malefyt, Timothy de Waal. 2012. Writing Advertising: the Production of Relationships in Historical Review. *Journal of Business Anthropology* 1 (2): 218–239.
- . 2013. Celebrity Status, Names, and Ideas in the Advertising Award System. In *Exploring Creativity*, ed. Moeran and Christensen, 191–210. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2018. Brands. In *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Malefyt, Timothy de Waal, and Robert J. Morais. 2010. Creativity, Brands, and the Ritual Process: Confrontation and Resolution in Advertising Agencies. *Culture and Organization* 16 (4): 333–347.
- . 2012. *Advertising and Anthropology: Ethnographic Practices and Cultural Perspectives*. Oxford: Berg.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- . 1954. *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays*. New York: Anchor.
- . 1965. *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1972. *A General Theory of Magic*. London: Routledge.
- Mayle, Peter. 1990. *Up the Agency: The Snakes and Ladders of the Advertising Business*. London: Pan Books.
- McCreery, John. 1995. Malinowski, Magic, and Advertising. In *Contemporary Marketing and Consumer Behavior: An Anthropological Sourcebook*, ed. John F. Sherry Jr. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miller, Daniel. 1997. *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg.
- Moeran, Brian. 1996. *A Japanese Advertising Agency*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- . 2003. Celebrities and the Name Economy. In *Anthropological Perspectives on Economic Development and Integration*, ed. N. Dannhaeuser and C. Werner, 299–321. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- . 2005. *The Business of Ethnography: Strategic Exchanges, People and Organizations*. Oxford: Berg.
- . 2014. Business, Anthropology, and Magical Systems: The Case of Advertising. *Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference Proceedings*, pp. 119–132.
- Ogilvy, David. 1965. The Creative Chef. In *The Creative Organization*, ed. Gary A. Steiner, 199–213. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1985. *Ogilvy on Advertising*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Rosaldo, Renato. 1993. Ilongot Visiting: Social Grace and the Rhythms of Everyday life. In *Creativity/Anthropology*, 253–269. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sandiegox. 2017. <https://sandiegox.org/2017-american-advertising-awards-winners/>.
- Schudson, Michael. 1984. *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion*. New York: Basic.
- Stewart, Pamela J., and Andrew Strathern. 2014. *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Taussig, Michael. 2003. Viscerality, Faith and Skepticism. In *Magic and Modernity*, ed. B. Meyer and P. Pels. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 1987. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Weiner, Annette. 1992. *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-while-giving*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1980. Advertising: The Magic System. In *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso.