

TIMELY LIVES AND LIVELY TIMES IN A FRENCH ADVERTISING AGENCY

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by

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# **Timely Lives and Lively Times in a French Advertising Agency**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis presents an ethnographic study of a group of cultural intermediaries at work in a French advertising agency. A theoretical frame drawn from selected works in cultural economy, sociology and philosophy is deployed to address the ill-understood nature of uncertainty in practice-based research on advertising. Practice-based accounts by marketers, sociologists and anthropologists typically suggest that advertising agencies are unstable businesses because they work with unpredictable stakeholders (consumers and above all clients), and because they struggle to establish the legitimacy of their expertise. The problem with this argument, however, is that whilst it insists on the fragmented identities of practitioners locked in their doubts, anxieties and even myths, the everyday nature, experience and ways in which cultural intermediaries deal with such uncertainties are underexplored.

During the three-month empirical study multiple research methods were used to collect data, including participant observation, interviews and visual techniques. It was established during fieldwork that uncertainty is best expressed in the awkward relationships practitioners entertain with time. The analysis of these relationships runs through three analysis chapters. One explains how imaginative conversations, practices and uses of objects seek to restrain time-related uncertainties by “constructing” time. The second further analyses this construction by describing the ways in which practitioners unshackle themselves from their feelings of wasting time. The third relates this construction to the ways in which time is incorporated into creative work and sold to clients. The thesis contributes a deeper and temporally-based interpretation of uncertainty to the small number of ethnographic studies of advertising agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Specific to the French system hence tough to translate. But whatever –this is where you learn how stupid you are.

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# Chapter One

## *Introduction*

**T**his short introductory chapter specifies how the thesis intends to study a group of cultural intermediaries at work in a French advertising agency. Section 1.1 introduces the research *context* and the principal research *question*, whilst the *structure* of the thesis can be found in section 1.2.

### **1.1 Research context and question**

There are manifold ways of creating knowledge about advertising depending on the objectives that are sought and the paradigms that are followed. In “marketing communications” (MarCom) sections, authors of marketing textbooks choose to study how advertising works and how it can function better (e.g. Boone and Kurtz 2001; Kotler and Keller 2005; Brassington and Pettitt 2006; Jobber 2007). In advertising manuals, academics explain in more detail what advertising is for and how it is planned, implemented and improved (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty 1998; White 2000; Belch and Belch 2003; Shimp 2002; Smith and Taylor 2004). In international marketing or advertising textbooks they show how it adapts across cultures (Mueller 1996; Terpstra and Sarathy 2000; Czinkota and Ronkainen 2003; Doole and Lowe 2004). And in consumer behaviour books, they describe how consumers react to advertising messages (de Mooij 2003; Schiffman and Kanuk 2004; Solomon 2006). Business students are typically acquainted with this “advertising orthodoxy” not only through such textbooks, but also through exposure to the principal theoretical approaches of marketing, advertising and consumer behaviour research.

Broadly speaking, research in these areas is dominated by a positivist approach to constructing knowledge about advertising, and an instrumental view of the uses of such knowledge –business is a science not a faith; consumer behaviour and methods of persuasion can be modelled by means of curves, diagrams, tables and equations. Such ways of thinking and teaching through quantitative approaches emphasise the

*certainty* of advertising knowledge and practices, and underplay the doubts and ambiguities of everyday working life. In other words, the scientific predilections of positivism and the desire to enhance business performance infuse much advertising research with a particular certainty of approach (e.g. Malthouse, Calder and Tamhane 2007; Capella, Taylor and Webster 2008; Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008; Kennedy and McGarvey 2008). The consequence of this is that the uncertainties of everyday advertising work are ill-understood.

This thesis is not inscribed in the didactic tradition and positivist orthodoxy of the textbook genre or marketing research. Nor is it directly concerned with enhancing business performance. Rather it chooses to scrutinise the *conditions* of advertising production, and in particular the nature of uncertainty, from a qualitative perspective. The thesis engages with and can be viewed as a practice-based account of advertising. Found in marketing, sociology and anthropology, practice-based accounts of advertising either describe the experiences of erstwhile practitioners (e.g. Ogilvy 1983; Sullivan 1998), or the observations of academics or commentators outside the industry (e.g. Rothenberg 1995; Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran 2005).

Unlike the orthodox literature, practice-based accounts typically highlight the “problems”, not the “solutions” of advertising. In particular they describe a business racked by the *uncertainty* of its environment. Yet, in common with the orthodox literature, they most often fail to explore how practitioners deal with uncertainty in their day-to-day activities. The key question that gives impetus to this project is therefore: what is the nature of uncertainty in an advertising agency?

## **1.2 Thesis structure**

The thesis is composed of seven chapters including this one.

Chapter two will review previous research on advertising as explored and critiqued in sociological and anthropological perspectives on consumer culture. This literature review will identify in “producer-led” views a problem of reification of advertising professionals, and in “consumer-led” views an overemphasis on consumption phenomena to the exclusion of production. It will then introduce “cultural economy” as a response to these two problems and a conceptual frame for the thesis. Shaped by



heterogeneous orientations toward anthropology and history, cultural economy feeds on practice-based accounts, whose paucity at present leaves it hungry for more. The thesis will respond to this lack by producing a practice-based study of uncertainty in an advertising agency.

Chapter three will outline and justify the methodology and research design used in this project. It will first clarify the nature of the thesis as an ethnographic study of an advertising agency located in Nantes, France. Then it will state the various philosophical bases of ethnography and my own philosophical commitments. It will go on to list the methods used for data collection, based on systematic recordings of participant observation, interviews and visual methods. Lastly it will describe how this data has been sorted out and analysed, thereby illuminating a writing procedure. On the whole, chapter three will show how field relations influenced my choice of themes for analysis and generated the substance of the thesis.

According to chapter two it is not enough to suggest that uncertainty “matters” or characterises advertising practice if the nature of this uncertainty is not investigated. After chapter three has underscored the inductive requirements of this investigation, chapter four will argue that uncertainty is revealed at work in the relationship practitioners entertain with time. It will show how uncertainty can be seen as an absence of temporal “rules” in the organisation, stimulating *strategies of rationalisation*. This chapter is the first of a series that scrutinises the *construction* of time in the advertising agency.

Chapter five will take chapter four further by describing how this absence of rules leads to impressions of “wastes” of time in advertising work. It will suggest that uncertainties arise from the paradoxical activities of an organisation that spends its time wasting its time. In line with chapter four it will also analyse the ways in which practitioners *rationalise* this waste, with particular emphasis on the ironic character of temporal construction in the advertising agency.

Chapter six, the last analysis chapter, will draw on chapters four and five to argue that wastes of time create much perplexity around the nature of creative production. Describing the role that strategies of rationalisation play in this production, it will

enhance our understanding of creativity in advertising. It will detail in particular how time is creatively “sold” to clients and questions the somewhat commonsense notion that creative work occurs in the creative department.

Chapter seven will wrap up the thesis. After re-iterating its theoretical underpinnings, objectives, methods and contents, it will outline the three principal contributions of this study to advertising knowledge. The chapter will also give recommendations for future research in advertising.



Why do you study  
advertising, you  
capitalist? There are  
more important things  
in the world you should  
be concerned with.

*My ex-girlfriend Ralia.*



# Chapter Two

## *Literature review*

Following the introduction to the thesis in chapter one, the aim of chapter two is to situate this study of advertising within an existing body of literature, before reaching a research question. It is this research question that the three forthcoming analysis chapters (four, five, six) will tackle. The literature review contains six sections that explore the ways in which sociologists, anthropologists and marketers have studied and debated the role, significance and impact of advertising in society with somewhat limited attention to the working lives of advertising professionals.

Section 2.1 examines advertising from “producer-led” and “consumer-led” perspectives. Drawing attention to the influences of the Frankfurt School and Bourdieu’s seminal book *Distinction*, the section argues that advertising scholarship should distance itself from conceptions of advertising as a “power” whose analysis only relates to consumption. Instead it should focus on advertising people as producers. An emergent and heterogeneous body of literature called “cultural economy” is introduced in section 2.2. Cultural economy criticises grand conceptual claims about advertising and draws attention to an underdeveloped body of “practice-based accounts”. These accounts insist on the instability of the advertising industry that has caused much insecurity in advertising lives. Section 2.3 focuses on the description practice-based accounts make of past and present uncertainties in advertising professions.

Section 2.4 is concerned with how advertising people deal with these uncertainties. It also outlines weaknesses of current practice-based accounts and suggests that they would benefit from the classic sociological concept of rationalisation developed in section 2.5. Section 2.5 explains how Weber’s concept of rationalisation can be

fruitfully combined to the cultural economy agenda. Based on two criticisms of recent empirical research, it recommends an alternative reading of advertising practice that the analysis chapters (four, five, six) will follow. Section 2.6 finally defines this thesis as a practice-based account of advertising whose impetus originates from an investigation and a critique of the current practice-based literature. It concludes that the question of uncertainty remains ill-treated because of a lack of focus on what uncertainties are and how they are dealt with in practice.

## **2.1 Understanding advertising through “producer-led” and “consumer-led” views**

This first section presents two approaches to advertising research and outlines their limitations in order to introduce, in section 2.2, a third way of understanding advertising. These two approaches are reviewed here in consonance with two combined frameworks. One is du Gay et al.’s (1997) three perspectives on the relationships between production and consumption, namely “production of consumption” (see also Featherstone 1991: 14), “consumption as socio-cultural differentiation” and “consumption as appropriation and resistance”. The other is an even simpler distinction proposed by Celia Lury’s (1996: 4-5) in her account of consumer culture. She distinguishes between “producer-led” and “consumer-led” views.

Following Lury’s framework, the first part of this section understands advertising through producer-led views as the engine of a powerful ideological system (2.1.1). The second part gathers consumer-led arguments that re-evaluate the capacities of consumption as “socio-cultural differentiation” and as “appropriation and resistance” (2.1.2). This second part also introduces sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as a central contributor of this literature review. His discussion of “cultural intermediaries” leads to two key criticisms (2.1.3) that motivate the introduction of a third body of literature to which the thesis contributes –cultural economy.

### 2.1.1 Producer-led views

Advertising has never been a matter of indifference but the subject of innumerable, committed writings. This subsection reviews the influence of Critical Theory on evaluations of advertising. Of a pessimistic nature, such evaluations are relevant to this thesis because one cannot study advertising without understanding how and why it has troubled people, how and why it has aroused fears and denunciations in the past as well as today. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, poster media were pervasive enough to irritate cultural commentators in the UK. Their worries about the ubiquity of advertising are reported in some editions of the magazine *Punch* for example (McFall 2004: 56). Likewise, as soon as advertising started to flourish in the 1920s United States, a number of intellectuals denounced its disastrous effects on “culture” –a privileged sphere that once belonged to the elite.

Business economist Paul Nystrom was one of them. He lamented a “philosophy of futility” whereby people indulged, often as a result of boredom, in the frivolous, fashionable, status-giving activity of consumption (Ewen 1976: 66-7). At the end of the 1920s even practitioners publicly recognised that they accelerated progress toward the reign of “obsolescence, free spending, and creative waste” glimpsed by J. George Frederick (Lears 1994: 227). But even more virulent critiques were formulated later on with thinkers affiliated to the Frankfurt School of “Critical Theory”: mainly Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer; but also Fromm, Haug and Habermas. It is important to recall some arguments the Frankfurt School raised about advertising because they had a profound impact on numerous writers who perpetuated the “production of consumption” tradition.

#### 2.1.1.1 Understanding Critical Theory and the “base-superstructure” model

The producer-led view is inspired by the writings of Marx that were preoccupied with the role, means and conditions of *production*. Marx was interested in production as a process that fully integrates consumption (Marx 1857/1973: 89-94). A description of this process can be found in *The German Ideology*, written with Engels (1845/1998), and the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859/1971). It has also been developed by Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1965), and is now known

as the “base-superstructure” model. Althusser sums up his readings of Marx in *Positions* (1976), starting with Marx’s representation of the structure of society by means of a spatial metaphor – “down below” is the economic base (productive forces and relations of production), which supports the “superstructure”. The superstructure comprises two levels, the legal/political level (law and the State) and the ideological level (religious, moral, political, legal ideologies). Without the base or infrastructure, the edifice collapses. But whilst in Marxian theory the “State Apparatus” is essentially repressive and operates through public institutions (the government, the army, the police, the administration, etc.), Althusser (1976: 82-3) elaborates on those private institutions that function on an ideological rather than repressive mode (the Church, the school, the family, the media, etc.); he calls them “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISA).

Along the lines of the Althusserian base-superstructure model that underlines the crucial role of ISAs, Frankfurt School writers usually see advertising as part of the media apparatus, that is, as an instrument of domination that nurtures capitalism and fosters its reproduction. For example Marcuse (1991) draws on the theory of commodity fetishism described in the first volume of Marx’s *Capital* (1867/1990: 125-244) to explain how advertising turns commodities into symbolic substitutes of the natural relationships we could have with other people. Marx calls commodities “fetishes” since people in capitalist society endow them with an objective value that mysteriously masks the relations of labour through which they were produced. “Mass entertainment” delivers these fetishes which, through the magical mediation of money, “alienate” people (Marcuse 1991: 24). Alienation refers to our estrangement from such commodities, hence from the people who produced them. The “culture industry” therefore contaminates, even subverts the higher values of authentic culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 1992). In broader terms the economic base contaminates the superstructure. Benjamin’s (1999: 194-226) thesis of “mechanical reproduction” illustrates this phenomenon quite well. He observes how the film industry annihilates a distance or “aura” to make objects accessible “right here”, at very close range. Ridding commodities of their history, of their context, mechanical reproduction “differentialises” them. This means in the specific context of advertising that campaigns do not depict cars as social products of human labour aimed at satisfying

certain needs, but as things naturally endowed with values of masculinity, prestige, power, etc.

#### *2.1.1.2 Understanding the impact of the “base-superstructure” model*

The Frankfurt School exerted tremendous influence upon later critical writers (e.g. McLuhan 1951; Fromm 1956; Lukács 1971; Deleuze and Guattari 1997 *inter alia*) even if they used different terminologies that did not always refer to a strictly Marxian understanding of fetishisation (e.g. Wernick 1991; Stratton 1996). From a key concept of commodity fetishism derived principles of social control these critical writers were all concerned with –alienation and mechanical reproduction, but also “false consciousness” and “interpellation”, developed by Lukács and Althusser respectively to show how subordinate classes fail to recognise the instruments of their oppression. Inspired by such principles, a number of researchers insisted on the ideological dimension of advertising (Williamson 1978; Dyer 1982) and weaved related themes of illusion, blindness, deception, myth, etc., toward a rather dark vision of capitalist society. In this society consumers are like the “prisoners” facing the wall of their cave and staring at shadows of reality in Plato’s (1976) *Republic*. Unable to look back, they cannot realise that what they see is not “real”, remain unaware of their slave condition and even exert themselves to defend and preserve the myth they live in (this is *The Matrix* in today’s popular culture).

This ideological dimension underlines asymmetrical relations of power –advertising people are an unelected, unrepresentative “power elite” (Mills 1956) giving consumers the illusion of choice and turning them into “happy robots”. In other words consumers are placed at the centre of a “spectacle” (Boorstin 1961; Debord 1996) which distracts them from the power elite’s true objectives –a “colonisation” of culture (e.g. Lefebvre 1991; Jameson 1991; Harvey 1989). And before the glittering façade of “commodity aesthetics” (Haug 1986), nobody seems immune to persuasion (Pollay 1986). This spectacle communicates the idealised imagery of capitalism –“the sky is always blue, chicks are never ugly, this is perfect happiness corrected on Photoshop” (Beigbeder 2004: 19). But replete with stereotypes, such imagery has



devastating effects on people's bodies and lifestyles (*anorexia nervosa* being a recurrent example)<sup>2</sup>.

All in all, advertising relays a culture of narcissism (Lasch 1978) and people get to “consume themselves”; they put themselves as goods on the market (Boorstin 1961: 66-7; Adorno 1974: 215; Williamson 1978: 13; Ewen 1976: 47-8; Wernick 1991: 182; Stratton 1996). Finally Critical Theory's overall depiction of a “contamination” of culture finds resonance within themes of “pollution”. In both the figurative and the literal sense, advertising pollutes the world. Exposed to between 3000 and 5000 advertisements per day (Coulter, Zaltman and Coulter 2001) a US individual's eyes and ears are constantly solicited (McLuhan 1951; Schrank 1977: 90). On top of this kind of mental pollution, the advertising industry causes serious ecological damage deriving from both the distribution of advertising artefacts and the consumption of more and more commodities (Packard 1960; Hyman, Tansley & Clark 1994).

Advertising therefore functions as the “mirror” of capitalism (Jhally 1987: 205), but it is a “distorted” mirror (Pollay 1986; Pollay and Gallagher 1990; Marchand 1985: xvii) insofar as it “mythicizes” the production process. Myths arise from feelings or beliefs that simulations are more credible, authentic or “real” than reality. For example the idealised images of advertising (e.g. a magazine photo of a model) and even the tangible simulacra they advertise (decaffeinated coffee, plastic plants, etc.) shape a “hyperreality” (Baudrillard 1988) –simulated worlds which never really existed, such as Disneyland<sup>3</sup> (see also Boorstin 1961; Ritzer 1999, 2000; Bryman 1999). Other cultural theorists strive to unravel these profuse myths or simulations via semiology (in particular Barthes 1993; Langholz Leymore 1975; Goldman 1992) –the

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<sup>2</sup> An extremely dense literature analyses these negative impacts of advertising. See for instance Reisman, Denney and Glazer 1950; McLuhan 1951; Potter 1954; Packard 1960; Mannes 1964; Skornia 1965; Boorstin 1961; Langholz Leymore 1975; Bell 1976; Ewen 1976; Schrank 1977; Williamson 1978; Ewen and Ewen 1982; Dyer 1982; Schudson 1984; Belk 1985; Pollay 1986; Schouten 1991; Richins 1991, 1995; Martin and Kennedy 1993; Hyman and Tansey 1994; Mittal 1994; Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Kellner 1995; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Miles 1998; Jones, Stanaland and Gelb 1998; Gulas and McKeage 2000; Tebbel 2000 *inter alia*.

<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard (1994: 12-4) argues that the fully assumed, conspicuous “simulation” of Disneyland conceals other “disneyfied” aspects of an increasingly branded reality outside it. For him “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation (...) Los Angeles is *no longer anything but an immense scenario* and a perpetual pan shot”.

science inaugurated by Saussure (1960) which studies the role of signs as part of social life. In other words they draw attention to what Baudrillard (1988) calls “sign-value” and see advertising discourses as “texts” that can be “decoded” (Mick 1986; Pandya and Venkatesh 1992; Mick and Buhl 1992). Some authors discover via semiotic analysis a disturbing manipulation through which complex meanings (happiness, love and the like) are transferred into commodities (Fiske 1989; Gamson 1994; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990).

### *2.1.1.3 Summarising and questioning producer-led views*

So the pessimistic themes inspired by Critical Theory warn against the horrors of the capitalist principle of accumulation, fuelled by the “management of demand”, i.e. the creation of ever increasing stimulations of envy. They describe harmful ideologies and a “dependence effect”, vicious circle whereby production only fills a void that it has itself created (Galbraith 1958). Accordingly Leiss (1976) worries about a “consumer logic” according to which exchanges on the market tend to replace family and community activities. In the same vein, public issues are individualised and the individual is defined by his/her consumer activity for Bauman (1990: 204), who speaks of a “consumer attitude”.

However the “production of consumption” view has been subject to a debate revolving around issues of power, agency and needs –are consumers as dominated and manipulated as Critical Theory claims? Is the critique not speculating too much about the passivity of individuals (Lury 1996: 45)? Is it not “elitist” in distinguishing between “high” and “low” arts, “true” and “false” needs (e.g. Swingewood 1977; Staught and Turner 1988)? To open up this debate, it is perhaps easier to start with the notion of “true” or “authentic” needs in the next subsection.

### 2.1.2. Consumer-led views

For Marcuse (1991) true needs are based on human biology<sup>4</sup> whereas “false needs” are created by the media, which assign a “second nature” to people. However the assumption of true needs betrays “a certain romantic nostalgia” for a pre-industrial, utilitarian world (Parry and Bloch 1989: 4). It fails to acknowledge the temporal and spatial construction of needs, whose substance always reflects historical circumstances<sup>5</sup>. As a result many contemporary cultural theorists (e.g. Baudrillard 1988; Featherstone 1991; Lash and Urry 1994 *inter alia*) cannot fully adhere to the “production of consumption” or “mass culture” critique (Miller 1987: 166). There is enough evidence in anthropology (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, chap. 3; Sahlins 1976: viii), history (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1982: 1), social policy (Doyal and Gough 1991), cultural studies (du Gay *et al.* 1997: 57; Clarke, Housiaux and Doel 2002: 224) and sociology (Bourdieu 1979) to suggest that separations between the needed and the superfluous cannot be universally determined. In this line of thinking, Bourdieu’s (1979) seminal study of French preferences and behaviours from the late 1960s and early 1970s becomes important to this thesis for two reasons. First, it describes how people display and/or manipulate tastes as marks of social distinction. Second, it introduces a “cultural intermediaries” theme which offers (both in what it says and in what it does not say) new avenues for advertising research. These two contributions are outlined below.

#### 2.1.2.1 Understanding consumption as socio-cultural differentiation

According to Bourdieu (1979) there is nothing natural in taste, but an ideology powerful enough to convert differences in the “ways of acquiring culture” into *natural* differences between people. This ideology works because cultural capital is legitimated only when it does not show the signs of its genesis (e.g. acquisition of

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<sup>4</sup> Marcuse uses the word more as a rhetorical device than as a serious reference to natural science (Bocock 1993: 90).

<sup>5</sup> Even under the influence of Marxian thought, semioticians in particular fail to elaborate on what they really mean by “false” or “real” needs. Williamson (1978: 16) claims that advertising “appropriates our real needs and desires to serve the interests of capitalism”; in the same vein Dyer (1982: 2) writes that “false needs (...) are disseminated with the aim of regenerating desire for the consumption of an ever-increasing volume and diversity of goods”. Meanwhile they assume that the reader has a clear idea of what these needs are supposed to be.

culture at school is nurture not nature, hence illegitimate). People tend to classify themselves in relation to the social classes they do *not* want to be associated with; accordingly tastes are often defined in relation to “distastes” (the “kitsch”, the “kinky”, the “meretricious”, etc.). This is why Bourdieu insists on the *symbolic* capacity of taste as a classificatory apparatus and a leading principle of “lifestyle”. Cultural consumption, he suggests, always implies a process of *appropriation* –people contribute to the production of what they consume.

This process is visible in the dynamics of fashion for example. Since Plato’s philosophy, the imitative nature of desire has aroused interest (e.g. Tarde 1999; Fuat and Dholakia 1998: 57) and classic studies have emerged, like that of Veblen (1899/1994) or Simmel (1904/1957). Simmel posits that subordinate social groups imitate the clothing of superordinate groups, whilst the latter respond by adopting new fashions to preserve status differentiation. As Veblen observed in the line of this “trickle-down” theory, consumption is a phenomenon of social structuring that advertising incentives alone can only encourage, not regulate. His account of “conspicuous consumption” explains how the symbolic aspects of consumption shape social categories.

So the work of Bourdieu and others before him indicate that Critical Theory, concentrating on issues of power and domination (2.1.1), inspired arguments that failed to link consumption to patterns of *socio-cultural differentiation*. Overlooked was a “basic need” for symbolisation (Langer 1951: 45). Indeed what makes us different from animals is our production and use of symbols. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss’ (1962) study that shows how people are always involved in operations of DIY (“bricolage”), Sahlins (1976) argues that food and clothes can act as classificatory devices or “totems”. In contemporary rituals like Christmas, consumer goods are similarly used as cultural “communicators” (McCracken 1988). In sum consumers should not be seen as passive receptacles of goods they do not “need”; rather they endow commodities with their own meanings (Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 74; Leiss 1983).

#### 2.1.2.2 *Understanding consumption as appropriation and resistance*

But despite the broadened insight it provides, Bourdieu's (1979) account of socio-cultural differentiation has been criticised for its determinism. The book describes a rather rigid social structure in which individuals have little room for manoeuvre. For de Certeau (1990: 35) it is too much concerned with *what* is used, not enough with "ways of using". As Bourdieu focuses on appropriation and the symbolic use of commodities, he might underestimate their possibilities for identity negotiation (Belk 1988; Dittmar 1992) and for the transgression of established social divisions and easy classifications (Fiske 1989). For example Bakhtin's (1968) work on François Rabelais and medieval carnivals shows how cultural institutions may emphasise sameness at the expense of difference, beyond the socioeconomic rigidities of life. Fairs, festivals and other opportunities for transgression and symbolic inversions of "official" culture have long provided "liminal" spaces in which taboos and impossible dreams can be expressed (Stallybrass and White 1986).

The popular tradition of fairs and carnivals reinforces feelings of emotional fusion, of belonging to a community, a "tribe". Tribes are precisely what subcultural studies are interested in. Perhaps best defined by their sharing of specific "lifestyles"<sup>6</sup> (as Bourdieu said of social classes) tribes are arguably more flexible and evolving constructs than Bourdieu's classes. For example they borrow from advertising as much as advertising borrows from them (Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar 2007). In these circumstances it seems no longer reasonable to contend that advertising only "does things to people", when people do things with advertising too (Baudrillard 1968; Lannon and Cooper 1983; Featherstone 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Elliott 1997; Shankar 1999). Thus O'Donohoe (1994) outlines the benefits of a "uses and

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<sup>6</sup> Terminologies differ but essentially refer to the same idea of "subcultures" –e.g. "consumption communities" (Boorstin 1961), "tribes", "neo-tribes", "pseudo-tribes" or "postmodern tribes" (Maffesoli 1988; Bauman 1990; Shields 1992), "brand communities" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Researchers looked at a number of specific "tribes" which contributed to the popularity of the concept –e.g. skinheads (Clarke 1973), punks, mods and teds (Hebdige 1979), motorbikers (Willis 1978; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The range of subcultures is otherwise potentially unlimited, from DIY-protest cultures to techno tribes, modern primitives, latino gangs, new-wave metallers, surfers, rollermaniacs, etc. (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003: 7). Finally the concept of "subculture" often implies a "deviant" relationship with regard to a "dominant" culture (Jenkins 1983: 41; Fiske 1989; Chaney 1996: 35; Abbott 1998: 48).

gratifications” approach which sees consumers as active users rather than passive receivers of advertising –for example consumers may use advertisements

for play at a personal level by creating a collage, at an interpersonal level by guessing the brand or product with friends, and at the level of social orientation by mocking the behaviour or concerns of particular characters (O’Donohoe 1994: 71).

Likewise “reader-response theory” seeks to discover how advertising texts work with the knowledge, expectations or motives of consumers (Scott 1994; Stern 1996).

In this connection subcultural studies and some areas of consumer culture theory draw attention to practices of *resistance*<sup>7</sup>. For de Certeau (1990: xL) the analysis of “ways of doing” deals with themes that are both similar and conflicting with Foucault’s (1975) *Discipline and Punish*:

[S]imilar, since it is about distinguishing quasi microbial operations that proliferate within technocratic structures and twist their objectives through a multitude of “tactics” articulated with the “details” of everyday life; conflicting, since it is no longer about describing how the violence of order turns into a disciplinary technology, but about unearthing the surreptitious forms taken by the scattered, tactical and DIY-like [*bricoleuse*] creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of “surveillance”. These procedures and ruses of consumption constitute, ultimately, the network of an anti-discipline this book is concerned with.

On the one hand therefore, the productive apparatus strives to discipline people by means of political, economic or scientific rationalities. Advertising discourses are obviously part of these rationalities that de Certeau calls “strategies”. But on the other hand people find ruses to circumvent and resist strategies in the very “practice of everyday life”. Tactics are these “arts of doing” through which people build on the flaws of the system to “invent”, to creatively *produce* their own “quotidianity”. From

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<sup>7</sup> In reaction to Packard’s (1957) thesis for example, Baudrillard (1968: 231) writes in an early work that “injunction and persuasion arouse all sorts of counter-motivations and resistances (these are rational or irrational: reaction to passivity, people do not want to be “owned”, reaction to pomposity, to repetition, etc.), in brief –advertising discourse dissuades as much as it persuades and it seems that the consumer is, if not immunised, at least a rather free user of the advertising message.” And as if echoing Bakhtin (1968) he concludes that “[t]he mechanism of purchase –which is already invested with libidinal power –is substituted for an eroticisation of choice and spending (...) as dance anticipates the sexual act. And through advertising, like in feasts of times gone by, society looks at itself and consumes its own image (...) This amounts to say that *advertising is first of all consumed rather than ruling consumption*” (Baudrillard 1968: 241-2, 275).

a limited number of strategically produced elements, possibilities are in fact limitless (Hebdige 1988: 55).

Hence, recognising the full potential of “appropriation” (e.g. through practices of resistance) tempers both the pessimism of the “production of consumption” critique and that of “passive” consumption as essentially social differentiation. In other words, a higher consideration of *agency* restricts the power of advertising as ideological state apparatus (2.1.1), as well as the power of taste as deterministic “classifier”. A more careful examination of advertising through consumption ceases, to some extent, to victimise people as mere sufferers of structure. Consumers become what futurologist Toffler (1981) calls “prosumers” –people increasingly drawn into the production process<sup>8</sup>. They may be recruited and even paid by manufacturers to help design new products (Levine *et al.* 2000); or they may pay a bit less to do the job themselves, as in Ritzer’s (2000) story of “McDonaldization” whereby labour costs are externalised on consumers.

### 2.1.2.3 Introducing cultural intermediaries

The second reason that makes Bourdieu’s argument crucial to this literature review is his virulent critique of a service class whose occupation deals with influencing taste. Whilst people in this class have been labelled “opinion leaders” (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) or “fashion leaders” (McCracken 1988: 96), Bourdieu (1979: 356-431) refers to “*taste makers*” or “cultural intermediaries”. They all belong to a petty bourgeoisie working in “new or renewed” professions in fields as diverse as journalism, cinema, fashion, advertising, decoration, tourism, real estate and medical or social assistance. Selling “symbolic products and services”, they promote a hedonic moral of consumption based on credit and spending, rather than the ascetic saving and

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<sup>8</sup> Written in a prophetic style more than twenty five years ago, his optimistic thesis could be summarised as follows: the agricultural revolution, “First Wave” of change, took thousands of years to play itself out. People gradually consumed what they themselves produced. Production and consumption were fused into a single life-giving function –the Greeks, the Romans, and the medieval Europeans were neither producers nor consumers but “*prosumers*”. With the rise of industrialism (“Second Wave”) everyone became dependent upon the market and the fused economy of prosumers based on “production for use” was split into an economy of “producers” and “consumers” based on “production for exchange”. Toffler argues with reference to self-service petrol stations, electronic banking and supermarkets, that “Third Wave civilization” (today’s civilization) sees the *re-emergence* of the “prosumer” or “do-it-yourselfer” (Toffler 1981: 286-7).



accumulation advocated by a conservative, declining petty bourgeoisie. The most typical are directors of cultural shows on TV or the radio, or critics writing in “quality” newspapers and magazines. It is their illegitimate domination that Bourdieu highlights, not without a sense of contempt.

Convinced that they owe their position to their diplomas as well as technical and “human” competences (dynamism, curiosity, etc.), these people he caustically calls “new intellectuals”<sup>9</sup> cultivate their taste, self-presentation and lifestyle in a quest for *distinction*, in particular from the established petty bourgeoisie (differentiation from the working class being easily achieved). “Distinction” refers more precisely here to the distance they create from the social structure they otherwise belong to. It is an estrangement from the classifications, declassifications and reclassifications they endure, a “romantic flight away from the social world”. The new cultural intermediaries would rather be marginalised than categorised; therefore they undermine hierarchies and status competitions, always in a falsely “laid back” and “liberated” manner. In other words they do classify themselves, but on a principle of *denegation* –claiming they do *not* follow the crowd, they display instead their “creative” alternatives (tastes for organic food, science fiction, homeopathy, esotericism, futurology, etc.).

Noteworthy for chapter two is the awkwardness in which these people, according to Bourdieu (1979: 356-431), are bound to define themselves. Linked to recent transformations of the economy, notably to the growing importance of symbolic work (“packaging, design, promotion, public relations, marketing”), their position in social space is still “ill determined”. Some professions even had to be strategically “invented” to create the need for symbolic action among potential consumers. Bourdieu first shows how these professions struggle to legitimate themselves through the semantic tricks they use for (re)establishment –more or less euphemistically ennobled terms such as “social work” or “cultural animation”; circumlocutions such as “collaborator” instead of secretary or “psychotherapist” instead of nurse. They all

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<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu also distinguished within the dominant class between true sociologists and the “cheap” theorists he would never speak to. He referred to Alain Minc, Philippe Sollers, Jacques Attali or his favourite whipping-boy Bernard-Henri Lévy as “negative intellectuals”, “fast thinkers”, “media intellectuals”, etc.



acquired their status through “a classic process of professionalization” involving specific training and diplomas, a specific deontology and ideology. And thus they like to think that they play the role of prophets or “avant-garde” setting up dominant values as a model for themselves, before turning themselves into a model for others.

#### 2.1.2.4 *Illegitimate professions? Towards limitations of producer and consumer-led views*

Then Bourdieu further explains *why*, in his opinion, the professionalization of such occupations is so fragile. What disturbs him is not that taste makers “profess” or “proselytize”, but the *illegitimate* means through which they make of proselytism a profession. For him they have assigned to themselves the impossible role of divulgating “legitimate culture” (the culture of the dominant class), inasmuch as they do not possess the statutory authority and specific competence of legitimate popularisers<sup>10</sup>. Because they wrongly identify culture with “knowledge”, taste makers believe that they can “teach” it to the social categories they feel distinct from. However culture has less to do with knowledge than with a *relation to culture*<sup>11</sup>, hence they lure themselves as much as they deceive others. They will never *know*, let alone relay this culture –heritage, by definition, of the dominant class. Only can they *acknowledge* or recognise it.

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<sup>10</sup> It might be unclear who the “legitimate popularisers” are, but one can think of Bourdieu’s affinities with “true” or “traditional” intellectuals (like his friend Derrida) as opposed to the “cheap” kind mentioned in the previous note. Also, the reference to Kant in the quote that follows somehow clarifies what he has in mind. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant (1798/2006: 120-2) writes that “the talent for inventing is called *genius*. But we confer this name only on an *artist*, therefore on one who knows how to *make* something, not on one who is merely acquainted with and *knows* many things. However, it is also not conferred on an artist who merely imitates, but rather on one who is disposed to produce his works *originally* (...) [one type of] *men of genius* (they are better called apes of genius) have forced their way in under this sign-board which bears the language “minds extraordinarily favoured by nature”, declaring that difficult study and research are dilettantish and that they have snatched the spirit of all science in one grasp, though they pretend to administer it in small doses that are concentrated and powerful. This type, like that of the quack and the charlatan, is very disadvantageous to progress in scientific and moral education when he knows how to conceal his poverty of spirit by dogmatizing from the seat of wisdom in decisive tones over religion, politics, and morals, like one of the initiated or a ruler [see Bourdieu’s use of *auctoritas* in the next citation]. What else is there to do against this other than to continue patiently on one’s way with diligence, order, and clarity, paying no attention to this trickster?”

<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu’s social determinism appears in bright lights when he cites the adage “culture is what is left in man when he has forgotten everything”, which specifies his conception of culture as essentially heritage, not acquisition. Cultural intermediaries are “men of nurture”, not nature, hence they cannot entertain the *relation of familiarity* enjoyed by those who are linked to culture by birth, by essence (Bourdieu 1979: 381).

Thus

they have to become, as Kant puts it, “apes of genius” and seek the substitute of the *auctor*’s charismatic *auctoritas*<sup>12</sup> and of the haughty freedom established within aesthetic casualness (visible for example in the relaxed ease of their style) and within an open refusal of heavy didacticism and depressing, impersonal and boring showing off, which are the price or external sign of statutory competence –whilst at the same time feeling uneasy about the contradiction inherent to the role of a “foil” deprived of intrinsic value. Their inferior position in the field of cultural production and their ambivalent relation to intellectual or scientific authorities incite them to launch partial revolutions of hierarchies, such as the canonisation of arts in the process of legitimization, or that of minor and marginal forms of legitimate art (...) Petty bourgeois spectators (...) get to acknowledge the “guarantees of quality” that their taste makers (...) offer them in the guise of (...) all institutional signs of cultural authority they have surrounded themselves with –academicians in magazines that make history accessible, Sorbonne professors in television debates (...) (Bourdieu 1979: 375-6).

By no means does Bourdieu describe competent “intermediaries” here. He rather links their role to the inevitable “uneasiness” arising from the “contradiction” between their claims and the actual capacities of their “inferior position”. All that is left to them is “a sort of flair” (Bourdieu 1979: 380) thanks to which they engage in “cultural bluffs”. In the above passage they reach a falsely comfortable position by surrounding themselves with traditional or pseudo-traditional authorities (“academicians in magazines”, “Sorbonne professors in television debates”). In other circumstances they borrow the most conspicuous, hence simplest to emulate, aspects of an intellectual lifestyle (e.g. daring clothing styles, taste for underground culture, etc.).

Now the ironical stance Bourdieu takes at this social class leads to three turning points in this literature review. First, his treatment of a whole “class” of people inspires two criticisms of the literature exposed so far –the “reification” of this class, and “consumption myopia”. Second, these criticisms motivate the need for different kinds of “cultural intermediary” accounts –concerned with this need is the cultural economy stream. Third, the contradiction Bourdieu points out gives birth to a research question; and the way of dealing with this question offers a contribution to cultural economy. The next section presents the two first criticisms.

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<sup>12</sup> The Latin *auctoritas* has given “authority”, but it also refers to the prestige a person acquired in Ancient Rome – *auctor* (author) meaning the “founder”.

### 2.1.3 From advertising to advertising people

In substance, Bourdieu's point of view is appealing –taste makers are compelled to “cheat” themselves and others for lack of legitimately acquired cultural capital. And fieldwork did not affect the sympathy I have had with Bourdieu's argument<sup>13</sup>. The problem that arises has more to do with his methods of enquiry. Bourdieu lacks evidence for assuming that the malaise or unease of cultural intermediaries must be seen in an “ambivalent relation to intellectual or scientific authorities”. He seems to give way to prejudice or excessive value judgement instead of rigorous demonstration. Thus there is no obvious reason why he should emphasise the *fragility* of strategies for relieving the unease (ideological inventions of new professions through titles and degrees) rather than their *stabilising* function. Besides, drawing on such a catch-all category of occupations from journalism to advertising to medical assistance, Bourdieu can only speculate about “family resemblances” and formulate grand claims about illegitimacy. Yet advertising creatives and psychotherapists have very different social and educational backgrounds for example, hence more differentiated accounts would do them more justice (Nixon and du Gay 2002).

#### 2.1.3.1 The reification of practitioners

In sum, not only the “production of consumption” critique but also influential works in the consumer-led literature (Bourdieu 1979; Featherstone 1991) have identified cultural intermediaries as key figures of economic and cultural life *without much being known about them*. Much has been written on cultural intermediaries in relation to *us*, not to cultural intermediaries themselves; that is, in relation to “what they do to us” and not to “who they are”. It is seldom their practices, feelings and aspirations that matter; rather it is how all these affect us “consumers” that matters. This preference is clearly visible in the labels theorists use, which either emphasise domination –“hidden persuaders” (Packard 1957), “*captains of consciousness*” (Ewen 1976) –or cut across too many occupations –“new petty bourgeoisie” (Bourdieu 1979), “specialists” in

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<sup>13</sup> The criticism that follows might be valid on the methodological plane *but* both the “uncertainty” theme in this chapter and later ethnographic inquiry support Bourdieu's analysis.

symbolic production (Featherstone 1991: 10, 43-5), “creative class” (Florida 2004), “creative industry” (Hartley 2005: 6, 18), etc.

For example Packard (1957) refers to “hidden” experts (notably in psychiatry) who use insidious, subliminal methods of persuasion<sup>14</sup> to control *our* tastes (see also McLuhan 1951: v; Dichter 1960; Fiske 1989). Dyer (1982: 11) recalls how public relations promote positive images of people or firms without appearing to do so. In sum these experts are invoked as triggers of “methods”, or as an oppressive “force” (like the objectified “public relations” appellation) annihilating *our* choices. *Advertising* prevails over advertising *people*. This chapter remains concerned with Bourdieu’s process of distinction, specifically that of cultural intermediaries through “professionalization”. At the same time it seeks to avoid burying advertising practitioners in a powerful but faceless machine of production. Instead, it proposes a theoretical framework and a methodology that will work against the *reification* of these people toward either a power or “force” oppressing defenceless consumers (e.g. “advertising”), or toward a “class” prone to stigmatisation (e.g. “petty bourgeoisie”).

### 2.1.3.2 Consumption myopia

The problem of reification weakens both producer-led and consumer-led theses. But two other weaknesses affect more specifically the consumer-led thesis. First, repeated emphases around the “spectacular” and often marginal practices of consumption (such as the resistance and deviance of subcultures) tend to overlook the mundane aspects of “routine consumption”, i.e. that of most activities (Burrows and Marsh 1992: 25). Consumer-led discourses then run the risk of overestimating the possibilities of consumption and quashing important points made by the “production of consumption” view rather too quickly. Second, they tend to isolate a homogeneous category of “consumers” in appearance distinct from another group of “producers”. A

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<sup>14</sup> In the dozen years before *The Hidden Persuaders* a series of novels depicted admen as materialistic, status-conscious, cynical people who manipulate consumers’ desires (Richards, Botterill and MacRury 2000: 59). Key’s (1976) exposé of “media rape” contends that media has the proven ability to programme human behaviour in the same way as hypnosis. In the last 25 years or so nonetheless, studies have shown that advertising people do not resort to subliminal imagery for there is no evidence that it “works” (Sutherland 1993).

more optimistic re-evaluation of consumption does discredit the “passive, individualistic and alienated shopper”; but by offering the “creative and desiring prosumer” as a replacement it also maintains *consumers* at the centre of the analysis (even prosumers are productive *consumers*).

In the end both production-led and consumption-led arguments concentrate on a more or less victimised, more or less active *Homo Consummatus*. Besides the problem of reification, an exaggerated focus on consumption or “consumption myopia” keeps misrepresenting cultural intermediaries. Ironically, it disregards all these consumers who happen to be professional producers too –notably advertising people in the context of this thesis. Either reified or forgotten via exclusion from the realm of consumption, the *Homo Faber* deserves more attention than has been hitherto granted. This thesis builds on this observation to *humanise* the claim, until now widely accepted by both production and consumption-led currents, that production matters. To this end, the next section introduces a theoretical framework that revalorises the *lives* of some producers in the advertising industry.

## **2.2. Understanding advertising through “cultural economy”**

Two criticisms have arisen from the literature overviewed so far. Whether seen through the lens of Critical Theory or “consumption-led” arguments, advertising is part of an autonomous sphere of production. As this sphere seems worth analysing only with respect to its influence over consumption (consumption myopia), cultural intermediaries tend to be objectified toward a more or less powerful advertising apparatus (reification). To respond to these criticisms and provide a less totalising representation of advertising production, this thesis falls within the emergent field of “cultural economy” (du Gay and Pryke, 2002).

This section first recalls the roots and objectives of this hybrid field, as well as its relevance to advertising research (2.2.1). It underlines in particular a lack of practice-based accounts of advertising. Such accounts however exist and a number of them are reviewed in subsection 2.2.2, which shows the benefits of the writings of “outsiders” (2.2.2.2) over that of “insiders” (2.2.2.1). But a common preoccupation of both

insiders and outsiders is the unpredictability of a business (2.2.2.3) which will be further examined in section 2.3.

### **2.2.1 Cultural economy and the need for practice-based accounts**

Cultural economy gained its recent impetus from, but also a certain distance to, the works of anthropologists (e.g. Sahlins 1976; Douglas and Isherwood 1979) and the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (e.g. Hall 1976). Broadly speaking, cultural studies challenge the base-superstructure model upon which Frankfurt School-influenced claims rest; instead they put forward the idea that producers and consumers are “co-producers”. In “primitive” societies the notion of “culture” and “economy” are interconvertible. The classic example of rain dances and other rituals that aim to influence the harvest show that work and play are indistinguishable. As a result Elwert spoke of a “culturally embedded economy” (Featherstone 1991: 54) before Appadurai (1986) coined the expression “cultural economy”. Appadurai was interested in “the social life of things” beyond their market value. He observed that the ways in which commodities are used, appropriated and imbued with a plethora of sign values have a significant impact on their circulation and exchange (see also Fiske 1989). Subsequently a number of theorists described interwoven, blurred boundaries between production and consumption in Western economies (e.g. Wernick 1991; Miller 1995; Lash and Urry 1994: 64).

However the blurring of these boundaries were taken as opportunities to formulate assumptions according to which “sign-value” (Baudrillard 1988) in our “economies of signs” (Lash and Urry 1994), “new economy” (Leadbeater 1999) “network society” (Castells 2000), “knowledge economy” (Hartley 2005), “new culture of capitalism” (Rifkin 2000) or again “cultural logic of late capitalism” (Jameson 1991), has supplanted a use-value that was previously the norm of economic and organisational life. On the whole these epochal claims depict an increasingly “culturalised” economy<sup>15</sup>, a “cultural turn” from materialism to discourse (e.g. Barrett and Phillips

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<sup>15</sup> In a cornerstone argument on the “culturalization of economic life”, Lash and Urry (1994) characterise contemporary Western economies as marked by a growing degree of *reflexive accumulation*, which entails a new degree of *aesthetic reflexivity* in the spheres of both production and consumption. For them capitalist production gets more and more design-intensive.

1992; Ray and Sayer 1999: 1; Cook *et al.* 2000). Yet this thesis does not validate nor build on this cultural turn because it agrees with Featherstone (1991: viii) that it is not the “reality” which has changed, but our perception of it<sup>16</sup>. It rather recognises with cultural economy the need for more empirical research in advertising, as detailed below.

#### *2.2.1.1 Objectives and methods of cultural economy*

Cultural economy was first given concrete grounds via an original case study, in which du Gay *et al.* (1997) showed how the Sony Walkman emerged out of a conversation between two cultures –a “culture of production” which refers to the meanings producers intended to attach to the Walkman; and a “production of culture” which refers to the meanings consumers actively attach to the object in return (Hall 1980). Given all these meanings are relational (they mean X especially because they do not mean Y; signification is achieved through differentiation), this conversation can be imagined in a structuralist fashion as a “circuit of culture”. Here is an endless chain of negotiated meanings between producers and consumers. Cultural economy is then “in the process of refiguring every aspect of the value chain, from production through to consumption” (Amin and Thrift 2004: xviii). This process entails rejecting descriptions of a “cultural turn” –it is not concerned with the blurring or hybridization of categories (economy versus culture, consumption versus production, etc.) per se, but with how such boundaries are constructed in practice. In other words it intends to describe the ways in which categories are performed and enacted by the discourses and techniques of which they are supposedly the cause (du Gay and Pryke 2002: 6); and the ways in which objects and persons are constituted through such categories (du Gay 2004: 100).

It is with such objectives that cultural economy draws on the anthropology of science and techniques (AST) and actor-network theory (ANT) (Callon 1998; Miller and Rose 1990; Hassard, Law and Lee 1999; Latour 1999) as well as the “genealogical” path

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<sup>16</sup> Featherstone (1991: 3-4) also refers to Lyotard’s “Rules and Paradoxes and Svelte Appendix”, in which he writes that ““postmodern is probably a very bad term because it conveys the idea of a historical “periodization”. “Periodizing”, however, is still a “classic” or “modern” ideal. “Postmodern” simply indicates a mood, or better a state of mind”.



designed by Nietzsche and recommended by Foucault and his followers (e.g. Rose 1999)<sup>17</sup>. At this point it is worth recalling that chapter two is not satisfied with Bourdieu's treatment of an awkward professionalization of cultural intermediaries, because of the reifying limitation of his representation. Cultural economy proposes two insightful ways of responding to this limitation –an orientation toward the past, i.e. a “history of advertising”; or an orientation toward the “present”, i.e. an “anthropology of advertising”. The thesis chooses the anthropological route. It recognises with Schudson (1986: 45) that too many criticisms of advertising dealing with texts and symbols have not taken into account what actually happens inside ad agencies and how advertisements are made.

### 2.2.2. Understanding advertising with practice-based accounts

When scholars realised that advertising is better understood with reference to the industry's *practice*, they began to reconsider *production* as an integral part of the consumption of symbolic forms (e.g. McGuigan 1992: 5). And twenty years after Schudson's specific call for empirical inquiry, they still urge their peers to look at what advertising people do for a living. Who are they? What are their background and lifestyles? What do they do every day? (Nixon 1997: 209-211; Mazzarella 2003; Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran 2003; McFall 2002, 2004; Cronin 2004a; Kelly, Lawlor and O'Donohoe 2005). For example Slater (2002: 75) thinks that

if we do not make sense of how advertisers [advertising people] actually carry out their commercial actions, then the global ideological analysis degenerates into a kind of abstract, disembodied functionalism: it appears as if advertising (rather than advertisers) creates capitalist or patriarchal subjects.

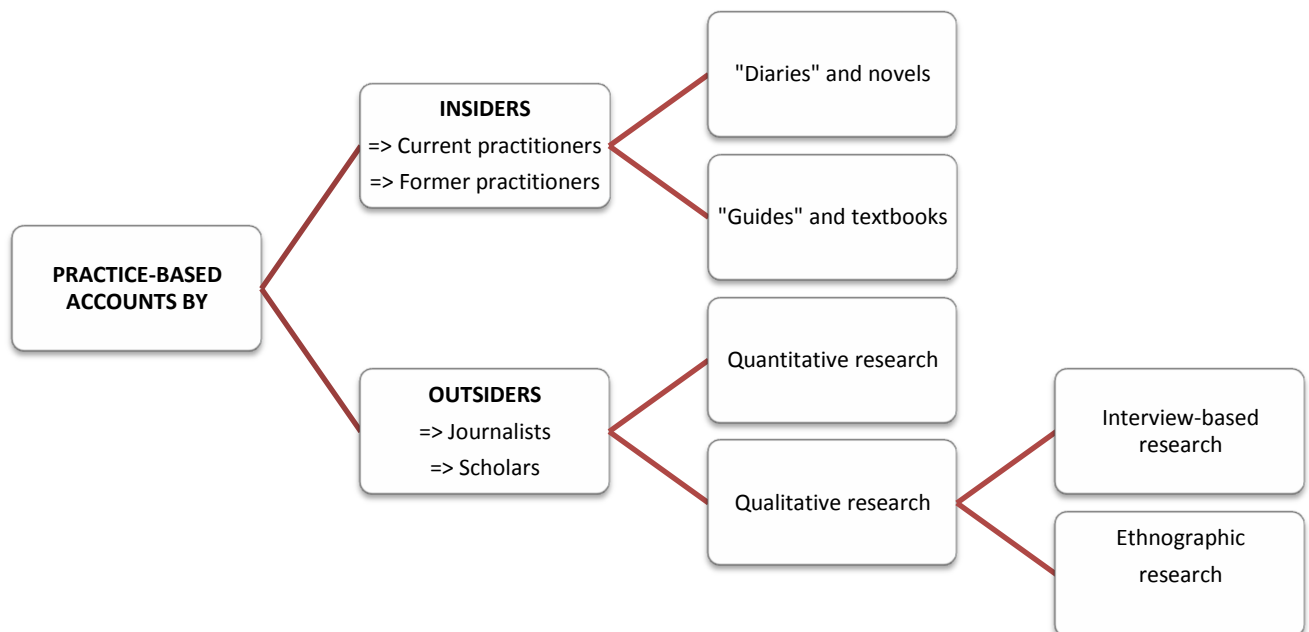
For McFall (2002, 2004), the lack of practice-based accounts contributed to unfounded claims about contemporary advertising being more pervasive and

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<sup>17</sup> Not as clear-cut a method as is often assumed. Towards the end of his life Foucault (2001: 77) is still concerned about what thinking “historically” means, noting in January 1979: “Not passing universals through the grater of history, but putting history along a line of thinking that refuses universals. What kind of history then?”. He nevertheless suggests that genealogy requires “the meticulousness of knowledge, a great number of piled up materials, some patience. (...) In brief, a certain determination in erudition. Genealogy is not opposed to history like the haughty and deep view of the philosopher is to the mole-like look of the scientist; it is opposed on the contrary to the metahistorical display of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It is opposed to the search for “origins”.” (Foucault 2001: 1004).



persuasive than before, or making greater use of the visual and the symbolic. The cultural economy literature has clear ideas about what a “practice-based” account should look like (du Gay and Pryke 2002) –it involves an *outsider* (generally a scholar) who describes people and practices in an organisation using qualitative methods such as interviews (Pollay and Mittal 1993; Cronin 2004b; Hackley 2000; Hirschman 1989; Kover 1995; Nixon 2003; Soar 2000) or ethnography (Alvesson 1994; Dewaal Malefyt and Morean 2003; Miller 1997). Seldom reviewed however is an extensive range of empirical writings that has long been published by *insiders* (generally people working in the industry) under the more intuitive forms of novels, confessions, autobiographies and other manuals on business practice. The diagram below gives a rough indication of what insiders and outsiders are more likely to produce, but in reality boundaries are not so clear cut. Practice-based accounts are often hybrid texts that use a combination of methods (novelised guides, diaries containing interviews, etc.).



Offering a more or less prescriptive, more or less didactic guidance in a vast number of aspects from the writing of an ad to the importance of a brief, insider accounts still inform lives and work in advertising organisations –occasionally with an immoderation that recedes from the ideal-type of neutrality underlying academic texts. The chapter moves to these “insider accounts” first.

### 2.2.2.1 *Insider accounts*

Insider accounts generally read like diaries scattered with directions or recommendations for business (e.g. Hopkins 1927; Caplin 1959; Young 1959; Burnett 1961; Lasker 1963; Biow 1964; Cone 1969; Bullmore 1998; Sullivan 1998). Wiser for their experience, practitioners thrust forward ideas for maximising resources and improving results. Whilst they sometimes assert the contrary (Ogilvy 1983: 8; Sullivan 1998: 13), they present these ideas as maxims or “rules”. Like Bullmore (1998: 176), Caplin (1959: 81) enumerates a good copywriter’s “basic rules”. Ogilvy (1963: 92, 115) creates “15 rules” and “11 commandments” and writes for example that “if you start your body copy with a large initial letter, you will increase readership by an average of 13 per cent” (Ogilvy 1963: 152). Butterfield (1997: 186) reach injunctions such as “write the brief with the intention of changing the world” and adages such as

There are no great briefs, only great ads.  
There are no great briefs, but there are a lot of bad ones.  
A good brief is probably as good as a brief gets.  
(Duckworth 1997: 169)

Sullivan (1998: 163) provides a “guide to creating great ads” and outlines “the six phases of an advertising project”

1. Enthusiasm
2. Disillusionment
3. Panic
4. Search for the guilty
5. Punishment of the innocent
6. Praise and honours for the nonparticipants

Noteworthy in these practitioners’ accounts is a writing style that betrays their professional inclination for short, “impactful” sentences. These rules are not too different in form and substance from advertising slogans. And slogans are not too different in terms of objectives (influencing beliefs) from sacred texts such as psalms or canon laws. Before his hard-working “life in advertising”, Hopkins (1927: 13) thought of a religious career. Ogilvy (1983: 217) ventures to make thirteen prophecies toward a metamorphosis of advertising:

3. Advertising will contain more information and less hot air
4. Billboards will be abolished.
5. The clutter of commercials on television and radio will be brought under control.
- (...)
7. Advertising will play a part in bringing the population explosion under control.

A parallel could be drawn between this future of advertising and religious promises of a better life after death. But if most insider accounts praise the virtues of advertising, some choose to demonise it. A former practitioner, Beigbeder (2004) resigned after his profession disgusted him. The narrator of his best-seller is a cynical, cocaine-addicted creative who confesses his sexual obsessions in repetitive acts of sublimation. A few slices of life, including meetings and the shooting of a campaign, insist on the absurdities of the advertising world. On the whole this self-portrait is very reminiscent of Bourdieu's *illegitimate* figure of the new cultural intermediary:

I prevent you from thinking. I decide what is True, what is Beautiful, what is Good. (...) Ideally you should hate me, before hating the era that created me too. (...) You disgust me, miserable slaves pandering to my every whim. Why have you let me become the King of the World? (...) Never has an irresponsible cretin been as powerful as me for two thousand years (Beigbeder 2004: 21-2).

Bourdieu's remark on illegitimacy can then be verified in practice, even if illegitimacy is directly embedded here in the power of an ignorant ("irresponsible cretin") and not in the way, dear to Bourdieu, in which the cultural intermediary tries to dissimulate his/her ignorance by aping those s/he cannot become.

Like Bourdieu's intuitive portrayal however, the insider literature fails to support its celebrations or demonizations of advertising through thorough descriptions of the working environment. Chronologically vague and/or overly anecdotal, insiders tend to provide rather sketchy representations of people's tasks and relations to other people. Though they write as agency leaders, account managers, copywriters or art directors, insiders rarely explore any campaign or issue in depth (Marchand 1985: 420).

#### 2.2.2.2 *Outsider accounts*

By contrast, outsider accounts rely on usually thicker descriptions and comprise journalistic accounts (Rothenberg 1995; Arlen 1980; Mayer 1958) and academic

studies including qualitative research in marketing (Hackley 2000; Hackley and Kover 2007) and sociology (Nixon 2003; Cronin 2004a; 2004b) as well as organisational anthropology (Miller 1997; Moeran 1996, 2005; Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran 2003; Lien 1997; Mazzarella 2003). With the recognition that formal interviews may be misleading, since what people say they do and what they actually do are different things (Malefyt and Moeran 2003: 10), ethnography is currently fashionable in marketing research. Although academic writings are more explicit about their use of methods, other non-academic sources involving secondary data and/or non-participant observation (Arlen 1980; Rothenberg 1995) might as well qualify as ethnographic texts<sup>18</sup>. The thesis then adds to a readily available ethnographic body, which is briefly reviewed below to end this section.

A first set of outsiders such as Mayer (1958) work neither in the advertising industry nor in academia. Mayer's "reporter's book about advertising" intends to show "advertising men at work" on the basis of nearly four hundred interviews and "a reading programme of little less than thirty thousand pages" (Mayer 1958: 11-2). Informative of US practices that are half a century old, he depicts well-dressed people overwhelmed with their job in quite a stressful, insecure industry. However Mayer keeps a distant look at their daily lives, integrating very little of his allegedly impressive amount of data and in the end very few insights of daily practice in agencies. Much more satisfying in this respect is Arlen's (1980) representation. Among all practice-based accounts reviewed in this chapter, his approach is unique because it does not "theorise" events, some rare personal remarks in places notwithstanding (e.g. p. 163). This quasi-absence of narrator makes the reading of this "purely descriptive" ethnography as pleasant as a good novel. Entirely composed of conversations, the book is about how an advertising agency (N.W.Ayer) creates, in collaboration with a media company (Steve Horn, Inc.) a thirty-second commercial for American Telephone and Telegraph (A.T.&T.). Involved in the conversations are different actors participating in the production process –from advertising people scripting the campaign to media people shooting it, including music composers and actors (the greatest part of the book is in fact concerned with the filming of different

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<sup>18</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 2) concede that the boundaries around ethnography are so unclear that they "would not want to make any hard-and-fast distinction between ethnography and other sorts of qualitative inquiry". For example the ethnographer and the journalist have things in common, since "good work in both trades is recognized by similar criteria" (Atkinson 1992: 4).

scenes for the ad). A more extensive story on the work of agencies in competition for the Subaru of America account (Rothenberg 1995) is nearly as descriptive as Arlen's, apart from personal comments that sadly verge on moralism at times. Mostly based on the author's recollected experience but sometimes on the experience of his informants, it is still impressively detailed and includes historical perspectives around advertising "gurus" (Bill Bernbach, Leo Burnett, etc.) and their "philosophies".

A second set of outsiders can be found in academia, where scholars have recently established analogies and differences between their work and that of cultural intermediaries in Trinidad, Japan, Norway, India and the US (Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran 2003). Of notable interest in Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran's edited collection of fieldwork in marketing or advertising companies, are the common efforts of advertising and anthropology –albeit for different reasons –toward a better understanding of culture. Kemper, Mazzarella, Sunderland and Denny, and Baba think in particular about what scholars and practitioners could learn from each other (see also Moeran 2005). Most of these studies are extended elsewhere. Miller's (1997) ethnography in Trinidad is broad in scope since it examines different channels and processes of both consumption and production, after providing some historical background on advertising in this island. Consequently the work contains quite a short section on the work of an advertising agency, namely a few striking events of a campaign for a soft drink. Mazzarella's (2003) study in India looks at how global and local cultures intersect through the consumption of advertising and contains two parts –one is a journalistic recollection (from secondary data) dedicated to a campaign for a condom, which serves as background for presenting consumption and advertising trends in India; the other looks at the work of an agency, but bizarrely does not say much about the daily lives of these producers. Mazzarella's focus remains on the consumption of ads rather than their production. Yet understanding these ads, argues Moeran (1996), implies scrutinising the social processes that go into their making. His ethnography of a Japanese advertising agency shows how "relations of promotion, persuasion, prestige, profit and power" affect the content and structure of advertisements (Moeran 1996: 33). For example he describes a competitive

presentation as a “tournament of value”<sup>19</sup> (Appadurai 1986), ritual whereby account executives try to persuade their potential client that their agency provides the best service.

### *2.2.2.3 Towards practice-based accounts of uncertainties*

Kelly, Lawlor and O’Donohoe (2005) are more specifically concerned with how creatives encode advertisements with meanings. Conducting a discourse analysis of ethnographic interviews recorded in an Irish advertising agency, they observe four influences on the advertising process – “cultural and social discourses”, an “ideology of science”, a “battle” metaphor and the power of clients over the organisation. Lien (1997) conjures up the same image of a battlefield in her fieldwork, but attaches it to markets rather than organisational relationships. Having spent nine months with marketing practitioners in the food industry, she explains how people in the Norwegian company she studied see their products living and dying (as a result of “natural selection” along their lifecycle) on markets that must be conquered (“territories in times of war”). She identifies these metaphors, as well as the incompleteness of information about consumers, as so many signs of unpredictability. According to Lien (1997: 247) modern marketers “gradually transform the foreign into something familiar” in their effort to control an unpredictable future. The next section turns to what practice-based research as a whole reveals –not the dehumanised world of certainty that textbooks often depict (e.g. Shimp 2002), but one of uncertainty and identity crises that requires further exploration.

This exploration will be more comprehensive, along an ideal cultural economic stance, if it combines *past* as well as current accounts of advertising practice. McFall (2002, 2004) has contended that the history of advertising is more accidental than is often assumed in grand narratives opposing, on the basis of loose historical records<sup>20</sup>,

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<sup>19</sup> Tournaments of value are “both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them. (...) What is at issue (...) is not just status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question” (Appadurai 1986: 21).

<sup>20</sup> She recognises that a number of reference books (Ewen 1976; Williams 1980; Dyer 1982) do contain historical evidence, “but even these provide only a fairly sketchy and general outline of the development of specific institutions and practices” (McFall 2004: 193).

advertising “back then” and advertising “now”. In the past and until very recently, “chronocentrism”, that is the tendency of writers to see the advertising of their own period as a “zenith”, has endured (McFall 2004: 97-103). However a more rigorous, historical look indicates that advertising emerged and developed in fact as a result of the manifold constraints under which it was made. This is why the thesis, despite its anthropological focus and restricted space that prevent any serious attempt to “historicise” advertising in a fully comprehensive way, does refer to the past (in chapter four and five mainly) as a means of giving a better picture of the present, starting with the next section about practitioners’ uncertainties as described in outsider accounts.

### **2.3. Illegitimate professions? Past and present uncertainties**

Noting that the advertising field cries out for empirical studies of production, cultural economy has provided a new hope for overcoming the two criticisms of “reification” and “consumption myopia”. Hence the thesis seeks to contribute to this emergent field on the anthropological plane –it is an outsider account that adds to the practice-based literature. Whilst the previous section reviewed some of this literature, this section pays more attention to its description of extremely insecure professions in advertising (2.3.2), after observing that this delicate state of affairs is no recent phenomenon (2.3.1). The section insists in particular on the role of clients in exacerbating uncertainties (2.3.2.1), and on how those impinge on identities inside agencies (2.3.2.2).

#### **2.3.1. Past practices: the roots of uncertainties**

Uncertainty in the lives of contemporary advertising people did not appear recently, but with the beginnings of the advertising *profession*. The history of advertising in the UK (McFall 2004) and the US (Sivulka 1998) is quite informative in this regard. In the US the profession did not exist until the mid-1800s. In the first half of the 1800s, only the makers of patent medicines merchandised “brand names”, bottling and labelling their potions. For other manufacturers soap was soap and flour was flour. As advertising was aimed at local readers, everyone would deal directly with newspapers.

However with improved methods of transportation, manufacturers began to require outside assistance for their promotion to reach beyond their local region; they paid more attention to packaging; and they realised identifying effective newspapers and negotiating rates was a time-consuming task that could be undertaken by intermediaries. Newspapers began paying agents to sell space to these manufacturers and a new business was born –the advertising agency (Sivulka 1998: 34, 48). But when agents began to appear during the 1850s and 1860s in New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago, they struggled to distance their work from “carnavalesque frivolity” and transform it into a genuine “profession”. In other words anxieties intensified with the “*professionalisation*” of agencies into proper businesses. In 1902 *Printers’ Ink* eventually applauded “The Passing [or triumph] of the “Expert””, indicating the willingness of advertising trade journals to adhere to a single, universal and objective standard of knowledge (Lears 1994: 88-89, 154).

But as advertising prospered to become part of the iconography of everyday life in the 1920s, US practitioners continued to disagree on what they did, and on the knowledge required to do it. Marchand (1985: 25) suggests that the leading advertising agents back then diverged on what “professionalism” meant –some referred to educational standards, public service and cultural uplift; others to a narrower, more practical expertise supplied to clients. According to Nixon (2000: 72), these debates on professionalism were ongoing during the 1950s and 1960s. At the root of such instability, he contends, was the “unholy trinity of terms used to describe advertising” –as an art, a craft, and a business. Even today, the way advertising agencies manage commercial relations does not only depend on formal knowledge (market research data, consumer feedback, pre-testing of adverts, etc.), but also on more elusive “informal knowledge and dispositions” (Nixon 1997: 209; 2003: 35). The backgrounds necessary for a baker or a lawyer to exercise their activities are not difficult to conceive –one must know about ingredients and cooking procedures, the other about laws and institutions. But what should an advertising agent know, and what sort of value can s/he add to a business? This may seem less obvious, due to the essentially tacit character of cultural knowledge<sup>21</sup>. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>21</sup> Polanyi’s work on tacit knowledge is informative in this respect. His famous saying “we can know more than we can tell” (1967: 20) seems crucial to advertising discourse, revealing at the same time the fragility of its foundations.



therefore, the advertising industry lacked credibility and suffered from lingering insecurities; as Lears (1994: 197) observes, its

carnavalesque past (...) kept resurfacing in the workaday life of the agencies, rendering ridiculous any claims to scientific objectivity. (...) Corporate advertisers felt constantly called to the task of self-justification.

Despite the panoply of statistics and graphs that accompanied every business presentation in the 1920s for example, advertising remained less science than art (*Ibid.*, p. 226).

### **2.3.2. Current practices: the permanence of uncertainties**

A “history of present advertising” confirms the status of a profession in perpetual search of itself. Ethnographies of advertising describe an “unstable industry” (Malefyt and Moeran 2003: 6) in which worried people are engaged in frustrating activities they feel the need to justify. The vexations, the overall bitterness that characterised the birth of advertising have not vanished. Moeran’s (1996) ethnography in a Japanese advertising agency depicts an environment full of uncertainties, where the work of advertising people happens to be *unproductive* as they learn about industry regulations, market copyrights, the client’s tastes and so forth. Thus Moeran mentions that clients delight in making the agency vulnerable to their whims. Or he observes that the copywriter and art director working on an *Ikon Breath O<sub>2</sub>* (optical lenses) campaign feel inhibited by the amount of information that must be included in the ad (due to the medical nature of the product) and by regulations preventing claims that these lenses are in any way the “best” or even “good”.

Creating an ad is a messy process indeed (Fox 1997) –advertising people may do a little work and be highly rewarded, or a relentless work for “nothing”. Often they cannot gauge which factor is responsible for failure. Accounts are lost without apparent connections to previous performances (Miller 1997: 166). Successes and failures just “happen” in a haphazard fashion; even the “reasons” that cost agencies important accounts every year, as enumerated by Mayer (1958: 41), seem coincidental rather than instrumental –“death or departure of key people, mistakes in advertisements or in client contact, changes in client policy or simply this desire to

find a “fresh approach””. As a result Peter Mayle (1990) speaks of “the snakes and ladders of the advertising business”. Drawing on an overarching notion of doubt found in the works of Bauman (1991) and Giddens (1991), Lien’s (1997: 90-112) ethnography in food marketing theorises this unpredictable game as part of the “modernity” of business in the 1990s. She highlights the unpredictability of markets in three case studies, which place indecisions and insecurity at the centre of the modern product manager’s life. Because they rely on such unforeseeable behaviours, advertising agencies struggle to convince themselves and their environment of their abilities to understand and respond to everyone’s expectations (see debates on “creativity” in section 2.4).

#### *2.3.2.1 Sowers of uncertainty –agencies’ clients*

In the end the advertising environment faces three poles of uncertainty –the consumers, the clients and the agency itself. Particularly salient in outsider accounts is a disarming dependency on clients’ tastes. Standing in a powerful position of judgement at potentially any stage of advertising production, clients regularly disrupt, delay and in extreme cases even cancel the making of advertisements (Alvesson 1994; Nava *et al.* 1997). In Kelly, Lawlor and O’Donohoe’s (2005: 517-8) study, creative interviewees perceive clients as “subscribers to the ideology of science”, which means that they insist on running procedures for testing ads. From the perspective of creatives, their “necessity to try and eliminate risks and uncertainties” spoils creativity i.e. ruins the quality of creations. Rothenberg (1995: 25-7) reports of the Subaru clients in very much the same way –they seek to ensure that risk is minimised through evidence of rationality or what one of them calls “left-brain thinking”.

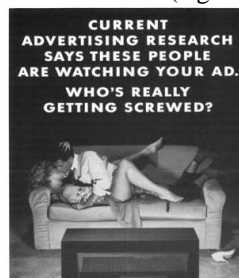
Finally the ties between advertisers and agency, already insecure in the past (Mayer 1958: 40) get even more so today. Dewaal Malefyt (2003: 142) notes that client loyalty is no longer what it used to be. The average length of a contract commitment has drastically dropped in recent years (around two and a half years now in the US, compared to 11 years in a “past” Dewaal Malefyt is not precisely situating). All powerful, clients ultimately decide whether relationships should be maintained or broken. Increasingly, big spending advertisers question the overall service they receive from experts in communication, and in particular that of above-the-line

advertising –for example Heinz and Nestlé both decided in 1994 to promote individual brands through direct marketing rather than through television advertising. Finally advertising agencies are facing competition from relatively new entrants – management consultants and “media independents” (Nixon 2002: 135-6).

But the fundamental issue from which all uncertainties possibly derive, what is at stake and in constant peril, remains advertising *expertise*. Almost all practice-based accounts deal with different aspects of the same question, raised and answered without much empirical evidence by Bourdieu –what kind of *value* are cultural intermediaries producing? Debates around the remuneration of advertising agencies (should it be commission, fee, or salary-based?) point to the difficulty in gauging this value (Nixon 2002). It seems impossible to “measure” advertising effectiveness<sup>22</sup>. Neither the client nor the agency will ever know much about the role the ad played in the client’ sales. Would have smaller or greater advertising budgets have generated more or less profit? Impossible to say. Neil Borden (1942) was already inconclusive on the “economic effects of advertising” more than sixty years ago. Mayer (1958: 36) consequently suggests that “the standard business-school thesis that companies advertise to increase their profits represents the *excuse* at least as often as it represents the *reason* for advertising”. All this justifies a famous quote (attributed to various people) in the business: “I know that at least half of my advertising money is being wasted. My problem is –I do not know which half” (Schudson 1986: 85; Mattelard 1991: 213; Mayer 1958: 267).

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<sup>22</sup> The scepticism of the industry in this respect is even perceptible in some of its cynical production. In 1989 HHCL printed an advertisement which has been frequently reproduced and discussed in advertising books and marketing textbooks since then (e.g. Mattelard 1991: 153; Brierley 2002: 131):



The ad reminded clients that research on the effectiveness of (probably above-the-line) advertising misled them. The company claimed that they had compiled a report on the failings of existing media research and that they could offer an alternative.

### 2.3.2.2 *Effects of uncertainties on advertising lives: stress and identity struggles*

Advertising's indeterminate effectiveness on sales increases stress on agencies as they endeavour to promote this value to clients (Cronin 2004a). This indeterminacy is reflected in a much disputed concept of "creativity" –will an ad acquire its "creative" status when it manages to satisfy a client? Or is "creativity" a prerequisite towards satisfying this client? The discourses of practitioners on creativity<sup>23</sup> are often quite different from academic understandings of creativity (not always). The absence of consensus, in any case, makes creative work confusing and impacts on the very identity of creatives. As a practitioner reports (Bullmore 1998: 168-170), creatives receive contradictory signals from their creative director and their client (whose taste is relayed by account executives):

[S]o many different people making disconnected judgments; so many sets of rules and so many changes to each of them; the very same action incurring both gratitude and reproach –but not invariably so. (...) All this makes it very hard indeed for creative people to work out for themselves what they're for.

In other words creatives themselves are not always clear about what their actual contribution *is* in the agency.

So the overall instability of a business whose outcomes are unpredictable, and whose expertise is constantly contested, destabilise identities at work. In the 1950s the satirical publication *Mad* even associated advertising practice with the psychosomatic effects of stress, as this passage testifies (Lears 1994: 256; Rothenberg 1995: 195):

*See the man.  
He does advertising work.  
He is called an "ad-man".  
See his funny tight suit.  
See his funny haircut.  
Hear his funny stomach turn.  
Churn, churn, churn.  
The ad-man has a funny ulcer.  
Most ad-men have funny ulcers.*

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<sup>23</sup> See Nixon (2003) for a synthesis on practitioners' understandings of creativity as a set of abilities to "absorb" trends, "reproduce" them, be a passionate and curious consumer, etc.; but also as more cynical determinations to solve problems under constraints. Both Nixon (2003) and Santagata (2004) elaborate on creativity as a "mythical concept" and as "problem-solving".

*But then, some ad-men are lucky.  
They do not have funny ulcers.  
They have funny high blood pressure.*

Such bodily symptoms of *fear* persist in contemporary advertising. Whether Rothenberg's (1995: 62) intention is toward personifying or mystifying this fear, he depicts it in the style of the empathetic journalist as an unsettling and enveloping spectre of evil:

Always, [advertising men] were surrounded by The Fear. The Fear of saying the wrong thing. The Fear of not doing what the client wanted. The Fear of violating some unspoken rule.

The Fear of displeasing the client is aroused by the impossibility of knowing and following "rules" for successful production –rules are always "unspoken"<sup>24</sup>. This is why Ogilvy (1963: 45) connects fear to the doubts that pervade both the *creation* and *evaluation* of advertisements. He reports that the typical copywriter

lives with fear. Will he have a good idea before Tuesday morning? Will it get a high test score? Will it sell the product? I have never sat down to write an advertisement without thinking THIS TIME I AM GOING TO FAIL".

Despite having 20 medals to his credit in the prestigious One Show, the Oscars of the ad business, copywriter Sullivan (1998: 22) writes likewise:

There has never been a time in my career I have faced the empty page and not been scared. (...) Who am I to think I can write something that will interest 8 million people?

However advertising people do not surrender to The Fear. They do not surrender to the idea that the reasons for success or failure are either unexplainable or impossible to influence. They refuse transcendence, serendipity and fate altogether. Instead, they produce responses to "tame" risks and anxieties. How they do it, and importantly how outsiders perceive such responses, is the subject of the next section.

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<sup>24</sup> Chapter four tackles the implications of this absence of rules through the concept of "anomie".

## 2.4. Dealing with uncertainty: myths and magic

The previous section articulated accounts of uncertainty in the practice-based literature, which confuse creative identities and arouse anxieties at all levels. Uncertainty finds its roots in unpredictable environments –principally that of clients in advertising agencies–toward which practitioners struggle to justify their expertise. This section gets to grips with the way in which insiders deal with uncertainties, the way in which they respond to the disconcerting nature of the activity that sustains them. Perhaps more importantly the section compares and contrasts these responses as insiders express them, and as outsiders read them.

As such, it is observed that outsiders tend to discuss *concepts* of uncertainty rather than concrete experiences of uncertainty. The section argues that this tendency is due to an exaggerated focus on practitioners’ discourses of certainty –advertising scholars like to argue that agencies inject “pseudo science” or “mystical beliefs” into their work (2.4.1). Meanwhile very little is said about the uncertainty that motivated these injections. Using insights from classical sociology, this section criticises this reading of advertising practice (2.4.2). This critique leads to the third turning point of this chapter after reification and consumption myopia.

### 2.4.1 Understanding practice through “scienticisation” and “mythicization”

Central to the business of an advertising agency is less an understanding of consumer behaviour than a demonstration that it can understand consumer behaviour. In the 1960s agencies started calling on scholars who produced models (AIDA, DAGMAR, VIPS, etc.) and pseudo-technical semantics to show that advertising “scientifically” works (Meyers 1984: 6; Fendley 1995). Most practitioners do believe in the capacity of these “linear sequential models” of communication to predict consumers’ likely reactions to their advertisements<sup>25</sup>. From the 1970s and 1980s, mostly quantitative

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<sup>25</sup> Depending on the agency culture obviously, the importance given to research and “scientific” frameworks vary. Given his reliance on Dr. Gallup’s findings, Ogilvy (1963, 1983) was a fervent user of positivist research in advertising but people like Leo Burnett or Bill Bernbach much less so. Dr. Gallup, from Northwestern University, invented a method for “measuring” readership among other pataphysical brainwaves.

segmentation tools developed (e.g. “values and lifestyles” (VALS) or “socio-cultural mapping” in France). But as researchers and practitioners classified an unfathomable crowd of “consumers” into a finite number of stereotypical “segments”, these tools did not “identify” markets –they *constructed* them (Callon 1998; du Gay and Pryke 2002: 2, 6). Despite what their etymology indicates, “data” [what is “given”] are always *produced* and not simply “gathered” or waiting to be collected or given out there. The fact that advertising research in general (questionnaires, focus groups, copywriting etc.) is still presented to clients as “expert knowledge” in gauging popular opinions (e.g. Moeran 1996: 105) shows that markets are “imagined” rather than discovered (Cronin 2000: 42-44; Slater 2002: 76; Sender 2004).

For Fendley (1995: 15) therefore, “scienticisation” reflected the industry’s own insecurities more than anything else. A practical example of this can be found in Lien’s (1997) account of “modern” marketing practices. For her managers attempt to undermine the unexpectedness that characterizes the future. The “colonisation”<sup>26</sup> of this future entails recoding the meaning of commodities in function of *imagined* markets. She views common segmentation practices in marketing as a form of modern “totemism” (or “classificatory device”, see Lévi-Strauss 1963: 7). It is based on such totemism that the company she observed attaches concepts of “authenticity” and “exoticism” to the taste and appearance of its pizzas. Amongst other religious aspects, totemism shows that the scienticisation of advertising is never too far away from mystification, just like alchemy has long been an integral part of chemistry. Even expert physicists find it easier to understand most phenomena through myths –for Carroll Epstein (1992: 77-8, 147) the force between static electric charges is thought about in terms of a sex myth for example (opposites attract, likes repel), conservation laws imagined as economics, inertia as an almost humanlike lethargy of matter, etc. He sees physics as a religion based on “articles of unproven faith” such as “There always has to be a reason” and “The body of reasons has no self (internal) contradictions”. Some astronomers like Shallis (1983) are even interested in astrology and the paranormal.

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<sup>26</sup> A notion borrowed from Giddens (1991: 11), who writes that the future “lends itself to colonial invasion through counterfactual thought and risk calculation”.

#### 2.4.1.1 Reading practice through magic

With regard to consumer behaviour then, advertising “science” is constructed in conjunction (or in confusion) with advertising “theology”. And the marketing literature is now replete with magic letters and numbers, secret matrices, universal pyramids and other cult apparatuses which all worship “THE CUSTOMER”. A number of practitioners and academics advocate mystical approaches to the knowledge of markets (e.g. Brown, Doherty and Clarke 1998: 34-6). An interesting case is Mitchell and Haggett’s (1997: 113-131) academic publication of a study that examines “the effect of date-of-birth on consumption behaviour”. Contrary to the reader’s likely expectations there is no apparent irony in the objective they set themselves. They do analyse smoking, drinking and leisure habits and find “significant differences in behaviour across the zodiac signs, and for some variables the differences matched the astrological predictions”. They conclude that “astrology might allow marketers to gain more insight into current market segments very quickly, easily, and cheaply (...)”. Here advertising research recedes from “science” – it is enabled by superstitions.

In such circumstances it is of no surprise that popular themes used to describe advertising are *magic* (Sherry 1995; Brown 1998: 34-5) and the *myth* (Barthes 1993; Levy 1981; Randazzo 1993; Stern 1995; Johar, Holbrook & Stern 2001). In the realm of “magic” first, an influential text is Raymond Williams’s “Advertising: The Magic System”, published in a collection of essays (Williams 1980) and in many other places. Along the lines of commodity fetishism (Marx 1867/1990), Williams (*Ibid.*, p. 27) views advertising as “a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies (...)”. In this context advertising people are not too different from gurus, enchanters or witch-doctors whose “creative mystique” solves problems and cures people (Brierley 2002: 58). Packard (1957: 48) reports of female consumers overtaken by “hypnotic trance”. Displaying the greatness of commodities using a plethora of rhetorical figures and images (McQuarrie and Mick 1996), advertising language looks like magical formulae (Richards, Botterill and MacRury 2000: 56). Obsessively hammered out, slogans and jingles sound like incantations. Whether printed or



chanted, advertisements invoke the miraculous properties of products via extraordinary characters living in enchanted worlds (Brown 1998).

These advertisements are said to have anxiety-reducing effects in a society which has become confused after the decline of traditional religiosity. Advertising professionals however offer remedies to some evils they created in the first place –they provoke our anxiety and simultaneously resolve it (Berman 1981: 13; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990; Bauman 1990: 50, 1992: 15-7; Giddens 1991: 81-84; Bocock 1993: 118; Falk 1994; Langholz Leymore 1975: 154-156; Mayer 1958: 326). Ewen and Ewen (1982: 61) argue that innovators like Babbitt, who packaged ordinary soap into individual bars, “masked the ordinary in the dazzle of magic”. And for them “to transfer [bad breath and body odour] from personal idiosyncrasies into tribal taboos is a magicianly trick indeed”. Accounts of magic are generally very convincing. Yet they also tend to assume that consumers are tricked by some wholly mastered advertising power. They insinuate that practitioners use their methods in disbelief (as magicians would) and have no faith in them (when witch-doctors would). They thus perpetuate misleading descriptions of advertising people who are immune to anxiety, live outside of enchantment and even manipulate people’s beliefs from a god-like position which is not subject to doubt. As section 2.3 suggests, this position represents exactly what advertising people are not. And on the whole as argued below, these accounts overlook the role magic does play in everyday advertising practice.

Paying more attention to the processes of production, a number of practice-based accounts go beyond this unilateral relationship between belief makers (practitioners) and believers (consumers). Instead they identify the very foundations of advertising in a *system* of shared beliefs. Yes, practitioners and, say, some consumer behaviour theorists do believe in the scientifico-mystical power of advertising work<sup>27</sup>. Yes, a comparison with alchemic work seems appropriate. But the fervent believers are

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<sup>27</sup> At least the most famous did. As one of his last speeches indicates, Bill Bernbach (DDB) believed in a quasi-hegemonic power of advertising over society: “all of us who professionally use the mass media are the shapers of society. We can vulgarize society. We can brutalize it. Or we can help lift it onto a higher level” (Sheehan 2003: 89). “At its best, [advertising] can produce magic” for John Bartle (BBH) (Butterfield 1997: 40). Very true for Ogilvy (1983: 209), who with the help of a professional hypnotist thought he once invented the ultimate advertisement. As if it were an evil manuscript, Ogilvy burnt it – it was “scandalously” powerful.

agencies and their clients in the first place –surely to a more systematic degree than consumers. As Richards, Botterill and MacRury (2000: 19) put it, “advertising agencies sell media space, advice and faith”... a contention confirmed in Rothenberg’s (1995) observations of advertising agencies in competition for the Subaru account:

Subaru and the six agencies vying for its account were grounding their belief that a new image would lead the auto company into the Jerusalem of renewed prosperity on one principle: faith. (...) The notion of advertising as “the only faith in a secularized consumer society” has long antecedents, going back at least as far as Bruce Barton (a founder of BBDO) and his contention that Jesus was the world’s greatest adman (Rothenberg 1995: 114).

Agencies therefore behave like prophets who believe and preach, not like Santa Clauses who “lie” to children about their actual role in front of megastores. Hence convincing connections have been established between advertising and “circuits” of belief (Cronin 2004a, 2004b) –agencies and their clients reassure each other.

Not unlike Miller’s (1997) ethnography, which is interested in the dialogue between advertising and consumption, Mazarella’s (2003: 186) research on an advertising agency in India attempts to show how global and local cultures intersect. Combined with his journalistic recollection of the making of a campaign for a condom, his own impressions of work in the organisation contrast with the previous body of literature that relates magic to consumption essentially:

Marketing tends to downplay the degree to which its procedures help to mould the categories that it claims merely to discover. The analogy starts to fall apart, however, when we attend more closely to the everyday *practice* of marketing. Suddenly it starts to look more like charismatic prophecy clothed in a scientific idiom. Marketing practitioners and theorists do not lie when they offer their science as a tool with which to manage consumers. But the promise does contain a deceptive displacement, because the consumers that are managed are not so much the ones who purchase the branded goods but above all the corporate client executives who “buy into” the categories of marketing discourse (emphasis in original).

Here again attention to practice reveals that the work of advertising is about indoctrinating clients in the first place, not consumers.

#### 2.4.1.2 Reading practice through myths

Another popular theme in outsider accounts is the “ideology” or “myth” of creativity. Take Miller’s (1997) “ethnographic approach” to capitalism, which includes a few episodes from a campaign for a soft drink despite its overall loose focus on advertising practice. Miller (1997: 185) stresses “instinctive” aspects of advertising work such as the “smell” of failure or success. Along with Moeran (1996), he understands creativity as the ideological frame of the business, and market research as a fetish invoked to justify decisions. For Moeran (1996: 138) individual creativity is a myth when 180 people or so are likely to be involved in the creation of a car advertising campaign<sup>28</sup>. He suggests that practitioners do not think in terms of “originality” but merely in terms of “bricolage”, through which people “work within a “style” and shift its boundaries “a little at a time”. The myth represents here something that does *not* exist and in which people do *not* believe. Yet this is not always the case, simply because practitioners happen to believe in “originality”. For example Steve Henry, founder of HHCL & Partners, likes

(...) the idea of being different. In fact, we felt that you had to be “different” to survive, and thrive. So we adapted the phrase aimed at us and made it our credo to be “different –for the sake of being better”, and this applied to nearly all the processes of working at HHCL (Henry in Butterfield 1997: 174).

The typical academic interpretation of this practitioner’s discourse is still that of a “myth”. But it can no longer be Moeran’s, since it refers to that which “does not exist” *but* in which practitioners however believe! This is how scholars surreptitiously drift toward patronizing theses. Immediately an inescapable irony infuses their writings, whatever trick they use for dissimulating it. In several places for example, Nixon (2003: 77, 88, 90) evokes the “cult” or “rhetoric” of creativity –which in such circumstances already carry the negative connotations of ideology and sophistry –as “a search for different-ness” and “a form of social fantasy”. What seems strongly inferred is that different-ness is quite unachievable (“fantasy”) and this cult quite vain in absolute terms.

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<sup>28</sup> Some practitioners also happen to highlight the meaninglessness of the “creativity” word in the context of an industry within which “everyone is creative”; for example Henry (1997: 185) claims that a new word is needed to describe people who are charged with coming up with ideas and materialising them.

This kind of irony stems from the fact that, if each advertising agency likes to think it is unique, its essential components “bear a strong family resemblance” (Duckworth 1997: 152). Agencies pride themselves on working with exceptional people<sup>29</sup>, i.e. inspired founders and unique copywriters or art directors; and many of these people believe that agencies are the only legitimate temples of advertising knowledge. As a result, advertising people portray themselves and others in the industry as extraordinary beings. They are “artists” or “(creative) geniuses” (Fendley 1995: 34-39; Santagata 2004) endowed with a “natural gift” for mass persuasion, an “intuition” or “instinct” (Brown 1995: 3; Nixon 2003: 55; Schudson 1986: 85; Mayer 1958: 25), a “creative flair” (Meyers 1984: 214), “special” capacities (Caplin 1959: 51) or inimitable “talents” (Ryan 1992: 44-5; Duckworth 1997: 149). On a less flattering note they are also described (or self-decried!) as workaholic, hyperactive, ambitious (Hopkins 1927: 7, 53; Ogilvy 1983; Meyers 1984: 44; Marchand 1985: 3; Bullmore 1998), competitive, egocentric, materialist, juvenile, laddish, chauvinist, disobedient (Nixon 2003; Mayer 1958), and therefore excessive (Butterfield 1997: 193) or emotionally unstable (Fendley 1995: 38-40). For example Cronin (2004a) and Beigbeder (2004: 57) assert that advertising people are fascinated by fashion and the media, and by their own style and reputation. Good creatives do not target consumers but the people who are likely to hire them, so that winning prizes is much more important for them than their clients’ market shares (Schudson 1986: 85; Moeran 1996; Miller 1997; Cronin 2004b).

Yet how, in the context of a highly unstable business, can such personalities and achievements be justified? By and large insiders invoke the fatality of genetics or, via some circumlocution, the cruel poetics of “mother nature”. Big names have made it because they were both mentally and physically “superior” to other people. They were born with “greater brain capacity” and were better at “observing” and even at “dreaming” than others (Ogilvy 1963). Thus Meyers (1984: 45) point-blank tells us, in an apparently serious tone, that Young & Rubicam’s Alexander Kroll was “born to be an adman”. For academic outsiders things are clear –this discourse of nature,

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<sup>29</sup> “Exceptional” in a sense of “rarity” but also “magic” –Ogilvy doubts “whether there are more than a dozen people in the United States who are qualified by temperament and experience to perform [creative work]”, for it requires “an ability to peer into the future” (Ogilvy 1963: 99), “an ability to think visually” (Ogilvy 1983: 32), etc.

according to which people were born to be what they are and to do what they do, is a cult or a myth or an ideology. But such theorisations do not say much about what motivated naturalisation. After all Miller (1997), Moeran (1996), Nixon (1997; 2003), or Lien (1997) restrict their analysis to the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that something which seems to exist is in fact something which does not. They typically insist on people's beliefs in fictitious notions such as "creativity" or "authenticity", and argue that these notions exist at an ideological level, not at a "real" level. Thus Lien (1997: 254, 256) first emphasises that in their "conscious effort to create an image that is *both constructed and authentic*", marketers remain "sceptical" about the notion of authenticity. They nevertheless use the language of authenticity "as an attempt to recapture the "true essence" of the product, an essence that is *both* arbitrary and (therefore) lost, *and* fiercely called upon and thus re-claimed". She reaches an odd conclusion around a "constant quest for authenticity" that generates "feelings of doubts" (Lien 1997: 285) –in other words she suggests that marketers are stubborn enough to be involved in a "quest" for something they are "sceptical" about.

Lien understands authenticity as a delusion or an ideology, as her use of inverted commas for "true essence" indicate. But one might find the ideological argument a little shaky –why would Lien associate authenticity with a very unconfident relation to knowledge, and not the *building* of confidence? with permanent uncertainties, and not the permanent *resolution* of uncertainties? Here "authenticity" as expression of uncertainty (or "scepticism") only refers to itself; it only mirrors uncertainty. Likewise Moeran (1996) *concludes* that 180 creative people involved in a campaign make individual creativity ideological. This ideology is also an end in itself; it does not seem to refer to anything else than itself. Even when Roland Barthes defines with incredible meticulousness two levels of reading, that of the denotation and that of the connotation (the myth), he does not analyse the *reasons why* his chosen denotation has been subjected to mythicisation. In other words he does not insist on the reasons why *this* image, rather than any other, has been connoted. The myth is explained through the myth and it seldom stands for the solution of a problem.

## 2.4.2 From myths to reasons

This thesis rejects the notions of myth or ideology for two reasons. First it finds it elitist and somewhat incomplete to suggest that people are blind or “stuck” in their uncertainties, without investigating how they make sense of their world and in particular how they respond to uncertainty. Who has authority to judge discourses and actions as outcomes of “false” beliefs or “fake” science? Second, the thesis believes that these notions create the problem of self-referentiality, which means that Lien, Moeran or Nixon *inter alia* tend to “explain” creativity through “the ideology of creativity” or uncertainties through “the myth of authenticity”. Self-referentiality is not uncommon when studies look at a particular community or culture (such as an advertising culture). It is reflected in the following propositions: “they act in a way that seems strange to us *because* this is how people act in their culture” or “they believe in bizarre things *because* this is what their culture believes in”. These do not constitute explanations of course but tautologies. And advertising is particularly prone to such empty interpretations via magic and the myth.

### 2.4.2.1 *Of the dangers of symbolical thinking*

As Boudon (2007) remarks in one of his essays on rationality, the belief in a “false idea” or an “ideology” (say, “creativity”) *may* be caused by some reasons individuals share:

To explain that they [a community] perceive as true what is false, it is not always necessary to assume that their mind is obscured by conjectural mechanisms such as those postulated by Marxism (“false consciousness”), Lévy-Bruhl (“primitive thought”), Freud (“the unconscious”), “structuralist” sociology (*habitus*), cognitive sociology and the theory of rational choice itself (“bias” and *frames*). In most cases, more acceptable explanations are obtained by admitting that, given their context, actors have reasons to believe in false ideas. (Boudon 2007: 94)

Boudon’s argument is that human thinking struggles to identify the “symbolical” as such, and that theorists instead transpose it towards reality. For example we find it difficult to admit that flipping a coin twenty times gives the result “twenty tails” with the same probability as a “random” series, because we want the ordered series not to be due to chance, but to an organisational force. By the same token we believe in the

existence of “primitive thought” or “false consciousness”, ascribing explanatory powers to such symbols. The persistence of magic and prophecy in our contemporary world reflects this difficulty of grasping the symbolical as symbolical, and this tendency to interpret it in a realist mode.

Sociology falls into the trap –through its very efforts toward disenchanting the social world, it ends up enchanting it, achieving exactly what it seeks to avoid. For example a thorough sociological study of time in medical work reaches this kind of conclusion (Zerubavel 1979: 101):

Sociorhythms, like biorhythms, introduce some rhythmic structure to human life, however artificial and arbitrary. Through the establishment of regularity in the timing of activities, they, indirectly, affect their tempo as well. From a social organizational point of view, sociorhythms are extremely functional in establishing a social order, since they are essentially mechanisms of social control.

Here sociorhythms resemble a force, a nonhuman power (“artificial and arbitrary”) impacting on us, disciplining us, establishing order (“mechanisms of social control”). Oddly enough, what cannot be but a human construction (socio-rhythms) recedes from our lives. In this way sociological analysis enchants our lives around the mythical influence of sociorhythms in the hospital, false consciousness in the department store, the ideology of creativity in the advertising agency.

#### *2.4.2.2 Returning to the nature of uncertainties*

An application of Boudon’s critique to the advertising milieu draws attention away from the “false idea” of the creative individual (as an end in itself) towards the social mechanisms that created this idea. The focus is on the “constructing”, not the final construction. Had the objective of this thesis been linked to habitus for example, then it would not look at how the habitus “structures” working lives, but how it is constructed *in practice* (within the creative team for example). The same approach would apply to sociorhythms and a whole flock of organisational concepts. The notion of “ideology” is therefore not exactly denied or disbelieved but viewed as a “practitioner discourse of rationalisation”, whose interest lies less in a judgemental distinction between the “true” and the “false” than in the process through which this



discourse became what it is. The existence of individual creativity is as real and “certain” to a majority of practitioners as God is to the apostle. Whether this belief is “true” or “wrong” is irrelevant –what matters is what is true to them. Why could the “myth” or “ideology” of creativity, the “magic” of advertising not be understood as wrong scientific beliefs are understood? That is, as *reasons* rather than “causes”<sup>30</sup>, which make perfect sense to those who perceive them in a specific cognitive context?

Of course a majority of insider accounts “*mythicizes*” advertising practice. Of course observation of practice makes these myths visible. But the analysis stops here inasmuch as it relates to myths only rather than the *nature of uncertainties* that motivated mythicization. The merit of outsider accounts of practice is to overcome consumption myopia and understand magic as a circuit of beliefs in the productive apparatus (rather than an attempt to bewitch consumers only). Yet they are often guilty of fetishising myths by either ignoring or vaguely recalling their origins. So the third turning point of chapter two is triggered by a certain discomfort occasioned by current academic takes on mythicization. Distancing itself significantly from these outsider accounts, the thesis embraces instead Weber’s classic conceptual framework of *rationalisation* and recalls that practitioners must have good *reasons* to produce a discourse of nature. Rationalisation is the subject of the next section.

## 2.5 Understanding advertising through “rationalisation”

The previous section initiated the shift from a reading of practice through “mythicisation” to another through “rationalisation”, which is the second important conceptual frame of this chapter after cultural economy (2.2). Building on two other criticisms of current outsider accounts (2.5.2), this section explains why the thesis prefers to draw on Weberian theory (2.5.1) rather than notions of “myth” to investigate the nature of uncertainty in the advertising business. Likewise, it contends that whilst outsider accounts remedy the methodological weaknesses of Bourdieu’s

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<sup>30</sup> Unlike “causes” of biological, social and affective nature, reasons always presuppose people’s wills. “Reasons” are the forces people deploy to explain the world; “causes” are rather forces the world deploys to affect them. All reasons may be valid while causes are plausible or implausible, existent or inexistent, etc.



conception of cultural intermediaries, they nonetheless neglect to take his point on illegitimacy further.

### 2.5.1 The meaning of rationalisation

Based on the works of Max Weber (1904-5/2001, 1922/1978) the idea of “rationalisation” expresses strategies for social action. Weber used the term to describe a society increasingly driven by “rational actions”, which seek to obtain control of the world. Rational actions result from a reliance on technical or “scientific” knowledge, producing in particular methods of *calculation*. However, despite what this notion of “calculation” infers, rationalisation does not always mirror people’s will to move away from magical thinking toward a more technical weighing of economic values, (e.g. Weber 1978: 81-107). Instead, it encompasses the superstitions or “magic reasons” practitioners still identify as “reasons”. From chapter four ethnographic analysis follows the Weberian approach. It primarily focuses on the *process* through which rationality is constructed –*rationalisation*. Embedded in the word “process” is an important reference to *history*, meaning that ways of thinking and acting issue from the sophistication of previous assumptions regarding the best means to successfully reach goals. For example current understandings of creativity in the literature –of the “best means” to satisfy frightened clients –draw on successive advertising “philosophies” or “eras” such as Hopkins’ (1927) “scientific advertising” and Bill Bernbach’s “creative revolution” (Schor and Holt 2000: 375-9). Other explanations and recommendations followed the creative revolution, and others, and others.

If Weber in his writings on religion repeats the word “rationality” and its derivatives, it is to insist that a community adheres to specific beliefs because those *make sense for the community*<sup>31</sup>. His interpretations of magical beliefs (1922/1964) are similar to

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<sup>31</sup> Boudon (2007: 144) further details: “In the chapter “Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen” of his *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion*, Weber talks about “rationalisation” (*Rationalisierung*) to describe various cognitive processes: the search for coherence –and more generally for credibility – in the explanation of phenomena, the search for means adapted to ends inspired by fundamental needs, the simplification of theories that explain natural or human phenomena, the definition of practices and the conception of techniques deriving from these theories, or again the codification of these techniques and practices. It seems to him that religious thought, like any form of thought, is subject to these processes of rationalisation. In a word, people seek to produce (...) explanations, credible to their eyes,

Durkheim's (1912/1915). The “primitive” who does magic is “rational” since he acts on the basis of a theory he believes in, and this theory intends to produce an outcome regarded as useful. For Durkheim the fact that periods of rain rituals are also periods when rain falls more often corroborates the “primitive” faith in the efficiency of these rituals. In combination with the concept of rationalisation, this section introduces the term “strategy” –a term that underscores both a “construction” and a “calculation”, whilst being broad enough to refer to a loose set of discourses or “knowledges” rooted in either science or religion. So “strategies of rationalisation” in an advertising agency encompass the calculated maximisation of means toward desired ends; calculation consists in an assemblage of scientific and/or religious justifications; and only through a look at its historical evolution can this assemblage be construed. In the microscopic case of an advertising agency, strategies are ways, sophisticated throughout history, of dealing with uncertainties –ways of “rationalising” advertising work.

#### *2.5.1.1 Rationalising social life*

Classical sociology (the Weberian or the Durkheimian) stresses that rationalisation is “human”; it concerns us all, for we all make sense of the world. Our world is made up of gods, people, stars, and markets, and it is our duty to turn this chaotic hybridity into either an “unruly shambles” or an “ordered whole” (Latour 1999: 16). Thus one can see *The Protestant Ethic* (2001) as Weber's own rationalisation of capitalism, insofar as he locates its origins and justifies its existence. Sociologists like Ritzer (2000; 2006) rationalise “fast food nations” (Schlosser 2001). Ritzer's “McDonaldization” is an “amplification” of Weber's theory in which the four dimensions of rationalisation –efficiency, calculability, predictability and control –become “irrational” and harmful to society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1964) adapt Weber's theme of predestination to the lives of Parisian students in literature. They first describe unstructured lives and unpaid activities following bizarre, irregular schedules that are disconnected from the working sphere. Then they argue that exam successes bring meaning, rules and goals to achieve. In need to know whether they are “gifted” or not, distraught students build an “ideology of the gift”, put their faith in magic rituals and thus rationalise successes

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for the phenomena that interest them or preoccupy them (sufferance, harvest's abundance, survival and reproduction of the herd, etc.), and from which they draw useful lines of conduct”.

and failures as Weberian ideal-types. All in all sociology provides explanations for situations to be as they are and not otherwise. Similarly marketing academics attempt to rationalise advertising practice.

This is where things get complicated (but not to an inextricable point) as sociologists produce rationalising discourses *on* rationalisation; in other words everyone, as Ritzer, Bourdieu and Passeron above, rationalise rationalisation. As such the “mythicisation” and “scienticisation” of advertising make sense of the activities of people making sense of their activities. This is why the thesis aims to clarify that “mythicisation” and “scientisation” are *not* processes through which advertising people rationalise their work. They are academic rationalisations of these rationalising processes, despite the convictions and infatuations with which scholars describe their theories *as* “rationalisations”. Having made this clear, how can rationalisation change our reading of advertising practice away from magic, deceptions and other falsities? The “insider” discourse of nature recalled above might sound grotesque outside of the business (Barthes 1993)... *yet* it produces the *rationality* thanks to which practitioners justify their actions. This rationality takes the form of “rules”, “commandments” and the like produced by the gurus of advertising –the David Ogilvys, the Bill Bernbachs, the Saatchi brothers, etc. (e.g. Caplin 1959; Smelt 1972; Levenson 1987: xvi-xvii; Ogilvy 1963, 1983; Henry 1997: 182; Bullmore 1998) and more recently by creative “stars” (e.g. Sullivan 1998). The imperative tense evokes the prescriptive statements (Lyotard 1979: 21-22) and aphorisms swarming in the Torah, the Bible, the Koran or nearly all collections of proverbs and good manners Elias (1978) was interested in. Starting with two criticisms of recent academic literature, the next subsection indicates how advertising practice can be understood through rationalisation.

### **2.5.2 Legitimised professions?**

Compared to insider accounts, outsider accounts usually offer thicker descriptions of practice. And yet not enough “thickness” is in fact achieved even in classic books in the area (Moeran 1996; Lien 1997; Miller 1997). This criticism will orient the methodological choices of this thesis in chapter three. But before that, to clearly situate the contribution of this thesis within the practice-based literature, it is necessary to return to Bourdieu’s concern with the illegitimate professionalization of

cultural intermediaries (2.1.2.4), this time informed by the empirical research reviewed above. Recent studies inspired by cultural economy (Cronin 2004a, 2004b; McFall 2002; Entwistle 2006; Wright 2005) portray cultural intermediaries as “liminal” figures that actively mediate between production and consumption. This means that they place consumption and production in dialogue, but also *perform* a division between them (Latour 1993). It is a matter of livelihood for cultural intermediaries to maintain this division, as well as other boundaries between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” culture for instance. This is because their expertise is based on them –they sell “mediating” skills that allegedly enable clients to reach out and tap into the “right” realm of culture.

#### *2.5.2.1 Cultural intermediaries: myth or reality?*

Yet the position of cultural economy does not seem to completely escape two problems that all outsider accounts struggle with. One problem has to do with the uses of “myth” criticised above, which persist in cultural economy notably through the confusing expression of “cultural intermediaries”. This expression already establishes a thorny territory where assumptions appear confusing –in a landscape where culture and the economy form one and the same locus of exchange, between [inter] what realms would an advertising practitioner be supposed to “mediate”? Cultural economy offers a clever but at the same time intriguing answer. Intermediation is only a discursive distinction essential to the advertising business whilst having no reality outside this business. For “in reality” culture and the economy are one and the same thing. So on the one hand, society and the market in particular should not be seen as advertising people see it; the corollary is that advertising people should not be seen as they see themselves. But on the other hand it seems impossible to describe who they are and what they do “outside” of what makes them who they are and what they do – their discourses, practices, in short their relation to others in their direct and broader environments. Advertising work would not be possible without firmly held beliefs as to the intermediary functions of this work, as cultural economy recognises, nor without a lack of questioning around that which might jeopardize their existence as will be reflected in chapter five.

These two different levels of representation, that of a “real world” (cultural economy) containing a “mythical world” (two separate spheres created by the discourse of intermediation), might enhance the risk of awkward social analysis. Hence after the problems of “reification” and “consumption myopia”, cultural economy cannot claim to represent an irreproachable alternative. It faces the difficulties inherent to the reading of practice through myths, which can be formulated as follows: if one accepts in a Foucauldian perspective (e.g. Foucault 1976) that the role and significance of advertising amounts to *what is said about them* –then why would cultural economy deliver a superior form of knowledge than the insiders’ discourses it emerged from in the first place? How come analysts tend to classify as “unreal” or “mythical” what looks and sounds so real in practice? Chapter two does not disagree with the assumptions and methods of cultural economy, but aware of the limitations and challenges that go with them it combines them with another framework –that of *rationalisation*. Armed with such inclinations to anthropology “corrected” by Weber, or adding a Weberian lens to cultural economy, the thesis decides to move away from the figure of the cultural intermediary. Instead it constructs advertising people as cultural “articulators” or “facilitators”, that is, *professional* prosumers whose paid role is to circulate along two strategic –rather than accurate –dimensions of the same cultural economy sphere. Such terms have the virtue of maintaining the idea that matters most (that of a “link”, of a “with”) whilst getting rid of a confusing “between” [inter].

#### 2.5.2.2 Legitimization without illegitimacy?

The second problem that recent interview-based contributions to cultural economy do not really escape has to do with Bourdieu’s argument. In this growing body of literature, this argument is often partially recalled or oversimplified in order to focus (perhaps rightly so) on its weaknesses. Most studies cite Bourdieu as originator of the “cultural intermediaries” term but then recede from his starting point of *illegitimacy*. Instead they directly tackle the issue of mediation (how do cultural intermediaries mediate in practice?) and legitimisation (how do they justify their mediation?). Yet legitimisation as a process must imply an initial situation of uncertainty –typically the anxiousness of the “outlaw” and other feelings of ambiguity and wrongness. Hence cultural economy should not ignore Bourdieu’s starting point and the above studies

might be criticised for their partial treatment of the question of legitimisation. As a result it seems necessary to shed more light on the initial state of illegitimacy, along Mazzarella's conclusion:

If the advertising business seems illegitimate, it is not primarily because it lies. Rather, it is because it reaches into the concrete foundations of our collective experience and, on that basis, performs an imaginative labour that cloaks its partiality in the vestments of the universal (Mazzarella 2003: 287).

Mazzarella deserves credit for returning to the essence of Bourdieu's critique –an apparently dubious elevation of an experience of culture, which everyone has, toward this expert form of knowledge endowed with exchange-value. In some tour de force that seems like a “lie” or an imposture, advertising people manage to commodify an experience which is not fundamentally different from others through the books they read, the music they listen to, the advertisements they see (du Gay 1997). Anthropologists may be criticised on similar grounds since they are similarly paid for “living” and “recording” their own experiences (Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran 2003).

Before reaching the conclusion of this chapter and a research question, it is now time to reassess the relevance of Bourdieu's (1979) initial portrayal of cultural intermediaries through another reading of practice-based accounts that combines cultural economy with the other major framework of chapter two, “rationalisation”. Cultural economy implies more empirical research; rationalisation implies less magic and more reasons. For Bourdieu cultural intermediaries feel “uneasy” about the contradiction inherent to their role of “foils” deprived of intrinsic value. Despite his lack of evidence for assuming so, later practice-based studies validate his intuition – not only were uncertainties and even sentiments of illegitimacy prevalent in the past; they are also lingering in the present (Beigbeder 2004). A discourse of uncertainty is especially eloquent at the level of creativity, as epitomised in the confession of Bernstein, an insider:

We –the creative people –are at the heart of the advertising business. We alone are indispensable. Though whether we know what we're doing is quite another matter. For the making of advertisements is an activity conducted by people who cannot agree upon a definition of what they are doing, the result of whose labours is submitted for approval to other people who are ill-equipped to judge it (quoted in Smelt 1972: 11).

But it has become possible to read accounts of this kind as well as Bourdieu's sketch of febrile individuals without giving into the fetishising perspectives of myths, ideologies or magic powers. The thesis accordingly stipulates that uncertainties in the business are subject to rationalisation, through which another practitioner's discourse is constructed.

This second discourse seeks to invalidate uncertainties. It thus produces the "certainties" that structuralists (Bourdieu, Barthes, Lévi-Strauss among others) identified as "myths", as stories that lack criticality –to persistent doubts they substitute unquestionable knowledge and sledgehammer arguments; to social and cultural complexity, "nature" (cf. *naturalisation*) and the tautological reasoning that goes with it. To those indecisions likely to disturb the social order in other words, they answer: "because that's the way things are". During the process, the modesty and anxiety inherent to doubtful states are replaced with the arrogance of absolute knowledge. In this operation of "self-mythicisation", advertising people become powerful scientists or magicians or perhaps even "the arrogant breed who are our masters" (Deleuze 1995: 181). Illustrative of this second discourse is a passage that introduces Plummer, who joined Young and Rubicam after his PhD in mass communication theory:

With his fresh-scrubbed face and close-cropped blond hair he looks more like an innocent choirboy than an analyst of human behaviour. But beneath the angelic façade lurks a real manipulator. Plummer is a probing scientist, and he spends most of his time at Y&R experimenting with the public's emotional chemistry. His soft eyes light up and the halo disappears with each new discovery of consumer vulnerability; he knows that this signals big sales for the agency's clients (Meyers 1984: 48).

Here the tonality has radically changed. The discourse of certainty gets rid of the tormented businessman by means of a double operation: the scienticisation of practice (an "analyst of human behaviour", a "probing scientist") and the establishment of science as a realm of unquestionable truths ("he *knows* that this signals big sales for the agency's clients"). So the incalculability of behaviours in the agency's direct environment (that of clients in particular) motivates a defence organised around overconfident behaviours and the naturalisation of the aptitudes required for working in the industry.



Similar portraits abound in the insider literature and they constitute the very rationality of the industry. To a “carnavalesque” past characterised by insecurity for example, insiders substitute a “golden age” peopled by the exceptional founders of big advertising agencies. Ogilvy is one of these sacralised heroes, visionary fathers. His *Confessions* (1963) became a reference work that the industry’s leading players adopted as soon as it was published (Fendley 1995: 5, 13). The arrogance that permeates the book naturalises the *auctor* [founder] as a genius, a superman or even a prophet. Yet an important point of this chapter is that self-mythicisation, just like stereotypes of superficiality or immaturity overviewed above (2.5.1), *makes sense*. Because practitioners respond to uncertainties by building a discourse of certainty, all this vanity is not exactly an “attribute of” or “intrinsic to” advertising work –it is the condition of its existence. In other words vanity does not appear because “that’s how advertising people are”; rather, it can be understood through anthropological contextualisation. The next section clarifies what exactly the thesis asks along this anthropological path.

## 2.6. Conclusion and research question

To conclude, returning to Bourdieu is not about “closing the circle” but opening new horizons in the light of the questions cultural economy has found vital to ask –who are advertising people, and what do they really do every day? Answering this question cannot be straightforward because of significant differences between what people do and what they say they do. Practice-based accounts somewhat manage to overcome this difficulty. What they do very well is identify causes of uncertainty in advertising agencies, in relation to the unpredictable behaviours of consumers and clients. However they provide little information on the *nature* of these uncertainties, that is, on how uncertainties express themselves in practice. If insider accounts lack in description, current outsider accounts do not seem to throw an adequate light on this nature either, because of their circular arguments around the “myths” of creativity, originality, authenticity and the like that refer back to uncertainties (people feel insecure “because” they adhere to *fragile* myths, and they adhere to fragile *myths* “because” they feel insecure). Therefore the thesis sets itself a simple question.



*What is the nature of uncertainty in an advertising agency?*

The analysis chapters (four, five and six) will therefore seek to understand:

- The uncertainties advertising people experience at work, in their daily expression.
- What these uncertainties do to people, and how people act upon them in practice (i.e. in their discourses and actions).

This objective involves Weber's mechanisms of rationalisation, with the recognition that work is not about constructing false beliefs but about finding reasons that overcome difficulties in a much disparaged industry. In continuation of the previous section, the research question derives from the idea that "ideologies" such as individual creativity can be better grasped as outcomes of an overall instability. And this instability should be more thoroughly described in practice if one is to understand how it stimulates the production of strategic responses (like the discursive sacralisation of practitioners in the insider literature). Finally such responses should be logically called "strategies of rationalisation" as they enable practitioners to recover certainty and confidence in their professions. The next chapter presents the methodology that was used to create an outsider account that throws light on this question. Falling under the banner of cultural economy but also the tradition of classical sociology, this account runs through chapter four, five and six.

# Chapter Three

## *Methodology*

Chapter two reviewed the role and significance of advertising according to various influential works. It also clarified my theoretical orientation to advertising research and provided an objective for this thesis. This chapter sets out to describe and justify the methodology and research design used in this study. Section 3.1 situates this ethnography in a French advertising agency with regard to ethnographic theory –it *prepares* fieldwork. In section 3.2 I make theory and my own experience of ethnography “talk to each other” –in the light of my empirical research this section addresses two critiques of contemporary ethnographic writing, but also points to other critiques of the methodology as a whole. So this section *questions* fieldwork. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 indicate where and how the data was collected –they *describe* fieldwork. Finally section 3.5 explains how the data was sorted out and analysed –it *reflects* on fieldwork. In total chapter three shows how my relations to the field shaped my choice and use of multiple methods.

### **3.1 Theoretical underpinnings**

This section first justifies the choice of an ethnographic methodology with regard to the research objective of chapter two (3.1.1). Then it provides an overview of the theoretical commitments and debates this methodology raises around notions of “description” and “interpretation” (3.1.2, 3.1.3). Finally mentioned is the position taken up by this ethnography on the theoretical material exposed (3.1.3.2).

#### **3.1.1. Why ethnography?**

Chapter two provided an objective for this thesis: to explore the nature of uncertainties in an ad agency, and how people live with them. In other words, the objective is not to establish the “truth” of advertising practice but to explore how a

community overcomes *contradictions*. This mission is exactly what ethnography prepares itself for. In the words of Lévi-Strauss (1955: 43):

I sense an even more serious danger in confusing the progress of knowledge with the increasing complexity of constructions of the mind. (...) In the end, [ethnography is] less about discovering the true and the false than understanding how people have gradually surmounted contradictions.

The uncertainty theme almost perfectly echoes Lévi-Strauss's idea of what ethnography is about. The ethnographic methodology is concerned with the resolution of contradictions, with problem-solving practices. It explores "how real human beings cope with both the eternal verities of human existence and the daily irritations and tragedies of living that existence" (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 285). By its very nature then, the research question calls for an ethnographic approach.

Moreover an obvious reason for ethnography emerges from the need, identified in chapter two, for more practice-based accounts of advertising –preferably of the anthropological kind. What is then expected from a new outsider account is an ethnographic study of organisational life which overcomes both the anecdotal and mythicizing inclinations of practice-based accounts. Finally personal preferences and beliefs influenced my methodological orientations. I am interested in *people's lives*, not just books about people's lives. Of course social theories are "of interest" when they say things about people; but equally interesting in my opinion is how people *inspire* theories –social science in the making. Ethnographic writing contributes to social science in a way that quantitative and purely conceptual texts do not. It begins with what the researcher *directly* experienced *with* other people. This means for some theorists (e.g. Blumer 1969; Lincoln and Guba 1985) that it is more appropriate to the study of human phenomena. This chapter clarifies that this ethnography will favour idiographic and "thick"<sup>32</sup> descriptions (Geertz 1973) as opposed to nomothetic generalisations based on large samples and tests of statistical significance (Hackley 2003: 129).

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<sup>32</sup> Borrowed from Gilbert Ryle, the notion of "thickness" adds *interpretation* to the recorded data – which alone constitutes "thin description" (Geertz 1973: 6-7). However, excessive attention to detail may cause the researcher "not to see the forest for the trees", which is why a number of authors advocate "triangulation", i.e. the use of other methods in combination (Denzin 1970; Folger and Turillo 1999).

How to define ethnography? Brewer's (2000: 6) straightforward characterisation arouses the questions and challenges this methodology cannot ignore:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or "fields" by methods of data collection which capture their social **meanings** and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

The citation assumes that "ordinary" activities and above all "meanings" can be "captured" by the researcher, and that data can be "systematically collected". There is also much vagueness around the "participation" of the ethnographer –this passage alone does not reflect, in particular, on how ethnography was thought about and conducted in the past, and how it is imagined and practiced today. Chapter three does not blindly accept this set of assumptions but discusses them in detail, starting from the next subsection.

### **3.1.2. The interpretive turn and the challenge of "meta-interpretation"**

Today it seems almost "natural" to assume that an ethnographic text is as biased as the hand that created it (Gowler and Legge 1983: 226). Yet this has not always been the case. One can see early forms of ethnography in the travel diaries of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, which combined personal narrative and objectified description (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 33). From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1970s, anthropologists like Boas, Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, Mead and Bateson perpetuated this positivist tradition. Anthropology was then associated with the British Empire and contributed to the understanding and ruling of colonised cultures. In the meantime but also later, as the "interpretive" approaches of structuralist and poststructuralist ethnography gained popularity, the positivist worldview was pejoratively labelled "naïve realism" (Hammersley 1992: 52). For Lévi-Strauss, Geertz, Marcus, Fischer and others, early ethnographers failed to recognise that knowledge was always relative to the culture in which it emerges. The role of the ethnographer shifted to that of the *interpreter*, the hermeneut whose "critical" role was to "clarify the opaque, render the foreign familiar, and give meaning to the meaningless" (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 51-2). For example Geertz's (1973: 417-448) depiction of the Balinese

cockfight is based on the assumption that societies contain their own interpretation, which is accessible to the researcher using semiotics. He reads a simulation of normally invisible status tensions in the cockfight – social passions and phantasms around power and its constituents (masculinity, pride, etc.) are symbolically expressed through the slaughter in the cock ring.

However, Geertz's (2000: 23) formulation of an "interpretive turn" might be misleading (or ironically, prone to misinterpretation). Much of the ethnographic literature takes the distinction between "description" and "interpretation" for granted<sup>33</sup>. Yet, outside of the realist paradigm, to "describe" never amounts to being "objective". So one may understand the "interpretive turn", not as a shift from something called "description" to something else (or something more) called "interpretation"; but more simply as an awareness that reality could/should be *described* differently. This is because description is guided by a set of beliefs with regard to what constitutes knowledge (epistemology) and reality (ontology). As such, my ethnography is committed to a (social) constructionist ontology, which means that reality is intersubjectively constructed rather than objectively accessible "out there" (Hammersley 1992: 44; Bryman and Bell 2003: 471). Like most contemporary ethnographies in other words, it is concerned with the "things for us" at an empirical or phenomenal level, rather than the "things as they are" at a deep or noumenal level<sup>34</sup>. My "field" is not the advertising agency awaiting discovery. It is on the one hand constructed through *writing*, an outcome of social transactions I was engaged in; and on the other hand constructed through the *reading* people make of my production (Atkinson 1992: 9). The reality recognised by my ontology (also characterised as "idealist" or "perspectivist") is "known" through another construction –mine. My epistemology is then "interpretivist" (Johnson & Duberley 2000: 91-3).

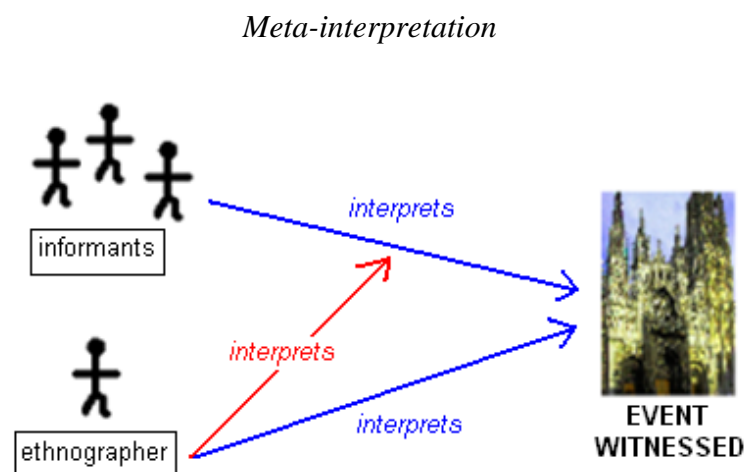
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<sup>33</sup> For example this distinction appears self-evident to Van Maanen (1988: 93): "[f]ieldwork constructs now are seen by many to emerge from a hermeneutic process; fieldwork is an interpretive act, not an observational or descriptive one (Agar 1986)". By the same token Mary Pratt assumes that "ethnographic writing as a rule subordinates narrative to description" (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 35) etc.

<sup>34</sup> Empiricists would even deny the existence of a "deep level" since it cannot be observed (Smith 1998: 299).

### 3.1.2.1 Meta-interpretation

Thus, if the constructionist-interpretivist paradigm is popular in current ethnographic research, it is less because ethnographers moved from “objective description” to “subjective interpretation” than because *the interpretive dimension of description was recognised*<sup>35</sup>. Description is always already interpretation since anyone I worked with could tell a different story, paint a different “reality” of the advertising agency (Denzin 1997: 43). So how to assess the reliability and/or validity of my research when the notion of objectivity is rejected? Hackley (2003: 102-4; 113) sets forth an alternative –“integrity”. All a researcher can do is asking readers to trust him/her. This means that ethnography remains at best the construction of a construction, or what I like to picture as a “meta-interpretation”:



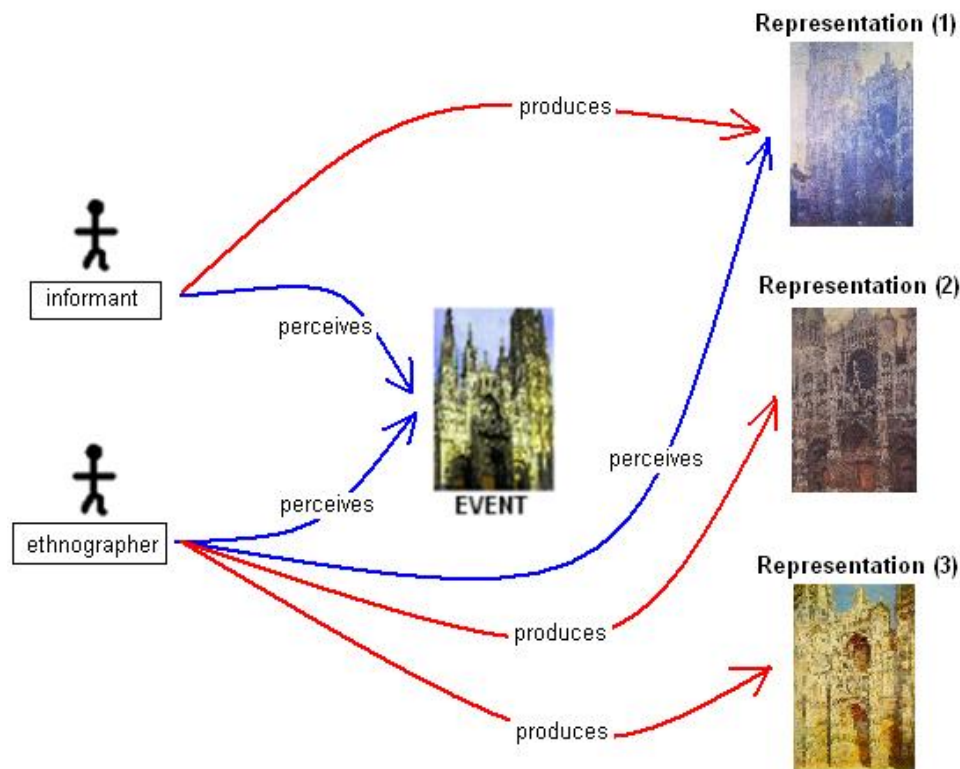
The ethnographer interprets an interpretation on this diagram, which still makes the scandalous assumption that all informants produce the same interpretation of an event they witness in common. But even in an unrealistic ethnographic simulation that

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<sup>35</sup> Husserl recommended that we should suspend our belief in the existence of the objective world (Smith 1998: 164) –objectivity is simply too fragile in social science, being “threatened by dogma, prejudice and lies” (Broad and Wade 1982: 193-211). To observe is to choose a point of view –the very act of observing is interpretive (Harper 2003: 183). This means that “bias”, despite its negative connotations, becomes the only possibility for grasping reality (Gowler and Legge 1983: 226; Gummesson 2000: 181). For example Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 33) assume that “all research is interpretive”, thereby implying a necessary confusion between description and interpretation. In other words there is no “bias”, only different possible interpretations (see also Hammersley 1990: 9; Van Maanen 1988: 35).

would engage with only *one* informant, the complexity of the study is such that the number of representations exceeds the number of people in the field:

### *Dealing with competing descriptions*



There are two people but three representations on this illustration. Representation (1) is the informant's own perception of the event, and representation (3) that of the ethnographer. Finally representation (2) is the informant's perception *as the ethnographer understands / interprets* it. Whereas representations (1) and (2) both emanate from the same informant, they are produced by different interpreters. These representations are thus "close" but distinct, (2) being a distorted version of (1). The ethnographer attempts to bridge the gap between (1) and (2) while dealing with his/her own interfering image (3). In an ideal case of "collaborative research" (Reason and Rowan 1981)<sup>36</sup> or "cooperative enquiry" (Griseri 2002), the informant and the ethnographer exchange their views in order to minimise this gap. In this sense, doing

<sup>36</sup> Collaborative research entails "joint understanding", i.e. a continuous dialogue between the "interpreter" and "interpreted" (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). This means that all people involved in the research would be co-researchers at times. This form of authority is according to Clifford (1988: 51) utopian.

ethnography entails coming to grips with an inextricably dense network of representations or “acts of interpretations” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 304). Finally, as if meta-interpretation was not problematic enough, the issue of “generalisation” appears at a broader level. Even when one assumes that quite a “faithful” representation of the organisation was produced –how can one generalise from it? Does any organisation not present a certain degree of uniqueness? Are the circumstances of today not liable to change, even in the near future (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2003: 83, 101)? The next subsection tackles these questions.

### 3.1.3. The “double crisis” of ethnography

Denzin (1997: 4-13) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 21) synthesize the problem of generalisation and representation into the “double crisis” of contemporary ethnography –the “crisis of legitimation” addresses epistemological problems and the “crisis of representation”, pointed out by Marcus and Fischer (1986: 7, 17-44), ontological ones. The postmodern response to these crises consists in saying that generalisation and representation are no longer the point –ethnography should even seek to avoid them. So what does the “crisis of legitimation” refer to first? Apparently, it is less a “rupture” towards a brand new paradigm than a continuation and radicalisation of structuralist discoveries. Like structuralism, postmodernism rejects the notion of universal truth and assumes that all knowledge is polyphonic, dialogic. In this context ethnographic research is inclined to Sophism –for Protagoras “everything” was true. And indeed no theory of human behaviour has failed to gain at least some empirical support; all theories have a grain of truth (Thorngate 1976)<sup>37</sup>. As Bourdieu (1993: 9-10), Clifford (1986: 2) and Jameson (1983: 114) recall, novelists like Faulkner, Joyce, Hemingway or Virginia Woolf had already abandoned omniscient narration in favour of a plurality of coexisting –and sometimes competing –perspectives. Centuries before, in *Don Quixote*, Cervantes gave different names to the same characters and also played with various registers in order to reconstruct the polyvalence words have for different minds (Spitzer 1948: 41-85).

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein’s (1953) “language games”, Bakhtin’s (1981) “heteroglossia”, Derrida’s (1976) “deconstruction”, Foucault’s (1970, 1972) “discourses”, Deleuze’s (1991) “planes” are based on this acknowledgement.



The crisis of legitimation therefore insists on the idea that unilateral images should be substituted for more complex representations based on distinct expressions of the same realities. “Canonised voices” in social science must be replaced by “polyphonic diversity” (Jeffcutt 1994: 39). For example Clifford (1986: 2) makes the ethnographic quest sound like Don Quixote’s crusade –it “makes the familiar strange, the exotic quotidian” (see also Marcus and Fischer 1986: 74). Burgess (1982: 45) has also underlined the advantages of a marginal position for the ethnographer, between familiarity and strangeness. Neither should the researcher “go native”, nor remain a complete outsider. In other words postmodernism takes the relativity of knowledge very seriously and blurs the familiar/unfamiliar, commonsensical/odd and other analogous dichotomies –exactly as dreams disturb the conventions and expectations of our awoken lives. In this spirit ethnography resembles an “oneiric science” which would assimilate interpretations to intimate extrapolations; and it could be personified as Verlaine’s narrator in the first stanza of *My Familiar Dream* (Translation Martin Sorrell in Salama-Carr 2000: 86). In it, a woman (one or many informants in the context of personified ethnography) appears to the poet as both strange and familiar:

I often have a strange and searing dream  
About an unknown woman whom I love  
And who loves me; never quite the same  
Nor someone else, she loves, she understands me.

This fantasy connects the desire for knowing her (she is mysterious) to the possibility of knowing her (she is also approachable). When we are awake, this desire and this possibility are asymmetrical –increasing the likelihood/intensity of one decreases the other.

### 3.1.3.1 Postmodern ethnography

When postmodern ethnography<sup>38</sup> is forced to lessen the value of generalisation, it chooses to reinforce its *aesthetic* dimension. One may imagine Marcus and Fischer’s (1986) “crisis of representation” as that which also affected realist or “academic” painting in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, leading to other conceptions of representation –

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<sup>38</sup> Associated with the works of American anthropologists from the mid-1980s: Clifford and Marcus (1986), Marcus and Fischer (1986), Clifford (1988), and Tyler (1987) among others.

impressionism, cubism, fauvism, surrealism, etc. The point was no longer to be “accurate” and glorify religious forces; at issue was how art transformed nature. In his novel, *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde (2003) suggests that art should not try and copy nature but understand the extent to which nature often emulates art –for example the London smog did not really “exist” before Turner and other impressionists painted it; it had not been “noticed”. Painters discovered the smog out there and painted it, literally in-venting it. So when ethnography is regarded as an art, just like storytelling, its non-reproducibility becomes a strength rather than a flaw (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). It is not so much preoccupied by the faithfulness or accuracy of its representation. The postmodern ethnographer is a scribe or archivist who sees informants as co-authors and puts “slices of life” together –thereby engaging, like jazz improvisers or quilt makers, in “bricolage”, “collage”, “montage”, stitching, editing (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 7). It is then an “absence of authorship” that characterises the result, which is why postmodern ethnography reconsiders the value of myths and folktales.

In the end a postmodern ethnography is this “true fiction” (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 6) that has been fashioned or “made up”. It is also a “messy text”, anti-form by definition (Marcus 1998: 567) and as such difficult to conceive. Lyotard (1979: 80) distinguishes two possibilities. At one extreme genres are mixed up, meanings and syntax distorted. At the other extreme the writing is so commonsensical that it goes beyond reason. Postmodern arguments related to ethnography are therefore keen to unearth paradoxes (e.g. the “true fiction” oxymoron) and may be confusing. Adorned with the inextricable twists and turns of Postmodernism, ethnography seems always easier said than done. Marcus (1998: 183) acknowledges that the power of the postmodern intervention is “in critique rather than in defining a new paradigm or setting a new agenda”. As such, Postmodernism is to ethnography what Surrealism is to storytelling: an “aestheticizing” theory. Finally the typical postmodern response to the crisis of representation is a much debated concept of “reflexivity” (e.g. Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 136; Hackley 2003: 68, 99; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 14-18; Marcus 1998: 189-201), whose meaning may vary, and which is in short an awareness of the social processes that influenced the collection *and* interpretation of data. Phrased differently, reflexivity is the researcher’s awareness that her/his representation of reality is in many ways limited.

### 3.1.3.2 *Is my ethnography postmodern?*

There are ways in which the methodology of this thesis could be labelled as “postmodern ethnography”, but also ways in which it could not. The postmodern label might apply to the polyphonic structure of the three analysis chapters for example, since my own “voice” articulates the voices of somewhat distant academic spheres (philosophy, physics, marketing, anthropology, literature, sociology), and furthermore intermingles this already bizarre compilation with the voices of my informants. Here is a classic system of narration (diary) that combines literary monologues (book quotes) to real-life conversations and situations (data). The “messiness” of this representation is reflected in multiple methods detailed in a later section (3.3). Finally the kind of prose that weaves this patchwork of tables, explanatory diagrams, photographs and other images could be called “butterfly writing” for two reasons.

First butterfly writing refers to the written material, to what can be read –namely this mixture of genres, tones, positions and styles flitting from the dramatic to the grotesque or from serious theories to boring routine in chapters four, five and six. Second, it refers to a writing process, to intentions of writing. Some bits in this ethnography were written with scientific rigour in mind (e.g. transcriptions of conversations with informants); other narrative bits betray some kind of artistic, decidedly unscientific casualness for lack of having more “interesting” things to say. However these portions were not written in the hope that style would compensate for content. They are of course endowed with the awkwardness of the foreign student writing in a language s/he does not master. As such they have the vapid flavour of a rushed translation. All in all butterfly writing never manages to flow; it keeps staggering like a failed dandy in search of inspiration and ranting at night, having gathered a crowd that delights in listening to his clowning, about his postponed fame he knows perfectly well in a sober state to be that of the accursed poet he wishes he became.

Then there are ways in which this ethnography is *not* postmodern, especially because it mistrusts the concept of reflexivity. It agrees with Silverman (1997: 239-40) that such a concept fosters the navel-gazing type of narration already pervasive in the anthropological discipline. Elaborating on this shortcoming, the next section expands

on the ways in which relations to the field shape ethnographic texts, including that of this thesis.

## 3.2 Field relations

This section operates the transition from broad ontological and epistemological considerations to the practice of ethnography, i.e. fieldwork. It shows how fieldwork affects the content of the three forthcoming analysis chapters. In continuation of subsection 3.1.3 on postmodern ethnography, it begins with a critique of the concept of reflexivity in consonance with that of ethics (3.2.1). My own experience of fieldwork is one illustration of the fragility of the reflexive orientation (3.2.2). Then subsection 3.2.3 points at another weakness of contemporary ethnography –a paucity of descriptive data, which the thesis attempts to overcome. Limitations of ethnography are noted in conclusion (3.2.4).

### 3.2.1 Questioning reflexivity

To my mind the notion of reflexivity is rooted in a sentiment of *guilt* that most fieldworkers are very likely to experience at some point or another. In a note on his study of the police for example, van Maanen (1988: 97) confesses:

I was once thanked by some of my police acquaintances for coming to the funeral of one of their mates. I still feel like a hypocrite recalling the incident, since I was at the funeral to unravel a cultural rite and not to pay my respects. Hypocrisy is always at issue in fieldwork (...)

Here is a self-flagellating statement at least, and perhaps a methodological suicide. With this confession van Maanen's methods become "unethical", in that they go against his own ethical convictions. He knows that what he does is "wrong", but he does it anyway. This kind of reflexivity does open up the way for ethical debates insofar as what is "right" and "wrong" to do is relative to the researcher's conceptions of ethics. But it first epitomises the fact that ethnographic knowledge is always a *transgressive* act ("hypocrisy is *always* at issue"). In my experience of ethnography (sections 3.2, 3.3) and in so many others, fieldwork has little to do with the ideas of "total immersion" or "collaborative research" classic to organisational ethnography

(Rosen 2000: ix). I do not reject these concepts but regard them as ideal-types that researchers should strive after. In reality though, I believe that fieldwork by definition is more of an *intrusion*<sup>39</sup>. Modern medicine was born with the “forbidden” opening up of dead bodies. Understanding the mechanisms and diseases of the body required a transgression of religious rules preserving the immortality of soul. The production of knowledge had to go through a violation, a tearing apart that also concerns ethnography. Unfortunately a number of methodological texts insist on ideal types of ethnography to the detriment of these more realistic conditions of research.

### 3.2.1.1 *Ethnographic ethics?*

Fetterman’s (1989: 130) chapter on ethics recommends for example that ethnographers be “candid about their task, explaining what they plan to study and how they plan to study it”. As mentioned above, Hackley (2003: 102-4; 113) refers to similar objectives of trust and integrity. Yet such apparently simple and reasonable guidance in theory becomes in practice a rule that cries out for its transgression; for an ethnographic approach is by definition inductive<sup>40</sup> –researchers are physically “in the field” because they do not know what is happening therein and more often than not, they do not even know what they are seeking. “The prime ethnographic maxim”, Rock (2007: 33) suggests, “is that one cannot know what one is exploring until it has been explored”. So how can ethnographers be clear about their “plans”? In my case, and I cannot believe I stand alone in it, a candid answer is “I do not know what I plan to study”, which represents the antithesis of Fetterman’s idea of ethics (“I will tell you what I plan to study”). This leads me to argue contra Fetterman (1989) that as long as integrity or honesty are viewed as adequate determinants of ethnographic ethics, then

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<sup>39</sup> This is mostly due to the requirements for exteriority (the presence of an external apparatus) as argued below.

<sup>40</sup> Keeping in mind that the sketchy inductive/deductive divide is maintained only to get to the point. In methodology “dichotomies obscure the range of options open to us” (Hammersley 1992: 168). Induction or *ideation* proceeds from immediate, a priori perceptions to the formulation of their guiding principles. It goes from the “particular” to the “general” –as Maso (2007: 140) puts it, “starting from what appears to consciousness (because of the phenomenological *epoche*) we try to acquire an understanding of the idea that determines its meaningfulness”. “Analytic induction” has been an influential conception of theory since Znaniecki (1934), for whom explanations are given by “generalisation” from the data by “abstraction”. Edmondson (1984: 106) speaks of “rhetorical induction”, through which “an author goes from a limited number of observations to a statement about what can reasonably be anticipated in general (...) [and] it is *interactive*, relying on the reader to decide what new situations to classify as comparable with those with which the author deals”.

ethnography is *in essence unethical*. Like van Maanen above, researchers are compelled to lie about their plans and indulge in hypocrisy. At the beginning of his study of part time crime, Ditton (1977: 10) is at least lucid about it:

Participant observation is inevitably unethical by virtue of being interactionally deceitful. It does not become ethical merely because this deceit is openly practiced. It only becomes inefficient.

I share this understanding of ethnography as a deceiving act through which the researcher always receives more than s/he gives. Van Maanen disrespected the funeral rite to take advantage of it as a teenager would lie about her age to get access to alcohol. Ditton also implies that overt research is chosen for ethical reasons when it is both ethically and substantially “inefficient”. I came to strongly agree with this point of view during the course of my own research, since I began with overt practices and switched to covert ones (3.4.1.2).

Sadly, neither covert nor overt methods seem to be shielded from the condescending style arising almost systematically with the concept of reflexivity. Armstrong’s (1993) “reflexive” account of hooliganism is a very good example of patronizing ethnography. He insists on his successful integration to a welcoming community, whilst also stressing that he was *not* one of them.

I enjoyed the company of those researched so much that at times I felt guilty that I was not being more academic in approach. At time I laughed so much I almost cried; I was more than once the worse for drink (...) (Armstrong 1993: 19).

So much is he enjoying himself that he experiences, like van Maanen earlier, this curious *guilt* of “not being more academic in approach”. But what on earth would an “academic approach” with hooligans (as with any other community) look like? Guilt is certainly grounded in the recognition that the point of ethnography is to create and sustain an insider-outsider relationship. This seems particularly vital in the study of organisations, since people may not have the desire, let alone the time to think about what they do at the very moment they do it –we are all task-oriented and cannot observe ourselves while working<sup>41</sup>. Social analysis thus requires a detachment

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<sup>41</sup> An objection could consist in asking: “what if we are not really working but daydreaming?” However the daydreaming might concern either past or future work, but never work *at the very moment*

provided by *external* apparatuses<sup>42</sup>. The ethnographer must take full advantage of the possibility of a “fresh glance” at things in her/his position of “professional stranger” (Agar 1980). Armstrong feels guilty of losing this distance upon which ethnography traditionally rests. He believes that he is not behaving “enough” like an outsider, and faces the dilemma that is especially relevant to ethnography “at home” or “auto-ethnography” (Hayano 1982) –to what extent is the researcher an outsider, and an insider? The previous subsection on postmodern ethnography suggests that s/he should be a bit of both.

### 3.2.1.2 *From reflexivity as solution to reflexivity as problem*

So Armstrong uses the idea of reflexivity to wash his guilt away, insisting that academia in the stadium is neither an excuse for drinks and fun, nor an amateur farce, but a respectable project that involves nothing less than acting talents, cultural sensitivity and fame:

I sought to be detached, but I was able to bring to the research a degree of reflexivity. The task of a researcher must always be to “fit in” and act as naturally as possible. This I found no problem in doing. I had what Bordieu [*sic*, in several places] (1984: 2) has called “cultural competence” to participate with this gathering. It is, perhaps, “not done” in academia to say so, but when researching with groups of people, the primary aim is to be both known and popular. When these two elements are combined, people talk to you (Armstrong 1993: 17-8).

Here is a self-portrait of the ethnographer as a clever chameleon. Because this kind of arrogant comment is frequent in ethnographies, reflexivity seems to be an excuse for navel-gazing and self-championing discourses. Take Norris’s (1993) “reflexive” passage in the same edited book, apparently inoffensive.

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*it is being carried out.* Otherwise we would not be working at this moment but daydreaming. In this sense reflexivity is merely impossible.

<sup>42</sup> Intruders, operators of surveillance (humans and/or machines) witnessing the environment under study without fully belonging to it –in practice an “outsider” and/or his/her recording equipment. Unlike philosophy, anthropology begins with the outsider point of view. Philosophy is the science of doubt; a perpetual questioning of what is normal or true *to us*. By contrast, anthropology scrutinises what is true *to me*, what is true *to them*, and what the observed differences might mean.

For instance, I would dress in the in-house CID style: grey flannels, blue blazer, white shirt, and formal tie. In this way, officers who did not know of my research role often took me for another CID officer. (...) As I became familiar with the police argot, I would use police talk to indicate a sense of shared perspective (Norris 1993: 131).

Covert methods are here depicted as something of a spying game in which the researcher “mingles with the crowd” and apes the other –a temptation that travel guides by and large recommend to resist. Using jargon is part of a rather unsurprising process of integration in the long term. So it is probably with “reflexive” objectives in mind that Norris writes on his “secret agent” capacities. In the end his feeling of domination over the community he observes is clearly perceptible in an implicit claim that he is gifted for emulating the cultural features of this community.

Together, Norris and Armstrong make research in their own culture more exotic. Their insistence on their subtle integration overemphasises the gap, despite their common cultural heritage, between researchers and informants. They write about “police talk” or “acting as naturally as possible” as if those were slowly and diligently acquired in remote tribes; about “a sense of shared perspective” or “cultural competence” as the coolest gifts that destined them for qualitative enquiry. Such a comedy of self-appreciation is part of the navel-gazing shortcomings of all interpretive ethnography –meaning my project does not escape it either. The next subsection clarifies the way in which I dealt with these shortcomings without turning them into reflexive competences. I rather perceived them as problems of ethnographic voice.

### **3.2.2 Nauseous ethnography**

My experience of the field has nothing to do with the pleasures of dressing-up quoted above. On the contrary it is permeated with self-disgust, with an overdose of the self. My ontological and epistemological commitments (3.1.2), unsurprising for ethnographic work (Bryman and Bell 2003: 471), mean that I cannot escape the use of a first-person narrative in analysis chapters. The “I” is the only credible means by which my habitus (inherited “glasses” through which I see the world) is constantly and effortlessly recalled. What *I* will tend to find noteworthy are the things that *I* have



found strange or unusual; yet those are likely to seem familiar to people whose everyday work does not allow its perpetual questioning. So “I” expresses variations between a number of mental representations derived from my habitus (the “familiar”) and a number of observations that are either in phase (the “familiar” again) or in contrast (the “strange”) with this habitus. “I” is this “outsider” that enables social analysis, exploring and questioning an otherwise tacit, taken-for-granted knowledge from which advertising people do what they do. The inescapable first-person narrative triggered a problem of ethnographic voice reflected in butterfly writing.

I have used “I” reluctantly in analysis chapters. I would rather speak for others but I am endlessly restricted to a sickening egocentrism. I can only speak for myself. And I can never “get out” of myself. My ethnography is as much a “story based on true events” (true events meaning “what was experienced and reported as such”) as it is a nauseous diary. Like the melancholic<sup>43</sup> hero of *Nausea* who feels he is “one too many” in the world, I felt that I was one too many in this advertising agency.

My impressions of advertising lives espoused Antoine Roquentin’s musing on the absurdity of existence (Sartre 1981: 152):

We were a load of awkward beings embarrassed by ourselves, and we did not have the slightest reason for being here, no one had; confuse and vaguely worried, every being felt in excess with regard to others.

That was it –this business gathered awkward beings. Clients embarrassed advertising people; advertising people embarrassed clients; they annoyed me; I annoyed them. And I could not see anything else than excess in our work. Wastes of time, wastes of efforts... everything seemed superfluous, unnecessary. Many times I was disturbed by the ugliness and pointlessness of these retouched photographs of smiling people that the printers belched out. *Nausea* does not suggest that existence is horrible; it states that life is nothing more than life. I realised in the field that advertising was just advertising. There was no mystery, no treasure to be found, no princess to set free from the forces of evil, no optimism-scented romance, no *adventure*. I came into

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<sup>43</sup> Sartre had first given the title *Melancholia* to his book. Being asked to change it, he came up with *The Extraordinary Adventures of Antoine Roquentin* before editor Gaston Gallimard suggested *Nausea*.

conflict with my methodology. Yet I preferred to remain in conflict with myself rather than embark on the reflexive impasse. Too many monographs, as Garfinkel *et al.* (1981) argue, have a tenuous relation to the actual concerns and doings of practitioners for me to revel in narcissistic delirium. I despise a number of ethnographers for recreating through reflexivity a sense of adventure, from which they present their role as *necessary* and feel like existing. Reflexivity would be regarded as a dubious orientation in early Sartrean philosophy, which postulates via Roquentin's voice that existence is never necessity but its opposite, *contingency*. Reflexivity benefits the ego of the researcher rather than the faithfulness of his/her representation.

Often I have been trapped in my research by the “necessity” of having “interesting things” to say. I expected more of these things to happen in the field. Instead we were already “one too many” and I could hardly bear what I wrote in my diary. I first saw nausea all around me... and then *in* me. My relation to ethnographic research was embittered in practice by a sentiment that I was (like at least one other trainee in the organisation) wasted workforce. First, I would have liked to work more and be given more responsibilities; second, much of the work I still did proved either useless, or to my mind useful but disregarded anyway. When the CEO introduced me to the creatives, he specified that I would be writing about the organisation. At this stage I was naive enough to think that this introduction would incite them to tell me more about their work and hopefully give me subordinate tasks. Soon enough I realised they would not, and began begging for tasks; but receiving too little guidance I could neither complete them properly nor efficiently. Also, I was clearly not welcome to meetings –except once, when they needed a figurehead specialist in advertising. Eventually I stopped asking for work when one of the copywriters suggested I could water the plants (which I did) and the other asked me “what’s the use of being a doctor if you can’t help us [on this campaign]?”. At this moment I had to recall that I was no doctor and that they had seldom required my help. There are two ways in which nausea affected the content of chapters four, five and six –one has to do with how I perceived myself in the corporate environment<sup>44</sup>; the other with how I perceived this environment.

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<sup>44</sup> This mirror does not relate to “reflexivity” in the above sense of a capacity (3.2.1), but to an *incapacity* that builds up on an *existential* rather than an ethical kind of guilt. For Sartre, who found himself ugly, the mirror was a problem, not a solution.

### *3.2.2.1 How I perceived myself in this environment*

My education was valueless in this organisation, and with few directives from management or even my peers I could only be an ill-taught parasite. Due to its impacts on writing, this position is as methodologically important as the reflexive attitude of the ethnographers-enlighteners cited above –it connects my reactions to an unwelcoming environment to that of two novel characters. The first one is a teacher calling into question his actual contribution to a community:

I am worthless (...) My technical abilities are largely inferior to that of Neanderthal Man. I am completely dependent on the society I live in, yet nearly useless to it. All I can do is produce dubious comments on outdated cultural objects (Houellebecq 1998: 201).

Such pessimism produces a different kind of guilt that is more relevant to my case than van Maanen's feeling of deception. The people I studied would not learn from me and I would still produce a cultural analysis of the very few things they deigned to share with me. The other character also has a teaching diploma, and feels as worthless when appointed as a translator in a Japanese company. In her allegedly autobiographical novel Amélie Nothomb (1999) commits a series of blunders due to her lack of knowledge of Japanese corporate culture. She is quickly downgraded to some kind of subsidiary accountant role, and ultimately to that of lady toilet attendant. Terrible at accountancy, she mocks herself but also observes less wryly:

My brain had never been so poorly stimulated and it discovered an extraordinary peacefulness. (...) And to think I had been foolish enough to go into higher education. Nothing less intellectual, however, than my brain blossoming in repetitive stupidity (Nothomb 1999: 60).

As a toilet attendant she withdraws into courteous silence. She is not unhappy but constantly daydreaming:

In this job that was now mine, I spoke extremely rarely. It was not forbidden to speak, and yet an unwritten rule prevented me from doing so. Bizarrely, when your task is far from brilliant the only way to preserve your honour is to remain quiet (Nothomb 1999: 157).

An ambiguous reference to her self-esteem, to Japanese codes of honour and cutthroat hierarchies, the word “honour” was not so relevant to my experience of being unmanaged. But whilst she is also more drastically ostracised than I was, I had roughly the same attitude to my failure of integration. I rarely spoke, and only suffered from vain attempts to socialisation –not from the nature of my work that embodied restful (hence not unpleasant) stupidity. So the absurdity of my presence is one of my important relations to the field, which shaped both the methods and the substance of the thesis towards aspects detailed in section 3.3.

### *3.2.2.1 How I perceived the environment*

The other important relation to the field had to do with the familiarity of my environment, with a lack of exoticism. In this organisation I did not find the oddities I expected to get inspiration from. Too bad –there is always more to write about the unusual. If the description of a human sacrifice in Bali in 1847 is quite detailed for example (Geertz 2000: 37-9), it is because the ritual is surprising to the Western eye. Of course I knew I would not witness a sacrifice, probably not even the death of an animal; but I still hoped I could experience a bit of a culture shock. When I began fieldwork however, I had to resign myself to the fact that I felt less like a “researcher” tasting the magic of advertising life or decoding its mysteries than an inexperienced French trainee in a French company of a disarming triteness. End of story? A certain degree of “foreignness”, fortunately, remained since I was a 25-year-old student exposed to the world of advertising work for the first time. But if I was less contaminated by the routine of this work than my informants, wiser for my status of stranger, I would not spontaneously identify like Rosen (2000) a number of events as “social dramas” or organisation “rituals”. Rosen (1988) chose to report a Christmas party held by members of an advertising agency. He notably saw party “skits” as symbols of real conflicts and uncertainties at work, subtly masked by an atmosphere of entertainment whose ideological function was to represent a warm and friendly company.

Nevertheless there was no particular event that I wanted to analyse in depth. It was quite the opposite. What I found most revealing in the business I temporarily worked for, is that it was *uneventful*. There was no Christmas party going on. Not much fun in

the creation room, even around new accounts. Not much openness to other people and ways of thinking<sup>45</sup>. So whilst Rosen (2000) made events somewhat “strange enough” to be worth analysing, the routine I have tried to represent refers to a very different kind of strangeness. Surprising to my eyes was the absence of surprising things and practices, in an industry that must be imaginative enough to fulfil a role of supplier of imagination. Unlike Rosen and his classic interpretation of a “special occasion” therefore, I sensed that my research had to be based on my disappointed expectations (“I can’t believe this is not happening”) or fulfilled anticipations (“I can’t believe this is happening”). My main difficulty was then linked to a representation of familiarity that had to “slow down” or “take its time” to expose, at the opposite of the sensationalism so commonly found in the media, this intriguing and at times depressing ordinariness. I was also aware that recent ethnographies of marketing companies did not really avoid the sensationalist or “anecdotal” pitfall Rosen (1991: 19) refers to elsewhere:

(...) a difficulty exists precisely because few people are writing ethnographies. Among those who are, even fewer write holistic analyses of organizations. Most limit themselves to journal articles and conference presentations; to short snapshots of organizational life.

Whereas there is arguably no “best way” to go about ethnography (Gellner and Hirsh 2001: 8), existing outsider accounts do not seem to adequately respond to this concern. The next subsection justifies this weakness and explains how the thesis intends to remedy it.

### **3.2.3 A need for thicker descriptions of practice**

To my mind existing ethnographies of marketing companies which are neither journal articles nor conference presentations (e.g. Miller 1997; Lien 1997; Moeran 1996) do not look like “thick” descriptions of practice either, but like conceptual works backed up by real-life episodes. Often parallels are drawn between these episodes and a

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<sup>45</sup> Popular American TV series and salacious jokes kept conversations going in the creative department. But what I tended to report in my diary was what I regarded as evidence of closed-mindedness.

theoretical literature in a deductive logic of verification<sup>46</sup>, not through the rigorous process of induction or “discovery” (Hammersley 1998: 9) inherent to ethnography. Informants’ voices get bogged down in broader theoretical claims that were formulated, each one more so than the other, in different contexts. Academic references are even used, to borrow Sutton and Staw’s (1995) phrase, as a “smoke screen to hide the absence of theory”. In comparison to analytical material finally, little space is actually devoted to working practices as such. It is for example surprising that Moeran (1996) spent so much time in an advertising agency yet related so few events.

### *3.2.3.1 Against narrating key events only*

Likewise Miller’s (1997) “ethnographic approach” to capitalism could better scrutinise the everyday discourses and actions of the advertising people studied. The author’s ideal conditions for ethnography are already debatable at best, not ambitious enough at worst:

Ideally I wanted to be present when the original brief was given to the advertising agency, at the meetings within the agency when the strategy was developed, and at subsequent meetings between the agency and the clients. This would permit the whole story of the campaign to be recorded, preferably by my sitting quietly in a corner with my tape recorder on (Miller 1997: 161).

Even if I am a fervent believer of the superiority of participant over non-participant observation, there are many ways in which non-participant research could be justified. But I am more concerned about Miller’s assumption that he could record “the whole story of the campaign” by simply attending meetings when it seems obvious that daily relations between management and creatives say a lot, if not more, about the creation process. On no account can these meetings alone tell “the whole story”, especially because the unlucky researcher might attend an unproductive event and miss out on

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<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal (1976) found that the “expectancy effects”, that is the tendency of producing findings in line with expectations researchers had prior to their experiment, affected a wide range of research areas. Experience on the field might as well become an excuse to enact an avalanche of anthropological theories compiled before fieldwork, rather than the basis of a more idiosyncratic argumentation. To quote Moeran (1996: 128) for example: “(...) marketers and advertisers have begun to postulate what they hope will become a logical equivalent between a society of goods and a world of social groups (...) in the same way that totemism does between a society of natural species and a world of social groups (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 104)”. Yet to what extent, really, have practice inspired this comment?

the more significant exchanges that occurred outside it. What is more, even the lucky researcher witnessing a decisive meeting would better construe it with reference to decisions taken as part of its preparation.

In sum, even professional anthropologists appear to have rather low expectations as to the methodological requirements for research to qualify as ethnographic in nature. In addition, Miller does not achieve in practice this “ideal” ethnography:

(...) In practice I tended to see snippets, for example the beginnings and ends of campaigns, rather than seeing many all the way through. (...) I also conducted some interviews with key personnel (Miller 1997, *Ibid.*).

Methods as recounted here blur the boundary between ethnography and qualitative, interview-based research. The weakness of this method is that it is not liable to provide a detailed picture of the processes and routines people are engaged in. Such occasional and probably opportunistic recordings do not necessarily analyse “critical” moments (“*kairoi*”), given that those are identified in relation to the sequential boredom of the “*chronos*”. The thesis takes immersion seriously and strives to create a less “punctual” type of ethnography, recognising that methodological hindrances spawn from the way in which the researcher was *allowed*, but also *chose* to use his/her time to the detriment of possibly better uses.

### 3.2.3.2 *For narrating the everyday*

The contribution of this thesis on the methodological plane is an inclusion of lengthier descriptions. The idea is to “theorise less” and “describe more”; to move from the frenzy of microscopic analysis swarming with academic references to a slower-paced, confessional kind of storytelling. As such the thesis includes more “raw data” than is mostly found in business monographs –mundane conversations, commonplace objects or trivial tasks receive more attention. In my view more systematic and explicit methods (section 3.4) generate at least a convincing database for analysis. On the downside these descriptions make my ethnography cumbersome and at times boring, especially when they *intend* to communicate boredom, to let it flow, to give it part of its fullness experienced in the field. I believe however that they are more representative of organisational life than “snippets” or even “key meetings”, because

advertising work is not just a succession of successes and failures, excitements and disappointments. It mostly consists of routine practices. Fetterman (1989: 11) notes in this respect that

where the journalist seeks out the unusual –the murder, the plane crash, the bank robbery –the ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people. The more predictable patterns of human thought and behaviour are the focus of enquiry.

Routine is then the point of departure of social analysis “at home” –a *motive* rather than an excuse for theorisation. And routine is all the more relevant to my ethnography since I mostly worked in the creative department where I got very bored (I found the work of marketing people much more interesting).

So the challenge for researchers is not reflexivity; it is to make this routine “interesting” enough in a text for a number of people to be willing to read it. Pratt (quoted in Clifford and Marcus 1986: 33) notes that unfortunately, ethnographers struggle to rise to this challenge:

How, one asks constantly, could such interesting people doing such interesting things produce such dull books? What did they have to do to themselves?

Yet writings on boredom are not doomed to be boring. Flaubert’s (1986) *Madame Bovary* is an example of “interesting” writing on boredom. Emma Bovary drowns her sorrows in the fictions she reads because her life is “not enough” to fulfil her; at the same time she feels “in excess” with regard to the world since she does not feel like belonging to it. Boredom is then to Emma Bovary what nausea is to Antoine Roquentin<sup>47</sup>. Flaubert has nonetheless claimed that “everything is interesting provided you look at it for long enough”. In other words literature can reach a “second order” at which ethnography should aim too. Reiterating this point, Rock (2007: 32) suggests that “there is no part of the social world that will remain boring after the application of a little curiosity”. Writing turns our lives into “something else”, and in a way “something more” than what they are (Denzin 1997: 37). Ethnography, whose artistic

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<sup>47</sup> A cohabitation of scarcity and excess, as Sartre (1981: 1684) writes in one of his notebooks: “People are bored. Animals are bored. (...) What on earth is ennui? It is where there is not enough and too much at the same time. Not enough because there is too much, too much because there is not enough”.



dimension is frequently noted, requires the same sublimating efforts as literature, painting, and other representational activities. These are all about finding a “language” to describe people, things, and evanescent emotions. In the end, as the concept of reflexivity shows almost in spite of itself, the first obstacle of ethnographic research is the researcher. I have clearly been my own enemy in every single aspect of this study. Describing the multiple methods used in this ethnography, the next section (3.3) shows why this was the case in practice. But before, some limitations of ethnography as a method are reviewed.

### **3.2.4 Limitations of ethnography**

The scope of this ethnography, like so many others, is always restricted by the constructionist and interpretivist assumptions introducing this chapter. Ethnography cannot read people’s minds and can be criticised by positivist researchers for being “unscientific”. Ethnography breaches principles of natural science in two major ways –it permits the researcher to become a variable in the experiment, and it uses data which does not appear as “objective” as numerate data. According to Brewer (2000: 20-1) the response to this “natural science critique” has been threefold. Positivist ethnographers have defended the natural science model, “humanistic” ethnographers have rejected it, and postmodern ethnographers have transcended it. Furthermore, the “double crisis” of ethnography (3.1.3) conveys another critique of ethnography as a method, since it advocates more reflexivity in writing. But then postmodern ethnography has been criticised too. Brewer (2000: 48-55) calls “post postmodern ethnography” a “reflexive and loosely postmodern” set of alternative paradigms including “subtle realism”, “analytical realism”, “critical realism” and “the ethnographic imagination”. This chapter will not go into these methodological debates.

Here I find it more meaningful to mention the “structural” view on the limitations of ethnography. This has less to do with the context of the researcher than with the ethnographic contribution per se. To put it bluntly –is it sufficient to “go and check” what is happening *in situ*? Perhaps not. The events witnessed are likely to be the effects of a greater structure invisible in the field, and whose power exert at a distance. Thus Bourdieu (1993: 159) refers to American ghettos which define

themselves in relation to an *absence* (essentially absence of the State, and of everything that goes with it: the police, schools, health institutions, associations, etc.). Even the most striking experiences might find their guiding principle elsewhere. So however detailed the field study is, it could be less useful in isolation than an examination of the external reasons that make sense of the situation. And finally the limitations of ethnography are linked to the ways in which methods are implemented in practice. The different techniques of data recording (interviewing, participant observation, etc.) are bound to omit details (especially visual, but also olfactory ones) and impart a determinacy that the events as they were experienced never possessed. In the following section therefore, I must say more about the nature of the methods I used in the advertising agency, as well as their theoretical and practical weaknesses. The brief presentation of the organisation below (3.3) precedes sections on data collection (3.4) and analysis (3.5).

### **3.3. Empirical site**

After specifying initial conditions of research (3.3.1), this section describes my fieldwork site (3.3.2). For the first time in the thesis some data is included, which presents the actors of this study in their working environment. Collection and analysis of this data, however, are the objects of the two last sections of this chapter.

#### **3.3.1. Negotiating access**

The thesis is based on intensive fieldwork conducted in an “overt” fashion at g&a, a five year-old advertising agency located in Nantes (Loire-Atlantique, France). Carrying out overt research means that participants to the study understand the nature and purpose of the research, and that they freely give their consent (“informed consent”). Once access to the organisation was granted, fieldwork was completed over a period of three months from the 20<sup>th</sup> of September to the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2005. However physical presence is not always the major problem in ethnography; it is trickier to negotiate and conduct appropriate research activities (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 56). When I informed the leaders of the organisation that I would be doing research, I understood that they granted me not only physical but also

“cognitive” access –that is, they had no particular objections as to what I would record. This section shows that this initial but vague agreement did not reflect the reality of my fieldwork. In the end I was not really granted cognitive access.

For the first time in this thesis, “data” is introduced. The table below specifies the convention that will be adopted henceforth for most of this data –this includes fieldnotes and tape-recorded data but excludes visual data (more on these different types in section 3.3). The textual data in each table represents an “event”. Most of the time an event is a *conversation* between people in the organisation; sometimes it stands for other actions or interactions when people work on a task or attend a meeting without speaking for example. The table mentions in four top boxes the circumstances under which the event took place (where, when and with whom I witnessed it) and the main box contains the event itself.

People involved in the event.	Day of recording.	Time of recording.	Place of recording.
This box mentions people in the organisation who participated in the event. I am never mentioned in this box but obviously present. More information on these people is provided in Appendix.	“Day n” means that the event occurred on my n <sup>th</sup> day in the organisation (day 1 being my first day at work). Thus this box essentially reflects my relative experience of the organisation. The event is likely to surprise me less as n increases, due to effects of habituation.	This either refers to the time when the recording of an event began, or to the time when I witnessed it and wrote about it. A time interval refers more accurately to the duration of the event.	Where recording occurred –generally in the organisation.

**“EVENT” = a conversation, sometimes another action/interaction**

The event is transcribed from fieldnotes or digitally recorded material (section 3.4). Where essential, italics take into account the participants’ tones, attitudes, and all other actions required to maintain narrative coherence (*as stage direction would in a play*). The “(...)” indicates that speech was truncated.

NB: in the next table only the data is based on recollection on the day of the event, not on fieldnotes in the strict sense.

*“I expected a bespectacled intellectual”*

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In the summer of 2005, after having unsuccessfully contacted dozens of advertising agencies in the UK and in France, I spoke to Laurence Louatron on the phone. Laurence is a distant relative of mine. She is the daughter of my grandmother’s sister (don’t ask me what that makes her in relation to me, I still don’t know what a “niece” or a “stepfather” is). She kindly agreed to put me in touch with a “gatekeeper”<sup>48</sup>, her former boss. There was no shortage of human resources in the industry and getting access to an agency required a bit of string-pulling. I got an appointment with the founder and CEO of a direct marketing company which had diversified its activities towards advertising in 1999. “Eighty permanent collaborators and forty full-time employees” the website indicated at the time. Laurence warned me that the CEO could be “outspoken”. She also mentioned that he was “a practical, experienced man”. On the day of the appointment, the receptionist had me wait for a short time before leading me to the CEO’s wooden door. She quickly disappeared. Here I was, on my own. Not too scared for once. It is just a marketing company. Let’s see if I can sell myself. I have a degree in marketing, I should be able to handle this. Right. I knocked the door, heard a hushed but snappy voice: “come in”. Sitting in a leather chair the man looked important. His face was very red. We shook hands:

Vincent	Day 24 BC (Before Copywriting)	10:14	Vincent’s office
<p><b>Vincent</b>, <i>grinning</i>: Good morning!</p> <p><b>François</b>: Good morning!</p> <p><b>Vincent</b>: Take a seat...</p> <p><b>François</b>: Thank you.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Vincent</b>: So...</p> <p><i>He reads the covering letter I sent him.</i></p> <p><b>Vincent</b>: Funny, I didn’t imagine you like that!</p> <p><b>François</b>: Really?</p>			

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<sup>48</sup> A gatekeeper has “control over key sources and avenues of opportunities” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 34) –the power to grant access to the field.

**Vincent:** Yes, I'm quite surprised, I expected a bespectacled intellectual you know, in his suit, the boring type you know.

**François, *joking*:** Oh but that's what I am, I usually wear specs...

**Vincent, *embarrassed*:** You do?

**François, *regretting the fact I could not hold my tongue*:** No, no I'm kidding.

**Vincent, *not laughing*:** Well, well, so I'm going to introduce you to this company if you will.

**François:** With pleasure, thanks.

*He reads the leaflet introducing the agency, word for word and taking a proud as well as inquisitive glance at me after each sentence, to ensure that I am following. He often pauses and asks: "you understand?", which irritates me. He insists on the fact that the company structure is unique in France, as he has been smart enough to be inspired by "marketing in the US". Then he draws an organisational chart on the board and wears an amazed look:*

**Vincent:** You're not taking notes?

**François, *embarrassed*:** Er, no, I'll remember... I usually do that.

**Vincent:** What? You haven't got any diary or something? How do you do then?

**François, *finding refuge with a lie*:** Well I'm typing down everything in my mobile phone, look...

*I take my mobile phone out of my bag and show him the "calendar" screen, without saying that it has never stored any appointment. He looks at it but does not say anything.*

**Vincent:** Yes, well, for your next interviews you'll know that you should bring a diary.

**François:** Yes, true, thank you.

**Vincent:** What bothers me is that I don't know where you could work here. Do you know what an account manager does?

**François:** Yes, a little, I have no experience in advertising but I did some direct marketing...

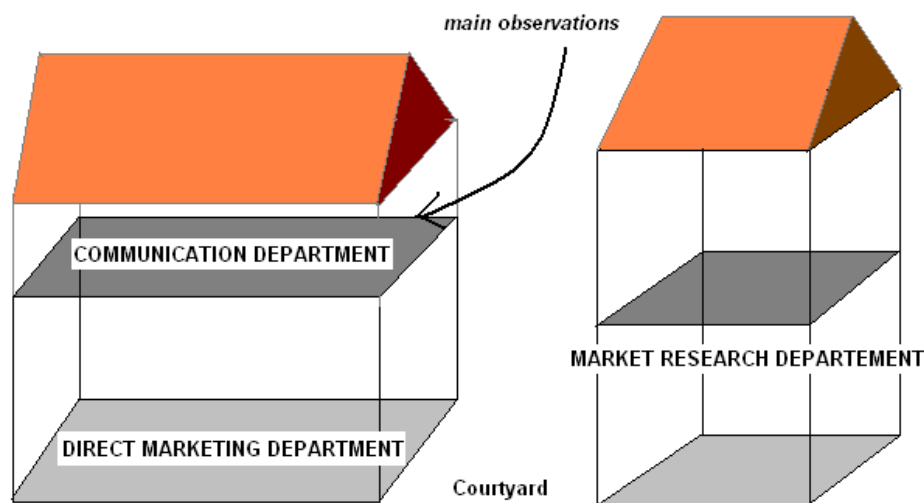
*Now he explains what the account manager job is about and calls the account manager in chief, Dominique. Dominique and I are introduced and Vincent tells me that the company is ready to integrate me. I thank him and tell him that I will give him confirmation very soon, after I have seen two agencies in Paris. He has been smiling at me during the interview and I can tell that his attitude towards me is positive.*

This is how I was introduced to g&a's anti-intellectualist culture, to its conception of the "intellectual" as the "boring type". This intellectual figure represented management's scepticism about the role of education in business practice. My experience at g&a would later confirm that the agency made a clear distinction between the useful, "concrete" practices and useless, "intellectual" attitudes that

receded from business realities<sup>49</sup>. Barthes (1993: 675-7) spoke of the “myth” of the intellectual as this idle person completely disconnected from reality, blowing hot air like a helicopter stagnating over people’s heads. This first meeting was also my first victory –thankfully I was not labelled as one of them. The next subsection introduces the organisation.

### 3.3.2. g&a: a young advertising agency

This subsection describes the physical environment of the organisation studied as well as its people and business activities. The organisation was called g&a, “g” being the first letter of the CEO’s surname and “a” standing for “associates”. It was based in Nantes, had opened an office in Paris, and the majority of its clients were insurance firms. From a core business in direct marketing g&a became an advertising agency in 1999. At the time of the study, in 2005, it was also diversifying its activities towards consultancy and “e-learning”. In Nantes g&a occupied two buildings:



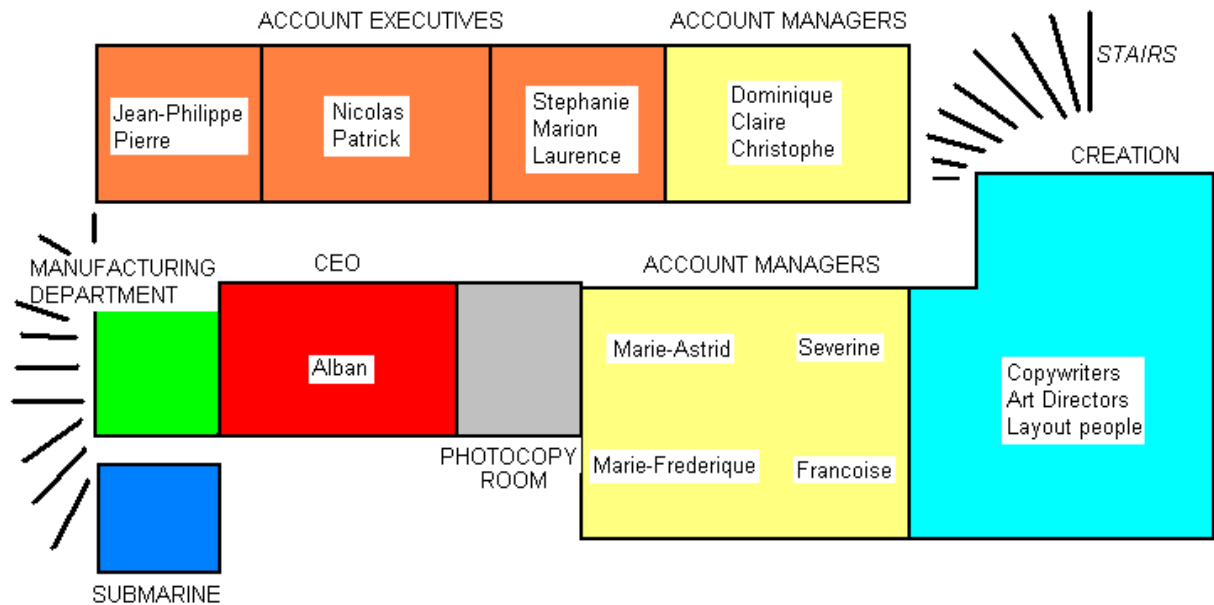
A detached building had been allocated to a market research department. In the main building the ground floor was divided in two zones:

- Part-time staff worked in a “call centre”

<sup>49</sup> For Mazzearella (2003: 69) business and the academia share responsibility for their lack of contribution to each other. The advertising business rewards only the sort of critical reflection that is likely to be instrumentally profitable; meanwhile the academia acknowledges “a radical separation between an Ivory Tower –within which a rarefied “life of the mind” seeks refuge from the crush of the street –and a World of Business, in which all is cut-throat instrumentality”.

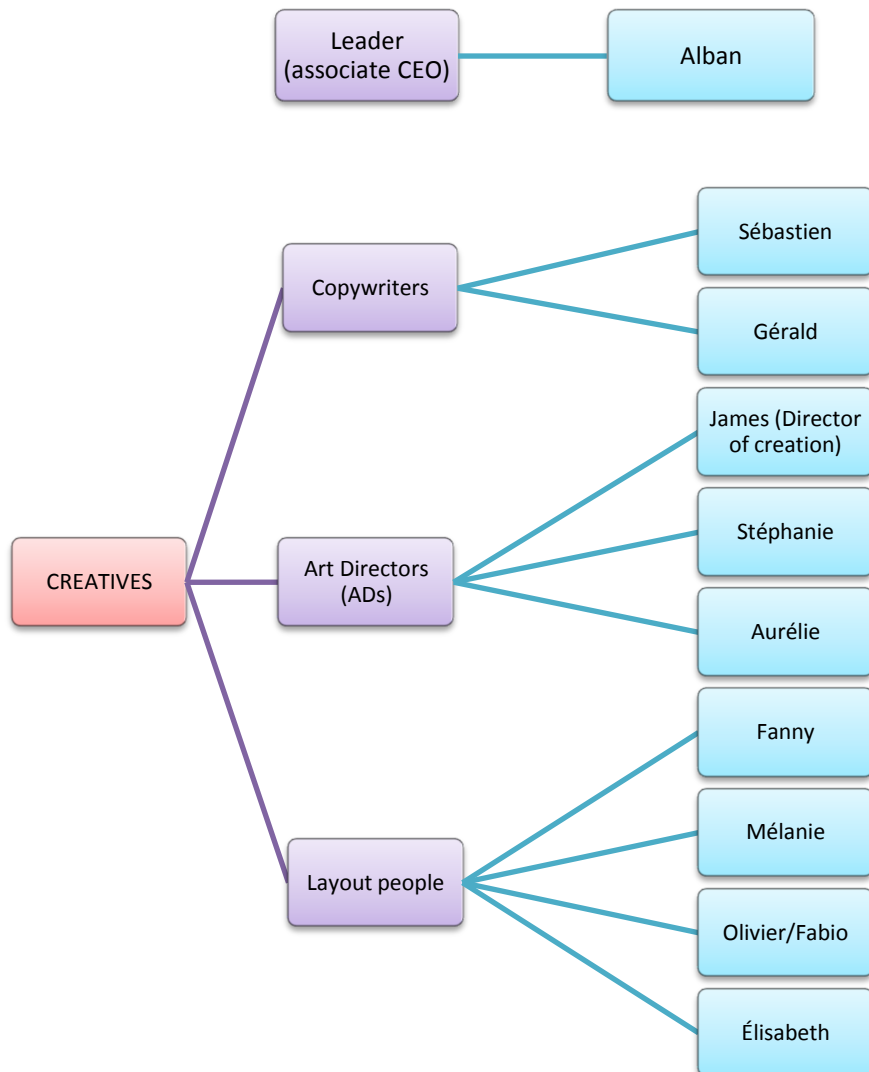
- Full-time employees worked in the “insurance centre”

The upper floor was the communication department, the advertising agency where I worked. It was organised as shown below:

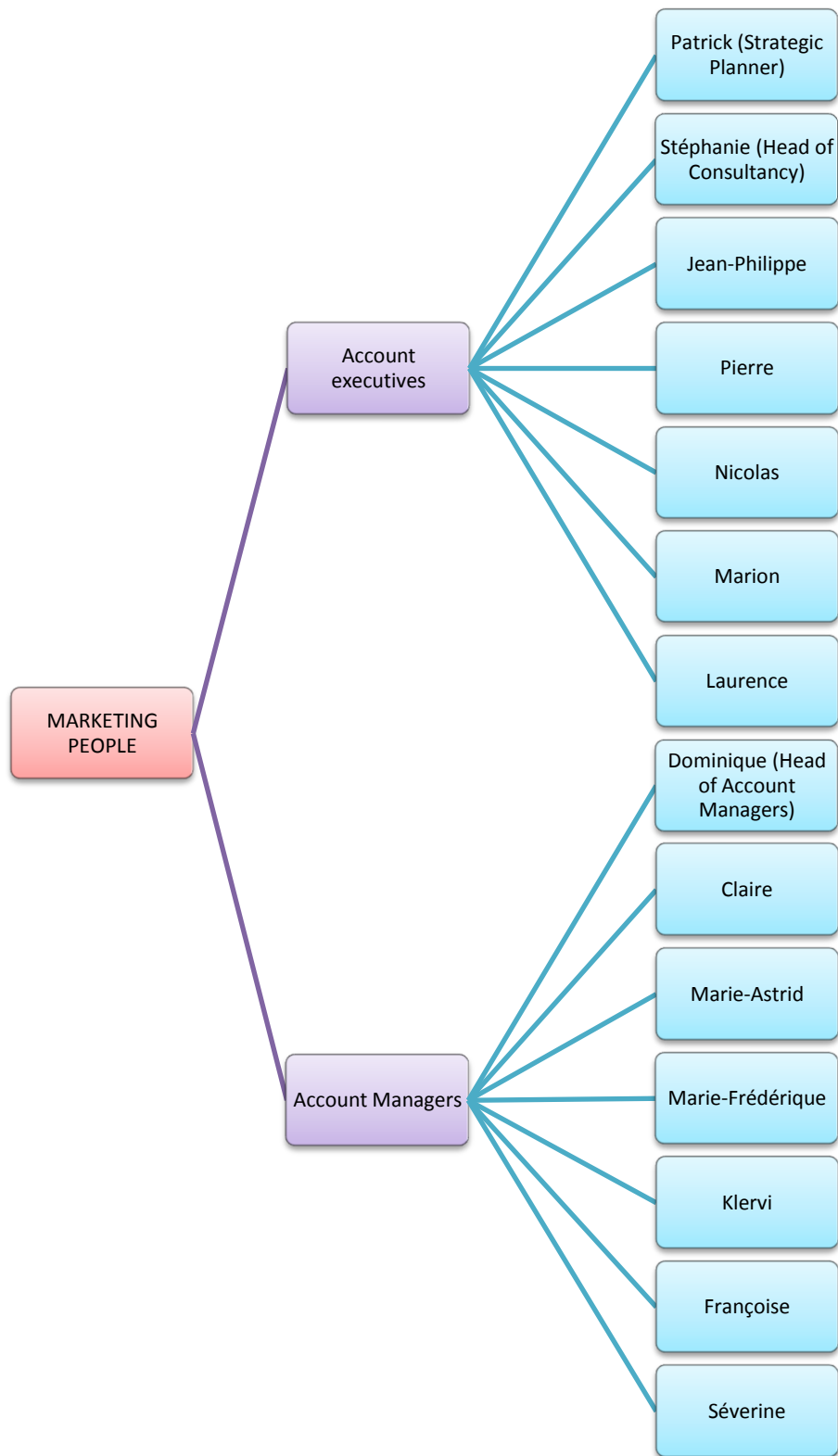


I like to call my informants in this agency “contributors”, because there would be no thesis without them. The youngest people, Christophe and myself, were trainees; most creatives and account managers were in their thirties and younger than account executives.

## Contributors







At g&a the creatives shared a passion for *Harry Potter* and popular American TV series such as *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*. When conversations were not related to work, they mainly focused on one of these fictions. Of course there were people with whom I interacted more than others –copywriters and art directors on the one

hand, and account executives Patrick and St  phanie on the other hand since they were in charge of the main project I worked on. Meanwhile I seldom saw the three people dealing with raw materials (“manufacturing department”) or a woman exploring different markets (“canvassing”). I could only guess that her task was not easy due to g&a’s current specialisation:

<b>Patrick</b> <i>(interview excerpt)</i>	<b>Day 41</b>	<b>11:09</b>	<b>Submarine</b> <i>(a cosy meeting room that will be described shortly)</i>
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**Patrick:** Sixty percent of our business is banks/services... and 5 years ago, when I joined, we *only* did bank/insurance. In 5 years, well the company’s doing 60-40 now. Trying to benchmark other sectors...

According to Patrick, g&a was not very good at “benchmarking other sectors” because it lacked a “contemporary dimension”. It had a “clever” side but it was not “creative enough”. And in fact the future strategic steps the agency would take were largely undecided. Alban hesitated between reinforcing the original orientation to direct marketing, or the recent emphasis on advertising:

<b>S��bastien James</b>	<b>Day 43</b>	<b>15:32</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
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S  bastien: Alban doesn’t know anymore whether we should do operational communication or whether we should communicate images. It’s the big debate right now, and it’s the future of the agency that’s likely to be disrupted.

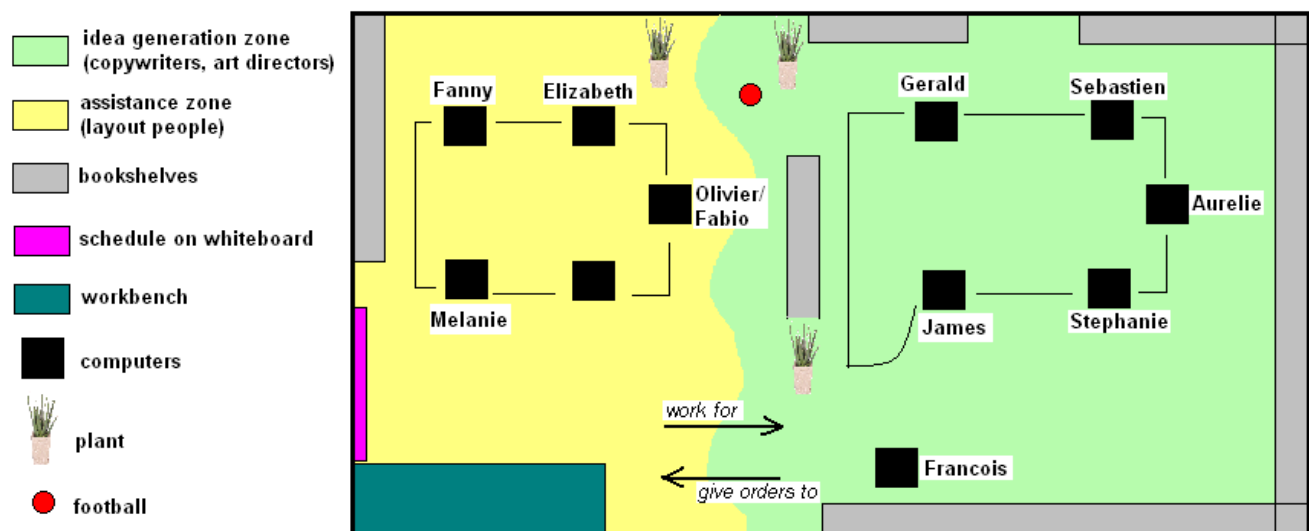
James: It’s not a matter of creation anymore, it’s a strategic choice...

S  bastien: Yeah, it’s the debate that’s been always going on anyway, since the beginning... either operational communication [sales, promotion, DM] or visual communication!

g&a mainly produced printed advertisements (leaflets, coupons, posters for billboards, etc.) but they also did radio ads once or twice a year, and they were going to do a TV ad for the first time.

### 3.3.2.1 *The creation room and the submarine*

I worked in the creation department, whose rough configuration below shows the extent to which “space was socialised” or “the social was spatialised”:



The physical divide revealed an “operational” zone that helped “taste leaders” (ADs and copywriters) bring their projects to fruition. It reflected a carefully planned heterogeneity; expressed here were hierarchical differences in competences and salaries. So the creation room was large enough to represent a “mini organisation” within the organisation.



I used this old Macintosh (most people whose profession or hobby involves the creation of music or graphics favour the Apple brand) which must have belonged to an AD before the agency acquired more recent ones.



One day Sébastien wanted to photograph me at his desk:



On my left side was a bookshelf, and behind me a larger one, full of picture books:



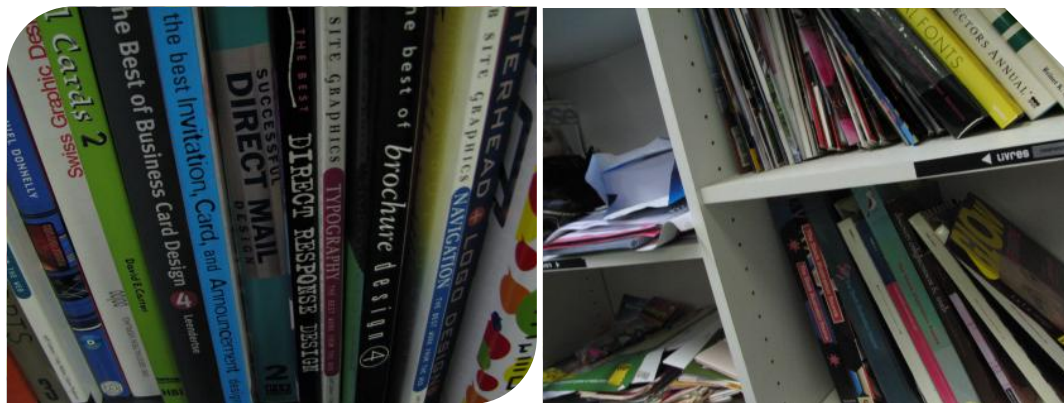
There were a few “advertising guides” rather than textbooks:

- Selz, R.K. (1988) *Devenez Imbattable grâce à la Nouvelle Publicité*, Colmar: Selz editions.
- *Marketing Operationnel 2000* [Guides Stratégies]
- *Agences 2000, tome 2* [Guides Stratégies]

Very few seemed not directly relevant to the advertising business or out of place:

- Mumford, S. (2001) *Le Livre du Massage*, Paris: Flammarion. [Translation of *A Complete Guide to Massage*]
- Walton, R. (ed.) *Cool Sites*
- Arthus-Bertrand, Yann (2003) *366 Jours pour Réfléchir à Notre Terre*, Paris: La Martinière.

Most of them were art books.



Some had pompous or enigmatic titles and all of them had strange formats – everything but A4. I guess that art books had to be unconventional to be recognised as such:

- 33<sup>rd</sup> Tokyo Art Directors Annual
- The 70<sup>th</sup> Art Directors Annual and 5<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition
- Flore & Faune # 2, Paris: Stock Image.
- The Beauty Archive
- Graphic Beat –The Soft Mix Vol. 1: A Collaboration of Music and Graphics
- British Design and Art Direction Annual (1995)
- The Best of Brochure Design
- Pictor
- Bios Diversité (2003)
- Liquid
- Destinations
- Conscience

- *Art de Vivre*
- *Images du Sud*
- *Humans*
- *Beauté*
- *Rouge*
- *Photononstop: Art de Vivre*
- *Discovery, Enlightenment and Truth*
- *Typography Eighteen*
- *Graphis Digital Fonts*
- *Gettyimages: Heroes*
- *Gettyimages: Spirit*
- *Gettyimages: Memento*
- *Zefa: Meaning of Life*
- *Zefa: People and Concepts*
- *Zefa: Glow*
- *Imagebank.com: Retrospective 1910-1970*
- *Imagebank.com: Life, Sports, Nature, Travel, Work, Ideas*

Specialised magazines were stored here as well:

- *The Stock Illustration Source* [several volumes]
- *Etapas* [unit selling price €10.7]
- *Elle Décoration*
- *Etapas Graphiques*
- *Elle*
- *Têtu*
- *Géo*
- *Le Pouvoir des Images*

They were arranged in the following categories (although some were out of place): music, travel, family, people, leisure & games, the sea. You could also find folders, spiral notebooks or printing paper. On the small shelf in the middle of the room, other magazines dealt with fashion, photography, cinema, celebrities and the media in general:





Behind Sébastien was another small bookshelf with on it:

- Dr. David Elia, *Le Bonheur à 50 Ans*, J'ai Lu.
- Gaillard, P. *Techniques de Journalisme*, Que Sais-je.
- Brochand, Lendrevie *Le Publicitor*, 4<sup>ème</sup> édition.
- Vani, P. *Petit Dictionnaire des Trucs*
- Mantoux, T. *BCBG: Le Guide du Bon Chic Bon Genre*, Collection Actuels.
- Piem *Bonne Santé Mode d'Emploi*

Judging by the dust that covered them, they had not been opened for quite a long time. Behind Gérald and Sébastien, a number of dictionaries including citations, rhymes, proverbs, symbols, etymology and synonyms:



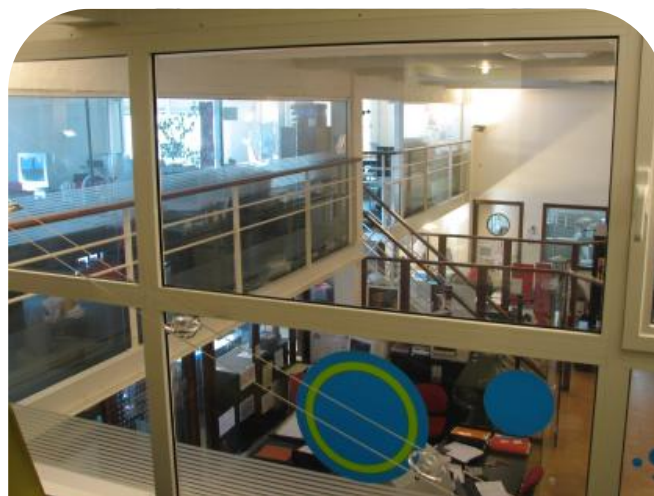
On Fanny's right side and Mélanie's left side, the shelf space of impressive height was devoted to data CDs containing picture banks.



The submarine was an important place, where briefs were delivered and other informal meetings or “brainstorming” sessions took place.



The submarine overhung the insurance centre, and although it had not surveillance function you could stand there and watch through huge windows the people working downstairs or even look askance at the spacious room where I had attended my first (and last) meeting on day 3.





A whiteboard on the wall could be used for presentations or whatever:



The next section describes how data was collected as well as problems encountered in this collection. Such problems reaffirm Gellner and Hirsch's (2001: 5) claim that access "has to be both scrutinized for the way it transforms the research and continuously negotiated throughout the time of fieldwork". They also reaffirm how in practice my relations to the field shaped both the methods and substance of the thesis.

### **3.4. Doing fieldwork: methods for data collection**

Having described the empirical site for this ethnographic study, the chapter describes in this section the methods used for data collection. In the spirit of induction the collection of captured, retrieved, and "found" data has been fairly unstructured and flexible (Hammersley 1998: 110-11). The database comprises of a 100,000-word transcript deriving from 23 hours 25 minutes of audio recordings, and 300 images (photographs and scanned documents). The section details how this material has been gathered via multiple methods or "triangulation" (Denzin 1970), listed below under three broad categories –participant observation and fieldnotes (3.4.1), interviews (3.4.2) and visual methods (3.4.3). The section ends as I ended fieldwork –"leaving the field" (3.4.4).

### 3.4.1. Participant observation and observational fieldnotes

Ethnographic work begins with an immersion in a culture, which involves “participant observation”. Participant observation in the advertising agency meant living and working with people, talking to them, watching what they did, whilst maintaining a distance<sup>50</sup> that would allow an adequate recording of data. My own feelings formed part of this recording (Fetterman 1989: 45; Brewer 2000: 59). I participated as a “trainee copywriter” but did little useful copywriting in practice. However I managed to work with the strategic planner and account executives. I had to be omnivorous at the data collection stage (Atkinson *et al.* 2007: 34) so I followed in my observations what would be called the “prudence principle” in finance or the “presumption of innocence” in law. Everything around me was potentially interesting or problematic. And given my stay at the agency was very likely to change my research objectives, I decided to remain vague about the reasons motivating my presence at g&a. This was a mistake, as the creatives I was mostly “working with” (or rather not working with) became distrustful of my behaviour<sup>51</sup>. Too much honesty never helps in the process of socialisation. It helps later, when trust has been established. So whilst I had excellent relationships with marketing people, my relationships with creatives rapidly deteriorated. But of course I had to record these observations before I could make sense of them (chapters four, five and six).

#### 3.4.1.1 Manuscript fieldnotes

“Fieldnotes” are the traditional means for recording observational data. Writing them is a difficult exercise –it is not possible to capture everything and I had to think about *what* to write down, but also *how* and *when* to write it down (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 142). Luckily I benefited from ideal conditions for note-taking, writing on my A4 spiral notebook whenever I wanted to. My informants paid little

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<sup>50</sup> Participant observation is for Schutz (1971) the oxymoron that strengthens the method through a sustained tension: to “participate” is to get involved, to “observe” is to keep a certain distance. Hence participant observation makes the strange familiar and, at the same time, the familiar strange.

<sup>51</sup> Perhaps I should have lied and made something up –something very accurate. Instead, all I told them was that I would explain in my dissertation “how they manufacture desire” (i.e. my initial objective). This was as unclear to me as it was to them, and they might have seen little more than a paucity of directions for this project, disregarding the possibility of a deliberately unspecific, inductive approach.

attention to what I was doing every day –even when I attended meetings they would behave as if I was not around, and nobody ever asked me anything about the spiral notebook. So I felt very free to keep my day-to-day log, writing about what they said and what they did and how they looked. The spiral notebook contained my research questions at the critical stage of their infancy. These could have to do with “certain subtle peculiarities”, as Malinowski (2002: 21) notes, which “make an impression as long as they are novel [but] cease to be noticed as soon as they become familiar.” Jorgensen (1989: 82, 96) recalls in this respect that

[i]t is extremely important that you record these [initial] observations as immediately as possible and with the greatest possible detail because never again will you experience the settings as so utterly unfamiliar (...) The longer you wait to record observations, the more will be lost from conscious awareness, sometimes forever.

In other words fieldnotes revive what routine destroyed over the time spent on the field. It is during my first days in the company that I identified the themes I would be most likely to write about.

Had I not inscribed my feelings at the moment they were experienced, some of these themes or initial questions would have slipped my mind. In this way the analogy between the making of fieldnotes and that of an impressionist painting is startling – both demand fast, emotionally-charged execution. Fieldnotes are something of a shopping list where the ingredients for “baking” this ethnography will not be effaced by time; in more noble terms they are the aide-memoire that I can always read and reread until I hopefully delight in a “Proustian experience of remembrance”<sup>52</sup> (Atkinson 1992: 17). At first I thought that handwritten fieldnotes would be enough to ignite appropriate “recall”. But then I considered opportunities for better quality data. Digital technologies of permanent recording were convenient and readily available. There were considerable advantages in using audio-recording for observational data, despite the fact that it did not capture non-verbal behaviour –in particular that of obtaining more data, faster, and in more reliable and durable ways thanks to new storage possibilities (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 147-8). The problem I had with

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<sup>52</sup> I am unsure whether Atkinson is serious about this trope or if he just compares a return to fieldnotes to a return to Combray for a laugh.

manuscript fieldnotes is that they were highly selective, that they “remembered” what *I* wanted to remember. Meanwhile there were so many things that I, for whatever reason, would not *want* to remember. Finally what motivated my decision to complement the writing of my spiral notebook with a more systematic technology was the slowness of handwriting and its negative impact on my everyday observation and participation:

Laurence James Gérald Élisabeth	Day 16	17:15	Submarine
<p><i>Laurence was giving her brief to the creatives about an insurance company. This is when I realised that too many things were happening too fast. I was looking down and writing things down and feeling down and excluded. I took a decision –I would buy a small recorder, which would allow me to get more involved in the life of the agency.</i></p>			

#### 3.4.1.2 Audio-recorded fieldnotes

On day 20 during lunch break, I bought a small digital recorder that would henceforth make me feel more relaxed about data collection. Then I tested the “open recording” method. Sadly only Patrick was comfortable with it:

Patrick	Day 23	16:57	Patrick’s office
<p><b>François:</b> Does it bother you if I record our conversation?</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> Don’t ask me! (<i>pointing at the small digital recorder</i>) Start your thingy and that’s it...</p>			

To me this reaction was yet another evidence of how Patrick stood out from all the other staff. He understood this was part of my project without being too curious about it, and was keen to help me. I enjoyed my time on all the rare occasions I had to work with him. In general I would interact with less compliant people. Day 24 would have serious repercussions on the way I wanted my research to be conducted.

Alban Stéphanie Patrick	Day 24	16:33	Alban’s office
<p><i>At the beginning of an “update” meeting about the plant park project between those who supervise it at g&amp;a.</i></p> <p><b>Patrick, referring to the digital recorder:</b> Is your thingy on?</p>			

**François**, to *Alban*: I'm putting this on...

**Alban**: What's that?

**François**: A recording device, for the report... Patrick told me "don't tell anyone, don't tell anyone", but er, I don't like to...

**Alban**: Oh no, I don't like this, we've got the right to talk bullshit here...

**Stéphanie**: No, turn it off!

**François**: I mean, it's for my own report, the work I have to do...

**Alban**, *interrupting*: We don't need a report...

**François**: I'll turn it off if...

**Stéphanie**: Yes, you turn it off, we're not joking now.

**François**: You're not?

**Stéphanie**: We're not.

**Alban**: No but we absolutely don't need it.

**Patrick**: See, they'd rather let you record without them knowing.

**Stéphanie**: You don't speak naturally when you see the thingy, you feel pressure.

**François**: Okay, next time I'll hide it... you were right Patrick.

**Alban**: Hide it...

**Stéphanie**: I just don't want to see it.

I then stayed in this office for another five minutes before leaving the room. I told them I would come back. I would not. Alban's demeanour ("we don't need a report") indicated that he was not interested in listening to what I had to say, and I felt exasperated at his selfishness. At this moment I still believed that covert research was not "ethical" enough. Yet I had to recognise that overt recordings did not bring me much –either they encouraged hypocritical participation (so I believe) or, as was the case here, simply proved impossible.

### 3.4.1.2 Ethics of participant observation at g&a?

This mishap in Alban's office catalysed my decision. I asked myself a simple question –to what extent was my research overt? After all, they knew I was writing every day, but they did not know what I was writing. And the majority of my notes transcribed their conversations. These conversations were not disclosed to them because they *did not care* about this recording –it was none of their *business*. So what difference would covert audio recording, or a superfast hand make? Important to them was neither the nature of data nor the way in which it was collected but *how* it would be used, as the conversation above implies. Of course all data would be used for academic purposes and I knew my extremely reduced readership (four people at the most) was not interested in competing with the agency. It was this last point about readership, essentially, that made me change my methods in this specific organisation. From day 25 I took Patrick and Alban's advice literally –I would not always show the way in which I collected data.

The recording method would considerably improve the quality of my participant observation. The microphone was so small that I could simply tape it under my shirt<sup>53</sup> rather than place it on a table and put “pressure” on everyone. As a “living recorder” I felt more respect from my informants, and I also felt that I respected them more –I stopped writing all the time, engaged with them in a more natural way, and at the same time felt less anxious about missing important data. Sometimes it is difficult to assess whether people are uncomfortable with note taking, hence I had complied with an “unobtrusive measure” (Webb *et al.* 1966). This would certainly help when dealing with sensitive topics and behaviours (Lee 2000: 3). I did not use covert methods every day or even all day long, but when I was actually taking fieldnotes on my spiral notebook. In this way I made it obvious to everyone that I was recording an event. With the recorder in my pocket I simply “wrote faster”. To some researchers, such a stratagem would be completely unethical (e.g. Bulmer 1982; Beauchamp 1982; Shipman 1988); others insist on the contrary on the benefits of supplementing official access with some covert observation (e.g. Vesperi 1985; Cottle 1977; Pryce 1979:

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<sup>53</sup> I used a flat, omni-directional group discussion microphone (Sony ECM-F8) and connected it to a convenient digital voice recorder (Olympus VN960), also invisible in my pocket.

282). Besides the increased accuracy of new technologies mentioned above (better recall means better transcriptions means better analysis), two other arguments could be raised in favour of my covert methods.

First, however “overt” was my participation observation as a whole, not everyone could be informed of the true purpose of research (Jorgensen 1989: 48). The second argument ensues from section 3.2.1.1 which suggests that *if* ethics concern the researcher’s “integrity”, then ethnography is always more or less “unethical”. With or without the technology I used, we all mentally “record”, i.e. interpret each other’s behaviours, without feeling the need to make this recording public. We all have hidden agendas ranging from strategies for seducing the beloved to status recognition; but we do not always express our good or bad intentions to the people they are directed to. Instead, we proudly show our public face, our hypocritical smile. We might even write “secret” diaries. I deceived my informants –so what? Everyone deceives everyone in some way or another (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 264). To conclude, the very notion of “ethics” in participant observation is not fully graspable because it cannot rely on a variable, contextual, hence indeterminate boundary between “private” and “public” spaces<sup>54</sup>.

#### *3.4.1.3 Limitations of participant observation as expressed on the field*

Before I did the fieldwork, I contemplated feeding my research with intimate sequences, especially with creatives. I would spend more time with them and was thus hoping to hear “confessions”, provided I could build quality bonds and gain their trust. Trust was a priority. But when fieldwork began I realised that I underestimated my own role in influencing the data *as it was generated* (c.f. the “observer effect” in the next section 3.4.2), as well as my capacities of socialisation. I am no chameleon. I cannot get on well with everyone. So data collection is as much limited to my informants’ trust towards me and the time they gave me, as it is to my trust towards them reflected in the time I spent with some people to the detriment of others. Even when trust is attained, it must be continually renegotiated. Unless the researcher

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<sup>54</sup> In Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1995: 279-80) opinion, “there are dangers in treating particular procedures as if they were intrinsically ethical and desirable (...) for what is appropriate and inappropriate depends on the context to a large extent”.

suffers from autism, masochism or other social pathologies, s/he will tend to spend more time with the people s/he likes in an organisation. Despite my efforts I was mostly interfering with the creatives rather than working with them. I could not really tell whether my presence annoyed them or whether they were indifferent to it; however I knew that they were not always happy with my observational methods and did not shilly-shally when it came to criticise them:

Stéphanie AD Aurélie Séverine	Day 53	14:39	Creation room
<p><i>Stéphanie noticed that I was listing the books' titles on the shelf.</i></p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Listen, what's the point of doing that?</p> <p><i>I had no idea whether this task would be useful for my thesis. But at least it kept me busy.</i></p> <p><b>François:</b> That's for my thesis.</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> Oh it's for your thesis? Who cares then, nobody reads theses...</p> <p><b>François:</b> See, I told you it's nothing important...</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> Yeah but we feel like laboratory rats...</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> But does it really help you understand desire, what we're doing here?</p> <p><b>François, lying:</b> Sure, sure, it's very useful.</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Because what we're doing isn't Cinderella, right, there's nothing magic about it!</p> <p><b>Séverine:</b> Yeah let's say it's very "mercenary"...</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> I have the impression that you're intellectualizing everything, while it's very simple, you know... I mean, I don't know why you're doing all this, there's nothing much to understand actually! I have a feeling that your approach is very naïve, very...</p> <p><b>François:</b> Enchanted?</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Yes, that's it. Haven't you been disappointed when you started here? Haven't you become "disenchanted", precisely?</p> <p><b>François:</b> Yes, from time to time, it's true I've been disenchanted. And that's fine, I wish I could disenchant everything.</p>			

After long interviews, intimidated informants would ask Bourdieu (1993: 14), "but what are you going to do with all this?" In this passage Stéphanie claimed that there was "nothing much to understand" in the creation room. So "what was the point" of



doing this inventory? The point for me was linked to the vagueness of my objectives. I would only use a small fraction of what I collected and the rest would be left aside, too obscure or too obvious for my taste, or perhaps irrelevant to the sharper objectives appearing at a later stage of the analysis. So I needed a large database at my disposal. Finally Aurélie’s feeling of being a “laboratory rat” simply confirmed that overall, people in this agency were wary about my methods, as further detailed below.

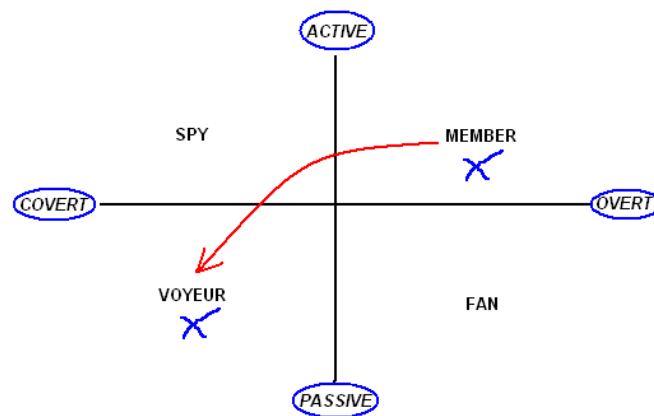
### *“He’s here to observe us like animals in cages”*

I was soon aware of the embarrassment that even the *idea* of ethnography could cause among participants, when they connected it like Sébastien to ethology:

Sébastien Dominique 2 other women	Day 1	10: 40	Jean-Philippe’s office
<p><b>Sébastien</b>, <i>introducing me to Dominique and two other women in the agency</i>: François is going to work with us. He’s a Lévi-Strauss. He’s doing a thesis about our great, loving profession. So he’s here to observe us like animals in cages.</p> <p><i>They look surprised and Dominique laughs.</i></p> <p><b>Dominique</b>: That’s promising!</p> <p><b>François</b>, <i>embarrassed</i>: no, no, not at all... I will just try to work and make myself useful here.</p>			

The caricature of a visit in a zoo invoked ethnography as a voyeuristic or colonialist mission, and I was not expecting to deal with preconceptions of ethnography so soon. There was arguably some truth in every caricature but people were not as predictable as animals of course, which made of the zoo a very inadequate metaphor of organisations. My first interactions with insiders made me feel slightly guilty, for I did not consider myself as an ethnographer but a student of ethnography. It was the first (and perhaps the last) time I was doing “research” and I was quite unsure about how to conduct it. Perhaps I should not have used the term “ethnography” in an anti-intellectualist culture for a start.

Using van Maanen’s (1978: 344) typology to conclude on participant observation, I would say that I started as a “member” but gradually realised that I was more of a “cultural voyeur” (Denzin 1997: xix) in these settings *and* that I should act as such:



The slightly chilly reception the creatives gave me undermined my guilt of switching to covert methods. By contrast I had more affinities with marketing executives. All in all I would feel like a “member” with Patrick, like a “spy” with St phanie, and sometimes like a “fan” but more often a “voyeur” in the creation room where I spent most of my time. The over-covert and active-passive distinctions represented in my experience continuums along which my position fluctuated depending on the people I interacted with. The next subsection on interviewing seems to support this conclusion.

### 3.4.2 Interviewing

Ethnographic interviews range from arranged meetings in bounded settings to more informal conversations that are in fact difficult to discern from participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 108; Fetterman 1989: 48). All interviews however use verbal stimuli (questions) to elicit verbal responses (answers) from a respondent or a set of respondents, allowing the fieldwork to discover how one person’s perceptions compare with another’s. Questions may be open or closed but should be written on an interview schedule (Brewer 2000: 63). The interviews I conducted were semi-structured (i.e. I used an interview schedule but also improvised) and mostly consisted of open questions, which I regarded as incentives for interviewees to talk about their work in general. I selected people for interview in relation to an important account on which we were all working (my own work was limited to this account). I conducted five “official” in-depth interviews with two account executives (Patrick

and Stéphanie), two creatives (Aurélie and Sébastien) and one quantitative analyst working in the market research department.

#### *3.4.2.1 Interviewing difficulties*

Asking questions is not easy. It is for Jorgensen (1989: 85) an “artful activity”, and is not without limitations. For example respondents might interpret questions in ways that I did not intend, and thus answers are not always informative. A more important limitation in my opinion has to do with inconsistencies between what people do and what they say they do. Such inconsistencies arise when people seek “social approval” and say socially acceptable things rather than what they really feel or believe; they also arise from the “interviewer effect”, which is to ethnography what the “observer effect” (Roy 1960) is to the Hawthorne experiment<sup>55</sup> (Mayo 1933; Roethlisberger *et al.* 1939). The observer effect exists on a purely observational level and it means that my mere presence impacts on my respondents’ behaviours (3.3.1.3). But it is particularly significant in interviewing circumstances, as people might answer different things in different settings (e.g. if I am elsewhere while they read questions on a magazine or on a screen as part of a quiz). Thus respondents may worry about the purpose of the interviewer, why they have been chosen, what use the data will be put to, etc; or depending on what they think about the interviewer, they may be reluctant to express an opinion. In any case such reactions might distort findings (Brewer 2000: 65).

The interviewer effect can however be moderated and some interviews prove as informal as natural conversations. Of the five in-depth interviews I conducted in the agency, three had this informal character that made them virtually indistinguishable from conversations recorded as part of my daily participant observation. With the two creative interviewees however, I realised that I would not get rid of the interviewer effect and after two relative failures I gave up interviewing this group. It is then a requirement that poor attempts at interviewing be compensated by appropriate observational notes. My interviews with creatives in the afternoon of day 52

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<sup>55</sup> Of interest in discussions of the Hawthorne experiment is not simply the claim that by watching people, one automatically affects their work; but also that by their presence, researchers may distort their own findings.

epitomised the worst nightmares of the reporter’s apprentice, because sincerity was irrelevant in their discourse. They rather saw the exercise as an opportunity to promote themselves (as the “witty copywriter” or the “funny art director”), and I think they enjoyed it because it made them into stars –giggles would burst forth, teasing lines would release screams and other teasing lines, and I too was giggling. But I was only pretending. This was not the conversation I had hoped for. It was hell.

*“Don’t you all answer for me!”*

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The extract below gives a flavour of what the shadow of an interview with creatives would involve.

Aurélie James Stéphanie AD Gérald	Day 52	15:12	Creation room
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*Whilst I interviewed Patrick in the submarine and Stéphanie in a meeting room, I tried to interview creatives in their own working space for several reasons. First I did not want to interrupt their work for too long. Aurélie kept on working whilst she was interviewed for example. Second, the things they might wish to show me would certainly be at hand. Finally they were more comfortable and talkative as a team –neither isolated nor defenceless but backed up by their close-knitted clan, they were also more willing to chat with me. My decision about this initial setting would however disrupt the whole interviewing process.*

**François**, pointing at the green stool: Okay, should I sit here?



**Aurélie**: Go ahead, take a seat my dear...

*Gérald says something I can’t hear and Aurélie bursts out laughing.*

**Aurélie**: Wait, I want to read the questionnaire first...

**François**, *handing the questionnaire to her*: It's an interview called "advertising life"...

*She begins reading.*

**Aurélie**, *to Gérard*: But he's asking about my bust measurement, it's irrelevant! (*Stéphanie and Gérard laugh*)

**Stéphanie**: Are you filming it or...?

**François**: No no, I'll take notes...

**Aurélie**: No it's not filmed... Is that why you didn't want to do it in the first place?

**Stéphanie**: Oh no, but even so, I wouldn't want...

**François**: Even if it's not filmed? Well, why film this...

**Aurélie**, *running her eye over the questionnaire*: Gosh, it's not the "yes or no" thing, this looks too...

**François**: No no, just tell me whatever you want to tell me (*She's reading the first question*)... Oops, wait, you should have the surprise!

*Aurélie laughs and I force myself to laugh.*

**Aurélie**: Why did I accept this?

**François**: So, here we go: surname, name, measurements? No, just kidding.

*She pretends to laugh.*

**François**: So, er: Aurélie, you're single, you're... 30?

**Gérald**: We can't hear anything!

**Aurélie**: Alright, hold on a second, we'll do it later...

**François**: You wanna do it later?

**Aurélie**: Yeah, cos it disturbs Stéph...

**Stéphanie**: Well, if you do it elsewhere I'll be fine...

**Aurélie**: Anyway, I've got to work... So we'll do it, er... later.

**François**: Okay, listen, you tell me when you're free, and so will Sébastien, er, it will last 10 minutes, but we don't have to do it today...

**Gérald**: No, it's *now* or never...

*Hubbub about the interview. I feel less and less comfortable.*

(...)

**François**: Well, what do I do, should I do it?

**Gérald**: Yeah go on, do it, do it...

**François:** So Aurélie you're thirty...

**Aurélie:** Hey come on, don't you all answer for me!

*Gérald and James prevent her from answering.*

**James:** Is it about g&a now?

**François:** It is, it's the « g&a » part...

**James:** Why didn't you start with g&a right away?

**François:** Well I just wanted to make it livelier, it's an introduction...

**Aurélie:** Yeah, alright... yeah thirty years old, single, no comment yeah...

*General laughter.*

**François:** So, erm, you're thirty, you've been working at g&a for a few years, right?

**Aurélie:** Not at all (*She laughs*).

*Silence. I guess she wants me to play the guessing game.*

**François:** No? Is it very recent? For a few months?

**Aurélie:** Since March.

**François:** Really? Alright then, since March...

I could imagine paediatricians or sociologists having the same kind of difficulties in interviewing kindergarten groups. I concealed my emotions but I felt awful after the interview. I tried to adapt, spinning out the jokes they made (“surname, name, measurements?”) but this was not enough to help Aurélie get into an interviewing mood. For her and for all the others, questions were a game, a pretext for a laugh. For me it was the sort of methodological catastrophe that still made sense of a certain experience of the field. This kind of dialogue perhaps characterised the creatives as an immature team, but not as an unfathomable one. The absence of answers might have meant more than detailed or straightforward answers. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 147) put it, “what is lost in terms of information may be compensated for by the illumination that the accounts provide into the perspectives and discursive repertoires of those being interviewed”. To conclude, all interviewees contributed to my account of the organisation in different ways. Whilst Patrick and Stéphanie provided me with illuminating perspectives on life in this organisation and advertising

work in general, the creatives still consolidated the feeling I had of wasting my time, which in turn led me to attach importance to “wastes” in my account of advertising practice (chapter five). Having described how the recording of voices was conducted, the chapter now tackles the recording of images.

### 3.4.3 Visual methods

In line with the growing interest in the visual (Bryman and Bell 2003: 408; Emmison 2004: 248), I have used pictures in this ethnography because they “thicken” the description of the organisation and because they enliven the presentation of the thesis. As a lecture accompanied by slides is easier to follow, a story scattered with images represents in fewer words (“a picture can tell a thousand words”) the real settings of a real study. In combination with words, images are also part of an argumentation that involves real people and real objects. This ethnography is not a pure fiction and in the spirit of triangulation, alternative representations of the same place through different kinds of data (a map, a photograph, a paragraph) produce a more convincing account of a place where people think, interact, move around, use objects, etc. As such, visual techniques respond to a weakness of current ethnographic studies.

It is undeniable that many ethnographic accounts seem to lack a sense of *places and spaces* (...) [they] need to pay close and serious attention to the material goods and circumstances that are integral to the organization of everyday social life. People do not act in a vacuum. Not only do they do things with words, but also they do things with things (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 136-7).

In this respect my ethnography contains different types of images, some of them already animating this chapter. There are photographs of the working space and material artefacts (offices, meeting rooms, bookshelves, etc.); charts reflecting interpretations of this working space; finally scans of documents produced by the company –final advertisements and all kinds of sketches from unused visuals to posters corrected by account managers, catch-phrases written on screwed up pieces of paper, folded sheet representing a potential mailing, etc<sup>56</sup>. All this work in progress throws light on a thinking process through which some ideas were rejected and others

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<sup>56</sup> My persistence in collecting imperfect productions led the creatives to regard me as a madman, and certainly prejudiced my efforts to strengthening our bonds.

preserved to become the advertisement that would be sold to clients. So I collected these prints whether I witnessed their production or not. In my view it is essential, in a study that seeks to represent what advertising people do every day and in a more “descriptive” way than current ethnographies, to show the artefact or advertisement in question for example. This is a matter of veracity not embellishment –photographs give a sense of where people work and of the objects they use; collected documents give a sense of what they produce. However using visual methods implies coming to grips with the assumptions and limitations of visual anthropology.

“Visual anthropology” (Banks 1995: 1), or “visual sociology” (Harper 2003: 176) uses photography, video, and cartoons or drawings or other pre-existing visual representations (Emmison and Smith 2000: 4). The most popular technique used in visual anthropology is *photography*, which in fact appeared with ethnography in the 1840s. Photography has therefore an ethnographic character that Barthes (1980: 52) has stressed: “since photography is contingent and cannot be otherwise (...) it delivers at once these details that are the very material of ethnologic knowledge”.



*Bronislaw Malinowski*  
*Trobriand Islands, 1916-1918*



*Claude Lévi-Strauss*  
*Brazil, 1935-1939*



As such, Mead and Bateson (1942) argue that photographs can convey more of the “Balinese character” than words could do alone –their book displays 759 of the 25000 pictures they took. These samples portray a Balinese mother and her child for example:



*Bali, 1936-1939.*

Photographs like other visual material can be seen as “texts” that are “read” by the researcher and/or the people studied. Thus in “photo elicitation” (Harper 2002; Collier and Collier 1986) or “photo interviewing” (Schwartz 1994), a photograph is inserted into a research interview. If images are texts, then epistemological issues around the status and “truth” of these texts concern images too. Of course a photograph “can tell a thousand words” and even reveal elements not identified using verbal instruments. Yet it is never just “taken” or “shot”; it is *made* (Jorgensen 1989: 103; Buchanan 2001: 152; Pink, Kürti and Afonso 2004). I chose a specific camera, specific angles and settings to “make” visual records. In addition, I had to adapt my methods to the people I worked with, as I went along (Pink 2001: 3).

There are several ways of working with images –they can be *examined* as “social artefacts”; they can be *used* as “projective stimuli”<sup>57</sup>; they can be *created* as “cultural inventories” (Heisley and Levy 1991: 259). The thesis examines and creates images, but does not use elicitation due to aforementioned interviewing difficulties (3.3.2.1). My initial intention was to shoot a few video scenes and take photographs of my informants at work. This proved impossible as they clearly expressed their unease,

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<sup>57</sup> For example the ZMET interviewing technique (Zaltman 1996) relies on interviewees’ pictures. Tian and Belk (2005) asked participants to take photos of treasured objects as a basis for interviewing.

even when I introduced autovoice<sup>58</sup>. So the video camera I had planned to purchase for my fieldwork would no longer be required. I decided to rely on a “bridge” camera (Canon PowerShot G2 S3.IS) –less obtrusive than a reflex whilst offering more creative possibilities than a compact. Its inadequacy for a short documentary notwithstanding (low image definition and very limited recording time), the device was sufficient for the inventory I was limited to. I thus intended to capture “places and spaces” as well as the material artefacts that played a key role in my informants’ working lives (a schedule on a whiteboard was one of them, c.f. chapter four). The 300 pictures and 10 minutes of video I took did not require any active cooperation from my informants, and thus my visual methods were “unobtrusive” or “non-reactive” measures (Webb *et al.* 1966; Emmison and Smith 2000: 43).

Nevertheless visual technologies are not always regarded as good ethnographic tools. According to Lévi-Strauss (2005) for example it represents a waste of time, a loss of focus:

For my first stay among the Bororos, I brought a very small camera. And sometimes I would press the button to draw some pictures, but I quickly got sick of it, because when your eye is behind a camera objective, you cannot see what is happening and you understand even less. (...) Anyway, I must confess something –I am hugely bored by ethnological films.

And despite new possibilities of ethnographic filmmaking, with the appearance of the portable camera in the 1960s, few ethnographers embrace visual methods (Harper 2003: 178; Emmison and Smith 2000: 11). As a result there is an overall lack of theoretical framework for visual anthropology (Suchar 1997; Prosser 1998: 102) given that detailed guides to visual techniques are not yet prolific<sup>59</sup>. Besides the fact that visual possibilities constantly change with the hectic pace of technological improvements, a number of practical shortcomings may explain such overcautiousness. For Lévi-Strauss the camera distracts the ethnographer. Also,

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<sup>58</sup> A “projective stimulus” through which participants are asked to record still or moving images. This kind of visual data would have been very helpful inasmuch as photographs may “tell us more about the picture-makers than about what is pictured” (Buchanan 2001: 152).

<sup>59</sup> A popular one is Collier and Collier (1986) and Pink (2001, 2006, 2007) has recently provided others.

obtaining consent from informants is far from certain<sup>60</sup>; finally difficulties linked to the camera's obtrusiveness and other "observer effects" may prove insuperable, as my experience in the organisation shows next.

### *Striptease*

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I introduced the camera on day 20 only, and told them that it would help my project if they took pictures or videos of anything they thought could reveal something of their job or their thoughts –things they liked or disliked, things they found funny or horrendous... things they found meaningful. I would leave my photo camera on my desk and they could use it whenever they wanted to; the more often the better, I specified without hoping too much for their enthusiasm. But Aurélie was so enthusiastic that I wondered whether she was mocking my methods or actually wishing she would be seen on a screen somewhere:

Aurélie	Day 20	16:20	Creation room
<p><b>Aurélie:</b> Does it mean we're gonna be famous?</p> <p><i>Short silence.</i></p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> Oh it's fantastic, we could place a fixed camera in a corner, like in <i>Strip Tease</i>, and we'd watched it afterwards and have a good laugh...</p>			

*Strip Tease* is a television programme which is part of the public culture of ethnography in France. It is also my favourite programme. *Strip Tease* films the lives of "ordinary" people (in fact their lifestyle often looks "extra-ordinary" on the screen) without voice-over, without interviews, without subtitles. The people filmed are from all social classes, professions, genders and sexualities. Since minimal interaction with the camera crew is shown, this is a "non-interpretive" type of visual ethnography which "strips" the protagonist(s)... but also leaves space for imagination and critical thinking. For Walter Benjamin (1999: 89), getting rid of "explanations" is one of the conditions for good storytelling.

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<sup>60</sup> Not to mention that photography embodies the "unequal relationships that are part of most research activities" (Harper 2003: 193); that is, it is easy for a researcher to take photographs of poor people, but impossible for them to infiltrate an academic department for similar purposes.

Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it.

The *Strip Tease* crew possessed at least “half the art of storytelling” and I often wondered how it seemed to get rid of the observer effect. People were probably filmed over a long period until they managed to “forget” the camera. Arlen’s (1980) *Thirty Seconds* can be seen as the paper equivalent of *Strip Tease* –the book reads like a film script, a textual transcription of events as they would be recorded by an “objective” camera. The physical and cognitive accesses Arlen or the *Strip Tease* team had been granted represented ideal conditions for ethnography that I would not enjoy in this organisation.

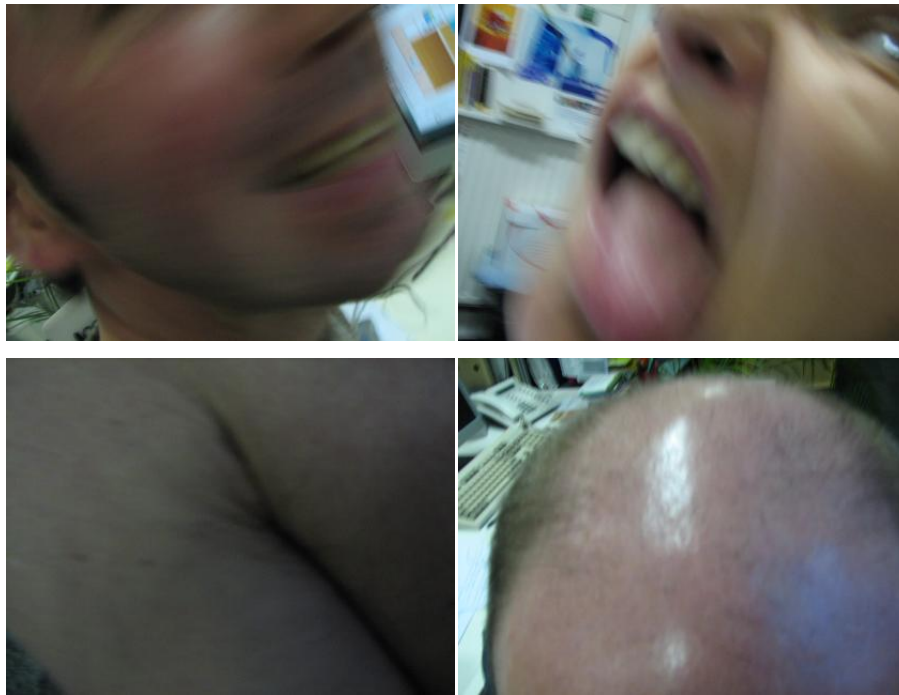
### *Won’t strip*

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The creatives would not bother when I took a few pictures as long as they were not in the frame. One day however I realised that they might not be as comfortable as I thought with visual methods:

Stéphanie AD	Day 32	16:21	Creation room
As I was taking pictures of the agency’s “famous quotes”, Stéphanie stared at me defensively:			
<b>Stéphanie:</b> Hey, there’s nothing interesting there, it’s just bullshit okay?			

I could sense a warning in Stéphanie’s intonation, so after that day I only took a few more pictures during lunch break, when the creation room was empty. Then I left the camera on my desk to remind them that, should they have some spare time, they could always do me a one-time favour. The favour never came; one day however, the creatives took advantage of my absence to take a few pictures of themselves. I was glad to find them whilst checking my camera records, but also puzzled as to the way in which I could interpret them...



I take this opportunity to raise a last point on visual methods about *reading* images. Having a large number of images at my disposal was a good thing, but what to do with them? In my idea images and words would support each other –Warren (2002) uses visual methods to build her argument as an “image-text” because neither words nor images would be adequate alone. Together they create a synergy that enriches the ethnographic story (Bateson and Mead 1942; Vesperi 1985). But as Barthes (1993) argues below, the fundamental challenge of reading image-texts lie in the relationship between the image and the text wrapping it –the text “about” this image. Take these four images. I was obviously curious to know about the identity and purpose of the photographer(s). However such intriguing close-ups, showing anatomies of James, Aurélie, Pierre, did not look like they could give me better options than blind guesses. First, either they shaped together a message the creatives directed to me; or the pictures were simply directed to creative people. In the latter case the photographer(s) might have done it “for a laugh”, showing (willing or unwilling) models some ridiculous close-ups to entertain them. Second, if I was the targeted recipient, then interpretations got shakier or in any case more speculative.

One could assume that the intention was to produce “nonsensical” art as evidence of wittiness or quirky dispositions. Creatives might have wanted me to regard them as “special” people. In this case images would project the “funny”, “atypical”,

“unconventional”, “never-seen-before” personality of the picture-maker –or even generic abilities of the creative team as a whole. Or one could assume that the series of pictures had more to do with a critique of my visual methods. The intention was rather to produce “useless” images (their uselessness perhaps being signified by their ugliness), like so many veiled references to the creatives’ ironic or contemptuous attitude toward my means of recording. In this case pictures were “non-representations” telling me that there was nothing to see or reproduce in this place than was already visible. Related to this interpretation was an intention of showing “mysterious” images, wasting the time I was likely to spend deciphering them. Whether “useless” or “mysterious”, such visual messages would mean that the creatives strongly disapproved of the presence of this camera in their room –“look at what you get!” These images are thus an exception with regard to the thesis as a whole, since I took or chose to collect the other pictures, not my informants. I also suggested that visual representations give a fuller description of the organisation than words alone in general.

The point of the different interpretations above, however, is not to select one or another but to insist on the limitations of my paradigm through the limitations of visual anthropology. An image-text is by no means more “objective” than any other text since I “made” it –from the technical capture of the event until a specific reading of this event rather than another. In his remarkable essays on all things visual (photography, advertisements, cinema and other artistic shows) Barthes (1993) draws implications from the fundamental distinction he makes between the “denoted” and “connoted” messages of an image. Above I have juxtaposed two “texts” (the set of images itself, and the words that describe it); I have put them in parallel, forced associations, produced “connotations”, ways of reading these photographs. For Barthes connotations interfere with the denotative level of an image. Concerned with the repressive, ideological power of language or speech [= *parole* =myth], Barthes generally argues that images used to breathe words into the writer, and after some historical reversal words became parasites of images. Advertisements for example use the semantic trick of connotation in order to *naturalise* their symbolic message (always the same message, namely the excellence of the product advertised).

I can thus pose the problem of connotation with reference to this thesis in these terms: do pictures illustrate my discourse or does my discourse illustrate these pictures? To what extent can analytic prose and pictures talk to each other? My answer to this question is that most pictures I included are not “strongly” connoted (e.g. the words “bookshelf” and “creation room” caption photographs of a bookshelf and of the creation room). And the pictures that are more densely connoted would rather “illustrate my discourse” –this discourse uses pictures less to convince readers of the viability of the connotation than to *clarify* an intended meaning, whose subjectivity has been recognised in this chapter as part of the theoretical underpinnings of ethnography. The next subsection offers a brief conclusion on this fieldwork before the last section comments on how the ethnography was written.

#### **3.4.4 No regrets? Leaving the field**

Whereas I got along with all marketing people, I did not like the group I “studied” the most in the creation room (even if I did respect them and they did respect me). For van Maanen (1988: 80) an ethnography will be more “trusted” if fieldworkers show that they liked those they studied (and vice versa), even if “there were certain periods during the study that were dull, uncomfortable, and perhaps distasteful”. To a certain extent however, I disagree with his point. Indeed a positive bias impacts on the analysis as much as a negative one. Had I “loved” my group of creatives, I would have embellished their portraits and the ethnography would not have been “more trustworthy”. Suffice to imagine that I “fall in love” (whatever it means) with my informants for van Maanen’s proposition to become untenable. Readers would be more likely to think that I have got “my head in the clouds”, far from the palpable reality I should strive to describe. “Love is blind”, as the saying goes, and I would suddenly lack in discernment (c.f. this ethnographic “distance” in subsection 3.2.1) and describe the world through a romantic, idyllic, or perhaps psychotropic lens.

This is why I claim instead that being at ease with your informants obviously makes things easier but does not necessarily enhance the credibility of an ethnographic account. On my last day I shook hands with Patrick and Alban in the courtyard. I felt like I had spent an eternity at g&a but Patrick was surprised I was “already” going back to the UK. Already, yes I was, thankfully. He said: “see you around”. I said “see



you around”. We walked away in opposite directions. This is how I left the field, not without relief. By then, all I had to do was to write about this experience at g&a. I had a taste of this exercise when I was fourteen. I wrote a school report about my experience of work in a garage (or rather the work of the mechanics I was with). In this report I stuck a tyre label and explained how to read it with arrows and captions. Drat! I would do exactly the same thing ten years later. Well, almost exactly –I would just write more pages and cite books, despite lacking the amazement I had when I saw a family employee building his own engine from spare parts in the garage. When you are fourteen and go to work with your moped, this type of man is your God. The next section says more about how the monograph that follows in chapters four, five and six was written.



*Outside the agency: Nantes by night.*

### **3.5. Writing this ethnography**

This final section is the shortest of this chapter. It draws attention to a process of *writing*, through which the unwritten behaviours, values and beliefs of a community of “foreigners” [*ethnos*] are fixed onto paper [*grapho*] and named “data”<sup>61</sup>. The first subsection describes how the data was sorted out and analysed after its collection

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<sup>61</sup> Because data (the givens) are not actually “found” but crafted, “data” is a misleading term. Better would be “capta” –things which are seized (Rock 2007: 30). Data collection and analysis transform and reduce features of the social world (Cicourel 1964).



(3.5.1). A transition between this chapter and chapter four, the very last section on “rhythmanalysis” (3.5.2) introduces the next chapter.

### 3.5.1 Analytical procedure

Theatre operates a transfer from the written to the oral; ethnography does exactly the contrary. I adopted quite a systematic procedure for writing this ethnography. After my fieldwork I transcribed the most important set of data, the audio recordings<sup>62</sup> (conversations). Then I simply wrote a chronological “story” of my experience in the agency. I would recall what happened without thinking too much about sorting out the data. Most of the time I dedicated to the thesis was spent on this task, not on reading or writing theory (thus I often felt like wasting my time on writing lengthy descriptions). Once the whole story was written, the data had to be “sorted out” as I found it easier to opt for a thematic rather than chronological organisation. I had two possibilities –I could look for “emic” categories based on the terms, images and ideas that were current in the organisation<sup>63</sup>; or I could look for “etic” categories that would reflect my own intuitions on the most significant categories to explore, e.g. in an advertising agency “cultural reproduction”, “intermediation”, etc. In practice ethnographers interweave categories of both sorts (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 194). However I would identify predominantly *etic* categories, grounded on the initial intuitions, naïve discoveries and hesitant interpretations of the “novice” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 99). The fieldworker researching in his/her own society has been portrayed as a “naïve intruder”, a culturally incompetent “anti-hero” inclined towards ironic telling<sup>64</sup> (Atkinson 1990: 106-110; van Maanen 1988: 33). The whole point of ethnography is to point out the “strange” *effortlessly, spontaneously*<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> The transcription of audio recordings required me to make a number of personal choices in order to enhance readability. Some fragments and hesitations (er, um, “you know”, etc.) had to be removed; intonations and attitudes could not always be transcribed, and when they were, they obviously expressed my perceptions (e.g. I could see “anger” on a face); finally the original French recordings (available on a separate document) were translated to English. So the “raw” data itself is a reconstructed narrative, which I still view as a careful attempt to restore some of the oral quality of recordings.

<sup>63</sup> In the advertising agency emic categories could be built from the advertising environment (“clients”, “creatives”, “account managers”), from advertising activities (“negotiating”, “presenting”, “copywriting”, “designing”), etc.

<sup>64</sup> Brown (1977) also claims that irony permeates sociological writing in general. Atkinson (1990: 110) however adds that the incompetence of the anti-hero oftentimes “stands for a period of naïve



*My room in Nantes, where the data was transcribed and where the first themes for analysis emerged.*

### *3.5.1.1 Towards analysis chapters: homologies of time*

Chapter two ends with the aim of exploring the nature of uncertainty in an advertising agency. Entangled with this aim is the condition of “spontaneity” –and because what struck me in the agency I studied was our relation to time, I felt almost compelled to write about it. I linked feelings of doubt to this temporal relation –both the “time” theme and my own uncertainties drew on my ignorance of the advertising milieu, with the ironic accents of the worthless novice. Data analysis began after a scholar advised me at a conference to look at how time was “constructed” in this organisation. I thought that this was a good idea. The thesis would suggest that uncertainties had to do with time in this French advertising agency, and it would explore how people dealt with these temporal uncertainties. Temporal construction gave impetus to three etic categories that would become analysis chapters (see below). Then commenced a long process of deletion. Following categories I cut down both the dataset and the “story” written alongside it (I would include images later in the process). When this was done I had a “thematic” rather than chronological story at my disposal, but little time to “analyse” it.

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misunderstanding before the enlightenment born of the fieldwork itself” (*Ibid.*), so that “the clumsy anti-hero is progressively revealed as a successful survivor”.

<sup>65</sup> A “stranger” sees strangeness at once (even if this strangeness is made of “too much familiarity” in my case) where insiders typically see routine.

Like Geertz and other theorists (e.g. Wilk 1995), I used the concept of “homology” to analyse the data. Developed by Lévi-Strauss (1962), it is based on the idea that all human societies possess the same cultural features (functions) borrowed from an ideal “catalogue” –only different societies combine them in different ways. By analogy with chemistry, this means that cultures can be theorised as molecules taking different shapes depending on the arrangement of the same elementary particles listed on the Mendeleyev classification. So I established “homologies” between the construction of time in the advertising agency and that achieved in historically and spatially remote contexts. For example I connected the origins of time discipline in Medieval history or in Mayan culture to the same kind of temporal construction in a contemporary advertising agency. Common to these three different contexts is the religious *function* of temporal construction. Since the forces that drove our ancestors are still driving us now, Lévi-Strauss (1955: 424) contends that “what was done and not done can be redone”. When parallels are drawn between different cultural settings, there is more to routine and the boredom it inspires than meets the eyes. Hence I included the routine data that related to my etic categories of time and rejected “other kinds” of routine. Finally the establishment of homologies impacted on the structure of this ethnography, since what was experienced in this French organisation constitutes the “data” whilst homologies appear with intertextuality (i.e. bridges toward and between other texts). This ethnography weaves together “theories” borrowed from different disciplines with “data”–this is one of the first suggestions chapter four makes via the notion of “rhythmanalysis”.



I don't care how  
long you've spent  
on your homework.  
What matters, is the  
result.

*My father Henri.*



# Chapter Four

## *Understanding temporal construction through “anomie”*

Chapter three underlined my own insecurities during fieldwork and chapter two highlighted the instability of the advertising business, reflected throughout past and current practice in fears of failure, unstable relationships with the environment and even identity issues in creative departments. Advertising lives at g&a did not escape this overall instability. Chapter four inspects how it arose in particular from unpredictable relations between the time practitioners spent at work and the value this work delivered.

The chapter contains three sections. The first section (4.1) articulates the conclusions of chapter three with the objectives of analysis chapters. Section 4.2 attributes anxieties to an arrow of time that generates “arrhythmy” –a pathological form of time consciousness. So there is a sense in which section 4.2 is sunk into people’s sufferance. To this dramatic structure section 4.3 provides relief, describing ways of dealing with arrhythmy at g&a and in particular a construction of time through discourses, practices and devices.

### **4.1. Introduction to this fieldwork**

In continuation of chapter three’s observations on ethnographic writing, this short introductory section states why I have chosen to describe in analysis chapters the “rhythms” of an advertising agency. The section explains how a study of organisational rhythms may be articulated (4.1.1) as well as the kind of homologies it may involve (4.1.1.1). This orientation toward “time anthropology” must also take the conclusions of chapter two into account (4.1.2).

#### 4.1.1 Of rhythmanalysis

Chapter two ends with the aim of studying uncertainty in a French advertising agency, and chapter three with a “spontaneous” interest in time. Together these two chapters set up an analysis that commences in chapter four. In this chapter as in the two others, data and theory are interwoven in an attempt to draw parallels between *functions* of time at g&a and in other contexts (“homologies”). Working on the empirical site I had a feeling that I would study *time-related uncertainties*, without knowing exactly what to say about them. So I began *hearing* (in the double sense of “noticing” and “understanding”) the temporalities within which advertising activities took place. Lefebvre (1992) after Dos Santos and Bachelard calls this hearing “rhythmanalysis”.

Lefebvre imagines a rhythmanalyst who pays attention to sounds, noises and talks, but who is also capable of listening attentively to a house, a street, a city as one would listen to a symphony or an opera. Soon I was aware of instinctively recording the rhythms of this organisation –in my fieldnotes I tended to describe heated debates and constrained silences, complaints and resignations; I would elaborate on busy and playful times, stressful and quiet times, harmonious and disharmonious times. My interest in analysing how the music of this organisation was composed, who played it and for whom, grew over time. Ideally for Lefebvre, I had to be sometimes a doctor examining dysfunctions in rhythms, and sometimes a poet making sense of people’s tempi on emotional grounds. A rhythmanalyst follows a pluridisciplinary approach and borrows from different disciplines, without being specialised in any of them. This ethnography draws “bits of knowledge” from philosophy, history, anthropology, physics and sociology.

##### 4.1.1.1 g&a-rhythmanalysis

Gradually I paid more attention to how people experienced, used, imagined, projected time. Chapter four, five and six explore how time impacts on people and what people do with time. In these chapters I have been concerned with the organisation of work through time, and with the organisation of time through work –with the rhythms of life in this advertising agency. An analysis through homologies implies understanding how work has been given rhythm in the past. In the earliest societies warriors

designed times of patience and times of rush to catch their prey; with the Industrial Revolution the efforts of workers had to be synchronised according to the beat of machines. But tensions have always existed between individual and collective perceptions of time. Hubert (1999: 71) writes that

the rhythm of time does not necessarily model itself on the natural periodicities established by experience, but (...) societies contain within themselves the need and the means of instituting it.

Rhythm refers to a collective construction which possibly conflicts with “the natural periodicities established by experience”. As a result chapter four asks in connection with the uncertainty theme: what kind of rhythmic tensions were experienced and how were they resolved at g&a? Of course the major limitation of rhythmanalysis is that informants are often unwilling or unable to qualify the time they are spending and using. Rhythmanalysis is not a pragmatic method in this respect but an emotional frame of mind which cannot be too conclusive. For example “wastes” of time only exist in relation to the individuals who feel that time is being wasted; by the same token to be “productive” does not mean that time was used efficiently, it especially means that time was thought to be used efficiently.

#### **4.1.2 Time anthropology**

The rhythmanalysis of chapters four, five and six are part of what Young and Schuller (1988: 13) call “chronosociology” and James and Mills (2005: 350) calls “time anthropology” to a certain extent only:

“Time anthropology” (...) involves two linked considerations: firstly, a more or less abstract examination of *why people represent time in a particular way* (and who might benefit from them doing so); and secondly , an examination of *the embodied practices by which people do time* –how they orientate themselves towards particular temporal /calendrical ideologies, and thereby integrate themselves into wider ideologically-structured communities.

The thesis follows the approach of time anthropology quoted above, but until the dash only –before the notion of “ideology” is mentioned. In echo of chapter two this ethnography believes that this inopportune notion ruins an otherwise insightful understanding, in this definition, of the task of anthropology around issues of time.

Here the anthropologist insinuates that there is a deeper level of understanding of time out there; he uses “temporal ideologies” as “wrong beliefs” about time (otherwise he would keep referring to temporal representations and practices) whilst not saying anything toward what time “should be”. “Temporal ideologies” institute a distance to reality –but what for, and on what grounds? What contribution does this “ideology” word make, apart from the odd allusion that there might be communities that are *not* “ideologically-structured” out there? So in an anthropological perspective, analysis chapters do focus not only on *what is said* about time, but also on the *things done* with time (James and Mills 2005: 2). Drawing on chapter two at the same time, they prefer to speak of temporal “rationalities” rather than ideologies and myths, and “historicise” time anthropology to the limited extent that the space of a thesis allows. Thus the next section describes and interprets uncertainties that have to do with time at g&a; but it suggests in addition (and chapter five even more so) that such uncertainties are better understood “through” time, i.e. through historical contextualisation.

## **4.2. Temporal anomie**

At g&a uncertainties had to do, above all, with the causes of successes and failures – hence about the courses of action advertising people should follow in order to increase their chances of success (4.2.1). This section links these uncertainties to “temporal anomie”, and temporal anomie to a religious elaboration of a “timeline” validated by scientific and economic knowledge (4.2.2, 4.2.3). It eventually understands temporal anomie as “arrhythmy” –a desynchronization between a predictable timeline and the unpredictable logics of advertising production (4.2.4). Arrhythmy impinges on advertising work in two ways: while this section is concerned with its *pathological* effects, section 4.3 will deal with its *therapeutic* effects.

### **4.2.1. Times of despair**

At g&a uncertainties were easily noticeable in the frustrations people expressed verbally, and almost every day. These frustrations were most openly expressed in times of crisis, when competitions and/or accounts were lost. I remember this very bad day for example. The kind of day when everything goes wrong. The kind of day



that gives a flavour of the disappointments people came to experience in the organisation:

Pierre Jean-Philippe Sébastien	Day 45	09:20	Creation room
<p><i>Last week g&amp;a participated in a competitive presentation organised by a client called Groupama.</i></p> <p><b>Jean-Philippe, walking in:</b> We haven't won Groupama.</p> <p><i>Heavy silence and solemn faces.</i></p> <p><b>Sébastien, at last:</b> Who's won it?</p> <p><i>No answer.</i></p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> We'll see their campaign in March...</p> <p>9:26</p> <p><b>Pierre, walking in:</b> We've lost Société Générale...</p> <p><i>He disappears. New silence.</i></p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> It's not even about money (...) It's psychological. After what happened we're not in winning mood. I don't want to saddle Alban with everything, but well, he doesn't make us progress.</p> <p>10:12</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> I'm afraid of the feedback, of [Groupama's] explanations that will tell us why creatively speaking it didn't work... It's just one defeat after another these days: Groupama, Aviva, Société Générale...</p>			

Groupama's sentence aroused a fear that had less to do with its irrevocability than with the postponement of its "justification", or reasons why g&a's prototype of a campaign did not look good enough to clients ("I'm afraid of the feedback, of Groupama's explanations"). The loss of this account was fairly worrying since the Groupama had been hitherto tied to g&a. Sébastien wondered about the reasons why creative work had failed to seduce three clients. For lack of immediate answer and instead of accusing the partiality of a judgement that had the effect of a "lettre de cachet"<sup>66</sup> (sealed letter) on them, he speculated on possible wrongdoings *within* the

<sup>66</sup> Symbol of the "Ancien Régime" monarchy in France before the revolution –a lettre de cachet sentenced an individual "by order of the king", meaning without trial or any possibility of defence.

organisation –the quality of their work could have been affected by interrelated issues of motivation and leadership. Perhaps their leader was not strong enough (“Alban doesn’t make us progress”). Perhaps they needed encouragements rather than reproaches (“it’s psychological. After what happened we’re not in a winning mood”). After an unpleasant morning it was time for lunch and account managers and creatives did not spare Alban some trenchant accusations:

Marie-Frédérique Stéphanie James Sébastien Jean-Philippe Séverine	Day 45	12:30	Pizzeria
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*We sat around a long table in a pizzeria nearby. Conversations were mainly about Alban.*

Jean-Philippe: He’s got to find another job.

Sébastien: He’s got to find another agency, I’d rather say... I mean, who cares what he’d do... As I was saying earlier on, either he leaves people do their job and he might bawl you out afterwards, *or* he gets his hands dirty but then he must accept failure, I mean he can’t do both...

Jean-Philippe, *nodding*: He’s just a kid, he’s moaning like a kid. (*taking a sulked, sobbing expression to parody Alban’s reaction when he learnt about their losing the competition*) “And, and, and the “Mobilidays” it was *our* idea...”

*They all burst out laughing.*

**les  
mobilidays**

*g&a’s design of a logo for a former Groupama campaign.*

To the rest of the agency, Alban was guilty of all evils. As a leader, he certainly had to inform staff that failure could be explained, that g&a’s results could improve. But he also had to identify these results as collective responsibilities, away from his own. He could neither accuse “management” nor particular tasks or people, since his leadership would then be criticised.

*“We’re crap!”*

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As a result, failure could only be explained in vague terms –the lack of synergy within “g&a” as a “team” caused failure, not some people more than others:

The whole Communication department	Day 49	09:20	Creation room
<p><i>Monday morning. Alban briefed everyone with a worried tone. The situation was alarming –losing the Groupama account was a financial disaster. It was equivalent to losing the Marché U account, even though Groupama could not supersede Marché U’s affective value. The agency had no faced similar difficulties since 2001.</i></p> <p><b>Alban:</b> Groupama was lost because g&amp;a kind of asked for this competition to be run. It is because g&amp;a could not establish Groupama’s loyalty that they decided to organise the competition.</p> <p><i>On several occasions, he said that he had to “sound the alarm bell”.</i></p>			

Perhaps Alban could not disclose what he really thought, for fear of stigmatising himself as a “harsh” leader, for fear of rebellious behaviours that would make things worse. Hence nobody could tell whether his brief was tainted with ignorance or hypocrisy. But as failure was attributed to the organisation as a whole (“because g&a could not establish Groupama’s loyalty”), no clear direction could be given. The general message of Alban’s brief was that people just had to work harder and do better. Clearly, it was the impossibility of clear directions that demotivated staff:

Jean-Philippe Marion Dominique	Day 49	9:45	Creation
<p><b>Jean-Philippe:</b> We’re crap!</p> <p><b>Marion:</b> On a Monday morning, it won’t get you going.</p> <p><b>Dominique:</b> Anybody want arsenic? I’ve got some...</p>			

This is how persistent uncertainties (would g&a win or lose competition X?) sustained frustrations: on what exactly depended all these victories and collapses? Was this business a game of luck? g&a was never immune from losing accounts. But at least, finding *reasons* behind these losses could undermine discouragements. They provided hope and opportunities for improvement in the future.

Alban	Day 39	9:27	Creation room
<b>Alban:</b> We've just lost the "Sea City" account competition... for pricing reasons.			

Here it was difficult to assess whether Alban actually knew the reason for failure. But identifying one ("for pricing reasons") and communicating it to his staff would incite them to keep on working.

### *"It's not magic, is it?"*

However, Alban was unpopular because he happened to blame a particular group for failing to deliver. When it was believed that creatives should have done better, their work was openly depreciated:

Sébastien	Day 44	14:30	Creation room
<i>Sébastien, James and Fabio had just seen André, Alban, and perhaps other marketing people.</i>			
<b>Sébastien, to James and other creatives:</b> They told us straight away that [our work] was worth nothing... Even André, he was like "I don't understand, you've been given a <i>true</i> [brand] promise, something nice, but you haven't found anything interesting" (...) ( <i>ironical</i> ) like "how on earth, after such a beautiful brief, you managed to..."			
<i>14:48 and Sébastien kept complaining at his desk. He seemed to be talking to himself and containing his anger.</i>			
<b>Sébastien, ironical:</b> "But how could you let this matter rest there, after we gave you this gold mine?"			

In general Sébastien felt that management did not valorise creative work enough:

Sébastien	Day 42	11:56	Creation room
<b>Sébastien, to all the creatives:</b> For Alban we're sometimes trash, sometimes geniuses. Yesterday, when we won Direct Assurances, he told us that the mailing was worthy of ING Direct [judging by the context, a compliment], but that's not true, you know... It wasn't too bad, but...			
(...)			
<b>Sébastien, to James:</b> Alban doesn't understand that finding ideas requires some work! It's not magic, is it! <i>He</i> believes that after a brief, either you've got ideas or you haven't, and that's all. I'd like it that way, but copywriting's about work!			

He stressed that copywriting was not the almost instantaneous process Alban had in mind ("either you've got ideas or you haven't"). For him "having ideas" took time.

## "It's gonna be quickly done"

But as I worked with Gérald this was not too obvious. The time spent on a creation did not seem to matter as much as Sébastien contended:

Gérald	Day 9	15:22	Creation room
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Gérald gave me a list of 21 names he had thought of and asked me to find a name we would give to a newsletter. I produced about the same number of names and showed him the list: he glanced at it, ticked four of them first, and twenty seconds later he had circled one of them. The name of the newsletter was chosen.

News, recherche de noms

**De pro à pro !**  
**Le Spécialiste**  
**Spécial'immo**  
**Bravo l'immo !**  
 Le nerf de l'immo !  
 Credo Immo  
 Crédit news  
 Specialis'immo  
 Euro Immo  
 Partenaire Crédit  
 Duo Crédit  
 Question crédit  
 Crédit Conseil  
 Crédit Reflex  
 Immo Attitude  
 Crédirama  
 Pro crédits  
 Immo passion  
 Immo finance  
 100% immo  
 Créd'Immo

immo plus immo+  
 le monde de l'immo  
 Immobiliissimo  
 immopro  
 la lettre de l'immobilier  
 immobilis  
 Créd'immo - pro  
 immocredit  
 allo immo  
 la tribune de l'immo  
 immo - débat  
 immo Sympa  
 immo sur l'immo  
 la spéciale de l'immo  
 crédit crédit  
 immo - immortel  
 indimodable  
 Simmobilia forever

dialogue  
 immo bilien forever

chapeau l'immo  
 immonique, nique, nique le spécialiste tout simplement.

le crédit  
 tout immo  
 immo - avantage  
 crédits  
 mercredit (si ça paraît le mercredi)

It took Gérald about fifty seconds to brand this newsletter. Sébastien's reflection on his own task also depicted copywriting as a potentially straightforward task:

Sébastien	Day 49	16:39	Creation room
<p><b>Sébastien</b>, <i>reflecting on Jean-Philippe's brief</i>: I love his brief... I've got three things to say. One, "new special effects", two "bla bla" and three "bla bla". And that's it. It's gonna be quickly done, I can tell you. That's what my writing is about!</p>			

Even "quickly done" finally, the job could turn out to be extremely valuable. The relation between the time spent on an account and the money it would bring in astounded me:

Stéphanie AD Sébastien Séverine Marie-Astrid	Day 51	17:10	Alban's office
<p>(...)</p> <p><b>Sébastien</b>: Are we still making money with AG2R [a client] or...?</p> <p><b>Marie-Astrid</b>: Oh yeah that's for sure, cos you know a moment ago I was invoicing them, I've charged them more or less the same as the end of last year (...) But you know, not only there's no coherence, and besides you know, everything adds up, that's the funny thing, they've asked us to do some research on dependency<sup>67</sup>, cos they didn't want (whereas they've got codes and machines and all that to liaise with call centres), they didn't want to receive phone calls! And I charged them €800, we spent half an hour on it with Séverine, at the most... So here we go... it's all these stupid little things piling up every time.</p>			

Thus all these "stupid little things" that the client requested, with "no coherence" whatsoever, eventually made g&a's business. Here was an example of success that had the same incoherent, irrational character as the failures above –two account managers had brought €800 to g&a in 30 minutes. Former creative Beigbeder (2004: 47) wryly comments on the privileged remuneration of a copywriter's time:

A freelance journalist who spends a week writing an article for The Times is going to be paid fifty times less than a freelance copywriter who turns out a poster in ten minutes. Why? All too simply because the job of the copywriter brings more money in.

<sup>67</sup> I do not know what this refers to.

*“When the deadlines have been met, we feel completely idle”*

So much value was created in so little time that I had to know more about how people at g&a spent their time and how they felt when they spent it. During lunch break on my first day, on our way to a café, I asked Sébastien whether he found his work exciting. In his answer creative work was less characterised by excitement than by “irregularities”. Intense periods of work preceded “deadlines” after which creatives would no longer work hard:

Sébastien	Day 1	12:40	In the street
<b>Sébastien:</b> No, it’s not always exciting but... it gives me a living wage. It depends you know, sometimes you are snowed under with work and one week later, when the deadlines have been met, we feel completely idle.			

If creative work could be humdrum (“it’s not always exciting”), then it was not only about creation. Sébastien’s account of an alternation of busy and idle periods pointed at creation but also non-creation, excitement but also routine and possibly boredom. When one connected these irregular patterns of advertising production to Gérald’s quasi-instantaneous selection of a brand name, or again to Marie-Astrid and Séverine’s half-an-hour task, then time seemed to relate to g&a’s creation of value in quite a strange fashion. But this strange feeling I and they had resulted from our preconception of what time is, and on how production and value are supposed to arise from it. As will be developed below, the paradox with time is that nobody knows what it really is; yet it has become a taken-for-granted notion in social life. Such taken-for-grantedness creates hopes at work, expectations from work, in short intangible rules or regularities structuring work. The next subsections interpret times of despair (in cases of failure) or more generally times of incomprehension (i.e. including cases of success) as an awareness of the inapplicability of such rules. In other words people notice breakages, anomalies, exceptions, transgressions of temporal rules. It makes sense at this stage of the analysis to specify where the rules originate from and what they are about.

#### 4.2.2. The timeline

This subsection stresses that our taken-for-granted conception of time is rooted in religion, that this religious conception is linear, and that this linearity nurtures times of despair. By “religion” one must understand here a set of interpretations of natural phenomena affecting the living via a transcendent force (the divine, the supernatural). Religion is a generic term encompassing all religions as systems of faith, which explain the world with reference to nonhuman entities (gods, spirits, etc.) influencing or governing us “creatures”. This generic term is used merely to point out that religion places humans on the scale of the universe; it situates humans in relation to the world and it situates the world in relation to them. Religion has provided a “predictable” relationship between work and time. It has prescribed specific behaviours, created specific expectations, and also offered clear answers to a gruesome enigma: is there a correct way of using one’s time?

Eliade (1976) suggests that cosmologies, eschatologies and messianisms that would dominate the Orient and the Mediterranean world for millennia are rooted in Neolithic conceptions. With the invention of agriculture during the Mesolithic age, and its development during the Neolithic age, people became producers of their food and had to perfect their methods for calculating time. The rudimentary lunar calendar was no longer sufficient, for the cultivator had to run a series of complex activities, in an accurate order, keeping a remote objective in mind –the harvest. The crises endangering the harvest (floods, droughts) were thus translated into mythological dramas and rituals that dominated Near Eastern civilisations for thousands of years. The theme of Gods dying and resuscitating has been one of the most dominant conceptualisation of time as a divine *cycle*. Interpretations of human existence and cosmic rhythms borrowed extensively from the vegetal life<sup>68</sup>. But these stories also indicate why it might be inappropriate to isolate “cyclical” imageries of time in a remote agricultural past from “linear” concepts allegedly appearing with industrialism.

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<sup>68</sup> According to Eliade (1976), primitive beliefs like contemporary religions find their impetus in the mystery of birth, death and rebirth of the vegetation. Metaphors including plants and crops provided cyclic explanations (e.g. “life is like a wild flower”).



#### 4.2.2.1 A spiritual and scientific arrow

The linearity of time is more ancient than may be assumed, not to mention that all conceptions of time might as well combine linear and cyclical patterns<sup>69</sup>. Already familiar to the Hebrew, it was systematised in Iran with Zurvanism (a syncretist theology). Zurvan (“destiny”) was sometimes the cosmic god of infinite time, sometimes the personification of time. The eschatological function of this master of “destiny” is clearly stressed in a text (*Vidēvdāt* 19: 29) which mentions that the souls of the just and impious men progress “on the path created by Zurvan”. A late Zurvanist writing (*Menōk i Khrat*, VII: II) claims that the world will last 9,000 years, divided in 3 equal periods. Zurvanism thus endowed time with a direction, a purpose (teleology) and a dramatic, spatial structure –to cut a long story short, Time was the locus within which Good would eradicate Evil (Eliade 1976: 297-302). This teleological understanding prevails today: time is a progression, an arrow or direction; it is an “open” line rather than a “closed” circle. Our lives are strictly regulated according to an artificial, arbitrary, human-made time system –“clock time” (Zerubavel 1979: 7, 17). This clock time is for physicians “Newtonian” given it flows regularly, restlessly and without relation to anything external. As Newton put it, “all motions may be accelerated or retarded, but the flowing of absolute time is not liable to change” (quoted in Shallis 1983: 17). Whereas Einstein showed that this was not true<sup>70</sup>, the Newtonian view continues to dominate our lives today insofar as the magnitudes considered in Einsteinian physics go far beyond the pace of human activity.

Yet even on a human scale, the arrow of time does not relate to time itself but to what is happening within it –most physical phenomena are submitted to irreversible transformations that forever prevent them from returning to their initial state (Klein 2007: 124). Therefore social subjects tend to *assume* that time “itself” has “absolute”

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<sup>69</sup> An idea of Leopold Howe (1981) in his study of Balinese time, as recalled by Farriss (1995: 112): “In a cyclical conception there is linear progression within each cycle. Conversely, cycles (days, months, years, centuries) can be added up to produce a linear sequence. Translated into visual terms it is a question of distance or perspective. The horizon appears as a straight line; the curve of the earth’s surface is revealed only from outer space. (...) Howe argues that there will be differences in emphasis. I go further and say that one concept must be subordinated to or incorporated into the other”.

<sup>70</sup> Einstein (1905/1920) has demonstrated that time is relative to the motion of the observer.

and “mathematical” properties, without knowing for sure what it really *is*<sup>71</sup>. We say “time is passing” to refer to the changes of our lives, and it is true that such a mental synthesis adds to the fetish-character of the concept of time (Elias 1992: 74). At the same time it seems very difficult to imagine anything outside of it. For Kant, this means that time must be an integral part of ourselves rather than an absolute reality. It must frame our perception *a priori*. The fact that there is no “shape” of time outside of our imagination triggers our representations of time –we “externalise” our temporal feelings (“synthesis a priori”). He refers to an “internal intuition” which does not yield any form, inciting us to

compensate for this lack by means of analogies [,] and we represent the sequence of time by a line that goes on towards infinity, of which the diverse parts constitute a series that has one dimension, and we deduce from the properties of this line all properties of time (Kant 1781/1968: 63).

As such time is commonly represented as a straight horizontal line.

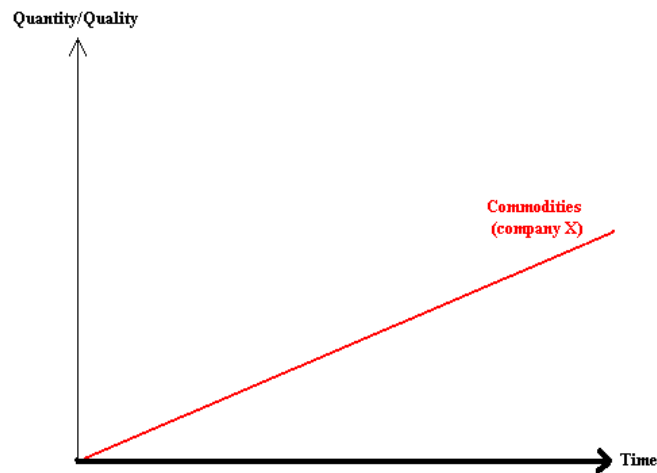
#### 4.2.2.1 *An economic arrow*

In cultural economy the production of value increases along this straight line. For purposes of clarity this production is shown below as a linear function of the  $y=ax+b$  type where  $b$  is equal to zero<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Whether in physics, sociology, anthropology or philosophy, works on time and with time seem doomed to produce hypotheses, assumptions, hesitations. Saint Augustine’s puzzlement is not resolved today: “for so it is, oh Lord, my God, I measure it but what it is that I measure I do not know” (quoted in Jahoda 1988: 154). He also points out in an often quoted line what Kant refers to just below as an “intuition” or tacit knowledge”: “what is time? If I am not asked, I know; if I am asked, I don’t” (quoted in Gale 1967: 55). Others, like Waismann or Bouwsma, would even argue that the question is improper (Newton-Smith 1980: 2).

<sup>72</sup> Accuracy is not the point here: of course different patterns would arise from different time scales, a decaying exponential curve would convey the same idea of “growth”, etc. The illustration merely intends to point out that the quantity and quality of commodities vary according to a coefficient of time:  $Q = n$  units of time.



This graph illustrates the commonsense idea that the more time you spend at work, the more value you create. That is, the more numerous and the better your commodities get. For even when the question of productivity is left aside, more work always implies more things done. In the context of “material” production (say, cars or clothes) this is easily verifiable –if it is given more time for example, company X will produce more and/or more reliable cars. However the logic of regular increase is less visible and somehow less obvious in “culture industries”, because the value they market lies less in their material production than in their generation of “knowledge”, “ideas” or “images”. In a structure like g&a the *quantity* of advertisements obviously increases with time, but in an extra-ordinarily irregular fashion –“sometimes you are snowed under with work and one week later feel completely idle” Sébastien says above. g&a is likely to produce more and/or better advertisements in the long term; but the short term is marked by periods of “idleness”. Short term irregularity is due to the fact that *quality* is more subjective in an advertising business than in other industries (e.g. the automobile industry), in that it merely depends on whether advertisements are validated or rejected by clients. Thus the quality of creative work is determined by a small number of judges (the clients) as opposed to a much greater population (“people” or “consumers”).

#### 4.2.3. Connecting times of despair to the timeline

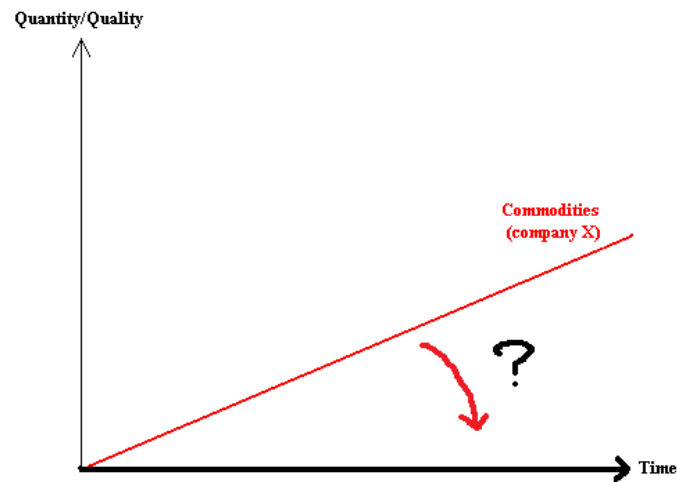
In the previous subsection an “intuitive” or “commonsense” function represents a regular (i.e. linear) progression/improvement of production in both quantitative and qualitative terms. But whilst this function is illustrative of the production of consumer

goods, it does not seem to reflect the weekly reality of production in an advertising agency. At g&a creations failed or succeeded independently of the time spent on them. When the agency lost accounts, it was therefore impossible for advertising people to rely on time as cause of failure, as explanatory referent (e.g. “lack of time” or “bad use of one’s time”). This impossibility yielded intense feelings of frustration and perplexity:

Sébastien	Day 45	11:45	Creation room
<p><b>Sébastien</b>, <i>back from another office</i>: We’ve lost Honda...</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>James</b>: I don’t get it... I believe it’s nobody’s fault... Sometimes you only work for 2 days and win the competition, and you wonder how you did it! Now he [Alban]’s asking us to stay longer in the office, to work weekends, but we’re not machines!</p> <p><b>Sébastien</b>: Yeah, besides you need rest from your job... It’s true, you’re going through a lot of thinking, aren’t you?</p>			

Why work longer hours, James asked, if success did not depend on time, if time did not guarantee success? Besides, good thinking required some time off, some time without thinking (“you need rest from your job”). This kind of trauma was no exceptional event at g&a, and it could be understood with reference to the linearity of production over time.

At this point it is important to underline that in giving birth to the eschatological arrow of time, religion created a *predictable relationship between work and time*. The linear function is an example of how this predictability may be thought about –not only does it represent a specific production, but it also illustrates *expectations* as to the quantity and quality of work throughout time. The first move of this analysis is to connect all the above frustrations at g&a, apparent in the search for “reasons” behind failures, to this relationship. Sébastien’s comments on deadlines (day 1) and James’ bewilderment above indicated that against expectations, neither the quantity nor the quality of advertising work (y-axis on the above graph) would increase along the timeline (x-axis). This means that relationships between the time spent at work and the value this work yields are perceived as *unpredictable*.



It is therefore reasonable to argue that the most crucial uncertainties at g&a are of a “temporal” nature. They are rooted in a *timeline* which, as a poor indicator of value, fails to inspire *lines* of conduct –how should Sébastien and James change their use of time? Should they work more, less, differently? It seemed impossible to know. Such “temporal uncertainties” refer to a general lack of guidance from the timeline, to the absence of a temporal “norm” –“anomie”. In the Durkheimian sense this normlessness is understood as economic and/or social perturbations of “traditional rules”, leading to a malaise or unsettling. Thus “anomic suicide” occurs when people’s activities are upset, for lack of societal regulation. In other words anomie results from a discrepancy between the standards or values a society conveys and what is actually achievable in this society. The anomic state is “reinforced by the fact that passions are less disciplined at a time when they would precisely require stronger discipline” (Durkheim 1897/1990: 281, 288). By analogy “temporal anomie” simply refers to the malaise caused by a discrepancy between an arrow of time and what is actually achievable along it.

#### 4.2.3.1 Temporal anomie

What I call temporal anomie has inspired a number of sociological works (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1964; Zerubavel 1979; Harvey 1989). Zerubavel (1979) and Flaherty (1987) speak of “temporal anomalies” –episodes in which the everyday experience of time is problematic. One of their conclusions is that people suffering anomalies often attempt to translate their internal experience of time into clock time. This internal experience is what Bergson (1948: 67) calls “(pure) duration”. For him

the “spatialisation” of time is a misleading move our conscience perpetually makes. We tend to forget that the religious / scientific timeline is not equivalent to duration. Whilst the timeline conveniently represents the idea of absolute time (a time that is the same for all of us) duration is

the form taken by the succession of our states of conscience when our ego lives for the day, when it refrains from establishing a separation between present and past states.

Philosophers have long been puzzled by this “duality” of time Bergson meditates about. Not unlike Kant (quoted above), Descartes (1966: 42) suggested for example that time is an invention to be distinguished from duration. What we call “time” would only be a measure of movement, a “way of thinking” about duration<sup>73</sup>. However Bergson insists that such *way of thinking* obscures the reality of duration. An “arrow” of time fails to express duration because movement, by definition, cannot be stopped –hence duration cannot be “spatialised”<sup>74</sup>. Our freedom of thinking is thus *restrained* because language is never faithful to individual emotions. We only recognise what used to be inside us through the outside images and words we project for others. Our existences take place in space rather than time; we live “for” the social world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think. Temporal anomie therefore relates to a situation in which clock time or the timeline are always “spoken” about, part of everyday temporal discourses on the one hand (e.g. “we’ll see their campaign in March”, “we spent half an hour on it”); and in which these do *not* reflect duration, or time as it is experienced on the other hand (e.g. “one week later, we *feel*

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<sup>73</sup> Here he takes a particularly revealing example: “(...) if two bodies are in motion for an hour, one being faster than the other, we do not count more time in one than in the other, but we still suppose more movement in one of them. But to understand the duration of all things under a same measure, we usually use the duration of a number of regular movements which are days and years, and name it “time” (...) although what we name here is nothing more indeed, outside of the true duration of things, than a way of thinking” (Descartes 1966: 42).

<sup>74</sup> Attempts to “represent” motion indeed are bound to failure: “How could movement *be applied on* the space it covers? How could motion coincide with the motionless? How *would* the moving object be at one point of its route? It is *going through* it, or, in other terms, it *could be at* it. It would be at it if it stopped at it; but, did it stop, we would no longer deal with the same movement. It is always in a single leap that the route is covered (...) [A]s trajectory is space and space is indefinitely divisible, we believe that the movement itself is indefinitely divisible. We like picturing it, for it is not the change of position that interests us in a movement, but the positions themselves (...) We need immobility, and the more we will manage to picture movement as coinciding with motionless points in space, the more we will believe to understand it. To tell the truth there is no veritable motionlessness, if it is to be understood as absence of motion. Motion is the very reality” (Bergson 1948: 158-9).

completely idle”, “you *only* work for two days and win the competition”, “he's asking us to stay longer in the office, but *we're not machines*”). In other words temporal anomie expresses a dysfunction resulting from the instinctive superimposition of the rhythms of mechanical production on the human rhythms of creative production in advertising.

#### 4.2.4. Arrhythmia

Hence temporal anomie may be understood as an “arrhythmia” (Lefebvre 1992) that induces *pathological* effects within the rhythms of our lives. In a healthy state of “eurhythmia” (or in medical terms “eurhythmia”) our bodies are synchronised with the rhythms of the environment. This means that our health is influenced by seasons for instance, as reflected in our benign diseases (winter cold, hay fever, etc.), or that daylight and darkness impact on our activities. So the social implications of the works of chronobiologists should not be underestimated (Adam 1990: 72-4). However, superimposed on our body rhythms are “Zeitgeber” (providers of time) like clock time and artificial light. Zeitgeber are responsible for far more worrying temporal-capitalist diseases –feelings of time running out, frenetic paces of living (Young and Schuller 1988; Adam 1995: 47-53). Mirabeau observed in 1908 (quoted in Honoré 2004: 46, *my emphasis*) that our

thoughts, feelings, and loves are a whirlwind. Everywhere life is rushing insanely like a cavalry charge (...) everything around a man jumps, dances, gallops in a movement *out of phase* with his own.

We suffer from stress and its physiological derivatives –high blood pressure, ulcers, heart diseases, etc. In the creation room at g&a, there was this awareness that Zeitgeber accelerated rhythms of work for no “valid” reason since they caused failure. In this example Sébastien complains about the absurdity of clock time constraints in creative work:

Sébastien Stéphanie AD	Day 53	9:13	Creation room
Sébastien was upset –the AG2R competition had been lost.			
Sébastien, <i>fuming</i> : I mean, it's nonsense... You cannot prepare a competition in one day! We did it in one day, so... If anyone talks about AG2R again I'll slap him.			

**Stéphanie:** Take it easy Séb, I agree with you...

Clock time (“we did it in *one* day”) aroused as many frustrations as the “arrhythmic” experiences (“you *cannot* prepare a competition in one day!”) it was responsible for. Sébastien’s distress showed the pernicious effects of the timeline as *Zeitgeber*. What was the timeline good for? Looking back toward the past, more often endowed with nostalgia and remorse<sup>75</sup> than with relief? Toward the future, which sheltered more fears and uncertainties than hopes?

Referring to instants that are not happening and only exist in our minds (the past is no longer, the future is yet to come), we keep undermining the possibility of a happy present (Pascal 1966: 224). So as soon as we forget that clock time is simply a machine we constructed, as soon as we take it for granted or regard it as natural phenomenon, rhythms *discord* and we suffer from arrhythmy. At g&a people suffer from it when clock time, as Sébastien remarks, is clearly not a good indicator of the value advertising should deliver. How come an idea which took a day to develop was more successful than a two-week work on the same account? It is in this sense that arrhythmy can be another word for temporal anomie, which amounts again for Adam (1995: 90-1) to a “non-temporal time”. She notes that

we lose sight of the knowledge that much of the complexity of work time bears little relationship to the standardized measure, that it is fundamentally different from the artefactual time we use to compare, relate and quantify (...) [However] social life, and by implication working time, is not invariable and abstract but fundamentally temporal and contextual.

At g&a and elsewhere, time was decontextualised from work and set as a neutral phenomenon that accords all hours the same value, whether it is the afternoon or the

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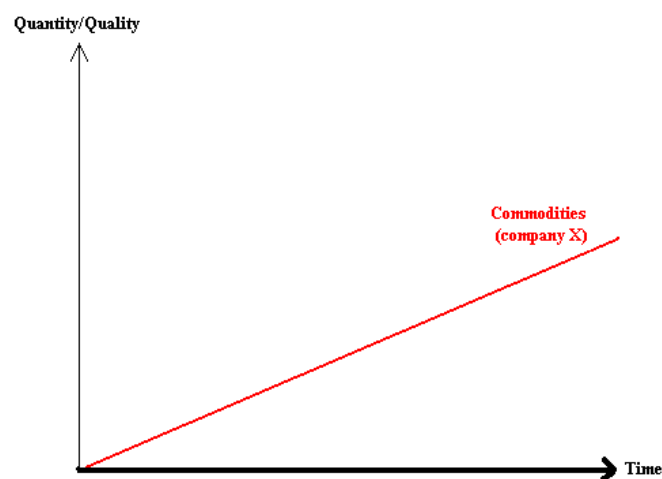
<sup>75</sup> Blatant in our *remorse*, for example, is the painful irreversibility, “irreparability” of past instants (Cioran 1995: 339). In pursuit of affective memories resurging from objects and sounds and smells, artists struggle to grasp what seems pervasive in their minds and yet forever lost. Giving rise to a sort of second reality, a lingering echo of present things, memories are there without being there. This paradox has been explored in the novels of Proust, the paintings of Dalí (the soft watches), the films of Wong Kar Wai and Kim Ki-Duk (my favourite directors), etc.



night, whether we are in South Korea or in Chile<sup>76</sup>. Sébastien's anger testifies that the creatives did situate their anomic feelings within this kind of decontextualisation.

#### 4.2.4.1 g&arrhythmia

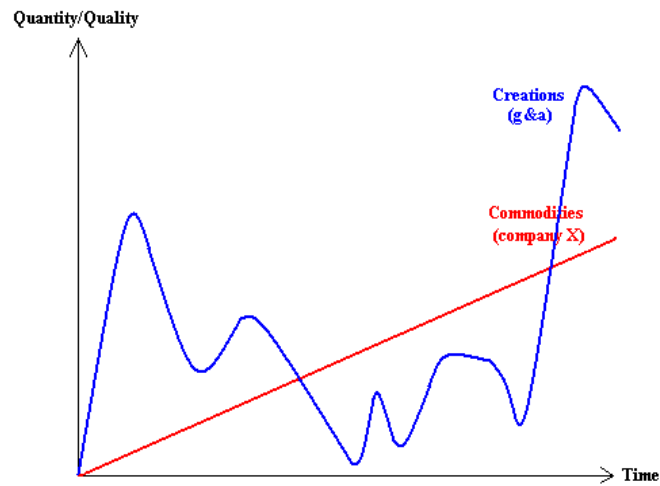
It is perhaps helpful at this point to “visually” clarify what temporal anomie/arrhythmia are all about. To communicate their problematic experience of time, people at g&a projected it on a plane where it could be understood by others (“I don't get it...”, James complains) –they spatialised it on the x-axis (Newtonian or “clock” time). But with this timeline appeared another “intuitive” (Kant) representation of production as a linear function (in red), which looks reasonably informative in the context of the automobile industry for example:



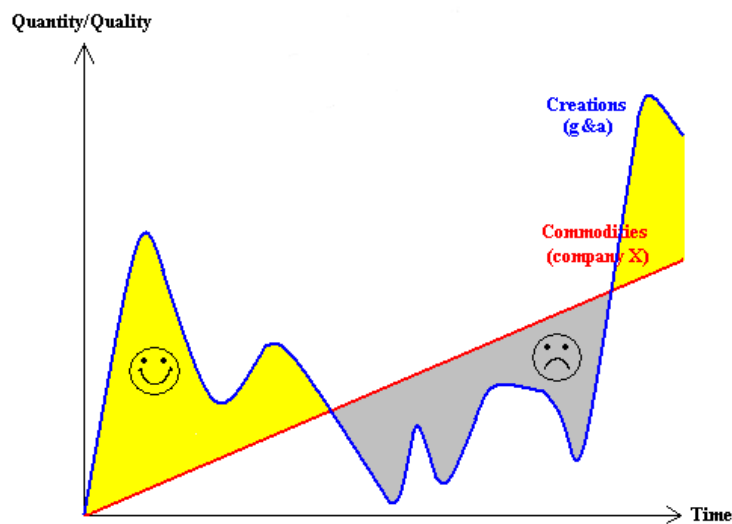
This red function is heading “high” and shows a progression, not a regression; a purpose, not a wandering. It implies that people and things “improve” over time. But a very different pattern is made visible when creative production at g&a is represented as a function of clock time (in blue).

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<sup>76</sup> In Tsai Ming Liang's intriguing but powerful film, *What Time is it There?*, active mourning and spatial reconnections (between Taiwan and France) show our efforts to escape this fatality of time. Perhaps in order to denounce the absurd conception we have of time as a regular, eternal flow, time is ultimately revealed as nothing less than death. Death as a wheel that stops rotating. Death in its appalling immobility.



Such a chaotic function, whose variations through time are unpredictable, stands for what g&a actually produces successfully when it is “following” clock time –when “spatialisation” is forced. Its superposition to the red, predictable function illustrates the disconnection between clock time and time consciousness (duration) which generates temporal anomie. The two curves are totally out of phase –this is an arrhythmic situation. Temporal anomie is this arrhythmy that encompasses all feelings of “deviations” from a predictable production whose value increases over time:



Satisfaction occurs in yellow areas and frustration in grey areas. But even yellow areas are tinged with frustration insofar as creatives do not know what caused satisfaction. Hence the coloured areas above “situate” anomic feelings. Durkheim (1990) shows that the phenomenon of suicide, in appearance individual, results from the relationships people entertain with *society*. For example he observes that anomie

may induce suicide. By the same token, if temporal anomie does not necessarily make working conditions suicidal in advertising, it does foster schizophrenic relationships with the *time* that *society* has constructed (the timeline). The *time* creatives are supposed to follow like the train follows the rails; the *time* whose predictability destabilises activities and identities (“for Alban we’re sometimes trash, sometimes geniuses”), making the industry so... unpredictable.

Hitherto it has been argued that neither the quantity nor the quality of advertising creations depended on time –in other words there is a sense in which the “normlessness” of creative work with regard to time corresponds to the “timelessness” of the creative experience (c.f. Adam’s notion of “non-temporal time”). But obviously the creatives suffer from the deadlines imposed on them, which force a timely, predictable reality into their unpredictable means of production. In this way, a time-based graph immediately reveals temporal anomie –the very existence of the x-axis contradicts the timeless nature of creative work. So how to understand the motivations behind the allocation of very tight deadlines (the AG2R competition had to be prepared in just one day), which increased possibilities of failure, not to mention stress at work? How to explain the stubborn but vain determination creatives had in rationalising their production along the timeline? How to interpret, in the first place, the persistence of the timeline in our thinking –other than as a relentless reproduction of a mistake? There are of course reasons for this timeline to endure (rather than, say, a cyclical conception) and impinge on our lives, and it is hinted at in section 4.2.2 – the origins and effects of the timeline should be linked to the role religion plays at work. Chapter five will unroll this perspective in connection to “wastes” of time (5.2), and show that it is even difficult to conceive purely profane working practices in advertising (see also chapter two). But first the last section of this chapter sets out to understand what happens “in our heads” when we compare our own temporal experiences with the predictable timeline. It describes how people at g&a “construct” time in strategic ways as a result of this comparison.

### 4.3. From temporal anomie to temporal construction

Whilst the previous section diagnosed arrhythmia in the organisation and looked at its undesirable symptoms and pathological effects, this last section describes the treatments or “cures” advertising people concoct to combat these effects. The section establishes, likewise, homologies between what people do at g&a and what other communities did to construct time in their own image. The timeline is first broken, and its very existence questioned (4.3.1). From this new timeless situation constructions of time are envisaged on a discursive (4.3.2), material (4.3.3) and creative plane (4.3.4). The last subsection returns to section 4.2 in the light of temporal construction, and finally operates a transition toward chapter five.

#### 4.3.1. From the continuous timeline to discontinuity

Philosophers and epistemologists like Kant, Bergson and others dealt with the question of time as we “feel” it flow. One of them was Bachelard (1966: 13-36). He intended to break with the Bergsonian tradition by looking at *past* segments of the timeline, i.e. memories. For him time consciousness does not exactly refer to our sensation of “time passing by”, to duration, but to *instants*. Our memory is filled with instants, not flows of time. To the unintermittible continuity of time Bachelard therefore opposes a fundamental discontinuity<sup>77</sup>. Saint Augustine had observed that the “past” exists through our present memories and the “future” through our present anticipation<sup>78</sup>. In the same vein Bachelard militates for the primacy of our *present* temporal feelings in the production of past and future projections. This discourse of discontinuity has also been that of a growing number of physicists over the past fifteen years or so. It posits the instant as a better definition of time consciousness

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<sup>77</sup> Gorgias before Aristotle was the first to militate for a “discontinuous” understanding of time. He stated that the *kairos* (the “opportune” or “critical” moment) should prevail over the continuity and eternity of *chronos*, to achieve a meaningful rupture within the unintermittible flow of time (Romeyer-Dherbey 1985: 49-51).

<sup>78</sup> He writes (1841: 342-3): “my childhood for example, which no longer is, belongs to a time past which no longer exists. But when I want to say something that relates to it, I can see the image of this something, and I can see it in the present time, for it is now in my memory. (...) what allows man to know the things to come is not really *future*, but *present* to he who can see it, and uses it to know the future; by the same token, his mind already pictures it, though the things he conceives and predicts have not yet come”.

than Bergsonian duration. In this line of thinking, time is produced by our imagination; it does not exist out there but is part of our mental projections.



Physicist Barbour (2000) claims for example that movement is an illusion –in reality nothing moves, nothing changes. At the opposite of the Bergsonian stance, he explains via the chronophotograph of a sideways jump that history cannot be expressed in terms of a movement on a path; it *is* the path. While the standard “temporal” explanation is that the gymnast passes through all these positions in a fraction of a second, Barbour’s “timeless” assumption<sup>79</sup> is that the patterns of atoms in our brain encode about six or seven images of the gymnast that are simultaneously present at any instant, and plays them as a film. He goes on to describe a universe where things and people are always present in different Nows (our memories are just snapshots of other Nows within this Now). This universe is defined by an equation that resembles the Wheeler-DeWitt equation. In its most direct interpretation, the Wheeler-DeWitt equation tells us that the universe is like a huge molecule in a stationary state, the different possible combinations of which are the “instants of time”. It attaches a ranking to each conceivable static configuration of the universe. Each Now “competes” with all other Nows to win the highest probability; but its chance to exist is determined by what it is in itself.

This argument implies that our existence depends on the way we relate to everything else that can be. It also means rejecting the possibility that time might be “given”, that it might exist “as such” in the advertising agency. If time does not exist independently of the people who construct and spend it, what becomes possible is a “timeless” reality in which these people “introduce” time. The corollary is that arrhythmy or anomie in the advertising agency can no longer be construed with regard to

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<sup>79</sup> For him, understanding the universe as timeless would solve a number of problems; in particular it would reconcile quantum physics with the theory of relativity. In Newtonian theory and in the special and general theories of relativity, the four-dimensional space-time framework stands higher in the hierarchy of being than the objects that move within. Quantum mechanics takes it for granted. However why would “instants of time” need such a framework? Could they not exist in their own right? As he puts it (Barbour 2000: 247): “how can theories with such diametrically opposed claims coexist peacefully? They are like children squabbling over a toy called time. Isn’t the most effective way to resolve such squabbles to remove the toy?”

Newtonian time –for if “time” does not exist as such, by no means can it induce anomie. Whence anomie must be caused, not by a referent that has been “removed” from g&a and “should be there”, but by *what is said about time*. Just as Lefebvre (1992: 26) said about the pathological state of arrhythmy, anomie appears to be simultaneously “symptom, effect and cause”. It is in this kind of self-generating timelessness that the search for a temporal norm is detailed below.

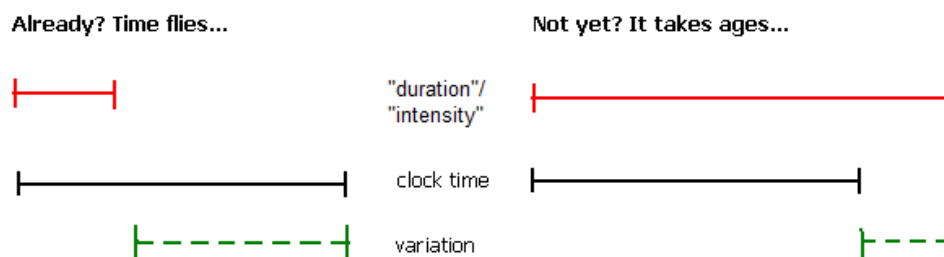
#### 4.3.2. The discursive construction of time

The discourse of discontinuity, which is that of an eternal present and only *mental* constructions of “past” and “future”, may convince if one acknowledges that some instants are more densely experienced than others. Psychologist William James (1890: 624) shifts the description of our internal experience (Bergson’s duration) towards this intensity that *constructs* instants of time:

In general, a time filled with varied and interesting experiences, seems short in passing, but long as we look back. On the other hand, a tract of time empty of experiences seems long in passing, but in retrospect short (quoted in Jahoda 1988: 155).

What James stresses is that we tend to re-temporalise, with hindsight, instants lived in the past. Under high emotional involvement time does feel longer or shorter according to the “enjoyable”, “painful”, “boring”, etc. character of the experience. Physical or psychological pain (feeling sick on a boat, losing a relative) “extends” time while physical or psychological entertainment (eating good food, listening to great music) “shrinks” it. Then in retrospect, all experiences are reconsidered, and this is when time is *in construction*. We come to compare the lapse of time we felt was passing by, and the lapse of time that actually passed by as measured by mechanical devices such as clocks.

Our consciousness of time results from such variations rather than just clock time, and incites us to *communicate* it to others. We comment that “time flies” or “it took me ages to finish this”, etc.



We make our experience of time (red segment) more meaningful by referring to a fixed referent, a measurable apparatus (black segment). We express a “variation” (green segment) via the *temporal discourses* upon which almost all the data presented so far focuses (“he’s asking us to stay longer in the office”, “you cannot prepare a competition in one day”, etc.). Bergson (1948: 86-108) accordingly justifies the spatialisation of time by the fact that our *social* life prevails over our internal, individual life. We “solidify” our impressions through language. But in doing so we confuse these impressions, in perpetual becoming, with the fixed objects we have externalised (black segments). Communication, social life is enabled by means of such a sacrifice<sup>80</sup>.

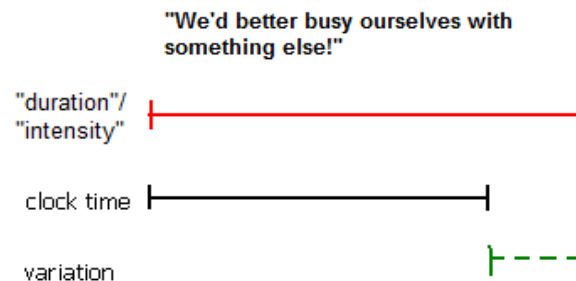
### *“We’d better busy ourselves with something else!”*

What happens when this line of thinking is applied to everyday advertising activity? Sébastien *felt* that a lot of time was passing by, whilst not producing anything. His anxiety was all the more stirred up since future perspectives were not promising –this summer six or seven competitions had been lost and it had been ages since g&a last won anything. Pierre and Alban kept implying that the creative department was not performing well enough. Sébastien disagreed –all failures were collective and marketing people had to recognise that they happened to deliver mediocre briefs and closings too. He then expressed his temporal feelings:

Sébastien	Day 20	10:12	Creation room
Sébastien, <i>angry</i> : And they [Pierre and Alban] moan because of a comma, and we’re gonna spend two weeks debating around the comma... we’d better busy ourselves with something else!			

<sup>80</sup> For Bergson language makes us believe in the immobility of sensations and lures us about their true, individual character. So for example the word “love” amasses everything that is stable, common and impersonal in human feelings, rejecting the delicate, transient, unique ways in which we love.

On the one hand Sébastien accused management's misuse of time by comparing the ridiculously long red segment ("we'd better busy ourselves with something else!") he projected to a fixed black segment ("we're gonna spend two weeks debating around the comma...").



But on the other hand the creative logic of his environment was *timeless* (c.f. Adam, Bachelard, Barbour), and as such there could be no “misuses”, only “misinterpretations” of time. In other words time was introduced as a result of conflicts and negotiations, not exactly around how people should use a given “time”, but around what time should *be*. People defined each other in this organisation through different understandings of time, different temporal discourses. Management wanted the creative team to change its approach to time in both quantitative and qualitative terms (“to work weekends” and “debate around the comma”); according to the creatives, management misunderstood what an appropriate relation to time should be in the creation room (“we’re not machines”, “we’d better busy ourselves with something else!”). And therefore everything that everyone said about time contributed to its laborious construction at g&a.

#### 4.3.2.1 *The social relativity of time*

Time was therefore a “collective” or “discursive” construction in this organisation, and it appeared to regulate the organisation’s activities to some of the most meticulous degrees of cohesion. The remainder of this subsection suggests that the discursive construction of time is based on what could be called, in echo of Einstein’s (1920) theory of relativity, the “social relativity” of time. The principle of relativity states that time is relative to the framework of the observer; distance and mass are no longer absolute; and if I book a one-hour return journey in a train that travels near the speed



of light (otherwise the differences in observations between Newtonian and Einsteinian physics are negligible), I will come back only to realise that my friends<sup>81</sup> have aged more than I did. On *my* watch I have been away for one hour, but many years have passed for them. I have moved into the future (Einstein 1920; Landau and Rumer 1961; Flood and Lockwood 1986). When I am back to the future, my friends and I look at our respective watches (or calendars, for that matter). Social relativity is interested in this very moment, when we share our experiences and invariably *communicate* our temporal feeling as “variations” from clock time. Time is relative, not to our motion but to how we felt time was passing by. Hence social relativity typically reduces “time” to what is said about it. And what is said about time procures, as proposed by Findlay (quoted in Gale 1967: 145-6) in his philosophical discussion of time, a certain appeasement:

(...) there are some questions which beset us, not because there is anything genuinely problematic in our experience, but because the ways in which we speak of that experience are lacking in harmony or are otherwise unsatisfactory. (...) Such moods of questioning plainly have no answers, in any ordinary sense of “answer”; we may nevertheless hope to relieve them by becoming clearly conscious of the underlying needs that prompt them, and by deliberately adopting ways of talking that provide appeasement for those needs.

Expressed in this quote is the therapeutic virtue of temporal discourse, explored below through the notion of temporal “strategy”. For example arrhythmia does not emanate from time itself, but from the ways in which we speak about time. Speaking about arrhythmia brings up the questions we wish to ask about time. No proper “answers” ensue from such questions, but what matters is the relief contained in the hope for answers. Once again and to reiterate Lefebvre’s points on arrhythmia, the poison seems to contain its cure, the problem its solution... the temporal tension its deliverance.

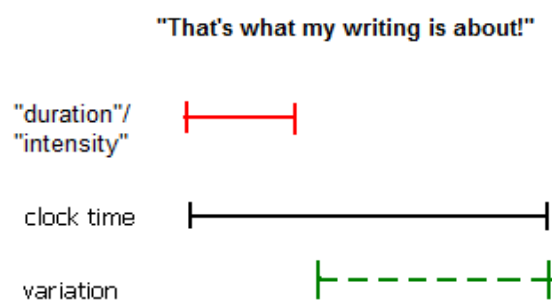
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<sup>81</sup> Note that initial conditions already facilitate a transposition to the *social* mode: at least two objects/people are needed for Einstein’s relativity to “make sense”. In an example whereby Einstein endeavours to make the theory accessible to those “who are not conversant with the mathematical apparatus of theoretical physics” –he was fond of pedagogy according to Moszkowski (1972) –he introduces the passenger in the train and a pedestrian observing it from the footpath to state that “it is clearly seen that there is no such thing as an independently existing trajectory (lit. “path-curve”), but only a trajectory relative to a particular body of reference” (Einstein 1920: v, 12).

So ways of thinking and speaking about time shaped temporal practices at g&a. They structured everyday work. A simple example will illustrate this. Above Sébastien was “thinking aloud” in a way that may recall the very positive relationship to time he was still able to entertain:

Sébastien	Day 49	16:39	Creation room
<b>Sébastien</b> , <i>reflecting on Jean-Philippe’s brief</i> : I love his brief... I’ve got three things to say. One, “new special effects”, two “bla bla” and three “bla bla”. And that’s it. It’s gonna be quickly done, I can tell you. That’s what my writing is about!			

To the rest of the team he communicated the possibility of a pleasantly short red segment, in comparison to a fixed black segment. He added to the collective perception of time.



The longer the green segment, the “quicker” time went by. So what would he do with his “extra time”? As reflected in the vagaries of his schedule (“sometimes you are snowed under with work and one week later, we feel completely idle”), he felt like wasting time, and complained about it (“we’d better busy ourselves with something else!”). The feeling seemed to be embedded in the daily business of a creative department. In a semi-autobiographical novel that received considerable attention in France (Beigbeder 2004: 68), the first-person narrator is a cynical and cocaine-addicted copywriter who confesses his disgust at the advertising profession before his resignation. He caustically notes: “only in advertising can people fight for a comma”. If Sébastien’s business indeed *was* about “spending two weeks debating around the comma”, then the exteriorisation of his feelings towards “complaints” had to constitute a strategy for making time in the image of the creation room. It is towards this *strategic* dimension of temporal discourses, but also that of temporal *artefacts*, that the discussion is heading now.

### 4.3.3 The material construction of time: g&a-time

The theses of “discontinuity” and “social relativity” have defined time as the result of temporal discourses comparing clock time (the black segment above) and experiences of time (red segments). The “time” relevant to g&a was therefore a construction rather than an external, absolute force flowing independently of advertising lives. This time could be referred to as “g&a-time”. It was embodied in a massive schedule hung up on the wall in the creation room –g&a’s own “Zeitgeber”, temporal device or what Zerubavel (1979) calls a “temporal reference framework”:

Each line corresponded to a week day (blue rectangles: Monday, Tuesday... Friday) and each column to a creative person:



Thus on Monday for example, Mélanie would work on “AR” [André Renault].



People inside as well as outside the organisation contributed to the creation of this schedule. Management and clients agreed on deadlines that creatives had to respect; creatives organised their time with the approbation of management, so that it was conjointly believed that deadlines could be met. g&a-time was in other words a very specific outcome of discursive negotiations, or interwoven variations (green segments) within the agency. The aim of the calendar was not to measure time, but to endow it with rhythm (James and Mills 2005: 7). Week days were sliced up and organised in a way, as Adam (1995: 104) has argued, comparable to an editing process:

The general orientation towards clock time thus constitutes the foundation for the flexible organisation of time. Since this process of recombining and assembling work time is similar to the task performed by editors of television and film, we could, with O'Malley (1992a) call it *time editing*.

### *“The whiteboard, where the weekly planning is”*

As such, the representation of g&a-time on the wall was for some a faithful metaphor of creative work:

Sébastien Aurélié Stéphanie AD (Interview excerpts)	Day 52	15:12	Creation room
François: If you had to take 2 to 3 pictures with my camera, which would symbolise your work at g&a?			
Aurélié: I would take a picture of the coffee machine... and VG <sup>82</sup> .			

<sup>82</sup> They called the CEO by his initials. VG was not aware of this nickname.

**Stéphanie:** Yeah, so would I! And the g&a logo as well...

**Sébastien:** I would take the whiteboard there (*he points at it*), where the weekly planning is.

Towards the end of my stay I was in charge of copying the paper version of the creative timetable onto this whiteboard –I put clients into boxes.



GEN	Puy fou	AG2R	M	OM	M
EDICA	IPO	AGF			
DA	IPO	AGF	MGEN	OM	M
	AVIS		argu	AR	
DA	AVIS	CIL	X	KDB	M
		TER		(PDV)	

But if g&a-time had been made “visible” on this wall, its *construction* as a process remained invisible. Only the observation of advertising practice would explain it. This is why it is necessary to proceed with a concrete example.

### “We already have tight deadlines”

I have chosen an account I was familiar with, and which was also quite important to g&a. I thought on writing on time shortly after I was introduced to this “big project”, on my third day at g&a. On that day Alban called me in his office and told me about an amusement park that was going to be built near Nantes, around the theme of plants (as in “flowers”). There was something funny about this “plant park”. It did not really exist yet –at least not concretely. The actors involved had planned its opening in 2009. g&a had just won the account and would be in charge of its communication. The agency had been provided with a thick book showing the “content” of the park. In it, a few maps and many reproductions of water paintings evoked the park-to-be. All in all, the existence of the park rested on these kinds of images, between technical drawing and kitsch illustration, where shadowgraphed visitors enjoyed what vaguely looked like attractions.



I have a vivid memory of the very first time Alban spoke to me about the plant park. Excitement inflected his voice and screwed up his eyes:

Alban	Day 3	9:31	Alban's office
<b>Alban:</b> We've got this meeting with the clients this morning. We're on something big. I think it would be good for you to attend, and you'll learn more about it (...) We already have very tight deadlines: by December the name of this park should be nailed!			

The mission of the agency was to give the “plant park” a proper name, and a visual identity. I understood that “the plant park” sounded awful... but *three months* to find a name? Was that a busy schedule? At this moment I found it difficult to conceal my astonishment. To my mind finding a name was a matter of a couple of days, a couple of weeks at the most. And even with hindsight –had Gérald not named a newsletter almost instantly? Was Sébastien not relying on the quality of Jean-Philippe’s brief to “quickly” write three things? A creative “solution” might as well pop out right away.

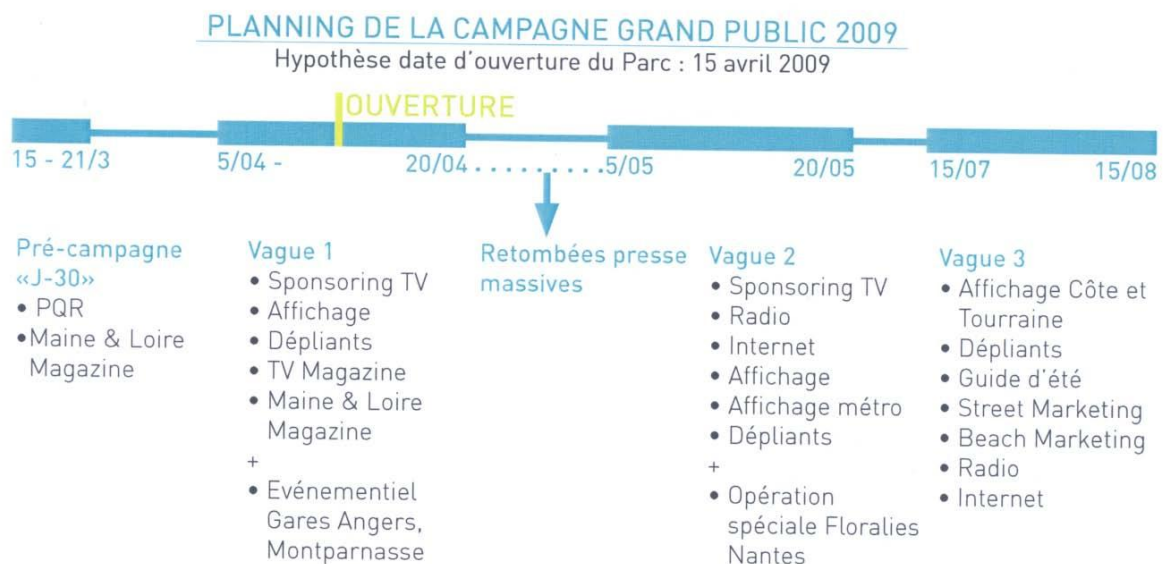
During the meeting with clients later on that day, I realised why I was wrong, and thought of writing what became chapter five about “wastes” of time. It first became clear that the challenge for the agency was not to “find a name” but to justify how it would use the allocated period efficiently. As may be seen in this extract of a twenty-



page booklet on the basis of which g&a won the account, for instance, the agency was in fact *selling g&a-time*:

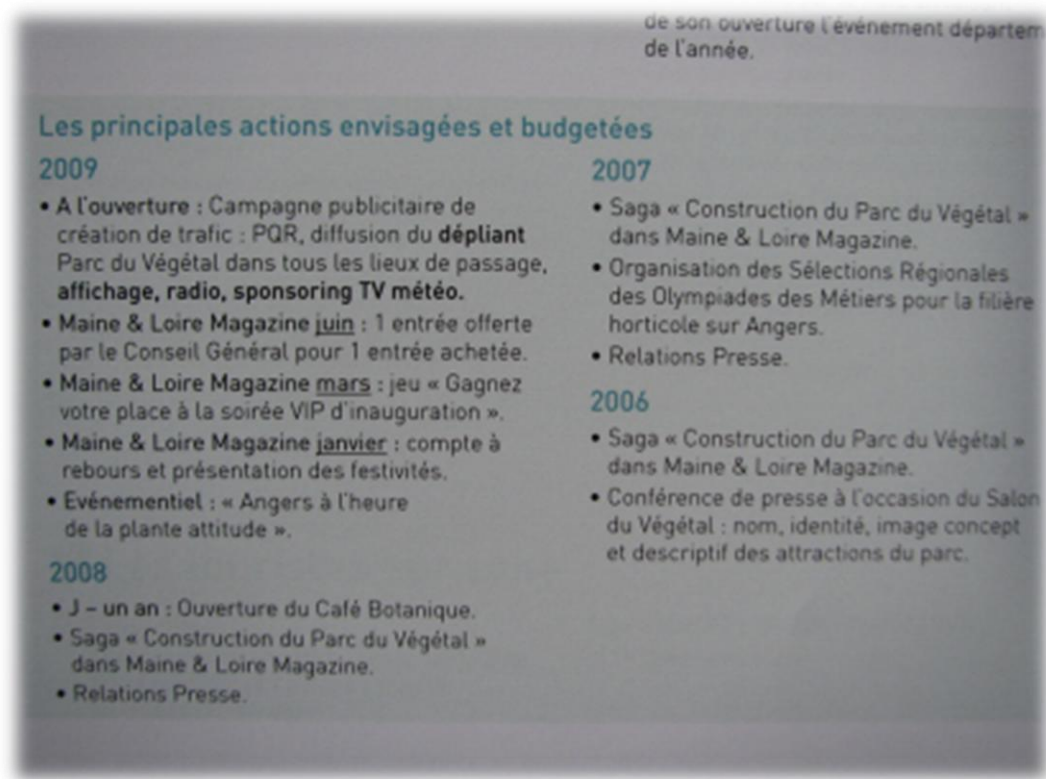
pour un lancement réussi

2005 (3 mois)	2006	2007	2008	2009 (9 mois)
1. Choix du nom	7. Conférence de presse Salon du Végétal	13. Présentation de la maquette du Parc	17. Visite Eden Project par les professionnels du tourisme 49	25. Partenariats Gamm vert, Système U...
2. Identité graphique	8. Mise en route du réseau partenaires du parc	14. Ouverture du Café Botanique	18. Conférence de presse Paris média presse nationale grand public	26. Pré campagne «J-30» : Maine & Loire Magazine, PQR
3. Image concept	9. Signalétique Parc	15. Olympiades des Métiers - filière horticole	19. RP à destination des T0	27. Campagne ouverture : sponsoring TV, radio, affichage, Internet, dépliant, TV magazine, Evenementiels gares Montparnasse, Angers et Angers centre ville.
4. Pré tests	10. Lancement rubrique Parc dans Maine & Loire magazine	16. Promotion du site internet pédagogique	20. Présentation du Plan de communication 2009 aux partenaires de l'Anjou	28. Insertion invitations dans Maine & Loire Magazine
5. Validation plan opérationnel 2004-2009	11. Lancement site internet et newsletter		21. Présence MITINTERNATIONAL et démarrage des négociations autocaristes et T.O.	29. Opération promotionnelle Florales Nantes
6. Organisation RP	12. Mise en place du N°vert info Parc		22. Salons CECOM	30. Invitations et mailings B to B sur filières et professionnels du tourisme
			23. Référencement France Billet, Ticket net...	31. Mailings à destination des groupes : scolaires, CE, Seniors
			24. Elaboration de la stratégie de fidélisation	32. Avant premières Professionnels 49
				33. Inauguration et Visite officielle
				34. Visites thématiques de journalistes
				35. Campagne post ouverture : sponsoring TV, radio, affichage, affichage métro, dépliant et internet
				36. Campagne estivale : affichage Côte Atlantique et Touraine, dépliant, Guides d'été, Street marketing, Internet et radio.
		37. Maine & Loire Magazine 38. Relations Presse 39. Site Internet + newsletter		



Above g&a presented some concrete marketing actions to be undertaken in the long term (e.g. “launch newsletter” in 2006, “press conference” in 2008, etc.). Each action was then carefully detailed, budgeted and importantly “temporalised” until 2009. In

June 2009 for example, the agency proposed a promotional action “buy one entrance ticket and get one free”.



In the short term (Oct-Nov 2005) these actions were of course more thoroughly detailed:

***1<sup>st</sup> step: production of names: 3<sup>rd</sup> October-14<sup>th</sup> November***

- sectional analysis and complementary research (“themes”, “axis”)
- pre-selection
- pre-filtering (elimination of existing copyrights)
- presentation of a list of 10 possible names

***2<sup>nd</sup> step: selection: 14<sup>th</sup> November-8<sup>th</sup> December***

- validation of the list and enrichment with you
- complete visualisation of copyrights
- evocation tests: at first we shall test 10 possible names against 30 project managers in the County Council and the tourism sector. At the end of the tests, the list will be shortened to 5 names.

***3<sup>rd</sup> step: choice: 8<sup>th</sup> December-22<sup>nd</sup> December***

- focus groups in the region and in Paris
- double checks from tourism professionals in France and Great Britain

However, what motivated the design of a “busy” schedule did not seem to be a great number of “necessary” steps to follow, but a rationalisation of g&a-time in which the

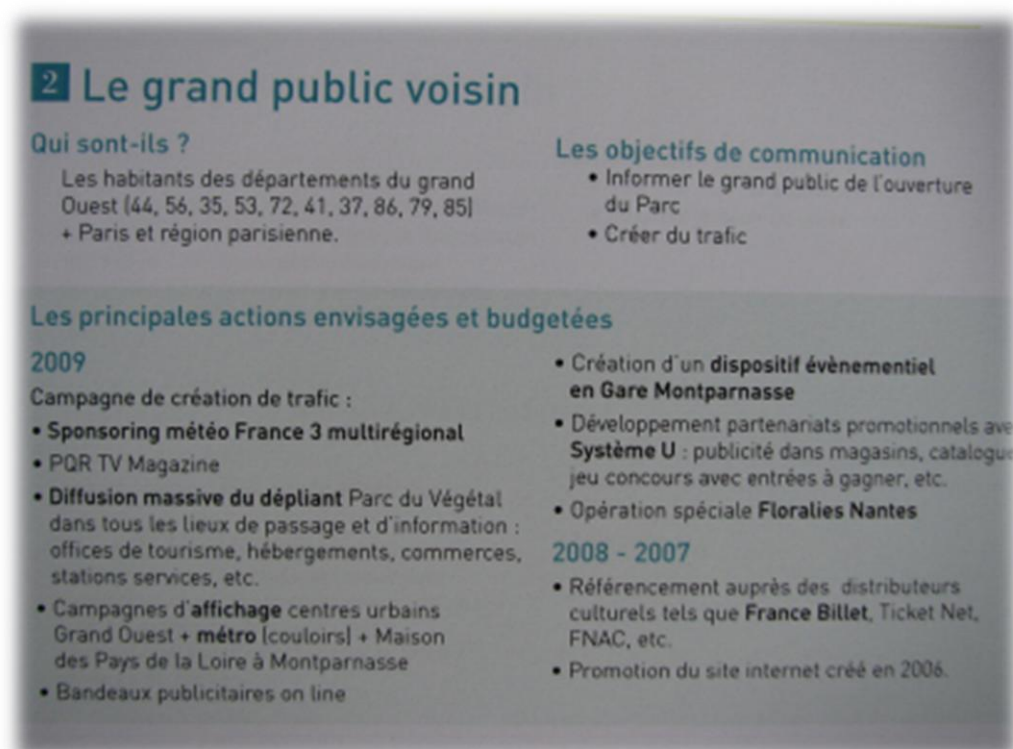


client could believe. Indeed, despite the obscure relationship between clock time (“3<sup>rd</sup> October-14<sup>th</sup> November”, etc.) and successful creative production, part of the agency’s expertise was to demonstrate to clients that the amount of time each task required could be reasonably estimated. In accordance with the arbitrary demands of the client in terms of schedule, management would thus split an allocated three-month period into different research phases, framed with “tight deadlines” exactly where it was not possible to do so.

### *“This is reassuring for a client”*

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In this way g&a valorised the work it would conduct over the next months. It showed that advertising people did *many* important things rather than very few unimportant things. By including a 2005-2009 detailed schedule for instance, the agency intended to reassure the client –predictions could be formulated and the future was bright. Time was mastered thanks to the blurring of the timeline with g&a-time.



Alban would even sound like a prophet when asserting to his clients during the first meeting (section 5.1.3): “in any case the name is vital until 2010: after that, the park

will suck the lifeblood out of it”. This function of reassurance was not too different from the oracle’s –since the park did not exist, reassurance could not be grounded in a rational demonstration. But the thesis will elaborate later on this “system of belief making” since the advertising agency consulted other oracles. Suffice to conclude here that the g&a had won the account thanks to its *reassuring* exhibition of g&a-time, as expressed in the mouth of the client himself in the same meeting:

Alban Stéphanie Fanny Nicolas Xavier	Day 3	11. 00 - 13.00	Meeting room
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**Nicolas:** We liked the clarity of your document, the fact that the strategy stands out well. This is reassuring for a client. Ten clear pages are better than forty pages that don’t say anything.

Nicolas explicitly requested g&a to “reassure” him about the viability of the project.

Having sold g&a-time to clients (more on that in chapter six), management proceeded to create pressure at the internal level. In a creation room contaminated by timelessness, tasks had to be temporalised. They had to become manageable. So when management had discussed and confirmed the schedule with clients, it was communicated to creatives. Creatives could make changes to a “reasonable” extent (at the margins), and would inform everyone during the weekly brief –every Monday morning, duties were recalled and people took notice of possible modifications. At around 9:20, all the communication department gathered in the creation room – account executives, account managers, purchase and manufacture managers, and of course the creatives. On this occasion Alban first spoke about past and future weeks, about objectives, problems, disappointments, hopes. He sounded like sounding out the staff for a few minutes in his usual low, monotonous voice. Despite the quietness of the creation room at this moment, I was not sure that everyone could hear him well. Then Sébastien or Gérald or James (but most of the time Sébastien) would read aloud the paper version of the updated table everyone could see too on the whiteboard.

	Sébastien	Gérald	James	Olivier <del>SEVERINE</del>	Elisabeth	Stéphanie	Auréli	Mélanie	Fanny	F
12	H G	M GEN	H G	AVIS	GAMBERT	EVECHE		AR deaking		
LUNDI	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	HARMONIE	U	PV long	↓	AVIS
13	PVY & FOU	↓		M GEN	CIF	SG		↓		
MARDI	↓	IPO N 3V	↓	↓	EULER	↓		ON		↓
14	AR	↓	AR	↓	AXA	↓		AM ISA		
MERCREDI	U Main	AGF	↓	↓	PVY du FOU	↓		↓		↓
15	HARMONIE	↓	↓	SATI	↓	CIL		↓		↓
16	U Kit	↓	↓	DA	IPO	AGBR		FORMATION		↓
JEUDI	AGBR DA	CECOMER	KolB	↓	↓	↓		↓		↓
17	↓	↓	CECOMER	AGF	↓	↓		↓		↓
VENDREDI	↓	TAT	↓	↓	AXA	↓		K-d B		↓
18	EVECHE	↓			TAT		EVECHE	CECOMER		
LUNDI	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓		↓

The term calendar itself goes back to the Latin *calendare*, “to call out”, to announce. In Rome an official would go around the streets announcing that the new moon had been sighted, which meant the beginning of a new month (Elias 1992: 193). One after another, names were called out, as well as the tasks that had been allocated to them. People generally approved; sometimes they would signal changes or clarify a thing or two. At times Alban would ask for precisions too, and he eventually nodded and said “okay, okay”. The weekly brief put the finishing touches to g&a-time. It gave deadlines, and deadlines gave reasons to rush. g&a-time was henceforth ready to be “spent”. The chapter moves on to this “spending”, keeping in mind that the ways in which people spend clock-time reflects above all g&a-time –a time constructed by and for the organisation.

#### 4.3.4 The creative construction of time: playing with g&a-time

At the internal level, the g&a-time (and the schedule representing it) that had been sold to clients had another application –it channelled time consciousness. This was quite convenient. Allocating a certain amount of time per task (often associated with an account) meant that targets could be reached; otherwise nothing would prevent

creatives from working an eternity on a sentence or a visual. g&a-time set boundaries (“boxes” on the schedule!) that were more likely to enable beliefs in *exhaustiveness*:

Sébastien Stéphanie Patrick Kamila	Day 51	9:40	Alban’s office
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*Sébastien raises concerns about choosing a name for the “plant park”.*

**Sébastien:** What’s depressing me is that, at this stage, I, we won’t be able to produce other names, it’s impossible, we’ll go round in circles... Given our area of competence, and the brief we had, we’ve explored all possibilities!

**Stéphanie:** Given the brief, that’s right...

Of course g&a’s own “Zeitgeber” on the wall could not be made in the image of actual experiences of time in the creation room; but its superposition to all temporal feelings and its reassuring status of collectively built referent were fortunate arrangements. Clock time was merely a mother grid or toolbox, a timetable with empty boxes; but as conventional and predictable as clock time, g&a-time also resized boxes and filled them with client accounts. Some lines became deadlines that restricted the number of possibilities (“we’ve explored all possibilities!”). Given an “area of competence” at g&a, tasks could be completed and people moved on.

### *“We only had 20 minutes to spare with you...”*

Finally g&a-time had an even more convenient application when it was strategically combined with the social relativity of time. Very subtly indeed, the creatives used to transform g&a-time into an objective referent, their timeless world into one of timely duties:

Stéphanie Gérald Sébastien	Day 8	14: 50	Submarine
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*Stéphanie briefed the copywriters on the plant park. They were required to consult the documents provided by the client, but did not seem very enthusiastic about it.*

**Gérald:** Alright, can we go now? We’re on other stuff. We warned you before, we only had twenty minutes to spare with you (*he laughs*)! No but I mean, I’ve got one hour left to finish Artésial, I’m almost done, so...

Five minutes later, Gérald and Sébastien were outside the creation room and chatting in the corridor. Not about work, the discussion lasted a little more than 15 minutes.

Gérald teased Stéphanie with this rather strict timetable, recalling that his activities were regulated by g&a-time. There surely was irony in his statement, since Stéphanie was aware that g&a-time impinged on, rather than reflected Gérald's experience of time. The "twenty-minute" or "one-hour" span was never that of a predictable production (e.g. in terms of "quality"), but a possibly unfair or conversely generous deadline that temporalised the creation room and structured copywriting. In his ironical use of g&a-time finally, Gérald became a "creative", someone entertaining a "special" (some would say "privileged") relation to time since his temporal *discourse* was in phase with g&a-time whereas his temporal *practice* was out of phase –Gérald said he needed one hour to finish Artésial before wasting a quarter of this hour chatting with Sébastien. The copywriters did not have to pretend to be busy; instead they turned the social relativity of time to their advantage. Social relativity meant that people's experiences of time differed and so being "busy" or "idle" did not make much sense in absolute. Others would not feel "busy" in Gérald's situation. And would Artésial keep him busy for an hour? Nobody could say. But to resist temporal anomie and even create opportunities out of it, he was happy to spatialise his duration towards the boxes on the schedule, towards g&a-time.

### "You cannot prepare a competition in one day!"

Bergson argued that the spatialisation required for *communication* is possible through a *sacrifice*<sup>83</sup> –that of being "unfaithful" to one's own duration. When Gérald claimed he could only give away 20 minutes of his precious time to Stéphanie, he was in fact being *intentionally* unfaithful to his own duration. The sacrifice was no longer negative, as it was for Bergson, but playful –it became a strategic set of discourses and practices (Gérald "warns" Stéphanie; then he "take his leave" of Stéphanie), a temporal strategy that communicated an ideal experience in phase with g&a-time rather than Gérald's own duration. Temporal strategies importantly brought responses

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<sup>83</sup> The reverse notion of sacrifice as communication seems true; it is at least pervasive in the works of Bataille. One of his overarching themes is that of a union (communion) through losses.

to anomie. Earlier for example, Sébastien had a very strategic way of communicating his frustration:

Sébastien Stéphanie AD	Day 43	9:13	Creation room
<p><i>Sébastien was fulminating –the AG2R competition had been lost.</i></p> <p><b>Sébastien, seriously angry:</b> I mean, it’s nonsense... You cannot prepare a competition in one day! We did it in one day, so... If anyone talks about AG2R again I’ll slap him.</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Take it easy Séb, I agree with you...</p>			

Complaining that it was impossible to prepare a competition in one day, Sébastien used g&a-time as an ideal culprit. It was not “reasonable” to prepare a competition in one day. The creatives had no hesitations in shifting guilt towards g&a’s schedule. In so doing they masked the construction that justified its existence, and naturalised it as a superior force upon which they had no influence. In other words copywriters (but also other people in the organisation) “fetishised” g&a-time as a means of proving themselves “innocent”. A fetishised g&a-time could be accused of all evils (people were “short for time”, needed “more time”, etc.), as if people were not responsible for the ways in which they had spent clock time. This kind of fetishisation was by no means unique or proper to an advertising organisation, if one admits that we always confuse “time” with temporal *phenomena* (what is happening “within” time). As we observe cyclical phenomena around us for instance, we assume that time is also cyclical. Hence it is always time that “carries the can”; we make it sole responsible for our fortunes and misfortunes. As if time became identified with our *use* of time, with our timetable, and had nothing else to do than embrace the rhythm of our activities (Klein 2007: 113-4). Should clients reject their creation for example, copywriters and art directors could always complain that they were given “insufficient” time to produce it.

### *“Who’s barking like that?”*

Inversely they could enjoy “extra” time, the time they had in excess, for entertainment in the disguised form of work. All creatives signed in to MSN Messenger so they could chat to their friends/partners while working. Entertainment, they could argue,

contributed to quality creations. Copywriters and ADs in particular, but also layout people strove to become a spectacle for the other, to attract the other's attention at any price. This often resulted in their exhibiting childish behaviour, including physical and psychological forms of teasing (an unexpected pinch, a pellet thrown at the face, parrot talk, baby talk, etc.). The atmosphere of the creation room was best characterised by "stage" performances (joking, teasing, storytelling, imitating) and "sports" performances (long jump, football, juggling). Thus Sébastien would be constantly acting and telling jokes with a childish voice (the child was his favourite character). Other stage performances included what could be called "barking hordes":

<b>Olivier Dominique Stéphanie AD</b>	<b>Day 20</b>	<b>11:35</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
<p><i>Olivier and Dominique began howling like wolves responding to each other in the night time. Mating calls? Impossible to say.</i></p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Who's barking like that? Is it Olivier? He's really doing it well.</p>			

<b>Fanny Dominique</b>	<b>Day 20</b>	<b>11:56</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
<p><i>Fanny and Dominique barked, but this time it sounded more like canine screams interrupted with giggles and less like Jack London's heroic growls.</i></p>			

Olivier would play "kitsch" music:

<b>Olivier</b>	<b>Day 21</b>	<b>16:30</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
<p><i>Olivier played Carlos' Papayou from his computer and everyone laughed, listening to the festive tune. Fifteen minutes later he played Annie Cordie's Tata Yoyo, another tacky song. At 17:25 Carlos' Tout Nu et Tout Bronzé resonated.</i></p>			





Funny songs could put a joyful end to a routine day:

Olivier	Day 22	15:55	Creation room
<p><b>Olivier</b>, <i>announcing heartily</i>: In response to a general request...</p> <p>Tata Yoyo broke the silence. Stéphanie was working on the bench and she started swinging her hips. Holding a craft knife, she was soon dancing. At 16:04 the Papayou tune was in the air.</p>			

Sometimes they would participate in what could be called “g&athlon” –sports performances at work:

Gérald Sébastien Dominique Jean-Philippe Aurélie Stéphanie AD	Day 31	09:30	Corridor (outside the creation room)
<p><i>They were evaluating the distance they would make, were they to perform a long jump in the corridor.</i></p>			





Gérald Olivier Fanny Élizabeth	Day 31	16:04	Corridor
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*Gérald kicked the red football and it hit the window with a booming noise. The girls jumped with fright and shouted, but Gérald and Olivier were already talking about soccer in general and Thierry Henry's free kicks in particular.*

Olivier	Day 32	16:31	Corridor
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*Olivier did a couple of long jumps in the corridor.*

Gérald Stéphanie AD	Day 35	17:34	From corridor to creation room
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*Gérald passed the football to Stéphanie, who passed it back. They kept playing for a little while.*

Finally, not a day would pass by without regular giggles in the creation room. The creatives would tease each other and do faces and voices and throw pellets and talk movies. Every day, bursts of laughter would resonate as a response to a tomfoolery or to something mumbled (more on humour later in section 5.3).

#### 4.3.5. Conclusion: temporal strategies vs temporal anomie

In the end g&a-time provided an apparent rigidity through which stress and idleness, creation and non-creation were *reproduced at a reflexive level*. That is, g&a-time was both the means and the ends of a perpetual *performance*, the mirror in which the organisation gazed at itself and rationalised the otherwise impenetrable logics of its production. People reflected on their temporal sufferance to develop techniques, skills, savoir-faires that would bypass an aporetic notion of “time”. Together they designed g&a-time as artists sublimated their desires or torments –it was given the irrevocable and inalterable properties of clock time that advertising needed. Once hung up on the wall every Monday like a painting in a week-long exhibition, g&a-time had not only transformed the unpredictable productivity of duration into a predictable and timely production; it had also created the object of all criticisms, satisfactions and dissatisfactions.

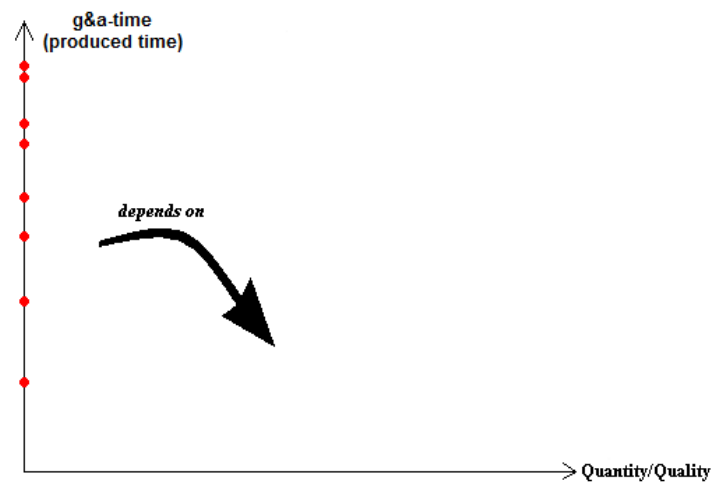
The schedule motivated the temporal strategies that negated social relativity –not without a sense of irony<sup>84</sup>! The creatives would notably harmonise or “fill the gaps” between time consciousness (duration) and g&a-time (opportunist construction), and between g&a-time and clock time (universal, Newtonian construction). In fetishising g&a-time and making it as absolute and inflexible as clock time, they could always justify that it was an inadequate referent for creative work (they were “too busy” or “too idle”). They made “time”, not their actions within time, responsible, thereby blurring the distinctions between work and non-work, production and non-production. Strategies allowed creatives to identify themselves as temporal experts rather than poor sufferers of temporal anomie. A great deal of identity construction thus occurred between temporal discourses (what people said about time) and temporal practices (what people did with their time). Creatives claimed that they were busy, but still spent a lot of time playing.

Therefore g&a-time legitimated most patterns of work and play, productivity and non-productivity, successes and failures. This meant that the representation of creative

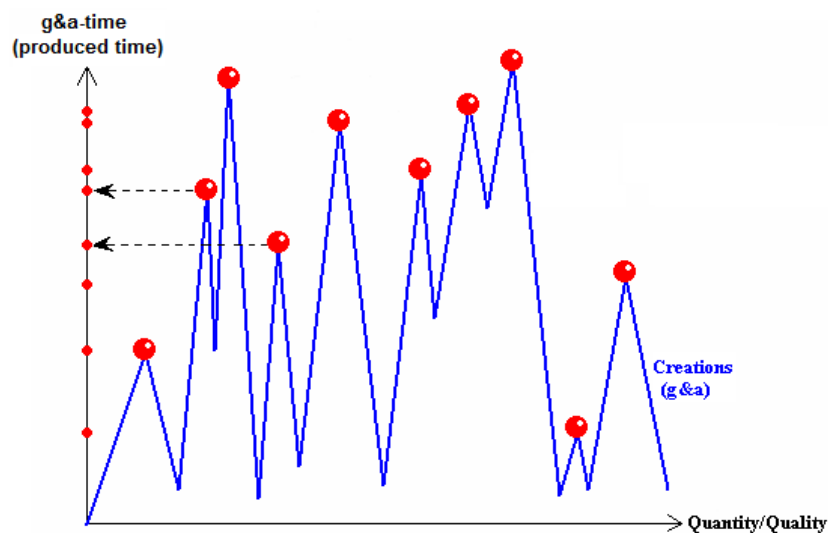
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<sup>84</sup> Given social relativity had conditioned the formation of g&a-time in the first place... See also “strategy of trivialisation” in chapter five.

work fluctuating through time (4.1.2) was less relevant than g&a-time as *a function of advertising work*.

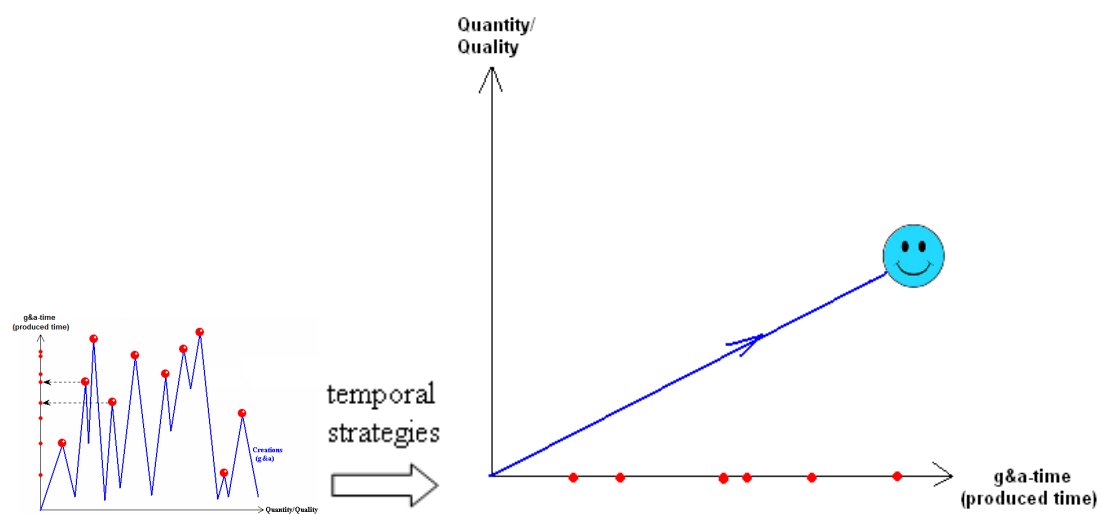


A *vertical* axis of time became more informative on a two-dimensional diagram (this is not atypical but in fact closer to space-time graphs in physics). This “time” was in other words the result of a construction negotiated between different actors. Clients imposed a final deadline and g&a produced a schedule containing creative “stages” that triggered other intermediary deadlines. Management used these deadlines to enhance g&a’s credibility with regard to clients (they knew what to do and when to do it); but also to frame creative work and make it exhaustive (the creatives had to be persuaded that time was “running out”). All these deadlines were the most “visible” aspects of g&a-time –a timetable for the plant park or boxes in the weekly planning for example. Deadlines are represented below by red balls producing time:



Meanwhile creatives reduced their anxieties and legitimised their (un)productivity by referring to g&a-time.

A *dynamic* concept of “strategy” was introduced to show that time did not “organise work”; rather work organised time<sup>85</sup>. Members of the agency performed either the role of masters of time (account executives in relation to clients) or that of victims of time (creatives in relation to account executives). In the end temporal strategies recreated a timeline in the agency; and with it a more predictable production. Strategies spatialised g&a-time on the x-axis:



The second graph gives the impression that the quantity and quality of creations depend on time, as if was actually the case; but having underlined the “constructed” character of the x-axis, the linear function was no longer “intuitive” (4.1.4) or “realistic” but “strategic” –it was explained by the first graph. This is how the predictable force of the arrow of time was re-established to rationalise successes and failures... a week would be dedicated to campaign X, an accurate schedule was provided to clients, a competition was lost for lack of time or, on the contrary, time had been wasted. It all depended on the circumstances that would benefit g&a. Since time was produced, it could be manipulated in an *opportunistic* manner. Eternal guilty, it forever carried the can.

<sup>85</sup> Garfinkel (2002) uses a metronome in a tutorial to show his students that practice makes time, not the contrary. To “clap in time” with the metronome, it is necessary to organise the clapping in a way that covers the sound of the metronome. Time is made *by and in the clapping* (Rawls 2008; Laurier 2008).

#### 4.3.5.1 Strategic constructions

This strategic use of time tied up with the Mayan resolution of temporal phenomena according to Farris (1995). The Mayas developed opportunist constructions of time where “cyclical” and “linear” patterns coexisted. The cyclical shape was part of the predictable cosmic order and the Mayas saw chaos and “evil” in deviations from this order. However the cyclical shape could not be taken for granted. People were aware of the accidental, unpredictable nature of human events over the short term –drought, illnesses, invasions, etc. came without warning. Confronted with chaos the Mayas imposed a reassuring predictability by subsuming these “accidental diachronies” into the longer-term cyclical pattern of cosmic time. Indeed, as long as the cyclical pattern was large enough, it could incorporate a long-term linear progression. Events only *appeared* accidental from the limited perspective of human time. Among ruling families, the twenty-year *katun* period regulated succession. And thus for Farris (1995: 118)

the cyclical pattern of cosmic time could provide a general model for the Maya system along with its sanctioning force –the How and the Why of political power. What it did not provide was the Who –which particular person or persons should wield power at any given moment. This purpose was served by the linear record of historical time with its emphasis on the issue of succession. A rotation system of transferring power would thus explain why careful genealogies and linear chronologies might be important over the short term but not over the long term when linear sequences were subordinated to the repetitions of the *katun* round in practice as well as in theory.

The cyclical pattern should not be reversed or changed, for that would disrupt order and court disaster. So the Mayas had a crucial role to play in the cyclical drama through their calendars, related rituals and even wars. They helped the gods “carry the burden of the days, the years, and the *katuns* and thereby (...) keep time and the cosmos in orderly motion” (*Ibid*, p. 130).

Adam’s (1990: 136) conclusion on the concept of time in remote civilisations is not too different. With reference to Critchlow’s study of megalithic temples she concludes that cyclical time was *chosen* as “a tactic to unify the one with the whole” and make time “stand still”; it was “a *creative* act rather than the inescapable condition of existence of a “primitive” people bound by the seasonal cycle and an eternal present”.

By the same token g&a sought to maintain an “order”, but that of linear time. On linear time depended the long-term improvement and predictability of production, as opposed to the vicious circle of failures in the short term. Deadlines fulfilled the role of the *katuns*, except that they constructed time as an arrow rather than a circle. In a capitalist era people did not seek to preserve the cyclical order of the cosmos, but the direction of the arrow toward profit and accumulation. Finally such manipulations had repercussions on the way work was experienced and conducted –chapter five further elaborates on how g&a-time *reciprocally* impinged on advertising practice.

#### 4.3.5.2 *Using time to consolidate faith and using faith to consolidate time*

The chapter can now conclude that “temporal strategies” of rationalisation (strategies rationalising advertising practice) were always already strategies of “temporal rationalisation” (strategies rationalising time). Understanding temporal construction at g&a through “anomie” is therefore about identifying the *pathological* effects of time that deteriorate working conditions (4.2), as well as the *therapeutic* effects of time that re-establish adequate working conditions (4.3). So there is a certain “circularity” in all constructions of time that inspires stories about its *nature*. A beautiful myth of creative destruction, or construction through destruction<sup>86</sup>, Kronos engenders ceaselessly the children that he devours; for Samuel Beckett time is the double-headed monster of salvation and damnation (Gale 1967: 374). By the same token, in Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* time is both a hero and a villain<sup>87</sup> –people’s obsession with time entail their downfall, but the “laws of time” help effect a cure (Turner 1971: 153). Leontes has been mourning his wife Hermione for sixteen years but she only pretended to be dead. When he sees a statue of Hermione kept by a lady of her court, he exclaims as she apparently comes to life (in fact she is the real Hermione):

*O, she’s warm!*  
*If this be magic, let it be an art*  
*Lawful as eating.*

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<sup>86</sup> Lévi Strauss (1964) argued that myths are “machines for the suppression of time”. Historical rites recreate the past, and this past becomes the present.

<sup>87</sup> Shakespeare (2001: 35) writes elsewhere that “Time’s the King of men; He’s both their parent, and he is their grave”.

In this last scene of the “statue” Shakespeare is as usual fascinated by “appearances”, by the problem of perception and reality (e.g. the Ghost in *Hamlet*). For Turner (1971: 170-1) this passage shows that “the timeless has become something friendly, something familiar (...) The human and the divine worlds are reconciled”. This reconciliation echoes both the Mayan articulation of difference logics above (the human “linearity” and the godly “circularity”) and the temporal imagination of a contemporary organisation (a schedule for clients, an internal planning for g&a). It therefore highlights the theist dimension of temporal construction. As Turner continues (*Ibid.*):

The true sight which Leontes has gained is perhaps the capacity to see that which is timeless in the flux of time (...) A person can grow, and contradict the law of time that rules that all things must decay; and the actions of a person cannot be explained only by the temporal laws of cause and effect. Again, to see human beings not only with the eye of reason, but also with the eye of faith, is to use a faculty which is in some respects beyond the touch of time. (...) Faith can endure blows that would shatter a concept based merely on reason.

It is towards this “faith” that the next chapter goes, in its attempt to understand temporal construction through wastes of time in the advertising agency.

# Chapter Five

## *Understanding temporal construction through “waste”*

Following the suggestions of chapter two and three, chapter four has connected the instability of creative identities to an anxious process through which advertising people are actively engaged in a set of discourses and practices that construct g&a-time (strategies of rationalisation). Chapter five is itself an expansion of chapter four, as explained in an introductory section (5.1). The three other sections outline the important role that wastes of time play in temporal anomie and temporal construction at g&a. Section 5.2 describes how my informants and I felt as though we were wasting our time (5.2.1, 5.2.2), often because of clients (5.2.3). Section 5.3 understands temporal anomie as the outcome of a historical rationalisation of time that led to negative perceptions of waste in society, and as a result *ironic reconstructions* of time such as g&a-time. Finally section 5.4 looks at strategic uses of this waste in the same way as subsections 4.2.4 and 4.2.5 unearthed rationalising uses of social relativity.

### **5.1 From anomie to wastes of time**

This short introductory section draws on the argument of chapter two to articulate chapter four and chapter five. Construed in the light of rationalisation, portraits and self-portraits of cultural intermediaries in the literature review are far too “real” to be read through “myths”. So when a key figure of the advertising business regards creative people as “insecure, egotistical, stubborn, rebellious, poor timekeeping perfectionists who seek fame” (Fletcher, cited in Negus and Pickering 2004: 46), his representation *makes sense* –described here are the *uncertainties* inherent to the occupation (“insecure”), which provoke identity crises as experienced during adolescence (“egotistical”, “rebellious”) and motivates the fabrication of *certainities*



(“stubborn”). Furthermore, the mention of time in this quote does refer back to the issues tackled in chapter four. The last sketch of “poor timekeeping perfectionists” reveals the irregularities of creative production (arrhythmy), due to the fact that its value does not necessarily increase with time. For Caplin (1959: 105)

[t]he cost to the advertising agency of the work which it does for each client is determined largely by the time which it has taken the account executives, visualisers, artists, copywriters, and others, to produce that work: and it is difficult to assess in advance how long that work is going to take.

Bartle Bogle Hegarty’s (1996: 10) *Business Practice* is very much concerned with this atypical relationship that advertising work entertains with time, which makes it difficult if not impossible to *evaluate*:

How long does it take a creative team to think of an idea that may fundamentally change the fortunes of a brand? Five hours? Five weeks? Sadly, ideas do not materialise on command. Is that idea, which may endure for decades, worth only the hours it took to develop? (...) The fact that one agency may cost more or less than another does not, of itself, make a statement about which offers better value (Quoted in Nixon 2002: 144).

And ultimately –how should this “better value” be recognised before the campaign is launched? Advertising people can neither escape nor predict nor identify these unproductive periods of time during which they are working “for nothing”. Hence they often dread “wasting” their time. Miller (1997: 166) once heard a creative whisper “I wish we had known that this is what they wanted before, from the very start, because we wouldn’t have wasted all this time at all”. In his own “reflections on fieldwork”, Mazzarella repeats this sentence *verbatim*, supposedly from one of his informants (Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran 2003: 79). Incredible coincidence of people in Bombay and in Trinidad expressing exactly the same idea, in the same words –and why not at the same time? Or rather plagiarised anecdote in an effort to strengthen the veracity of fieldwork –no one will be any the wiser? An echo, in any case, that substantiates the preponderance of wastes of time in advertising agencies.

### 5.1.1 Rationalising wastes of time

Yet such judgements on poor time management and unproductive time do not illuminate *how* people waste their time and *how* they deal with such wastes. With notable exceptions (e.g. Sullivan 1998) insider accounts report arrhythmic phenomena (“five hours? five weeks?”) without dwelling on them; as to outsider accounts, they follow the path of “mythicisation” and conclude rather than understand, quote rather than analyse –thus Miller and Mazzaella note that creatives have wasted their time but fail to describe what they did and how they felt when they wasted it. It is however possible to move away from a reading of practice that views temporal uncertainties as a mere reflection of “advertising *culture*” (e.g. creatives are never punctual “because” it is in the culture of advertising not to be). The idea of rationalisation stipulates that practitioners cannot accept phenomena as unexplained if they are to feel in harmony with what they do. To incomprehension they elaborate solutions, to anxieties remedies. Both uncertainties and remedies can be *explained* as consistently (failing simplicity perhaps) as water drinking is explained by the demands of subsistence. It is in this line of thinking that chapter four discovered strategies emerging from time-related uncertainties. And it is with this orientation that the thesis goes on to analyse the relationship practitioners entertain with time, beyond the observation that this relationship is reprehensible (“poor timekeeping perfectionists”) or unsettling (“we wouldn’t have wasted all this time at all”). The rhythmanalysis of g&a continues in the next section with more specific anomic feelings –that of “wastes” of time.

## 5.2. Wasting time

This section focuses on impressions of wasting time in the advertising agency (5.2.1, 5.2.2) and situates these wastes in the relations g&a entertained with its clients (5.2.3). It then links wastes back to the *uncertainties* already discussed in chapters two and four, thereby outlining the disturbing contradictions of the day-to-day business of advertising (5.2.4).

### 5.2.1. Outsider perceptions

Section 4.3.2 implicitly states that much time in advertising agencies is wasted. If these wastes dominated *my* own perception of time at g&a, my *informants* also used to complain about them (section 5.1.3). I shall begin with my own, long-lasting impressions imbuing most of my fieldnotes. I would often write about frivolous things being done very seriously in my diary. What I found strange as an outsider was the amount of time practitioners would dedicate to activities that seemed “unimportant” according to my preconceptions of advertising work. For example the creatives busied themselves reworking, by and large, graphical and typological tiny *details*... and tiny details of some details of details. To my surprise the content of an ad, its underlying idea, would often be quickly found. The rest of the work, however, would take much more time. It was done at the margins, so to speak, and form always seemed to prevail over content (e.g. the artistic quality of a visual would prevail over what it could mean). Very soon satisfied about their idea, copywriters like ADs were interested in the quality of the signifier, not the signified; in how “good” the advertisement looked.

The work of art directors would disconcert me:

Stéphanie AD Aurélie	Day 23	15:32-16:39	Creation room
<p><i>They were both sitting at Stéphanie's desk and looking at her 17-inch Macintosh screen. Stéphanie was clicking on different parts of the screen and drawing dotted lines and squares to select areas of focus. For a little more than an hour, they discussed what “model” to place in an ad for an optician client (Opticiens Mutualistes). They hesitated between a 42 year-old green-eyed woman and a 35 year-old blue-eyed woman. They also knew they wanted an orange background for this visual, but still had to choose among different hues.</i></p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> You see, she could be quite cool, but she's gonna be hard work...</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> Definitely, I quite like her hairstyle though...</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Well I was thinking of her skin... (<i>She points at the woman's chin</i>) You've got nasty pixels there...</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> Prepare for extermination! (<i>She laughs</i>)</p> <p><i>When they eventually decided about which woman to use, digital retouching began. Spots were removed, wrinkles lifted and a bit of make-up “perfected” –now her features looked as unreal as the picture of a magazine cover. They spent the rest of the afternoon working on the same ad.</i></p>			

Spending an hour on this task already would have bored me. But if my past experience of production line work equally bored me in the past, at least I felt I was productive, I was doing something useful in the factory. And I did not question the value I was producing as much as I did in the agency. Here I could not help thinking that Stéphanie and Aurélie were merely wasting their time –was the client going to notice and appreciate the change, in the single-colour background, from light to dark orange? Why would one be happier with a 42 year-old green-eyed woman rather than a 35 year-old blue-eyed woman? Unless the ADs designed the advertisement conjointly with the client, step by step, this was impossible to know. But never mind, Stéphanie and Aurélie would spend their afternoon doing some coloured drawing and face lifting. This activity reminded me of the things we all do for want of anything better to do. I could see myself making a celebrity on a magazine cover look grotesque, adding with a cheap ink pen scars and vampire teeth and devilish eyes and eyebrows and a ridiculous pipe between the lips. I could hear my uncle calling this the supreme graffiti offense. But what else to do with fake beauty? Even beauty showed itself only to be soiled. Beigbeder (2004: 148) goes further in questioning the value of advertising design, caustically recalling this anecdote:

When advertisers struggle to sell, or with no reason, just to justify their indecent wage, they order a CHANGE OF PACKAGING. They pay a lot for companies to give a new look to their products. They have hours of meetings. One day I was at Kraft Jacobs Suchard in the office of a guy with crew cut hair, Antoine Poudard. (...) He was showing me the different logos that had been put forward. He wanted my opinion. He wouldn't stay still and was gloating about, on the verge of orgasm; he felt useful and important. He was spreading out projects of packaging on the floor (...) I looked him straight in the eye and at this moment I felt that he was doubting, that for the first time in his life he was wondering what the hell he was doing here, and I told him to choose one at random, and he picked up the definitive logo (...), and today this packaging is on the shelves of every supermarket in Europe...

I had exactly the same feeling with the work of ADs. Had Stéphanie and Aurélie picked up a model randomly and made her up in five minutes, they might have reached the very same result they got in a couple of hours. Even the design of a logo did not really matter (e.g. had Coca-Cola's logo been white and green, everyone would probably still be drinking it). Would the appearance of a woman on a regional leaflet matter?

### *“Winning accompaniment” or “THE winning accompaniment”?*

The work of copywriters was no less disconcerting. They spent their time wondering whether “often” should be replaced by “frequently”, whether a line should appear in italics and so forth:

Laurence Gérald James Fabio	Day 45	17:45	Submarine
<p><i>A brief for the IPO client. Looking at his own pencilled scrap jotted down on a sheet on the coffee-table, Gérald looked puzzled: should it be “winning accompaniment” or “THE winning accompaniment”? Sitting around him, Laurence, James and Fabio hesitated, now mumbling something, now its contrary.</i></p> <p><b>Laurence:</b> I’m not too sure...</p> <p><b>Gérald,</b> <i>tapping his pencil on the table:</i> Yeah.... neither am I.</p> <p><b>James:</b> I’d go for “the winning accompaniment”... or... no, forget it, “winning accompaniment” should do.</p> <p><b>Laurence:</b> But what about “<i>the</i> winning accompaniment”, it might as well do...</p> <p><b>Gérald:</b> Are you saying “<i>the</i>” winning accompaniment Laurence?</p> <p><b>Laurence:</b> That’s not what I’m saying... Well, that’s what I’m saying.</p>			

To use or not to use the definite article? That was the question at the centre of Laurence’s brief. So this seemed true: “only in advertising could people fight for a comma” (Beigbeder 2004: 68). Although to be fair, this insider view perhaps ignored what happened in academia. But at least it was very relevant in this advertising agency. More than once I would lose my composure and think: “what is this chat for?” or “who cares?” For what an awful amount of time it took! What an awful number of people it involved!

Account managers and creatives would have short informal meetings on a regular basis to discuss work in progress. In general, internal evaluation of an ad consisted in checking whether words were consistent with images and vice-versa. That is, they evaluated how well the visual(s) and the typographic message responded to each other.

Jean-Philippe Gérald James	Day 54	11:55-12:20	Creation room
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*Standing in front of Aurélie's computer, they were looking at the project of a poster for "Syndicate of the Sea" ["Comptoir de la Mer"], a client selling fishing garments. The ad showed the face of a male model walking on the shore and obviously wearing "Syndicate of the Sea" clothes. The greyish sky looked as depressing as the man's jumper. Judging by his fluttering hair the photograph was taken on a windy day, or perhaps the fleeting fisherman had had to face an electric fan for the occasion. At the bottom a white slogan, "seafarer". In the left-hand corner, a blue and white logo.*

*To evaluate the impact of different versions, James cut "seafarer" and pasted "sea spirit":*

**Gérald:** I think this one gives it a bit of freshness... I'd say it's probably easier in a "quick reading" perspective...

**Jean-Philippe:** You think so? What else did we have?

*James cuts "sea spirit" and paste "in all weathers"*

**Jean-Philippe:** In all weathers...

*There is a pause. They contemplate the possibility in silence.*

**Jean-Philippe:** Could do too...

**Gérald, to James:** Can we go back to the previous one, just to...?

**James:** This one is shorter, think of it in terms of impact... *He cuts "in all weathers" and pastes "sea spirit".*

**Jean-Philippe:** The logo on the left pisses me off though... it ruins the atmosphere.

As Gérald told me one day, the connection between the visual and the written message had to be "obvious". He thus made the strange assumption that meanings were stable and that slogans and visuals were never put together to reach a contradiction or some rhetorical effect. Even within g&a, this was not true; but to my eyes the main oddity was elsewhere...

### *"You can justify them"*

Before my experience in the agency, I believed that most advertising work was done on "conceptualisation" –the general idea or story behind a campaign, the overall design of a poster, etc. I believed this "framework" would inspire much debate. But it seldom did at g&a. Instead, account managers and creatives debated around the details of a given framework. They tried to improve the advertisement in spite of the

notion that “quality”, ultimately, only lay in the eyes of the beholder-client. But was this client going to notice, let alone appreciate a syntactic change on which copywriters had debated for half an hour? This last scene illustrates again work at the margins, or the substance of creative work at g&a:

Patrick Gérald Sébastien James Fabio	Day 42	18:20-18:46	Creation room
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Shortly after a brief on Avis Estate in the morning, Gérald got his idea and explained what he wanted to AD Fabio. Fabio worked on it in the afternoon, and produced two versions of the same idea. Patrick and others gathered around Fabio’s computer and discussed the version that should be adopted:



**Patrick:** They both have their internal coherence, they’re both acceptable...

**James:** Now it’s a question of feeling...

**Fabio:** A feeling, isn’t it...

**François,** to Fabio: What’s your intuition on that one?

**Fabio:** As Patrick says, as Patrick says... you can justify them.

Again, I had trouble understanding why a discussion on graphics could be important when they did not have feedback from the client yet. I had largely underestimated the time practitioners would spend on just materialising on screen an idea that was agreed upon. Once creatives had put their faith into a framework, it was difficult to move away from it. As chapter two suggested, creative work was very much led by intuitions (“it’s a question of feeling”) and faith.

### 5.2.2. Insider perceptions

Now were my feelings of wastes of time due to my outsider stance? Both the practice-based literature and my work and observations in Nantes would indicate that advertising professionals felt the same way. Until recently insider accounts have described, by and large, an extremely hard-working environment in which “gifted” people devote themselves to a fulfilling but demanding profession. Recognition and rewards come after quasi-inhuman effort and sacrifices (e.g. Caplin 1959; Ogilvy 1963; 1983; Butterfield 1997; Bullmore 1998). In these circumstances clock time is “irrelevant” because

the advertising man is paid for his production, not his time, and the industry expects every man to do his duty whether he is in the office or eating lunch, on the commuter train or in the bosom of his family. (...) At the agencies, especially, the hours are long to the point of brutishness. Clock watching (...) is a cardinal sin, a violation of the standard sales brag that the agency’s people work harder and longer than anybody in the client organization, to serve the client’s interests (Mayer 1958: 23).

In 1958, should this experience be trusted, advertising people did not watch their clocks, meaning that they spent a staggering amount of time “working”. However, more recent accounts of practice (e.g. Hart *et al.* 1995; Nixon 2003; Sullivan 1998) are in stark contrast with this description of the businessman pouring with labour sweat. They still introduce a notion of “timelessness” but, because they *detail* what this working is all about (notably the “creative” type of work), timelessness is of a completely different kind. These accounts substitute temporal *excesses* to temporal scarcities, temporal *waste* to temporal frenzy.

Unfortunately, most descriptions of wastes of time remain succinct in these accounts. Wastes are either hinted at (rather than explicit in the text) or taken for granted. When Hart *et al.* (1995: 99-100) describe the “creative process” for instance, they claim that “very little” happens after the creative team has received a brief. The creatives “spend days staring out of the window” and occasionally “a few cursory scribbles are made”. Much less frequent and much more telling is the kind of introspective writing that elaborates on these uses of time and communicates temporal feelings to us readers. I see one of these exceptions in the confessions of Luke Sullivan (1998). Sullivan is an



award-winning copywriter at Fallon McElligott who writes about his twenty-year experience in the business. Right from the beginning of his book, he devotes more space to phases of work when his colleague and him are *not* producing anything, when they are *not* creative, than when they are. His account emphasises the routine of a creative process which is worth quoting at length (inasmuch as routine itself is only conceivable in its length):

In fact, if the truth be known, you will spend fully one-fourth of your career with your feet up talking about movies. The ad is due in two days. The media space has been bought and paid for. The pressure's building. And your muse is sleeping off a drunk behind a dumpster somewhere. Your pen lies useless. So you talk movies. (...) [W]orking, in this business, means staring at your partner's shoes. That's what I've been doing from 9 to 5 for almost 20 years. (...) This is the sum and substance of life at an agency. In movies, they almost never capture this simple, dull, workaday reality of life as a creative person. (...) Hollywood's agencies are always "nutty, kooky" sorts of places where odd things are nailed to or stuck on the walls, where weirdly dressed creative people lurch through the hallways metabolizing last night's chemicals, and the occasional goat wanders through in the background. But that isn't what agencies are like. At least not the four or five agencies where I've worked. (...) For me, writing an ad is unnerving. You sit down with your partner and put your feet up. You read the account executive's strategy, draw a square on a pad of paper and you both stare at the damned thing. You stare at each other's shoes. You look at the square. You give up and go to lunch. You come back. The empty square is still there. So you both go through the product brochures and information folders the account team left in your office. (...) You feel the glimmer of an idea move through you. You poise your pencil over the page. And it all comes out in a flash of creativity. (...) You put your pencil down, smile, and read what you've written. It's complete rubbish. You call it a day and slink out to see a movie. This process continues for several days, even weeks, and then without warning an idea just shows up at your door one day, all nat-tied up like a Jehovah's Witness. You don't know where it comes from. It just shows up. That's how you make ads. Sorry, there's no big secret (Sullivan 1998: 16-20).

This passage reads like advertising prose. Short sentences and colloquial words evoke the spoken language that copywriters tinge with an allegedly "natural" propensity for punch lines ("and it all comes out in a flash of creativity"). But this writing style also reinforces the triteness, in everyday creative work, of a time unproductively spent ("working, in this business, means staring at your partner's shoes"). Most of the time devoted to copywriting may even seem pointless insofar as its outcome is almost external to the process, appearing by accident ("it just shows up"). A few minutes or a few weeks of "thinking" ("this process continues for several days, even weeks") may well result in the very same idea. Such wastes of time are not limited to the copywriting activity. For Sullivan (1998: 177) a considerable number of meetings is

organised not because it is necessary, but because “somebody needed something to do”. These meetings

aren’t called because decisions need to be made. They’re just called. And oh how they go on. I was in one of these Hour Gobblers once and I swear time actually stopped. I’m not kidding. Swear to God, as plain as day, the second hand on the wall clock just *stopped*. No more ticktock. Just... tick... and that was it. It was a particularly useless meeting three hours long.

Here timelessness has nothing to do with that of the earlier “advertising man” who disregarded clock time because he would always run out of it. Instead temporal anomie is explicitly described as an “out of time” experience (“I swear time actually stopped”). That is, the discrepancy between time consciousness and clock time is large enough for the copywriter to begin *rationalising* his boredom and wondering why he has been here for *as long as* three hours (“it was a particularly useless meeting three hours long”). What is similarly noteworthy in Arlen’s (1980) *Thirty Seconds* is the huge amount of time it takes to produce a thirty-second advertisement. The book recounts the tiny details that the media company and filming crew take into account when shooting a scene. It takes forever and everyone gets tired, nervous, and bored to death.

### *“I’ve worked for nothing”*

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At g&a such negative feelings were shared at both managerial and creative levels. For Aurélie the constraints imposed by clients, or even learning about the agency’s poor performances, were not as annoying as realising she had wasted her time on a task which had become useless:

Aurélie The rest of the clan (interview excerpt)	Day 52	15: 12	Creation room
<p><b>François:</b> (...) This is not gonna be a funny question Aurélie, but I ask you anyway... What’s worse –not being able to create what you want because of the graphic theme<sup>88</sup> or having worked for nothing when a competition is lost?</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> No, what’s worse, is that we’re doing stuff, and then you’re told “sorry, in the end it’s not gonna be this way, it’s gonna be that way” and I need to do it all over again, I’ve worked for nothing.</p>			

<sup>88</sup> Visual constraints (colour theme, logo, must-be elements, etc.) imposed by clients, from which g&a should not deviate.

A competition, well, but I mean when I'm told something and then the brief changes...

**François:** So constant modifications that, er...

**Aurélie:** Yeah.

ADs had to adapt to changes and were sometimes compelled to go back to square one (chapter two speaks of the “snakes and ladders” of the business). Obviously such changes were triggered by the clients, not the agency. The clients had to be the principal and dreaded “timewasters”.

### **5.2.3. Timewasters**

The figure of the timewaster was quite faithfully embodied in the “plant park” clients. g&a had been given three months to find a name. As much as three months? At first astounded, I was to understand why everyone regarded the deadline as “tight”, why it was in fact as *little* as three months. When the clients arrived shortly before 11am, Alban introduced me to them as a “very special trainee” researching on advertising. He was in fact using me as a fake expert in order to enhance the credibility of his team at this initial, crucial instant; for this was the first and the last meeting I would have the privilege to attend. Profuse in “welcome”, “thanks”, “certainly”, “after you”, “this is a fascinating project” and the remaining range of civilised courtesies one could think of, the morning discussion did not really progress towards anything significant. It was already time for lunch. I joined Alban, Stéphanie, Fanny, and their clients Nicolas and Xavier for a business meal (my last, but not least business meal in Nantes). We walked together from the agency to a posh restaurant nearby. Alban ordered, and could we have this, and could with have that, thank you very much. The food was soon on the table, enjoy your meal, thank you very much, this looks delicious. Alban then explained how worried he was about the very large scope covered by the “theme” of this theme park. And suddenly as I was sitting there enjoying a tasty sole meunière and a nice little Alsace wine, Nicolas said in a domineering tone...

Alban Stéphanie Fanny Nicolas Xavier	Day 3	13: 18	Restaurant
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Nicolas: The client doesn't care about the theme! What he wants, remember, is people visiting his park.

At this point I did think that he was out of his mind. He had just stereotyped himself as a businessman for whom money is everything and people nothing but inputs producing it. But beyond this unflattering self-portrait, his words epitomised the responsibility of a client in leading to unproductive conversations. Nicolas *had to* care about the theme, which was the reason why people would visit or ignore the park.

### *"We'd like to hear a beautiful story"*

The afternoon meeting did nothing but confirm my impression that if the agency as a whole suffered, it was because clients were talented timewasters:

Alban Stéphanie Fanny (PR) Nicolas Xavier	Day 3	14: 00- 18: 20	Meeting room
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*Back to the same room at g&a, where the meeting continued.*

**Alban, confidently:** So, it's necessary to bring elements that are exterior to the park, but have to do with plants. It is this package we must communicate, we do agree with that (...) What I suggest we do now is read through the document we gave you, from "strategic recommendations" on page 5...

*Alban starts reading.*

**Nicolas:** Before you go further, I must be honest with you: I hate the word "federate". You need to distinguish where we are "present" from where we are "leaders"... So making alliances with the county council is fine, but it's toward the park *itself* that we must channel our efforts. (...) I don't really like "Anjou: Chlorophyll energy!"... I'm not comfortable with this...

**Alban:** Let me clarify this, this is not a slogan, but...

**Nicolas:** Well, even so, I just don't like it. (...) We had the idea of a "green trail" too; but once again, its identity must be created.

*Reading goes on to page 5: positioning.*

**Nicolas:** The plant park is a place where you're having fun, it's not a "stroll". I'd like you to reinforce

the “theme park” side, you know, as it is your promise is far too “contemplative”. Make it more entertaining, more playful... remember –recreation, fun, this is what the park is all about. In the same way, the term “domain” is too static. We need the idea of a journey, and odyssey, yeah I like “odyssey”, and adventure, something like that. I like the word “conquest” for example, because it’s attractive in its very aggressiveness. (...) just forget about “interactive” too. It means everything and nothing at the same time. (...) I’m not too sure about “encounter” either...

*What follows is a lengthy and animated debate on the words “encounter” and “stroll”.*

**Nicolas:** We’d like to hear, first and foremost, a *beautiful story*. Even before we know it’s realisable. Creators of theme parks were strip cartoonists who didn’t care whether it was feasible or not.

(...)

**Alban:** It’s a *political* project in the noble sense of the term. (...) During lunch you said you had found 100 names to be avoided, but perhaps you shouldn’t give us the list. It might impinge on the enthusiasm of our creative teams.

(...)

**Fanny:** Patronage is very risky and we should be careful. It might work if and only if we find the right person, someone who really wants to carry the project.

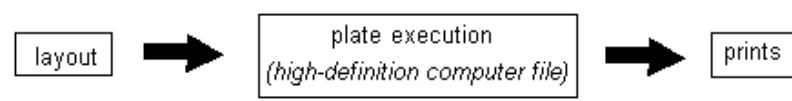
**Alban:** Yes, I’m hesitating. A celebrity does bring up something, but also suck the lifeblood out of this something. Our agency will have a session to discuss this topic and we will give you a much more informed opinion.

**Nicolas:** He or she should be a local star.

**Stéphanie:** Or a national star, if we’re lucky...

(...)

*At the end of the meeting Alban explains to Nicolas and Xavier how an advertisement is created:*



*Followed a discussion about the projected website and presentation of a three-minute video clip to local councillors. Immediately after that, the two parties engaged in a heated discussion that tried to solve financial misunderstandings. The clients demanded more transparent fees, terms and conditions. The climate grew bitterer as the talk lingered on remuneration details, but eventually subsided. The next meeting (that I would not attend) was planned for the 18<sup>th</sup> October. g&a should have modified the brand platform by then.*

Since Nicolas wanted to hear “a beautiful story”, he made his position of “believer” very explicit. Enchantment and hypnosis only work if the individual has a positive attitude towards them. He wanted to be amazed, like the villager is by the griot. g&a was to sell Nicolas and Xavier a dream, a timeless “once upon the time” tale in which everything could be true, everything could be possible (“creators of theme parks were strip cartoonists who didn’t care whether it was feasible or not”). But if he knew what

he did *not* want, Nicolas did not appear to know much about what he *did* want (“I’m not comfortable with this... I just don’t like it”). By and large, his input was that of the child listening to a bedtime story and reacting to nasty ogres (“I hate the word “federate””) or good fairies (“yeah I like ‘odyssey’”). But he was not very useful when it came to story-*making* after all (“once again, its identity must be created”). Because the park did not exist *yet*, g&a was as limited as medicine in improving the condition of an *unborn* baby. So I sensed that the agency could only administer a placebo to which these clients reacted –not useful in substance, the drug (the plant park booklet) still worked due to the positive attitude of the patient toward it.

In sum both parties seemed to engage in a role playing game (RPG) whose “gamemaster” (GM), in the official setting of a meeting, was not the client but the advertising agency. This particular RPG aimed at imagining as vivid a magic kingdom of plants as possible. The theme park was “fictional” enough at this stage for the gamers (the clients) to seek inspiration from the GM (g&a) whilst being recalcitrant, whilst changing the rules (“make it more entertaining, more playful...”). The GM’s improvisations, coupled with the gamers’ objections, created a strange situation in which the two parties had “too much freedom” in the making of the story. So they alternatively *constrained* each other –one would listen and the other advise; one would obey and the other innovate; one would hold back and the other dictate. Thus Alban sometimes stimulated the clients’ participation (“it is this package that we must communicate, we do agree with that?”); or he would on the contrary encourage their passivity (“during lunch you said you had found 100 names to be avoided, but perhaps you shouldn’t give us the list”). This is how they designed together a perimeter that would *contain* this park –they imagined the rules that would restrain their imagination, the boundaries that would restrict their boundless freedom.



*The park's enclosure according to its designers*

So in its design of the park's enclosure, this first meeting highlighted the master-slave dialectic of the advertising business.

*“At some point you work with the client don't you?”*

Finally a good RPG was likely to be fun, but even more likely to be a fantastic waste of time. Stéphanie, Alban and Fanny would confess shortly after the meeting that they had wasted their time. This kind of lengthy discussion was doomed to stagnate insofar as the rough capacities of language in creating common representations (e.g. Nicolas' mental image of an “odyssey” might not match other people's idea of an odyssey) meant that the description would never be vivid enough, that the “war on words” would never cease. And did war not embody wastefulness and pointlessness by definition? Now at least, the idea that the three-month deadline was “tight” made more sense. Only when one was willing to spend an eternity arguing on what words really mean could three months seem like a busy schedule. In official or direct interaction such as the above meeting, the agency would of course perform its function of GM; but my observations of daily life in the agency pointed toward a very different kind of reality. Despite its role of inspirer, expert or “master” in communication, g&a was in “nonofficial” circumstances *enslaved* to clients. The

agency's duties were closer to that of a powerless vassal owing allegiance to the suzerain-client.

Work around the plant park account showed the extent to which the clients “took g&a for a ride”. Staying on the sidelines, they drove Stéphanie mad:

Stéphanie	Day 35	10:05	Submarine
<b>Stéphanie</b> , <i>between irritation and desperation, to François:</i> (...) I talked to Nicolas M... over the phone yesterday evening: no comment about the names he might keep, nothing... he was like “we’re not that enthusiastic about what you’ve found, but well, we’ve chosen ten names, er, keep searching...” But we keep searching on what basis for God’s sake? I mean at some point you work with the client don’t you? You can’t be on your own...			

This episode showed how g&a’s activity depended *entirely* on regular feedback from clients. Unfortunately, when the “plant park” clients at last decided to voice their opinion, they would often put forward nonsensical requirements:

Sébastien	Day 15	10:45	Submarine
<i>Alban, Stéphanie and Sébastien presented the “revised” brand platform to clients the day before. I did not attend the meeting but as Sébastien recounted, the clients found the words ‘exotic’ and ‘relaxing’ “too negative”. I thought this was odd, and had Sébastien not elaborated on the client perspective I would have not understood it. In French the privative prefix in “exotic” [dépayçant] and the radical in “relaxing” [déstressant] made the words sound “negative” to clients. As a result, g&amp;a was told to forget about them.</i>			

I could not believe these clients were illiterate or superstitious enough to see negative connotations in “exotic” and “relaxing”. They were truly unbelievable timewasters. But obviously Stéphanie and Sébastien had to embrace the decision, and would accept other insanities as gospel truths leading the project.

### *“She’s kind of fucked up anyway”*

The agency’s subservience to a debilitating environment structured everyday practice. g&a articulated the diverging opinions of different stakeholders involved in the project:

Stéphanie	Day 35	10:29	Jean-Phi’s office
<i>As I was wandering along the corridor Stéphanie invited me in.</i>			



**Stéphanie:** (...) I spoke to Françoise L. on the phone, she's working on the contents of the park. So, what's she told me? But well, we should stand back from all this sometimes, because er...

(...)

**Stéphanie, reading her notes:** So she's saying, "encounter", encounter if exchange, the visitor must be, um, he's a link in the chain of the living, putting oneself in the plant's place, in short her "plant attitude" story.

**François:** Yes...

**Stéphanie:** Er... So she'd be happy with "Plant Planet in Anjou" for example.

(...)

**François:** Yeah... But we're not gonna call a park "Plant Planet in Anjou"?

**Stéphanie:** Hell no... That's why I told her at some point, "hold on a second Françoise, you're saying interesting things, on which we might get things going, but this is *our* job"... When she says "I'd be happy if the park was called "saga of plants and people"" for example (*she shakes her head in irony*)!

**François:** She said so?

**Stéphanie:** Yes. And I said we're on a catch phrase here, I mean it's the leaflet's catch phrase... It's no longer a name... She was like "yes but today there are brands, in the textile industry for example, brands that er...", I mean long and complicated names do exist, but it's not gonna work for a park, you've got the descriptive, you've got all these things that... And you see that when you say "Hortiworld", "Plantopia", you see, "Botanipark", well it works!

**François:** It does.

**Stéphanie:** I mean it does sound like a name for a park, but she's kind of fucked up, anyway... So "Terra Botanica", she says that it puts people away, it's too scientific... that we should be careful about botany because it sounds very scientific... Er, "The Green Ark", she found it interesting, it reminded her of Noah's Ark of course, but she says this is almost the next stage. That is, at this stage she wants people to become aware that plants are important in their lives, so she says that "The Green Ark" is the next stage with something that protects us, so we've got a message that's going even further...

**François:** So here it says too much...

**Stéphanie:** Yeah. It says too much... Er, "Plantopia" reminds her of molehills actually...

(...)

Molehills? Gosh, we had forgotten –as opposed to the "topos" Greek root, the French "taupe" meant a mole (as in the animal). Here again Stéphanie had to deal with other recondite remarks ("I'd be happy if the park was called "saga of plants and people""). Alvesson (1994: 548) noted in a Swedish agency that advertising people tend to make negative comments about their clients ("she's kind of fucked up"). As usual,

Stéphanie had recourse to a “soft convincing” method whereby a point of view was negotiated rather than imposed (“you’re saying interesting things, on which we might get things going, but this is *our* job”). It was in her interest to avoid heating up the debate. Keeping clients happy by agreeing with everything they said; building on what they said to recommend better ways of doing things –such was the delicate balance g&a strived to maintain, between blind dedication and merciless critique. I therefore perceived the relationship between the agency and its clients (from the perspective of the agency) as a demagogical enterprise. Now flirtatious but also hypocritical, now stricter but also more sincere, Stéphanie made a very cunning use of a discourse she knew contained the soul of consultancy.

### *“Then what?”*

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The satisfactory level of communication Stéphanie awaited was never reached. Her frustrations only intensified over time. Towards the end of my stay I came to her office where she was chatting with Sébastien. She felt extremely stressed and “fed up”. Tomorrow was yet another meeting with the plant park’s clients and she felt that Alban “abandoned” her. Nicolas, the client, kept being passive. He too was absent. Luckily Patrick would be around. Even though Stéphanie could not work properly in those circumstances, she had to show that she did:

Sébastien Stéphanie	Day 50	17:10-17:49	Stéphanie’s office
<p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Tomorrow our presentation is about showing that if you’ve got something descriptive [a descriptive name], it still works, I mean if “Plant Planet” works for example, well they should stop worrying... That’s it. (...)</p> <p><b>Sébastien, irritated:</b> I think at some point the agency must say: “it’s this or nothing! If you don’t want it, then...”</p> <p><b>Stéphanie, curtly:</b> Then what?</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> No but I dunno but er...</p>			

Stéphanie was recalling here the powerlessness of an agency engaged in poor communication with a client (“then what?”). Sébastien had to admit that however “irrational” the behaviour of clients, g&a had no choice but to submit to it. So the agency’s deepest feelings of uncertainty were rooted in a contradictory combination

of roles. The role it had been assigned was that of “inspirer”, of “leader”; the role it actually fulfilled was that of “follower”.

#### 5.2.4. To waste or not to waste?

All of the above tends to indicate that the very existence of the advertising business rested on wastes of time, on relationships with time wasters. Clients did not always communicate directions; and when they did, these could be vague or contradictory or unjustified. Lack of justification was clearly echoed in one of Nicolas’s decisions coming as a bombshell during the first meeting. He said apropos ‘chlorophyll energy’, “I just don’t like it”. Copywriter Sullivan (1998: 160-3) remembers “the director of marketing for a large corporation whose name you’d recognize”. In his account, time is always “running out” because this client wastes it exactly as Nicolas does:

She looked at the storyboard, looked at her notebook, then (...) said, “I just don’t like it.” The strategy wasn’t the problem. How we were saying it wasn’t the problem.

“I just don’t like it”. (...) We decide to let her play the “Just don’t like it” card. Fine. We go back. Time is running out, so we bring three storyboards to the next meeting. Luckily we’re on a streak and all three are good. We’d have been happy to go with any one.

“I just don’t like it”.

“All three?”

“I just don’t like it”.

“What is it you don’t like?”

“I can’t say”. And then she said the one thing all the really bad clients say sooner or later. “I’ll know it when I see it”.

(...) Some 25 boards passed before her. And 25 died. I assure you, we didn’t give up. It was a good product. (...) We presented good work right up to the end.

“I just don’t like it”.

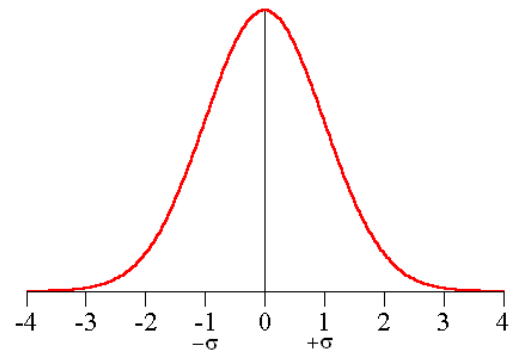
Time began to run out. (...) The media was bought and the client was panicking. Client panic sometimes works in the agency’s favour. Not this time. She asked for more. In the final phone meeting, the agency simply refused to provide any more boards. And the client unravelled. I mean, she completely fell apart.

(...) Somehow, around board 29, she bought something. The agency wasn’t proud of the piece. We were just holding our noses, hoping to simply produce the thing and be done with it. (...) in the 11th hour, in the 59th minute, and in the tail end of the 59th second, the client’s antiperspirant failed again. “I just don’t like it”. (...) The agency had to go back to the drawing board yet again. This time, getting the idea took just ten minutes. The tired copywriter and the dispirited art director walked to the end of a nearby pier and lit cigarettes. Idea 30 limped into the writer’s mind like a sick dog with its ribs showing, and the writer said, “Okay, what if we did this?” The art director looked at the dog. The dog looked up at the art director.

“Fine”.

They took their sick little animal of an idea and walked it back down the dock toward the nearest phone. The client loved it.

This episode is reminiscent of the chaotic fluctuations of value through clock time explored in chapter four. Chapter four has connected these fluctuations to pathologic effects (arrhythmy) and therapeutic responses (temporal construction); this chapter builds on the idea that value is not created through clock time but determined by clients, as a result of chance (either they “like it” or they “just don’t like it”). You can roll a dice twice and obtain the number wanted (e.g. “6”) or, if you are really unlucky, rolling it a hundred times without obtaining a “6”. Of course there are statistical laws according to which you are much more likely to obtain it than not to obtain it. The Normal law, in particular, does establish a sense of predictability. Its bell curve is the graphical expression of the Central Limit Theorem according to which the sum of a number of events with finite variances will tend to a normal distribution as the number of events grows.



However “pleasing a client” is an event that the science of probability cannot inform in the same way. Human bias (the client’s “taste”) involves a game with loaded dice and events as *coincidences* rather than effects of pure *randomness*. Advertising people happen to be “lucky” to have guessed an outcome before the loaded dice were thrown –if they try several numbers but “6” (they haven’t thought of 6) they will always be “unlucky” no matter how many times they try. Getting the right idea does not depend on the number of attempts and this is not “normal”. So the time practitioners spend “trying their luck” is *by definition* wasted. Sullivan and his team wasted their time producing 29 boards... before the winning idea was found in just ten minutes. The client is then *by definition* a timewaster; but at the same time a creator of advertising work, hence of advertising “time” to be spent. Here lies the specificity of the advertising business: its production is by definition a *contingency*. This contingency raises questions around the provenance of value, and these questions give impetus to religious discourses (e.g. superstitions, personality cults, etc., c.f. chapter four). As such, it also has to do with temporal construction.

#### 5.2.4.1 From paradoxes to strategies

Chapter five thus completes chapter four, which understands temporal construction at g&a through arrhythmy, by suggesting that arrhythmy is the temporal expression of *paradoxical relationships* between the agency and its clients. For example g&a was both an “inspirer” and a “follower” of the plant park project. Being an inspirer (“before” or “in front of” the others) and at the same time a follower (“after” or “behind” the others) implied going *against* the reassuring timeline. It implied *accepting* anachronistic<sup>89</sup> conditions of work and succumbing to anomie, to the absence of temporal rules. As a result, constructing an answer to this question, i.e. clarifying g&a’s position (*either* inspirer *or* follower, and preferably inspirer) amounted to *construct* g&a-time. The agency was indeed *refusing* to yield to despair, engineering optimism out of the pessimistic appearance of reality, colouring and colonising the future. As shown in the dialectics of temporal pathologies and therapies (chapter four), uncertainties somehow kept the business alive. “Hope keeps man alive”, as the proverb goes, and I think it contained the essence of temporal strategies at g&a. Because this organisation was not just one person, its identity was a matter of life and death indeed<sup>90</sup>. To be or not to be, that was the bloody question resurging every single day. Ultimately, all aspects of work at g&a were plunged into the existential struggle of a young organisation which was *trying to be*. And the organisation managed to exist especially because it was “in becoming”, especially because it attempted to clear fundamental doubts about itself. In other words the unfairness of anachronistic conditions of work and paradoxical relationships with clients gave the industry its impetus, its dynamism, its arrogance, its dogged determination to survive. In sum, temporal contradictions experienced at work (chapter four) reflected the contradictions of a business which owed a great part of its existence to the time it wasted in obsessively re-assuring its status, its true role, its reason for being. And only through a temporal approach could uncertainties be “solved” and possibilities for uncontroversial existence discovered.

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<sup>89</sup> Etymologically “against” time.

<sup>90</sup> A sarcastic comment from Patrick in the next chapter (6.2.1) reflects on this. Being shown copywriters’ ideas that he finds horrible for brand names, he sniggers: “imagine that this is what the life of the agency is all about... [the creatives] don’t need us, do they?”

This is how I understood during the first meeting with clients why it would take so long to choose a name – people needed a lot of time because they *had* to waste a lot of it. Their time was *always potentially* wasted. How much time would be wasted was an issue of coincidence (rather than probability), the result of an accident. There was no way of knowing whether the time practitioners were spending now would make a client happier or unhappier later. Consequently the agency simply spent its time wasting time. Its production was a contingency; waste a necessity; and on the whole advertising work a “production through compulsory waste”. Alas, finding a name within a couple of days would discredit the work of g&a and trouble clients because both parties believed that time “as such” would ultimately improve the quality of the outcome. As argued in chapter four apropos temporal anomie, this was clearly a “wrong belief”; but it motivated a construction of time (g&a-time) that *rationalised* the work of the agency as well as the client’s perception of this work. The next section explains how waste motivated a construction of time that strategically got round negative feelings of waste.

### **5.3 From temporal waste to temporal construction**

This section shows how wastes of time paradoxically constructed time at g&a. It recalls through historical investigation that these wastes have not always been perceived as negative; but because the business of advertising is based on waste on the one hand (5.3.1), and because the capitalist system that sustains this business *condemns* waste on the other hand (5.3.2), the work of an advertising agency appears inconsistent by nature. The section therefore complements chapter four by suggesting that uncertainty emanates at a broader level from this inconsistency (5.3.3).

#### **5.3.1. Advertising practice as origami**

Creating value from waste consisted in spending large amounts of time on activities whose nature and purpose seemed “non-productive” or “trivial”. Arguably triviality could be “serious enough” to structure everyday work (Rehn 2004). A typical activity at g&a, the design of prospectuses illustrates this.

Stéphanie AD Sébastien	Day 34	17:45	Creation room
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*Stéphanie shows her work to Sébastien, who looks satisfied. It is a bright red (“glamour red”, for Stéphanie) leaflet.*

**Stéphanie:** See how the colour flashes at your eyes?

**Sébastien:** Yeah but the power of this thing, I guess, is in the revelation...

**Stéphanie:** You’re right, it works so well together, you open and it’s like, “the VIP door opens before you” ...

Stéphanie and Sébastien further discussed the “revelation”, which referred to the way in which people would open out the leaflet. In this organisation you never simply “opened” leaflets. You *revealed* them. The advertising jargon put the fun back into as anodyne an action as the way in which a leaflet opened. Again an outsider was likely to find this kind of brainstorming very surprising. However “glamorous” its colour – would people feel eager to “dis-cover” the leaflet, as if unwrapping a Christmas present? Would they look forward to perusing it? This was just an ad after all, and most people did not like ads. Then who would appreciate the artistic effort that had been put into this kind of marketing origami? Perhaps the client alone? And if so, could g&a evaluate the extent to which folds really mattered to this client?

### *“Are we gonna see the end of it?”*

The following highlights in more details what working on “revelation” meant in practice<sup>91</sup>:

Stéphanie Gérald Aurélié	Day 26	14:22-14:49	Stéphanie’s office
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*I stopped by Stéphanie’s office.*

<sup>91</sup> Note that the conversation had begun for an indeterminate amount of time before I appeared. Thus it lasted longer than the thirty minutes I actually attended. Also, for reasons of space and clarity I will only show below 20% of the original 30-minute recording.



*She was sitting at her desk and looked cheerful. Aurélie and Gérard were both standing. As the conversation dragged on Aurélie leant against the wall on Stéphanie's right and Gérard's hands leant on the desk so that his face got closer to Stéphanie's. Her eyes were shining as she listened to him, and she spoke to him with a smile and I could tell she quite liked him. They were discussing the format of the future Christmas greeting card, which represented g&a's effort to maintaining the loyalty of one their oldest clients, IPO. While the same "g&a greeting card" would be sent to different people at IPO, only a few key decision-makers would receive, in addition, a gift. This would either be a book of photographs compiled by the "Reporters Without Borders" NGO or a management book entitled The Keys of Success.*

(...)

Gérard: Yeah but that's where you've got a fold on the left and then...

Stéphanie: You've got an accordion fold, that's the way you do it (*she folds a piece of paper*)...

Gérard: Yeah but this doesn't look like a greeting card... That's not "teasing"... We're doing "teasing" here...

Stéphanie: Couldn't we have something like that (*she quickly unfolds it, and folds it again differently*)?

(...)

Gérard: There was a square shape, let me remember, er... (*he folds a post-it*)

Stéphanie, *smiling*: Am, Stram, Gram<sup>92</sup> er...

(...)

Gérard: You'll have your three visuals here actually...

(...)

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<sup>92</sup> French counting rhyme.



Stéphanie: I think that since we've got three visuals, something with three sections would be nice, wouldn't it? On this avenue –the baby, the oak<sup>93</sup>...

Aurélie: Well, yes...

Stéphanie: Here you've got your first visual, there your second, etc. (*she unfolds her folded piece*). We don't need anything as complicated as yours...

Gérald: It's not complicated actually...

Stéphanie: This is one, two, three, and ultimately er... the answer, right... (*she shows how her own prototype works*).

Gérald, *mocking*: Wow, you've reinvented the triptych you know? (*he laughs*)

Stéphanie, *smiling*: And see, I did it in the correct order, have you seen that Gérald ? (...)

Aurélie: Yeah but when you open, here (*seizing the prototype again and opening it*), you can see the two [visuals] at once...

Gérald: You see, here, for one visual [the space] is kind of reduced...

Stéphanie: Excuse me? Are you seeing just one visual?

Gérald, *pointing at one section*: Well yeah, here, that's a pity...

Stéphanie: Well, listen, possibly one more but this is possibly enough for a folded thing... on this avenue... But after all it's a question of folding, isn't it?

François: You need to be expert in origami...

Gérald, *to François*: In direct marketing, yeah...

(...)

Stéphanie: Why don't we make something that unrolls, that opens by itself?

(...)

Stéphanie, *mimicking with her hands a "revelation"*: And the card that... opens, you see, you open it and you've got your first visual, you open that and you've got a second visual, you open that again and you've got a third visual, you get me...

Aurélie: Yes as I thought in the beginning...

Gérald: And how does this work?

Stéphanie: A sheet... (*she grabs an A4 sheet on her desk and folds it*). Are we gonna see the end of it?

(...)

Gérald: Well I tended to think it was more original that way (*he shows his own fold*).

(...)

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<sup>93</sup> Visuals planned for the greeting card.

Stéphanie: And what about this, my rolled fold? (*she shows another fold she did before*)

Gérald, *ironical*: This is an idea from... an account manager... (*he sniggers*)

Aurélié, *sounding uncomfortable*: Oooh Jeez...

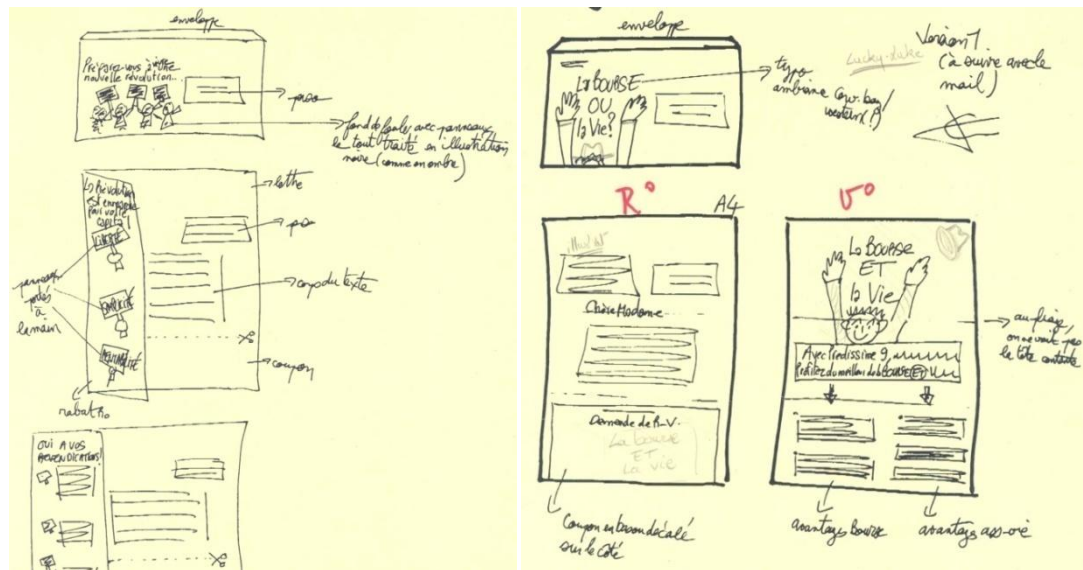
Stéphanie, *sounding uncomfortable*: I know that er, well... hey... Gérald, on principle...

Gérald: Let's work on Euler?

Folding, unfolding, refolding, a cover, a revelation... Of course this had to be thought about. Of course this should be integral to g&a's expertise. But what surprised me was the amount of time spent on such considerations. As Gérald acknowledged, their production for direct marketing had to do with origami. The Japanese art of paper folding does not usually aim to create market value. It is entertainment, not "useful" work. However so much time spent on folding papers showed that origami was regarded as serious, productive work at g&a. Thus this work did not seem to be defined by its opposition to play but by the large amounts of time (hence the large amounts of money) spent on play, on the very frivolities that became, throughout time, "work". Huizinga (1970: 199-200) attributes a blurring of the spheres of business and play to recent developments and improvements of *communication* in our civilisation:

Sport and athletics showed us play stiffening into seriousness but still being felt as play; now we come to serious business degenerating into play but still being called serious. (...) Technology, publicity and propaganda everywhere promote the competitive spirit (...) This process goes so far that some of the great business concerns deliberately instil the play-spirit into their workers so as to step up production. The trend is now reversed: play becomes business.

This is no exceptional finding but the plain effect of specialisation –by doing one and the same thing and however trivial this thing is, people create value from it. Amateurs play chess or football occasionally, as a pastime not work. But as soon as they devote their time to training, to improving and developing strategies, as soon as they spend all their time on one and the same game, then play takes on the importance of work, and provided they are talented enough amateurs become professionals. What turns the futility of a chess game into serious income is the time and energy the passionate gamer will put into it.



*"REVELATION": a key term for direct marketers and (for example) devout Catholics. Above an Art Director at g&a imagines the folds and contents of a future leaflet.*

I make a hen out of a piece of paper and what my friends see is a funny little inoffensive thing –it has no economic value whatsoever. But at g&a people were “professional” origami makers –the difference between my paper hen and their leaflet is that whilst I spent a minute or two doing the three first folds, they would spend thirty minutes just thinking about them. So on the one hand, time turned the trivial paper hen into the goose that laid the golden eggs; on the other hand, time was “always potentially” wasted, given clients might as well despise the thrust guiding the final origami. Origami as both a trivial and a professional use of time was therefore quite an appropriate image of advertising practice. Trivial uses of time at g&a involved wastes of energy (that of machines and people) and wastes of paper like so many embodiments of wastes of time.



*Every day the creatives filled a huge bin under the work bench (left) in the creation room and piled up colour-printed trials next to the printer in the corridor (right).*

The incredible patience the details of a greeting card required, the “gos for nothing” (“couldn’t we have something like that?”), the disagreements (“that’s not “teasing””), all contributed to characterise g&a’s work by the professionalisation of the futile through time. The “productive waste” oxymoron thus reflected the existential crisis of advertising and the paradoxical relations to its environment.

### 5.3.1.1 Chronigami



In fact origami as epitome of g&a’s work not only reflects *productive waste*, but also *temporal construction* as the core business of advertising (see chapter six). In their imaginative ethnography of a pharmaceutical plant in Ireland, Kavanagh and Araujo (1995) draw on actor network theory and an origami metaphor to understand “how time is constructed and who does the construction”. They call “chronigami” the temporal equivalent of origami, wherein “folds” represent “trials of strengths” or “events”. *Kairos* is a critical event in time, a fold in origami, while *chronos* is represented by the flatness of the paper connecting the folds –it is the “passing time” or “waiting time” between events. In the episode of the IPO greeting card, Stéphanie and Sébastien create events in quite a literal sense by folding post-its and an A4 sheet of paper. As they unfold and refold mock leaflets, they also go backward and forward in time. Sometimes they give a past greeting card a new lease of life (“there was a square shape, let me remember... (*he folds a post-it*)”); or they inscribe different future scenarios in the present (“why don’t we make something that unrolls, that opens by itself?”). Each fold/event is both enabled and constrained by prior events, however not in the chronological sense –the folds rather testify a process of hypothesizing and envisioning (“this is one, two, three, and ultimately the answer...”).

The construction of g&a-time thus finds its metaphor in such anodyne and at the same time crucial practices of the organisation. Chronigami as a temporal concept stands for the time through which Gérald and Stéphanie’s origamis acquire their professional status. Folds represent many pasts, futures and non-futures, “futures continually being created and destroyed” (Kavanagh and Araujo 1995). Finally the folds that shaped the final object are no longer visible –they are “black boxes” (Latour 1999) concealing

habits, savoir-faires, beliefs, in sum all thoughts and intuitions that made their construction possible. This means that the *kairoi* are all the more “critical” at g&a since a client rejecting a leaflet or expressing disappointment with a greeting card crushes at the same time all the black boxes that made their making possible. In this case folds become useless, advertising people go back to square one and what remains is the *chronos*, the flat sheet of paper. On this sheet, the former critical moments are still visible but no longer usable. They are archaeological marks of past failures, leaflets that the client “just didn’t like”. In other words *failed trials* deconstruct (unfold) the invalidated origami toward a *chronos* devoid of *kairoi* –less a “waiting time” than a “wasted time” in advertising. Reduced to its origins and deprived of its history, this origami is part, as argued above, of the monotony of advertising work<sup>94</sup>. It gives rhythm to g&a’s activities, endowing them with the repetitive, cyclic, tedious tempo of an eternal return.

### 5.3.2. Time and work: a co-production

Hitherto the chapter has argued that the time advertising people spent on the tiny details of posters and leaflets would not necessarily perfect them. Therefore the agency did waste time, by definition, on futilities; furthermore, clients could be timewasters. All this wasted time was however a sign of professionalism. It defined the essence of a business as trivial and unserious as origami, and at the same time as crucial and serious as the very sustenance of advertising people. In this way, the existence of advertising seemed to be justified by a productive character of waste. Yet, practitioners hated the feeling of waste and even feared it. Systematically demonized, wastes of time fostered temporal anomie. The wider sociological explanation of anomie had then to do with the discrepancy between a productive form of waste and the traditional negative, pointless associations ramifying around waste over the course of history. To understand anomie in a sociological perspective, this last part of section 5.3 turns to the historical demonization of waste.

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<sup>94</sup> For example the “fucked up” plant park clients ask g&a to *forget about* ideas of “stroll” or “chlorophyll energy”, and to *forget about* a string of other terms (interactive, encounter, exotic, relaxing, etc.).

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim (1912/1960) accepts the Kantian notion that time originates “in the mind” rather than in reality; but for him this is a collective mind, not a personal one. The nature of time is social, historical<sup>95</sup>. This argument that time is relative to the culture in which it emerges is widely supported in anthropology. So for example a French advertising agency may be seen as a working culture in which people construct time in a way that makes it objective or rational to them. This is how the Weberian tradition (section 2.5) sheds a different but complementary light, with regard to chapter four, on temporal rationalisation. For example the conceptualisation of how a schedule affects lives at work (e.g. “temporal constraint”) must give way to the more insightful analysis of what made it what it is (how has the schedule become a constraint?). And what made time “what it is” today is its incorporation to working lives over the course of history. Understanding how time has *become* what it is, why it has developed in one direction rather than another, is typically the aim of sociological enquiry (e.g. Elias 1992: 93) and/or historical investigation (e.g. Thrift 1988; Kieser 1987).

#### 5.3.2.1 Historical imposition of time discipline

Thrift (1988: 70-86) for example has detailed how work and time co-constitute each other with reference to British history. On the one hand the rigour of the monastic system, following Mumford (1963), led to the invention of the clock –working practices “produced” time. But on the other hand new timekeeping devices shaped new interpretations of time (as money, as clocks) which in turn affected work discipline –artefacts “produced” working practices (Latour 1999). Thus Church bells had long been ringing the canonical hours, which did not mark equal units. As commerce developed, towns imitated monasteries and bells sounded for start of work, meal breaks, end of work, closing of gates, council meetings, time for street cleaning, etc. Towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century time consciousness began to shift under the

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<sup>95</sup> He suggests that the “rhythms of social life” gave birth to the “collective representation” of the category of time. This category “does not merely consist in a commemoration, partial or integral, of our past life. It is an abstract and impersonal framework that encompasses not only our individual existence, but that of humanity. (...) It is not *my time* that is organised as it is; it is time as a civilisation objectively thinks about it. (...) Divisions in days, weeks, months, years, etc. correspond to the periodicity of rites, feasts, public ceremonies. A calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activity and at the same time maintains its regularity” (Durkheim 1960: 13-4).



influence of this artificial system of time reckoning. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century “sacred time” (the time of the church) was converging towards secular time (the time of the merchant) in London, Bristol, and other urban areas large enough to be insulated from rural rhythm. The new bells made calculations possible (how long until? how long since?) and people organised their lives in a more “arithmetic” fashion. Through leveraging on time consciousness, religious and commercial institutions alike have imposed artificial schedules on a population that began to regard them as natural occurrence, and organise their life according to them<sup>96</sup>. Elias (1992: 22) sees this evolution as a “civilising process” and concludes that

[t]he external, social compulsion of time, represented by clocks, calendars or timetables, possesses to a high degree (...) the characteristics which promote the formation of individual self-constraints. The pressure of these external constraints is relatively unobtrusive, moderate, even and without violence, but it is at the same time omnipresent and inescapable.

Nonetheless, E.P. Thompson’s (1967) classic study of “Time, Work-Discipline and the Making of Capitalism” in England shows that people resisted the change in their perception of time, and this conversion to arithmetic time took centuries and a great deal of “Protestant ethic” (next section, 5.3.3). Welsh bard Dafydd ap Gwilym exclaimed in 1304 (quoted in Honoré 2004: 43):

Confusion to the black-faced clock by the side of the bank that awoke me! May its head, its tongue, its pair of ropes, and its wheels moulder; likewise its weights and dullard balls, its orifices, its hammer, its ducks quacking as if anticipating day and its ever restless works.

There are tensions in the interaction of time consciousness and arithmetic systems of time reckoning. This thesis argues that such struggles with time still exist in an organisation in 2005, following chapter four that showed how different “times” shaped the rhythms and temporal dynamics of g&a. Chapter five proceeds to view temporal anomie and temporal strategies under this wider, but complementary angle. It understands them through negative perceptions of wastes of time in society, and eventually suggests that a French advertising agency in 2005 and a church in Medieval England are temples in pursuit of comparable objectives –disciplining

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<sup>96</sup> An example amongst many: Christmas drives the population’s conducts either as religious celebration or as marketing ritual.

populations which, once dependent on the system, contribute to its subsistence. Both are *self-disciplinary* apparatuses (Foucault 1975) whereby social control is *internalized* in “everyday life” (Lefebvre 1991) and therefore difficult to identify.

### **5.3.3. Histories of waste: negative and positive evaluations**

Two famous orientations to time have dominated throughout history. Cycles seem to have to do with the cosmic, the “natural” (days, nights, seasons, tides, etc.) whereas lines come from human activity, from the “social” (artificial frames such as clock time and g&a time). But as Eliade (1976) suggested in section 4.2.2, the circle and the arrow are both ancient ways of representing time. These alternative views of time coexisted in Medieval Europe. As long as power was concentrated in the ownership of land, time was associated with the cycle of the soil; but the mercantile class diligently fostered linearization (Toffler 1980: 120) and for Weber (1904-5/2001) it is no coincidence that one conception eventually outrivalled the other. It is, he contends, because the Protestant ethic regards time as a scarce, unrecoverable resource that linear time triumphed in every industrial society. How is the Protestant ethic linked to the spirit of capitalism? Through its orientation to time, answers Weber, who finds the spirit of capitalism best expressed in Benjamin Franklin’s maxim: “remember that time is money”. His influential analysis shows how notions of time, work and religion “rationalise” each other.

#### *5.3.3.1 Condemnations of wastes*

Within a universally applicable time, assumptions of predictability and calculability are visible in the requirement for punctuality. Ascetic morality condemns all forms of waste –people must restrict their expenditure to “reasonable” needs such as decent housing and sufficient and healthy food. Weber (2001: 158) points to the work of a central figure of Protestantism, Richard Baxter, who preached against wasting time in his *Christian Directory*. In this context wastes become sinful:

Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one’s own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary to health (...) is worthy of absolute moral condemnation.



St Benedict required his monks to be occupied at all times so as to avoid idleness, “the enemy of every soul”. Weber (2001: 118) suggests that this rationalised conduct was back then revolutionary. Its purpose was to overcome *status naturae*, to free people from their dependence on nature.

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and under the influence of the haute-bourgeoisie, the utilitarian emphasis on the optimal utilisation of time developed around notions of efficiency, standard durations, synchronisation, deadlines, etc. – altogether shaping an apparatus of time-discipline obsessed with speed and time savings (Zerubavel 1979: 3). Factory owners tampered with clocks to control workers, because “time dedicated to contemplation and reverie, time divorced from mechanical operations, was a heinous waste” (Mumford 1963: 197). Inspired by Taylor and implemented by Ford, “scientific management” aimed at maximising “productivity”. Nowadays taken for granted, the concept of productivity exemplifies how time is always endowed with a value. Throughout his works Marx addressed a critique of this value in relation to labour time. He contended with Engels (1976: 127) that management regulates labourers as clockmakers set or programme devices – “man is nothing; he is, at most, the carcass of time” (see also Giddens 1981: 118-135; Harvey 1989). Thus clock time expresses a commodified time and drives work toward its division into a multiplicity of units. The division and timing of tasks may lead to the kind of counter-productivity ridiculed in the hilarious scene of the feeding machine in Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, but still relevant in today’s assembly lines.

On the whole, this rationalisation of time (“time = money”), which goes as far back as Medieval times (Gurevich 1985: 150; Le Goff 1980: 51), has yielded a negative understanding of waste. Progressively, *feelings* of waste have become “bad” feelings. At g&a this was reflected in arrhythmy. These bad feelings, in turn, generated the discourses and practices that rationalised this historical rationalisation of time – temporal strategies. Therefore there is a sense in which strategies did not go further than ironic “reconstructions” (section 5.4 elaborates on their ironic dimension). They created different, more flexible shapes of time perhaps, but ultimately these shapes had the same linear functions and failed to enable positive understandings of waste. They kept rationalising time in a way that invariably reproduced anomie, which motivated rationalisation, and so on and so forth along a vicious circle. As long as

capitalist principles drove the economy, people would see the enemy in waste itself rather than in the “negativity” of waste.

### 5.3.3.2 *Glorifications of waste: the energetic principle of spending*

Conversely Georges Bataille (1970a, 1970b, 1976) insisted that only a positive understanding of waste would benefit humanity. This positive understanding emerges from a “glorious” principle of spending that should be recalled as a follow-up study of Weber’s thesis above. Whilst there is no correct way of defining the “useful”, the sun certainly is useful to us. As the fantasy of the “pineal eye” indicates, it also fascinates Bataille. The sun generates a splendid, beaming energy only to release it, without restriction, towards all beings on earth. It shines to bring life unconditionally. In Camus’ *Stranger* (1996) the sun is everything: heat, feast, power, cause, life. The Aztecs believed that the sun appeared out of a sacrifice –a human God had thrown himself into a furnace and given birth to the splendour of the day. They connected sacrifices to the exhilarating sentiment of *glory* that light inspires. Their glorious economic system involved reckless spending and extravagant consumption. Wealth was paraded in feasts and human lives celebrated, before being spoilt in wars and sacrifices. Their incommensurable value was proudly displayed, and then suddenly consumed (burnt), wasted.

The dialectic of contemporary bourgeois feasts –including funerals –similarly rests on the conspicuous destruction of money (Barthes 1973: 195). The Aztec civilization understood that a share of its wealth had to elude necessity and contribute instead to magnificence, to “useless” beauty. People demonstrated their feeling of deep irony with regard to materiality by being wasteful, distancing themselves from the futility of luxury and pitting themselves against the universe. Only the self-derision of glorious conducts enlightened their lives, for it fuelled a spirit of communion far more intense than today’s individualistic concerns. People identified with each other –they *communicated* through contagious spending. Our need to disseminate the energy we accumulated therefore circulates and intensifies through snowball effects. The terror

of sacrifice, the shivers of eroticism, the exuberance of laughter<sup>97</sup> and uncontrollable giggles show that energy consumption is exponential. In this way, people communicate a *knowledge* of a reality they can no longer deny, a reality in which death and delight are intimately linked. At the paroxysm of energy spending is irresistible horror.

For all beings therefore, consuming energy means dissipating, squandering, dilapidating, giving it up. Throughout his works Bataille insists that life rests on this fundamental “notion of spending”, which refers to unproductive forms whose ends are in themselves –luxury, mourning, wars, cults, constructions of sumptuary monuments, games, arts, sexual perversions (i.e. deviating from reproductive finalities). It excludes all forms of consumption leading to production. Finally it is a *necessity*, albeit consisting of a continual release of intense forces, of a tremendous destruction of lives and riches, of an atrocious and almost perpetual holocaust, maintaining existence to a state of near-angst or near-nausea and sometimes carrying it, stealthily, towards trance and orgasm (Bataille 1970a: 305; 1970b: 158). Bataille contends that “loss” should never mean “sheer loss” since it inspires a gain akin to the glory acquired through sudden annihilations –the sacrifice being their most powerful image<sup>98</sup>. His “law of coincidence” (1976: 240) does not equate *spending* with profit, but with *satisfied avidity*. So a glorious system does not recognise value in the objects themselves, it does not “calculate” anything, and it does not respect fixed limits. Instead, it acknowledges a more complex notion of value that nothing “objective” or “quantifiable” may measure.

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<sup>97</sup> A symbolic excretion for Bataille, but an excretion nonetheless, entailing waste. Sadism is mainly connected to anal eroticism but all forms of discharge and bodily rejection participate in an understanding of pleasure through humiliation and nausea. Because it rests upon shame, Japanese culture is one of the few that conceptualises eroticism in this way nowadays. If you see an adult grotesquely falling on the ground, do not smile, says Bataille –burst out laughing. Emptiness and death opens up before your eyes! Laughter has no other source than anxiety.

<sup>98</sup> In its etymological sense “sacrifice” is indeed the production of “sacred” things through extreme losses. Thus the success of Christianity can be explained by the crucifixion theme, representing human anxiety by means of limitless loss and decline. The bigger the loss, the more meaningful.

In the philosophy of Sade human nature is oriented toward lavishness and the selfish satisfaction of all drives, not restrictions<sup>99</sup>. Desire is not for ideal beauty, Sade observes, but for soiling and withering this beauty. Accordingly the Aztec economy was based on gift-giving and spectacular losses. Its logic seems difficult to understand in today's Western civilisation, only because spending is no longer understood as immediate release in the present but as calculated production in the future. This can be clarified as follows: the amount of energy producing wealth is always greater than that required for its production. People have no choice but to dissipate this excess of energy. Then comes the choice –it can either be given away like the glorious emissions of the sun (“general economy”) or consumed for the acquisition of new energy (capitalism). Decongestion has always been the object of a feverish quest. Ancient societies found it in the feast –they erected colossal temples, pyramids and cathedrals, whose utility was not material but spiritual. It cost Herculean efforts, incredible amounts of time and numbers of lives to build sanctuaries; but glory motivated it all. Nothing was economised to perfect their splendour. Hence religious activities disrupted the accumulative tendencies of “useful” work, thereby absorbing the excess of energy. Before the Protestant Reform in the Western world, the sum of territories donated to the Church was the size of a nation.

### *5.3.3.2 Understanding the transition from glorifications to condemnations of waste: the accursed share*

From the Protestant Reform glory was relegated to useless excitement that went against piety and even prejudiced the economy. Glory was for the dead, not the living. Capital began to be regarded as a means of production. Every expense, even unproductive, was subordinated to the acquisition of new means of production. This did not affect the proportion of luxurious objects with respect to useful ones; but ordinary items were endowed with an air of fake luxury. Today people keep worrying

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<sup>99</sup> Sade writes that “nature only wants propagations, and of the seed he is offered for such propagation man loses as much as he likes! He finds as much pleasure in this loss as in its useful use, and never the slightest drawback!” (Sade 1993: 159). Therefore “nothing contains debauchery (...) the true way of stretching and multiplying desires is to establish boundaries for them” (Sade 1966: 27). Cruelty is for Sade a human *energy* that civilisation has not yet corrupted. Whilst torturing and killing procure vertiginous joy (as an exhibition of strength and wealth), our *selfishness* also produces a *morality* that imposes limits to our pleasures. But this morality is in a way laughable, for it is contextual, *relative* to a specific community, and still prides itself on holding a universal rank.

about making useless or meaningless expenses and justifying their spending. Protestant asceticism corresponds to the rise of a dramatic era for Bataille. As people accept the utilitarian morale, “the sky shuts on [them]: they ignore poetry, glory, the sun to [their] eyes is only a source of calories”. Excess is no longer enjoyed in the sunshine but reinvested in the distressing sadness of production apparatuses:

The old world of churches uniting the cities to the skies expired in giving birth to the world we are haunting, wherein factories rise up from wasteland. (...) Even the aspect of life is radically different: instead of proud cities inscribing the sky and the earth in their soul, lifeless towns buried in suburbs whose dreariness breaks our heart (Bataille 1976: 207, 212).

In the Aztec world the spirit of the sacrifice led to outbursts of joy; with its destruction by centuries of puritan, utilitarian morals, this festive economy vanished. It is thus an understanding of waste as both necessary and productive that collapsed. In its place, the feeling of poverty takes hold of everyone whilst there is no real poverty:

It is still admitted that the world is poor and that we need to work. The world is nevertheless sick with wealth. A contrary sentiment is due to the inequity of conditions that makes us think as lacking to Peter what is nothing but Paul’s luxuries (Bataille 1976: 15).

So excess does exist, it is available, but our society *curses* it. As Marx thoroughly analysed, capitalism handles surplus in a very peculiar way in our contemporary Western civilisation. The capitalist notion of “spending” eradicates glory and is instead *restricted* to the principle of exchange, according to which donation is a mistake. The capitalist economy is restricted because the “accursed share” is *not properly consumed*. It focuses on “equilibrium” and disregards all other disequilibria. The “general economy” Bataille (1976: 46, 63) proposes, on the other hand, is something of a Copernican revolution whereby surplus is gloriously given away.

Bataille’s thesis shows that the advertising business and the temporal strategies it develops are simply effects of the “spirit of capitalism” promoting negative perceptions of waste. The advertising business is precisely based on this kind of waste –the wastes of time and resources described above never issue from glorious spending but from sad asceticism. The true irony of advertising is that such wastes reproduce

uncertainties, that these uncertainties boost its business, and that this business stimulates commerce. Advertising makes money out of waste, but cannot help worrying about waste, and thus remains in perpetual conflict with itself. At the very opposite of the squandering of *excess* advocated by general economy, the industry justifies its activities through principles of *lack*, *need*, *utility*, in short everything that it is clearly not driven by. Account executive Stéphanie's discourse on "consumer needs" was typically inscribed into negative waste.

Stéphanie (interview excerpt)	Day 56	10:31	A meeting room
<p><b>Stéphanie:</b> (...) you see, for example we've worked on the Tan account [Nante's transports]... I must have worked three months on the topic, it was a tremendous job...</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Stéphanie :</b> Besides we'd organised focus groups to validate our thingy, really, it held water you know, our creation was superb. (<i>nostalgia in her eyes</i>) Su-perb.</p> <p><b>François:</b> Was it... What were you working on, on the logo or something else?</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> All aspects of communication... (...) And we had er, I mean something that held water like nothing else would, right... Today when I see what the competing agency came out with, I'm thinking we're not doing consumers a service... and that the brand got it wrong... you see, and that's what's frustrating. Frustrating, in the first place, because we didn't win the account, and frustrating because you really feel that the brand's doing bullshit, and if our campaign had been chosen we'd really bring something else to consumers.</p>			

For Stéphanie g&a would have done a better job than the rival agency and it was a shame because this kind of advertising did not respond to consumer "needs". However, I could not help thinking that she barely circumvented the blatant evidence for the wasteful nature of g&a's production. She referred to this competitor whilst knowing that this *waste* might as well be her own ("we're now in a glutton world", she says later, see 5.4.3) –by no means a glorious spoiling of luxuries but a long accumulation of worthless things adding to the dumping ground, as embodied daily in impressive wastes of ink and paper (inside the agency) and in the visual and auditory pollution of advertisements that surrounded us all in public places (outside the agency –"contamination"). Therefore advertising people suffered (c.f. Stéphanie and the "plant park" clients above) because they tended to negate the fact that waste conditioned their production; because they only reluctantly resigned themselves to accepting waste as a necessity, as the ironic essence of their contingent business.

Instead they avoided the very *idea* of waste like the plague. The next section explains how they strategically did it at g&a.

## 5.4 Strategies of trivialisation

The chapter proceeds with “strategies of trivialisation” that dealt with temporal paradoxes (“anachronies”) at g&a such as wastes of time that produced value or futile practices that led to serious business (such as the origami). Trivialisation consisted in insisting on these very contradictions, peculiarities or abnormalities in order to build normality. The section describes how practitioners escaped waste (5.4.1) and unrolls three interrelated dimensions of trivialisation –playful cynicism (5.4.2), expiation (5.4.3) and laughter (5.4.4). Thus listed below are the ways in which advertising people detached themselves from their *status naturae* and recognised themselves in g&a-time.

### 5.4.1 Escaping waste

In order to know more about feelings of waste without sounding too inquisitive at g&a, I asked about the “importance” of people’s task. This interviewing technique produced rather unexpected data. Prior to interviews most creatives would get very excited. James, Gérald and Stéphanie would insist, whenever Aurélie or Sébastien wished to postpone or cut the interview short, that they carried on. But when we did carry on they would somehow disturb or interrupt its process:

Aurélie (interview excerpt)	Day 52	15:12	Creation room
<p><b>François:</b> So why is what you do important for g&amp;a?</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> What do I find important, or...?</p> <p><b>François:</b> Yeah, yeah, in your role for example, why, er, is your role of AD important in a structure like g&amp;a?</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> Oh yeah? Well they’re kind of hard, your questions... <i>(pause)</i> Would you mind skipping to the next question?</p> <p><b>François:</b> Yeah, no problem.</p> <p><b>Aurélie, giggling:</b> It’s a bit vague to me.</p>			

(...)

*Long silence. Gérald and Sébastien decide to break it by commenting on questions and answers. An inaudible remark from one of the copywriters makes Aurélie and Stéphanie guffaw.*

**Aurélie, to Gérald:** Go ahead, answer, why is it important, er...? (to Sébastien) And you, um...?

(...)

*Silence.*

**Aurélie, laughing:** It's so vague! I can't see what's really important and what's not important in what I do...

**Sébastien, to Aurélie (apparently not joking this time):** Do you want us to answer for you?

(...)

**Aurélie:** What's important and what's not important, how can I know! A good atmosphere, that's very important, a good atmosphere...

**François:** Yeah?

**Aurélie:** And that everybody gets along. *That* is important.

*Whistling and singing, Sébastien recreates a "good atmosphere" in no time at all and Aurélie laughs heartily.*

Silences and giggles indicate Aurélie did not feel too comfortable answering the question "why is it important?". I had deliberately phrased it vaguely, thinking it would make it easier for her; it clearly did not. Also, I had underestimated the "group effect" –hostile to any interviewer, this kind of environment however said something "important" about the creative culture at g&a. Aurélie's colleagues were listening out for her answers or absence of answers, reacting to them and even "completing" them and filling her silences, as if they had to be. The question aroused an interest such that the creatives wanted to make the answer collective, not individual ("do you want us to answer for you?"). So the answer appeared to be too crucial for them not to take control of it. This is why Aurélie's politically correct snatches reached my ears at sporadic intervals, when it was not drowned in the interfering answers and laughter of others. Given that she struggled to say something about what she did every day, she must have felt pressure in answering on behalf of other ADs. For lack of a better answer, she concluded that what mattered at work was a "good atmosphere".



*“It’s not important...”*

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I believed that such a narrow-minded view of their activity, as well as the jokes, irrelevant answers, critiques of the validity of the question, etc., reflected a general will to *escape* the question of importance, the question of the uses or misuses of time in the organisation. The creatives were not inclined to think “too much” about what they did. They did it because it was a convenient way of earning a salary (“it gives me the living wage”, Sébastien tells me on my first day); but they did not want to be “too much” aware of all this time they were in fact wasting (“I need to do it all over again, I’ve worked for nothing” Aurélie complains above; “she’s kind of fucked up anyway”, Stéphanie says about a client). So when creatives did something at g&a, they always tried to understand the “something” rather than the “doing”. For Sébastien the question of “importance” was not important. Important was *what* advertising did, not *how* it did it.

Sébastien (interview excerpt)	Day 52	15:12	Creation room
<p><b>François:</b> So er, why is it important, what you do?</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> Why is what I do important? Because the CEO won’t be able to do it...</p> <p><i>Gérald, James, Stéphanie, Aurélie burst out laughing.</i></p> <p><b>François:</b> Why? Why?</p> <p><i>Sébastien and Gérald roar with laughter.</i></p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> Why is it important? In relation to what?</p> <p><b>François:</b> Well, in relation to g&amp;a, first?</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> In a communication agency, one must be in charge of writing messages.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>François:</b> (...) And for society in general?</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> For society in general? For society in general... Society, society, er, the world?</p> <p><b>François:</b> Yeah, or French society.</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> It’s not important, it’s not important...</p> <p>(...)</p>			

**Sébastien:** You shouldn't ask me this question in terms of importance, but in terms of efficiency... Where you can measure the usefulness of your role is where your message allows you to sell, er, to respond to objectives that were given to you from the start or not...

**François:** Yeah.

**Sébastien:** It's more in terms of efficiency than in terms of importance.

**François:** Yeah. Economic efficiency...

**Sébastien:** Yes, yes. That's part of advertising, isn't it?

And indeed, after trying to escape the question by means of a joke –which also gave him more time to think about it –Sébastien stated that copywriting was *not* important outside the agency. How could it be important inside then? Like Aurélie, he was not willing to answer the question in a serious manner and digressed towards the issue of “efficiency” (Aurélie similarly digressed towards the cohesion and “fun” attitude of the team). Overall he was using the interview as a pretext for consolidating his status of “funny guy”. The interview was a test awaiting validation by the rest of the clan, a rite of passage (“because the director won't be able to do it”, and they burst out laughing). His competence and popularity were at stake –had he not been able to ridicule the “serious” and his peers might reconsider his “creative” abilities. A good joke would earn him respect from others.

Hence both interviews emphasised the extent to which all temporal issues were at the same time identity issues. Time shaped creative identities –temporal anomie weakened them, temporal strategies strengthened them. It was concluded above that practitioners constructed g&a-time because it was, as the house is to the architect, the means and the ends of their business –because they were “professional origami makers”<sup>100</sup>. My interview question shook the foundations of the whole edifice, endangered its stability. To save these foundations in their answer therefore, Aurélie and Sébastien had to deviate the purpose of the question, to ridicule it, to prove it irrelevant. Why was it important? It was not important, I was missing the point.

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<sup>100</sup> The expression brings together key notions of a construction (“makers”) from the serious (“professional”) and the frivolous (“origami”). Origami also refers to the *concept* of temporal construction (chronigami) as suggested above.

### 5.4.2. Playful cynicism

Therefore this kind of behaviour had a reflexive role through which people stood back from their activities and cast inquisitive glances at their own image. Spectators of their own spectacle (joking, laughing, performing in g&athlon, etc.) they displaced their concerns away from wastes and temporal uncertainties in general. The rest of the chapter argues that the creatives were not captivated by their own reflection because it was “in their creative culture” to be so, but because they deployed strategies of trivialisation which ridiculed the everyday traumas and frustrations they endured.

*“It’s always the same thing anyway...”*

For example Aurélie and Sébastien did not want to think “seriously” about the time they spent at work, and Olivier very much doubted the impact of g&a’s ads.

Gérald Patrick	Day 33	15:04	Creation room
<p>(...)</p> <p><b>Patrick</b>, <i>reading a catch line on Gérald’s computer screen</i>: This is typically Gérald’s kind of stuff. When the client asks the agency to do a roll forward, what we do at g&amp;a is a triple backward somersault, forward flip and we find ourselves in the town centre! No, cut the crap, nobody’s gonna believe in your thingy...</p> <p><b>Olivier</b>: Ah, because people should also believe in it?</p> <p><i>All creatives laugh.</i></p>			

Olivier’s witty appreciation strategically trivialised g&a’s activities as a whole – nobody would believe in their advertising messages. It compared people’s determination every day and the relative pointlessness this determination resulted in, when considering broader objectives outside the agency. Were they not spending their time, in the end, preaching in the wilderness? Olivier had just created a distance between creative work (what they did) and creatives *at* work (who they were). He built on what could be called “playful cynicism”, making a mockery of creative activities as if he had just extricated himself from himself and was now taking a puzzled look at everyone in this creation room. Like Sébastien’s joke above, playful cynicism turned the *drama* of creative work –shaken by anomie and the sad triteness

of origamis –into a good joke. It “de-dramatized” their activities so as to circumvent their serious questioning. A refusal to think too hard about the usefulness and purpose of work, an escape through laughter, playful cynicism was the strategy of trivialisation *par excellence*.

To de-dramatize wastes of time and relativize the monotony of creative work, Sébastien similarly adopted a blasé, phlegmatic attitude to his own production:

Gérald Sébastien Laurence	Day 31	16:45	Submarine
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*Sébastien and Gérald were both out of the creation room so I took my routine stroll towards the submarine. What else to do? Being useless here or there, what difference did it make? And there they were, listening to Laurence’s brief on the CIF insurance company. When I stepped in, their meeting was almost over. There was a piece of paper on the coffee table and Gérald was scrawling on it; he used a soft lead pencil and it looked like this (next page):*



*Also on the table was a coloured print that might have been made by one of the ADs on Gérald’s request –a tennis racket was hitting two identical toy-houses, coloured in yellow for the occasion. On the right-hand side a catch line in white letters: “Yes to mortgages that get back to me!” All this looked pretty ugly.*

**Laurence:** What bothers me with “win-win” though, is that we’re sort of having the same discourse as last year, you see er...

**Sébastien,** with a weary, blasé tone: Yeah yeah, so what, it’s always the same thing anyway...

In response to Laurence’s expectation of something “newer” (“we’re sort of having the same discourse as last year”), Sébastien argued that reproduction was inevitable (“it’s always the same thing anyway”). I observed that account managers and executives expected a lot from creatives at g&a, and were not often very enthusiastic about what copywriters and ADs came up with. Here again Sébastien neither negated

nor resisted the frivolous, reproductive aspects of copywriting. On the contrary these were fully acknowledged and willingly exacerbated.

### 5.4.3. Expiations

Previous subsections are imbued with the idea that the status and scope of advertising careers survive thanks to carefully restricted self-criticisms in the industry, just like a cult survives because it has stopped questioning the world and instead provided this world with answers.

—thus 5.3.1 abolishes self-criticisms and 5.3.2 turns them into jokes. Such playful cynicism made creative labour more mechanical, more “obvious”. It trivialised it. Moreover, trivialisation drew on an ascetic guilt inherited from Christianity, and whose crucial shaping of capitalist morality was discussed above by Weber and Bataille. As Sébastien exclaimed “so what, it’s always the same thing anyway”, he castigated himself in the way a penitent would seek absolution. “So what”, he was a poor sinner after all. In the *Bible* (Numbers 32: 14) Moses addresses “the tribes of Reuben and Gad” in these words (Anon 2008):

The Lord was angry with Israel and made them wander in the wilderness for forty years until the entire generation that sinned in the Lord’s sight had died. But here you are, a brood of sinners, doing exactly the same thing! You are making the Lord even angrier with Israel.

In Christianity the sinner reproduces mistakes because it is in his nature to do so. Thus after David has committed adultery with Bathsheba, he declaims before Nathan the prophet (Psalm 51: 5):

Have mercy on me, O God,  
(...)  
For I was born a sinner—  
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.  
But you desire honesty from the womb,  
teaching me wisdom even there.  
Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Sébastien asked Laurence to recognise the “sin” of reproduction as inescapable —yes, “from the moment [his] mother conceived [him]” the poor copywriter would do

“exactly the same thing” and make the “Lord [the client!] even angrier” with g&a. Hence the tensions of creative work could be imagined as repeated efforts toward filling an unshrinkable gap between the Sinners (the agency) and the Godly (the clients), knowing that the Sinners by definition would have no place among the Godly.

*“It’s our job, isn’t it, packaging hot air!”*

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Thus strategies of trivialisation clearly had this dimension of a *purification* –creatives would depreciate their work to obtain redemption (“purify me from my sins”):

Sébastien Claire	Day 32	17:19	Creation room
<p><b>Claire:</b> On OM [Opticiens Mutualistes, a client], have you managed to... have you made progress?</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> I, I did, I’m done with it.</p> <p><b>Claire:</b> Are you? Great, it’s great, the “special specs box”... I hope they [OM] validate it, I think they’ll say yes.</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> It’s just, it’s just a load of rubbish though, you know, the “special specs box”, it’s nothing, right, it’s just about packaging a... an offer... It’s our job isn’t it, packaging hot air!</p>			

When Claire referred to the “Final Judgement”, this moment of revelation when God (the OM client) would accept the Idea as his Brother in the Kingdom of Heaven or instead condemn it Forever, Sébastien used a strategy of trivialisation. In response to Claire’s prayer (“I hope they validate it”) which put faith in the Idea (“I think they’ll say yes”) he undermined his merit and did penance for the “load of rubbish” he had produced. He was “just” this humble copywriter whose manoeuvres boiled down to doing “nothing, right, it [was] just about packaging an offer”. As such, Sébastien prepared himself for the potential grimness of OM’s final decision, and enhanced reflexivity in his work. Like Olivier earlier, he stood back from himself, looked at his reflection (“it’s our job, isn’t it?”) and wanted to recognise the “humble sinner” who righteously expiated his misconducts.



**Votre solution « Presbytie » sur mesure...  
...à tarif mutualiste!**

[illegible]

Sébastien's religious resignation could also be witnessed at the level of management, as Stéphanie's confession echoes:

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**Stéphanie:** Well, no but I think we're now in a glutted world... You can see advertising everywhere er... So in my opinion two things can make a difference, 1) a communication that's a bit off-beat with regard to the style we're used to seeing, and 2) devices that are also a bit innovating, impacting. (...) I mean, using innovative media can help you stand out... from an overflow of advertising that's unreal, right?

Stéphanie like Sébastien admitted it –g&a's role was to sublime client propositions that could be rather empty ("there's not really much to communicate"). This led to the production of "empty" messages and advertisements ("there's nothing much"). "Packaging hot air", selling empty boxes, such objectives were part of g&a's routine business. The agency spent its time enchanting dull offers and infantilizing the end consumer –puns and magic boxes here, quizzes and photographic gags there. These "fairytalizing" messages and images gave substance to miserable "promises"; they turned nothingness into a marketable something. Advertising work was about fetishising the void.

#### 5.4.4. Laughter

Finally everyone in the agency referred to notions of originality, difference, unconventionality, innovation, etc., which the literature brings together under the umbrella of a "myth" of creativity ("a communication that's a bit off-beat", "devices that are a bit innovating"). But rather than a myth, creativity was a set of heterogeneous rationalisations of advertising practice. If Stéphanie in the above interview and the creatives elsewhere seriously sought after creativity, it was at other times ironically laughed about:

Gérald Sébastien	Day 30	15:04	Creation room
<p><b>Sébastien:</b> We can't do the chocolates this year, Alban said he didn't like the idea...</p> <p><b>Gérald:</b> Really, we can't?</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> Yeah, he doesn't like it, because <i>Aubade</i> did it already... and the same Alban made the same brochure for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time!</p> <p><i>They laugh.</i></p> <p><b>Gérald, <i>ironical</i>:</b> At g&amp;a we're ethical... we never copy others!</p> <p><b>Sébastien:</b> Yeah, we never do the same thing three times... I mean, four times the same thing!</p>			



*All creatives laugh.*

This other example of playful cynicism “de-dramatized” again the very expertise they sold to their clients –“creativity”, “originality”, etc. Creativity was such an ungraspable concept when time did not affect it... yet it defined their profession, and they had no choice but to explain it. So they simplified it, they trivialised it towards reproduction (“we never do three times the same thing”, Sébastien jokes) and the packaging of nothing (“it’s just packaging hot air!” above). This type of trivialisation put laughter at the centre of rationalisation. Self-derision or self-sarcasm, laughter often revealed the most atrocious truths of their work as well as their bitter resignation to keep it going. Reducing anxieties to frivolities, burdensome existential questions to evidences, laughter relieved tensions in the creation room. Cynicism would play down the importance of winning a big account for example (Groupama here):

Sébastien	Day 40	10:16	Creation room
<b>Sébastien:</b> I’ve lost five or six competitions, so I can afford to lose seven or eight...			
<i>Gérald and James laugh.</i>			

This kind of joke dealt with what was *not* laughable of course. Sébastien communicated here that his pride was not at stake. So there was a sense in which the essence of trivialisation ran through laughter. In this way chapter five connects “timely lives” to “lively times”, i.e. playful ways of dealing with temporal anomie. Lively times were in appearance “happy” times, moments filled with laughter.

The uncontrollability of laughter is what makes it mysterious and frightening. Most of the time, it arises from a surprise, a rupture from some expectation. As such it is also the awareness of a gap between what “should be” and what actually *is*. For example the behaviour of a clown is at once identifiable and distinguishable from the socially acceptable behaviours of “real” people, people who do not clown about. Young children in a circus are likely to perceive a larger “gap” than adults, who need to reassure them that this is *not* “for real”<sup>101</sup>. What they see is simply not what it looks

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<sup>101</sup> In *The Circus* Chaplin tries to save his life on the tightrope whilst beaming spectators believe they are seeing a performance. This scene of the funambulist is exemplary –it sustains tensions between acting and being, unreal and real, comedy and tragedy.

like. It is an act, a performance, not real life. Such performance conforms to what “real” people “should not” do; to what they “should not” be. So in creating a temporary gap between our expectations (e.g. what it is possible or reasonable to do) and his/her own actions (what is impossible or unreasonable to do), the clown produces the “unreal”. By the same token, I saw creative performances (g&athlon, teasing, etc.) as strategic productions of an “unreality” thanks to which my informants escaped from the harsh reality of waste and pointlessness. Laughter was this evasion from a painful working condition. And through a kind of perverse effect all these “unreal” times made real anxieties more visible. When the child at the circus asks “is he really dead?”, underlying is his real anxiety of death indeed<sup>102</sup>. I will now support this interpretation with examples of teasing in the creation room and Bataille’s theorisation of laughter.

### *“Enough with the bullshit”*

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Sometimes the creatives teased themselves by throwing things at each other. Paper pellets and other tiny UFOs would fly through the creation room:

<b>Aurélie Stéphanie AD</b>	<b>Day 37</b>	<b>15:36</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
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*They threw cake wrappings at each other for fun.*

<b>Aurélie Gérald</b>	<b>Day 49</b>	<b>10:47</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
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**Aurélie, teasing:** Gérald, I think you’re quite talkative for a Monday morning...

*Gérald threw an empty plastic bottle at her and Aurélie giggled.*

<b>Olivier Fanny Mélanie</b>	<b>Day 16</b>	<b>16:34</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
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*Olivier received a pellet on his neck.*

**Olivier, giggling:** Who’s just thrown that at me? *He stands up and takes an air spray from the*

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<sup>102</sup> As Bettelheim (1976: 126) remarks, this is why fairytales actually help children apprehend reality by playing with their biggest fears. He says apropos fairytales that “while the fantasy is *unreal*, the good feelings it gives us about ourselves and our future *are real*, and these real good feelings are what we need to sustain us”.

*workbench. I know of tits that are gonna show beneath your clothes!*

*He sprays some air towards Fanny who protests, and then towards Mélanie who shouts and laughs. After 7 minutes with no incident:*

Olivier: Who's thrown this pellet at me by the way?

*He would leave earlier today, and at 17:16 he already had his helmet on, pretending to give Klervi a headbutt.*



*Right under the schedule, the workbench where the creatives cut and paste images. On the left, the air spray.*

Olivier	Day 2	18:24	Creation room
Olivier was throwing pellets at Fanny, Élisabeth and Mélanie who, giggling, were fighting back.			

The liveliest times at g&a were in this kind of events –pellet games, infectious laughs and good-natured provocations. But on day 2 Olivier put on his jacket, took his helmet and struck a “serious” blow in this hearty atmosphere:

Olivier	Day 2	18:30	Creation room
<b>Olivier:</b> Well, enough with the bullshit... I have a family. I'm wearing back my family cap now. See you tomorrow.			

Did the “bullshit” referred to the pellet battle, and to the pellet battle only? Directly preceding the image of the “family” (as if to emphasise the contrast between what was “serious” and what was not), the “bullshit” sounded like a synecdoche that labelled not the friendly fight episode itself, but the working day as a whole. Interviewing a

number of creatives, Hackley and Kover (2007: 68) found that they “distanced themselves even more from the commercial ethos, speaking repeatedly of advertising as “bullshit”, and of their preference for the superior values of art and literature”. The “bullshit” led to this moment, not of easy critique, but of “enhanced awareness”. What I mean by *awareness* is not exactly that of an opposition between playful wastes at work on one side, and serious responsibilities at home on the other. I am referring instead to the terror laughter revealed. Through laughter Olivier had momentarily accessed the gravity of his working condition, and was now escaping it by expressing a wish to return to a more comfortable and enjoyable role of father. He was turning the frightening reality of waste into a laughable “unreality” and embraced his life away from work as the reality that mattered. Worthwhile things occurred in this reality, not pellet fights (“I’m wearing back my family cap now”). The serious was elsewhere, not in the creative department (trivialisation). Suddenly revealed in *their*<sup>103</sup> acting silly, their mischievous pranks, their bullshitting, was something which was not bullshit at all. Laughter lifted the veil, as did the triviality of the origami, from the “reality” or “truth” of advertising creation.

Laughter was certainly, according to Bataille (1976: 526), the only kind of knowledge worthy of the name. Bataille distinguished two types of knowledge. The first is given by classical sciences; the second is emotionally boosted (through laughter, terror, etc.), more powerful, but also more mysterious and harder to reach via an “inner experience” (Bataille 1973). It is an act of “non discursive knowledge”. The sacred for example is only accessible through laughter. What makes us laugh is the real, the substance of things. When we laugh the nature of things is laid bare, it betrays itself and we get to *know* it. Clearly he showed how laughter is *the communication of a lifted fear* (1970b, 1976: 274-9)<sup>104</sup>. It was then *during* the bullshitting that creatives

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<sup>103</sup> The enunciation of this statement is confusing –Olivier seems to be speaking to himself (“I have a family”), but also to others (“see you tomorrow”).

<sup>104</sup> A mother *communicates* with her baby by tickling his/her belly for example. Suddenly the baby is no longer convinced of the stability of this little belly. If the tickling intensifies the baby feels pain and the closer s/he is to crying out with fear, the more s/he laughs. Another example is that of someone stumbling, or even falling to the ground. What happens to us when we burst out laughing at this sight? Are we happy about the misfortunes of our peers? Bataille’s conclusion is influenced by Roger Caillois’ theory of the feast and Marcel Mauss’ reflections on sacrifice. Laughter functions exactly like sacrifice –albeit sacrifice is the communication of fear itself. When I see a sacrifice or when I get the giggles, I feel equally dependent on the emotions of my fellow creature. I fear to discover (as Sade and

lifted their fear of an agonizing reality –of origami making, enslavement to clients, temporal anomie. As the sacrifice communicated a knowledge of death, play in the creation room touched on the essence of work. It appeared in the absurdity of a pellet battle.

#### **5.4.5. Conclusion: from productive waste to creativity**

People cannot create order without chaos. Chaos is a dormant form of order, a prerequisite of rationalisation. With its focus on wastes of time in the advertising agency, chapter five has explored a salient aspect of temporal anomie, which was broadly presented in chapter four. The notion of waste, identified through the typical relationships g&a entertains with its clients, was particularly telling of the nature of uncertainty in advertising agencies. Uncertainty is bound to arise from the paradoxical activities of an industry which spends its time wasting its time whilst at the same time condemning waste. As usual temporal anomie, notably impressions that clock time was wasted, inspired strategic behaviours. Complaints about wastes contributed to “normalise” anomie, to establish it as a *norm* (“it’s always the same thing anyway”, Sébastien observes) from which practitioners shaped their own logic, their own time. Strategies of trivialisation revealed some of the chaos pervading the agency, but only to take a cynical look at it. The next and last analysis chapter of the thesis proceeds with understanding temporal construction in the advertising agency through another strategic theme –creativity.

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Nietzsche also observed) the emptiness of my being, inhabited by terrorizing, impossible desires. Sade thought that we laugh at ourselves to deal with the angst wrapping up our cruel nature.

# Chapter Six

## *Understanding temporal construction through “creativity”*

Chapter four and five have detailed the construction of time at g&a. Chapter five concluded that the core competence in advertising was built around the time “professional origami makers” seemed to waste on tasks they further “trivialised” –they laughed at their own conditions of production. This core competence is otherwise called “creativity”, so there is a sense in which temporal strategies are also strategies for creativity. For example section 4.3.3 (about g&a-time delivered to clients under the calendar form) shows that the expertise of the agency was engineered and sustained by “temporal strategies towards creativity” or interchangeably “creative strategies towards temporality”. All strategies have the same objective of rationalisation –the ungraspable meaning of creativity, like that of time, motivated discourses and practices whereby g&a expressed the trite offers of their clients in a convoluted, time-consuming fashion.

The chapter contains four sections. It first explains how g&a-time was creatively commodified to appeal to buyers (6.1). Then it questions the notion that creative work is principally that of the creative department (6.2) before identifying in “self-censorship” a fundamental strategy for creativity (6.3). The chapter ends with a combination of this strategy to the concept of “power-knowledge”, and its daily expressions at g&a including practices of collage and recycling (6.4).

### **6.1. Commodifying time**

This section begins with some work on the Groupama account that illustrates how marketing staff commodified a reassuring timeframe for clients (6.1.1). The section goes on with the creation of a specific time for this campaign, and sees creativity as a manipulation of time toward a specific narrative coherence (6.1.2).

### 6.1.1. Selling g&a-time

As I was at a loose end as usual, I invited myself to yet another meeting; it had hardly begun when I entered the room:

André Jean-Philippe Sébastien James	Day 34	11:55	Patrick's office
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*Groupama wanted to know what kind of below-the-line advertising different agencies would be able to produce, and organised a competition.*

(...)

**Jean-Philippe**, *reading his notes*: We've all [g&a and competing agencies] got 15 days to work on it, and we've got one hour forty-five minutes to present (...) In 2005 we've witnessed a new style and tone of communication [in the Groupama campaign], notably with the emergence of a "Cherry" character (...)

**James**: Actually what we'd need to do is, er, to make Cherry a star...

**Jean-Philippe**: Yeah. You'll see that Cherry's not the emblematic figure though; she's not "Mister Clean", she's the representation of a customer and a lifestyle that's consistent with Groupama's offering. (...) (*He keeps reading his notes*) Cherry and her universe, well here there's plenty of things to say: it's both a character and her environment, and also a narrative technique and a presentation. (...) Cherry embodies a Groupama customer: she's a customer who's found with Groupama a bank-insurance partner that allows her to fully enjoy her life. So she embodies the risk incurred, and risk is the salient point in their branding strategy. (...) So under no circumstances is she a physical representation of the brand.

*André, James and Sébastien react and ask a few questions.*

**Jean-Philippe**: Then, we even have details on her life, okay, with a nice boyfriend and so on. If Cherry embodies the customer, she also embodies, at the same time, in fact the brand values –she's accessible, familiar, (...) pragmatic er, rather cunning, positive, modern, young and sparkling... and then (...) she's not limited to just herself, there's also Alex, she also has a friend, parents, grandparents, etc. Even if today they're not identified apart from Alex, they might turn out to be useful at some point, if one day they need to communicate their pension schemes, well Cherry talked to her grandfather, er... So that's where we're on more than one character...

*More questions from James.*

**Jean-Philippe**: That's it (...) (*reading his notes*) Then the second important point is a narrative style and a principle of staging, presentation (...) That's to say, it's always an event in Cherry's life that's being told. We'll create a world. We will mix a real element with a picture of the person, then some pencil strokes to convey emotion. (...) and then through effects of temporality: past, present, future. And by the way, you can't see that in the TV adverts but I'll give you all the radio ads that communicate er, for example health stuff, well you won't have *one* ad; you'll have many ads and each one tells us an adventure with Cherry... Erm, she joins a karate club, Alex's afraid she might get hurt but she's chosen a good insurance... so you've got three, four spots like that about moments in the life of Cherry when Groupama's present. (...) So I've got all the TV ads, they're on my desk. Watch the ads, and also listen to the radio ones, because they tell different stories so they might inspire you as well. On the way it's been done, there's a "making of" (...) In appendices finally you'll find "Cherry's

youth”, so this has been written by the ad agency, where her childhood is told... Her school years, her studies, her personality, her love affairs, well you’ve got photos: her world, her clothes, her aspirations, her projects... There’s an uncle, Cherry’s uncle somewhere, who’s a farmer...

**James:** Is there a family tree?

**Jean-Philippe, *laughing*:** No... but you can recompile it if you want... She’d like to go to Brazil for four weeks, but well she’s very busy at the moment... (...) all that stuff is kind of outlandish but it’s fun... (...) So we’ve got a number of tasks for this, the first being, er, how are we going to transpose this universe in “print”, that is, which codes are we gonna use and which events in Cherry’s life are we gonna build on? Is it gonna be a serial, er, like Cherry’s tricks that come back er, we must find a narrative coherence I think. (...) And depending on the closing, a poster, a mailing, a UL [unaddressed leaflet] or a street marketing action, especially if we’ve got many types of visuals...

(...)

**François:** So it’s a competition?

**Jean-Philippe:** It’s a competition between 6 agencies: Publicis, Ogilvy, Wunderman, MDC and Piment.

**François:** Ah okay. And g&a...

**Jean-Philippe:** And g&a.

**François:** Okay. Wow, many people...

**Jean-Philippe:** Many people, and they’ll all fight like cat and dog.

Thus Groupama sought to complement their above-the-line campaign by other below-the-line (promotional) tools such as street marketing, SMS, mailings, etc. Cherry embodied a typical or rather “loyal” Groupama client. g&a competed for designing the “print” versions (billboards, mailings, etc.) of an already existing campaign created by Young & Rubicam. Jean-Philippe believed that g&a should reach the same kind of “narrative coherence” in the advertisements it would present on D-day. For example what would be seen on the streets would have to relate to what could be seen on TV.

However narrative coherence was probably not enough to win this competition; g&a also had to present a convincing story. Storytelling required an imaginative use of time. The challenge for both creatives and account directors was to demonstrate to clients that they were temporal experts and that the campaign should be imbued with g&a-time. The task of account executives was to reassure the client about the 2006 campaign, explaining why Groupama should follow g&a-time in terms of marketing actions; in the meantime creatives would construct “Cherry-time” in terms of



advertising narratives. They would manufacture a problematic past first, or perhaps a present full of promising opportunities, and then a future in which opportunities were enjoyed. They would of course appeal to all kinds of shortcuts and rhetorical tricks on the basis of which advertising practice has often been condemned (e.g. “happiness=brand X”, “love=brand Y”, etc.). The Groupama clients expected the agency to inject temporality into static representations of Cherry.

### 6.1.1.1 AIDating

On the day of the competition, the agency presented their project in tabular form<sup>105</sup>. The table combined a communication “process” to a set of “arguments” or messages. It was *temporalising* Groupama’s discourse. Vertical arrows articulated the marketing theory supporting this table.

			Arguments et messages		
			Capital Culturel	Capital Relationnel	Capital Produits/Services
			Des valeurs projection de vie ... Ouverture & optimisme Epanouissement Confiance en l'avenir	... qui se matérialisent dans le vécu relationnel avec Groupama Transparence	dans l'offre produits/services Groupama Responsabilité, expérience
Processus de communication vente	Objectif	Média hors média			
Attirer l'attention	Traces d'image	TV	Cerise : les événements heureux, moins heureux... c'est la vie et elle vaut le coup d'être vécu	Groupama toujours là pour me permettre de profiter de la vie	Crédit auto à taux exceptionnel 2,9% Valeur d'achat garantie 3 ans
Eveiller l'intérêt	Notoriété de l'offre produit	Radio		Groupama m'interpelle dans mon environnement personnel	Mobilidays = 40 jours exceptionnels pour profiter des offres mobilité Groupama Accélérateurs canal « mobile » Accélérateurs canal « web »
Susciter le désir d'achat	Création de trafic téléphone, internet et agences	Street mark. Habillage agence externe SMS MMS Bandeaux web			
		PLV Mailing clients Mailing prospects ISA E-mailing Pages web	Mobilidays = avec Groupama, je vis pleinement ma mobilité	Groupama m'incite à venir les rencontrer	• Crédit auto à taux exceptionnel 2,9% • Assurance auto performante : - Valeur d'achat garantie 3 ans - Assistance 0 km - Protection du conducteur et des passagers + offre additionnelle (Ex. GAV) + Accélérateurs canal agence
Acheter/Souscrire	Argumentation personnalisée	OAV face à face OAV VAD		Groupama s'ajuste à mes besoins de mobilité	Les + de Groupama pour chacun de mes besoins de mobilité : • Crédit : remboursement par anticipation, aménagement et report de remboursement • Auto : véhicule de remplacement
Recommandation	Signature	Fin d'entretien de vente : • demande de recommandation • annonce privilégiée prochaine ACC		Je fais partager les opportunités de la vie à mes proches	Rendez-vous en avant première avec notre prochaine offre « banque »
Pré-saturation	Rebonds commerciaux			Demain avec Groupama	

In the first column, AIDA<sup>106</sup> was a temporal tool – it established a certain “order”, a blueprint for conducting this campaign. Perhaps the agency believed that AIDA could

<sup>105</sup> Of course I could not attend the presentation –I did not even bother to ask –but I found a print copy of one of its final versions in the dust bin.

<sup>106</sup> Not Verdi’s opera but an acronym taught in marketing communication modules, which designates stages of selling: marketers must get *Attention*, hold *Interest*, arouse *Desire*, and then obtain *Action* (i.e.

deconstruct the campaign into a few chronological steps; or perhaps it was believed that AIDA would enhance the credibility of these steps during the presentation. Under its scientific veneer in any case, AIDA enabled the agency to suspend the client's opposition since the client had no similar models or studies at its ready disposal. As Rothenberg (1995: 152) among others puts it (c.f. chapter two),

Advertising people are continually inventing empirical techniques, gussying them up in quasi-academic terminology, and bringing them to bear on the most subjective and individualistic of decisions. The agencies' determinations are unverifiable, of course; few things are less subject to laboratory testing than consumer behaviour.

On the horizontal dimension g&a distinguished between different “levels” of argumentation; namely what they called “cultural capital”, “relational capital” and “material capital”. The first, broadest level simply emphasised how great life is with Groupama. It posed the equation “Groupama=optimism”. The “relational capital” level deconstructed this equation according to the AIDA sequence. This second level intended to explain how Groupama should positively impinge on your life. Finally the last level brought practical justifications to claims made at the second level. In short, depicted on this document was a unique sequence (more or less detailed) that the Groupama clients were advised to follow. The table illustrated *one* recommendable direction, *one* particular organisation of time. Just as it did for the plant park client and for many others, the agency was selling g&a-time following a popular eighty-year-old marketing model.

### **6.1.2. Creating Cherry-time**

As Jean-Philippe understood it, the creative task consisted in producing, through narration, “effects of temporality”.

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purchase). Interpretations of this model may vary but in Strong's (1925) first publication advertising can move a product one stage at a time. A campaign can either focus on grasping attention for a new product, or raise interest for an existing product, etc; but it will not move a product through all four stages. The idea is that marketers must be aware of the stage their product is at. The mainstream marketing literature attempts with AIDA, like meteorology with satellites, to minimise unpredictability.

*“These offers are boring to illustrate”*

Sébastien and James began to brainstorm on these effects. What should Cherry-time look like?

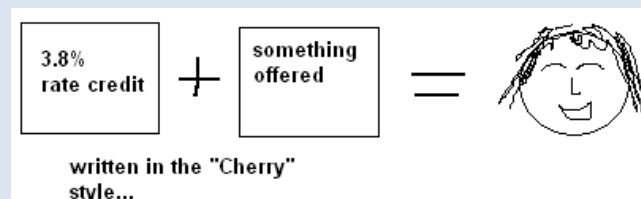
Sébastien James	Day 36	15:48	Pierre’s office
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*This session, like many others on the Groupama competition, was punctuated with deathly silences. As if James waited to be convinced by Sébastien. On the coffee table, there was a can of Coke, a paper cup of coffee, some colour-printed pictures and the Groupama brief that James had annotated in red. There were also two spiral notebooks opened out; one was James and the other Sébastien’s. On Sébastien’s you could see two pencilled sketches reproduced further.*

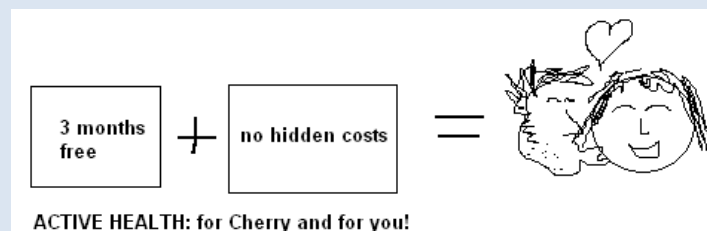
(...)

**James:** Maybe she’s dreaming of her “Mobilidays” ...

**Sébastien:** (...) I’ve got the feeling that the visual we’ll show is not about illustrating numbers but illustrating the result (...) I don’t give a shit about having er, 3.8% [but] I’m happy to get a nice car in the end, you see (...) I can show you what I did in relation to this: it’s with a “Cherry” typography, a typography that’s written like, kind of perfect... It’s: car credit at 3.8% plus erm, the guarantee thingy for free, equals, and here a photo of Cherry, in her car with her hair floating in the wind, something like that... *(he shows him a sketch)*



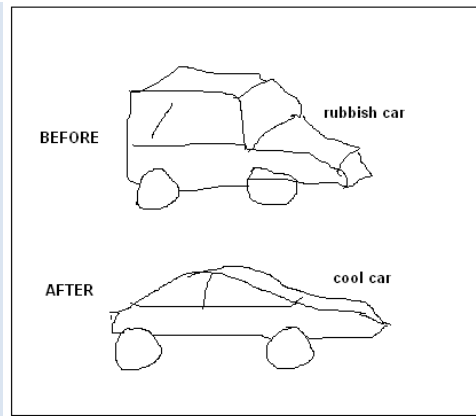
Here I’ve got Cherry being kissed by... well Cherry’s a bit coquettish, she’s eyeing up or blushing or something, with her boyfriend kissing her... And you see, “Active Health opening for Cherry and for you, from this date to that date in your Groupama agency”, yeah, see what I mean?



And it’s always about getting to a result... *(Sébastien goes on, as James remains quiet)* Er, because the result, in the spirit of Groupama, it’s in the end, a happy ending, I mean in the end “let’s give life all its chances” [Groupama’s slogan], that’s even what they told us last year in their graphic identity, that’s about photographs, people having fun...

(...)

**Sébastien:** By the same token when I’m showing you the “before/after” stuff...



I think we must end up with a positive result... (...) And that's what I fear with the illustration of the offer, because they're boring, these offers are boring to illustrate... I'd rather illustrate the result, in the spirit of Groupama...

*Long silence.*

For Sébastien a happy ending would be consistent with the “Groupama philosophy”, which cut the arrow of time down to two caricatured instants – an unhappy past where a vexation was pictured as a cataclysm; a happy future where Groupama saved Cherry from the cataclysm. An advertising narrative was thus built like a fairytale since it appealed to the same kind of ellipses and did not clearly situate the story in time. “A long time ago Cherry’s life was a nightmare (say, like Cinderella’s)... and thanks to Groupama they lived happily ever after”. Except that this kind of fairytale was impoverished in three main respects. First, the offers themselves were “boring”; what mattered was what they could lead people to acquire. Second, the advertising tale used shortcuts in style (the “before/after” narrative) and in content (there is *one* solution to your problem). Third, the effects of time, experience and learning were replaced by the effects of instantaneity, magic and laziness. In *The Beauty and the Beast* (de Villeneuve 1996) the Beast fights against time to become human again. His search for redemption may refer to a power to control our destiny since the past can be “repaired”. By way of contrast Cherry gets a new car through a magic, instantaneous, ready-made solution; personal efforts and learning have vanished in favour of immediate gratification. But the timelessness of this advertising tale still established its prescriptive character –it was true in the past, now, in the future; it was *always* true. Conditioned by Groupama, Cherry’s delight was eternal. In the above meeting the creatives produced Cherry-time as follows –either they “paused” the time invented

by Young & Rubicam to focus on Cherry's happy future; or they "sliced" this time into an dull "before" and a buoyant "after".

Ultimately g&a would offer three possibilities, each consisting of three promotional actions for the 2006 campaign. The first possibility was to illustrate a temporal process: a "boring offer" (a car loan, a free credit card for one year...) followed another and led to a photograph of a smiling Cherry in a driving mirror. The two-step temporal process was indicated by either arrows or arithmetic signs (+ and =) that led to happiness. It was the "Mobilidays" in March, an "Active Health opening" in September and the "Take it into Account!" slogan for the summer. Periods of time had been branded:



The second possibility was to focus, not on the temporal process (*chronos*), but on a critical moment (*kairos*). Whilst the same periods were branded in the same way, one could now see Cherry's boyfriend driving her in the sunny weather or Cherry exercising in a sunny park or Cherry in some kind of meditating position (I don't quite get this one):







Finally a third possibility consisted in drawing more directly on the existing TV campaign. The temporal tricks used here were flashbacks that made the advertising message even more explicit. Posters added the kind of cold, technical information that the aestheticism of the TV ads tended to obliterate (hence Groupama's desire to "complement" above-the-line advertising with direct marketing). Stopping movement and working on still shots, g&a could comment on what Cherry was thinking at a particular moment in time. Her life was "paused" at the very moment Groupama appeared in it:



### *"Hear this again"*

Because the sequence of events in all Cherry's life scenes was already established, the creatives had limited freedom of manoeuvre. So they had to demonstrate to the Groupama clients that the same story could be told in different ways and that g&a was a good storyteller. Their claim for originality resided in their capacity to "temporalise" things –their communication of "cherry-time" had to be convincing. To introduce their own flexible and idealised cherry-time, the creatives used *sampling* methods. These began with an immersion into the current Young & Rubicam campaign. It involved listening stoically to a mind-numbing logorrhoea.

Sébastien James	Day 36	11:30	Pierre's office
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Sébastien and James were standing in front of a desk on which a laptop played the Groupama advertisements.

**Sébastien:** Wanna watch it again? (he clicks on the “play” button)

**Female voice over:** “Meet Cherry: she is, as they say, blind as a bat. Without her specs she can’t see very clearly (Cherry arrives to her office and says “Hi Mike!” to the hat stand). She was planning to take a short break with Alex; unfortunately, on Monday, she breaks her specs. This means she must buy another pair and forget about her weekend. Fortunately, with her insurance bonus « Active Health » by Groupama, she was able to get a pair from an optician partner, without paying anything in advance. She can now enjoy her trip with her new glasses... and her lover!

**Male voice-over:** Groupama Active Health: let’s give life all its chances.”

(...)

**Female voice-over:** “Meet Cherry: She’s 30. Last week she got a promotion: so she decides to change her car (Cherry says to her old-looking car “I’m leaving you”, and the car collapses as if heartbroken). About the colour she keeps hesitating, but she doesn’t about her Groupama (... ??), and without breaking into her savings. Three years later, she meets Alex by accident (Cherry’s car crashes into another): good news, with her Groupama insurance, she gets a full refund for her car. Other good news: Alex is also single.

**Male voice-over:** “loan + car insurance” package: discover it in your Groupama agency.”

**Sébastien:** Hear this again... How she says it...

**Female voice-over:** “... insurance, she gets a full refund for her car. Other good news: Alex is also single.

**Male voice-over:** “loan + car insurance” package: discover it in your Groupama agency.”

(...)

**Radio voice-off:** “Cherry sees life through rose-tinted glasses. But since she broke her specs... [Cherry]: “they’re very, very... blurry rose-tinted glasses”. And thinking that she must sacrifice her weekend with Alex because she needs new specs, she sees red... very red. So for Cherry, and for the others, Groupama offers a health insurance bonus that allows you to buy glasses from an optician partner without paying anything in advance. Go to your Groupama agency or call 3260 and say “Groupama”, fifteen cents per minute. Groupama: let’s give life all its chances. Offer under conditions available from Groupama agencies”

(...)

Two radio ads follow, as demoralizing as the former. We then listen again to the first one, then to two others. We also listen again to the last one twice and I already feel like suffering lobotomy.

**Sébastien,** ironical but also seemingly frustrated: Here we go... Isn’t it nice to do media stuff? You can say just one thing... in thirty seconds. We are going to say three things on... one square metre.

The Young & Rubicam story was constricted by time (“you can say just one thing in thirty seconds”); Sébastien and James’ constricted by space. They had to interrupt the verbal diarrhoea and imagine how Cherry-time as organised by Young & Rubicam

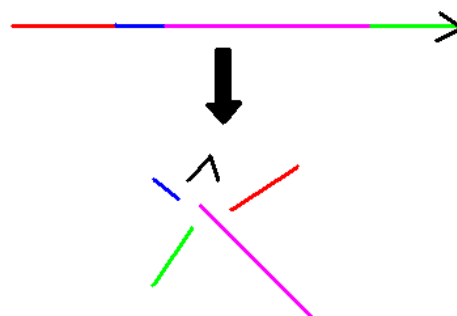
could occupy the space of their ads. This is why part of the preliminary research they had to undertake consisted in scrutinizing the Young & Rubicam discourse by manipulating clock time –rewinding, forwarding, pausing, and replaying it, they inflicted on themselves the eternal return. Creatives then proceeded with graphical dissection or *sampling*:

James	Day 39	10:13-11:20	Creation room
<p>10:13: He was watching the several existing “Cherry” ads many times. He would rewind and watch specific parts again, and rewind again.</p> <p>10:55: He was capturing images and printing them so that he could work on them with a pencil. He added balloons on one of them for instance, to represent Cherry “thinking”.</p> <p>11:20: He was saving images from another Cherry ad.</p>			

James selected the samples and assembled them towards Cherry-time, the time Cherry would live through. Screen captures were key prerequisites for this sort of “editing” or “collage”–James had to stop motion (Young & Rubicam-time) in order to change expressions, attitudes, situations or whatever. This enabled “digital surgery” –James could go back in time (rejuvenation cure) or catapult Cherry into the future (“here is the solution to your problems”). Here was a process of creative destruction that produced temporality from a timeless base, from an immobilized Young & Rubicam-time. James constructed Cherry’s past, her future, her own time in parallel to ours. Digital surgery epitomised the ways in which creatives introduced temporality into essentially extemporal people and objects (Cherry was a fictional character with a fictional past):

## 1) RUPTURE

*Digital surgery involves breaking a “text” (e.g. an existing ad) or elements of this text (a sentence, a sound, a picture, etc.) into segments of samples.*



*The segments are then altered –emphasised or shortened or suppressed or whatever.*



## 2) RE-ASSEMBLING

*Samples are then assembled into a new “arrow of time”:*



Therefore creation at g&a often amounted to temporal manipulation –digital surgery – involving sampling and editing procedures. The next section of this chapter focuses on the meanings, expressions and (following on from the “waste” theme of chapter five) paradoxes of creativity at g&a.

## 6.2. Resituating creativity

It may seem commonsense that creativity (or the injection of creative value into advertising work) is the task of the creative department, as if often confirmed by the practice-based literature. However this last section begins with calling this assumption into question (6.2.1). It suggests that the question of creativity has been debated without adequate reference to the tasks and contributions of different staff roles in advertising agencies. For if one decides to look away from creativity as a *concept* and scrutinise instead the generation of ideas in an organisation through *concrete work*, then one realises that the sanctuary of creativity is not necessarily the creative department; that copywriters and art directors do not necessarily unearth the golden nuggets that an agency can rely on (6.2.2).

### 6.2.1. Creativity in the creative department: “myth” or reality?

It is first important to note that advertising people shaped the concept of creativity in a way that would rationalise the outcome of their work in a circular fashion. In the words of Patrick:

Patrick (interview excerpt)	Day 41	11:09	Submarine
<b>Patrick:</b> Why will you lose a competition? Why will CAMIF (a client) not trust you? (a couple of days ago he had orchestrated a long presentation for them) Why... why? You'll always find rational arguments, but deep inside [the client] will think you don't really deserve the “creative” label if you failed to send signals showing you are contemporary. Our company doesn't have, in the signals it sends, this contemporary dimension. (...)			

Patrick's argument was circular, i.e. tautological –the presentation failed because the agency was not “creative” enough; it was not creative enough because it lacked a “contemporary dimension”; and this contemporary dimension allegedly “explained” why g&a lost competitions. Based on a circular sequence of irrationalities, this strange system of reassurance, albeit not explaining anything, somehow managed to construct the rationality of creativity at g&a.

James Sébastien Mélanie	Day 36	16:04	Pierre's office
<p><i>Mélanie burst in the office.</i></p> <p><b>Mélanie:</b> Sorry for interrupting... I just wanted to know, er, James... What background colour did you want for the second poster? It's blue on the first one, I thought we'd choose something else now.</p> <p><b>James, with a sigh:</b> pff... green? You wanna do green?</p> <p><b>Mélanie:</b> I don't mind, well yes, green sounds good...</p> <p><b>James:</b> Try to find a green that's modern... Something that's kind of modern.</p>			

Would g&a become more “contemporary”, on this ad at least, if it managed to find a “modern” green? To the outsider these conversations sounded like gibberish. But it could be suggested that the circular creation and reproduction of such categories (the “modern”, the “original”, the “contemporary”, the “fashionable”) fulfilled a role of *permanent* identity construction, insofar as it weeded uncertainties that were tirelessly growing back (“why?... why?”). Advertising jargon was meaningless in essence but extremely meaningful in function –it was the energy *circulating* through g&a and keeping it alive, the oil or water stream that enabled the rotation of the engine, the wind that made the mill's wings spin and sustained the dynamic<sup>107</sup> shield required to keep uncertainties out. One reached again the conclusions of section 5.2.4: existential struggles destabilised the organisation as much as they fostered and even conditioned its dynamism.

<sup>107</sup> “Dynamic” because the meaning of “modern” would shift over time for instance.

### *“Why not!”*

Also, working with different groups in this agency, I perceived account handlers as more “creative”<sup>108</sup> than the creatives. This became clear as I collaborated with Patrick on the plant park. Doors were usually wide opened or at least ajar at g&a, so one day I asked him whether I could help in anything. Bingo. This afternoon would be by far the most exciting time I would have in the company:

Patrick	Day 11	15:16	Patrick's office
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*We were flicking through the big project book, which contained colourful maps and watercolour paintings, but almost no writing at all.*



*We spent three hours writing down what these images inspired us, finding neologisms and simpler names that appealed to fantasy. They sounded like schmaltzy novels or Walt Disney titles, and the more “magic”, the more “childish” they did, the more I laughed. Patrick would content himself with shrugging or exclaiming “why not!”. The different zones of the park had to be marketable after all and he said we were having good ideas. When I returned to the creation room I had to dry off tears of joy from my cheeks.*

<sup>108</sup> Due to the numerous debates around the notion of “creativity” (c.f. 2.3, 2.4), the meaning of the word is here limited to its *purpose* –convincing a client to launch the campaign.

## Les attractions ..

*Suggestion de nom de zone (si zone il doit y avoir) + Les noms d'attraction  
Dans l'ordre de la présentation du projet en respectant le zonage actuel  
L'objectif c'est imaginer et désintellectualiser  
Donner envie en étant tout de même précis..  
Ensuite on gardera ce qui est le plus évocateur !  
On s'apercevra qu'il y a du trop et du pas assez pour donner de la consistance à certains thèmes majeurs*

### → La conquête du végétal

Le quai des explorateurs  
L'odyssée des 5 continents  
Les voiles de la découverte  
Les explorateurs du végétal  
L'expédition botanique  
Les chasseurs d'espèces  
Les aventuriers de l'épice  
Le radeau de la canopée  
Le campement du père David  
La tente bédouine de Théodore  
Les colporteurs de l'oisier  
Les compères des tropiques  
L'épopée chlorophylle

*Jeu : sur les traces des aventuriers..  
La cueillette insolite*

*Histoire*

*80*

*Animation / Attraction*

*Botan + cinéma + entropie*

### → La croisière florale

Les passerelles sur la mangrove  
Les terres aquatiques  
Les îlots des saules  
Les rives enchantées  
Le canal fleuri  
La serre généreuse  
Les floraisons d'Anjou  
Les nouvelles sèves  
Le génie vert  
Le parcours des 5 sens  
Les marchés du monde  
Les norias du lac  
Les tonnelles pourpres  
Les drapées aux magnolias

*Jeu : ..*

*100*

*Paysage d'Anjou.  
Dance Anglaise.*

*Bourse.*

*Accumulation*

The “Bubble Organ”, the “Angelic Garden”... this had to be a joke. But I liked this kind of brainstorming because it unbridled our imagination –anything could go, nothing had to be censored.

On the contrary creatives were much less flexible. They adhered to a system of taboos (see 6.3.2) where things were possible and others –though not too eccentric at first sight– out of the question. Patrick and Stéphanie’s roles on the plant park project were roughly that of “strategic planning”, a term mostly used in bigger agencies than g&a. Planners conducted research on the client’s business (here amusement parks), observed and synthesized market trends. In the words of one of them<sup>109</sup>, they did “all this in-depth work that consists in summarising in one sentence the product you are

<sup>109</sup> I forgot the name of this strategic planner, who is also CEO of TBWA France –heard on the radio on day 18 (France Inter) while driving over the speed limit in a rented Fiat Punto between Paris and Nantes. I jotted down this extract after stopping at a rest area.

going to sell”. Planners knew more about the topic than any of the creatives would ever know. Their design of a “whole new world”<sup>110</sup> would participate in a demonstration of the overall knowledge g&a had acquired on theme parks. And I could only see creativity in this kind of relevant display of knowledge. To my mind creative branding began with good conceptualisation. Poor knowledge on a topic would almost certainly lead to poor conceptualisation and bad advertising.

### 6.2.2 From creative myths to management power

Hence I believe that the most creative (and exciting) work at g&a was not done in the creation room but at the level of strategic planning. Don Slater (1989) observed that “whereas the advertising agent *par excellence* is generally thought to be the “creative person”, the real centres of power in most [British] agencies are the account handlers” (cited in Sender 2004: 16). In my experience of advertising this “power” lay in their creative aptitudes and I think Slater’s remark could go further: “the real centres of creativity in most agencies are the account handlers”, not ADs or copywriters. Account executives described the big picture with which the creatives-executants would only play at the margins. A brief was more creative in my opinion than the visuals and catch-phrases it would give rise to. In a way the creatives would not generate ideas but work on ideas that had already been found. Hackley and Kover (2007: 73-4) remark that creatives are often regarded as a management “problem”, as “trouble” for managers, before concluding that “[t]his might be because what is at stake is not creativity at all but the power to decide what counts as work”. Like them I wish to refer to conflicting situations between creative and commercial milieus, which disempowered creatives and made them particularly vulnerable (c.f. chapter two).

#### *“We’re putting them on the rails”*

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This also explained why I learnt more during the few hours I spent with Patrick than during my idle weeks in the creation room. Consistent with my feelings, his vision of strategic planning undermined the role of creatives.

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<sup>110</sup> Not a reference to Walt Disney’s *Aladdin*. I would proudly mention *The Lion King* though, as my favourite in the genre.

Patrick Stéphanie	Day 10	15:50-17:10	Submarine
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*They were discussing the major account they handle, the plant park, when Stéphanie's mobile phone rang. She answered.*

**Patrick, to me and with an educational tone:** You see that (...) this work we're doing in the submarine, it's behind-the-scenes... The copywriter will get that later, he will receive a briefing, he might also ask for the brand platform if he wants to, but he situates himself in relation to that (*pointing to his notes on the table*), which is a sort of charter. You understand the work we're doing François?

**François:** I'm beginning to understand.

**Patrick:** Everything we do –even if we're like fighting about the slightest little thing –saves creatives hours and hours, later. Everything we do is root work, we're clearing the ground. We're in a submarine and we're doing submarine work. If we get it wrong, the creatives flunk it. We're putting them on the rails, and that's really important –after that, they're free to have a ball on the rails...

(...)

**Patrick:** At some point you give this to the creatives and it allows them to take off, but not to take off 2 miles away...

Of course Patrick could tend to overemphasise his own role, but I found the metaphor of the executive's "submarine work" most relevant to my observations. Here was the "centre of power" –the power of breathing life into a dull project, finding a direction, building the rails of creation before chaining the creatives' ankles to them and watching them dance. Stéphanie and Patrick produced *ideas* in the Platonic sense of ideal constructs, whereas copywriters would produce *names* based on these ideas. With this analysis in mind, Sébastien and Gérald's blasé reaction to the very first brief about the park made more sense now ("alright, can we go now?"). If they were not interested in the hesitant, sketchy blueprint Stéphanie showed them at first, it was because they expected something more definitive, possibly an accurate story of the park as it would *exactly* materialise in the near future. Practitioners know that creatives seek to be restricted; they ask for the chains that will tie them up around that which is supposed to channel their imagination. Bunting (1995: 94) for example asserts that

a common mistake among young account-handlers is to assume that the creative team needs maximum freedom for self-expression. (...) Creative people actually prefer the discipline of tight briefs.



At g&a the creatives fabricated names and baselines, not ideas or concepts. Outsider accounts often miss the point when they refer to the “myth” of creativity. More important in my opinion is to signal that creativity is not the business of the creative department essentially. If outsider accounts fail to underscore this misconception of creativity as the exclusive task of copywriters and ADs, it is because they do not pay enough attention or provide enough descriptions of the mundane roles, tasks and internal relations of practitioners. For example how does a creative see an account executive? What do they say to each other? What do they expect from each other? etc. In general insider accounts are better at answering these simple questions than outsider accounts. And for lack of this basic, vital information, outsider accounts happen to mythicise practice (c.f. chapter two). What is much less debated in the advertising literature, broadly speaking, is how and where creativity occurs. But this was not too commonsense a question to be asked in my observations of advertising work. Marketing textbooks (Kotler and Keller 2005; Brassington and Pettitt 2006, etc.) and some practitioners’ accounts content themselves with telling us that creativity occurs in the creative department. For example Josling’s (1995: 61) writes that “the most important department is the creative department, since it produces the product for which an advertising agency exists”.

### *“Without marketing people, it’s going nowhere”*

Yet at g&a I saw creativity essentially elsewhere. As the metaphor of the submarine and that of the rails suggest, management used creatives exactly as directors use actors –as tools that allowed them to achieve a result they often had in mind prior to the shooting (not always). The creative task was in other words extremely mechanical for two reasons. First clients guided the whole process; they were producers “investing” in g&a’s talent (spinning out the cinema metaphor). Second, the marketing staff at g&a “directed” the operations in a way that gave little room to improvisation. Altogether, I gladly compared these constraints, in echo of the graphic theme (c.f. 5.2.3), to that of a “paint by number” activity. I got along very well with Patrick, who trusted me and even confided in me about his perception of the agency. When we were on our own he would not hesitate to tell me what he thought went wrong at g&a. Clearly disappointed with the copywriters, he was here very critical of the value they added to the business.

Patrick	Day 23	16:57	Patrick's office
<p>(...)</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> So what have our two ninnies [copywriters] found?</p> <p><b>François:</b> So they favoured er, mostly stuff with “plant” because Sébastien wrote something that said ““plant” seems inescapable”, and so he really wanted to use “plant”<sup>111</sup>...</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> And?</p> <p><b>François:</b> So he’s found stuff, around the location first, or around sensation, voyage, but always keeping the “plant” word. What he’s found is this kind of “Plant Valley”, “Plant Galaxy”, “Plant Passion”, etc. Then I added others.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> Well I’m not buying this conclusion... Cos you might as well call it “Chlorocosmos”, and then a baseline “The Plant Park in Anjou”, right? Dunno what the fuck we’re doing, getting stuck like this... <i>(reading Sébastien’s list, he mumbles some of the “plant” names, then frowns)</i> I’m going to “Plant Challenge”, I’m going to “Plant Boarding”, let’s stop this shit before it gets any worse...</p> <p><b>François:</b> Yeah I agree...</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> Imagine that this is what the life of the agency is all about... [the creatives] don’t need us, do they? I’m just noticing. Now if they really want their “plant”, fair enough, let’s “plant” everything, it’s not, it’s not... It’s so simple to produce a logo... hup! “Plantopia: The Plant Adventure”... “the park of... park of the plant adventure”.</p> <p><b>François:</b> Or “adventure park of... plants”... yeah...</p> <p><b>Patrick, now incensed:</b> You stick it [the baseline] below, why the fuck are you gonna trail “plant” along? You get me? <i>(he stamps both hands on his thighs)</i> And right away... <i>(he whistles and suddenly lowers his voice, adopting a confidential tone)</i> No but you know what, this agency, five years ago, that’s what it was about –tiny operations, the kind of stuff DM blokes do, you see... (...) No but, this is just between us –okay, I know I don’t have an easy temperament, I know I’m a spoilsport, a troublemaker and all that, uh, very well, but this is what’s adding value in the end... I’m happy this [work] has been done, it shows marketing people that without them, it’s going nowhere... We’ll add, I mean we’ll remove many of [the names] now, and it’s a collective responsibility...</p>			

<sup>111</sup> “Végétal” in French, which refers to the “vegetable” in general.





*Logo design at g&a (left) and AD Fabio's first attempts at creating the plant park logo (right)*



*On day 4 I played the art director for the first and last time –dreadful logo, but I didn't like Fabio's either.*

Patrick simply “noticed” how essential the work of marketing people was in a structure where creatives needed much channelling indeed. Had g&a been limited to the creation room, Sébastien’s intuitions on the word “plant”, producing disastrous names such as “Plant Challenge”, would have been seriously considered. Patrick even described creative work as a nuisance more than a progression (“let’s stop this shit before it gets any worse”). But not being a creative myself I played the role of a communicator, reporting from the creation room, bridging an operational unit with the decision cell. Patrick was the only person who made me feel part, for reasons I could not quite understand, of this decision cell (“they don’t need *us*, do they?”). A spy who revealed secrets, I too was granted secrets (“this is just between us”). But the hard work on the plant park was not really about “trying out” names or designing logos (“it’s so simple to produce a logo”). Even choosing between potential logos was unchallenging –in chapter five Beigbeder (2004) recounts of a marketing manager

drawing lots for a logo that would be catapulted “on the shelves of every supermarket in Europe”!

The hard work on the plant park was rather about orienting thinking towards a few directions only; and it was about justifying the reasons why these directions had been chosen. Again, Patrick wanted to say in a roundabout way (it was still a “collective responsibility”) that marketing people were the orchestrators or puppet-masters who “add[ed] value in the end” and without whom g&a’s business was “going nowhere”. He finally lamented a culture of creation that was incapable of growing apart from the company’s initial specialisation in direct marketing (“five years ago, that’s what it was about (...) the kind of stuff DM blokes do, you see”). I shared exactly the same feeling about the company’s overcautiousness and fear of change, which found its best expression in a xenophobic and homophobic creation room. But again such a culture of creation did not explain itself by itself. Instead trivialisation, laughter and fear (phobias) explained each other as part of a coherent cultural system. To this system I add a set of self-restrictions that shaped the concept of creativity, and determined the conditions of production in the creation room. By analogy with “strategies of trivialisation” and in line with Elias’ (1992) account of self-imposed constraints (5.3.2), this set of discourses and practices could be called “strategies of self-censorship”. These are described in the next section.

### **6.3 Strategies of self-censorship**

This section describes another set of strategies of rationalisation and contains four subsections. Censorship is first analysed in relation to the plant park account and notably through the role it plays in arousing a “spiral of fear” (6.3.1). The two subsections that follow identify strategies of self-censorship in “clichés” and “sacralisation” (6.3.2, 6.3.3). Finally attention is drawn to the history of self-censorship in parallel with the history of the organisation (6.3.4).

### 6.3.1 The spiral of fear

*“If you start rejecting things, the agency can close down”*

Strategies of self-censorship referred to a kind of creative asceticism arising as a response to a turbulent environment. The story of the plant park could establish this religious dimension of creativity:

Stéphanie Patrick Sébastien	Day 41	10:15	Stéphanie's office Corridor Patrick's office
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*I walked in Stéphanie's office where Sébastien, Stéphanie and Patrick were conversing.*

(...)

**Stéphanie:** “Plants”, they want us to explore it... Emmanuel M (...) wants us to chuck out everything that's “polis”, “world”, “mundi”, “cosmos” because they just lead to bankruptcy, because these are parks that weren't that successful, and as an expert in parks he says we should definitely cross them out...

**Patrick:** Why not...

**Stéphanie:** “Edenia”, same thing... he says that everything that ends in “ia”, uh...

**Patrick:** There won't be any “Edenia”, alright...

(...)

**Sébastien:** (...) The problem with this is, as long as we have no feedback from consumers er... everything will blast...

**Stéphanie:** Except that before running the focus groups there's more work to be done. Cos focus groups must be based on names er, I mean one of these names will be the park's.

(...)

**Sébastien, standing up for himself:** It's true that we haven't used “plant”, it was so ugly that... Besides, I can already imagine the local press headlines if the park is in deficit, “the park that blew it<sup>112</sup>”, uh...

(...)

**Patrick:** Our convictions are taking shape (...) What's going on here –you've got three categories of names. A category that's completely descriptive, what I would call “Sea City”, descriptive, “Plant Planet”, “Plant Adventure”, you can't get it wrong. Then you've got names like “Plantopia”, which don't immediately say, um...

**Sébastien:** Yeah but it already exists somewhere...

**Patrick, Sébastien is talking at the same time:** Yeah it already exists, erm, who cares, because if you

<sup>112</sup> The French pronominal verb “se planter” means “to mess up”.

start rejecting things, the agency can close down because everything's been done already, of course, besides you haven't registered it, and besides and besides... (...)

**Sébastien:** My feeling is that now, we're getting nowhere... So many contradictory opinions, er... (...) The bloke's telling you, "er...", no but I mean it's insane, it's not because it was called "polis" that it went bankrupt! It's a "black cat" thing, it's bloody stupid.

**Patrick:** Well ok but let's look on the bright side, at some point we need to make choices. Since I've been seeing a team, which for two weeks, for three weeks, is listening to the whole planet, since from the start I said there are three categories, we're on our first intentions and we're not gonna move away from them.

(...)

*Shortly afterwards I come across Stéphanie in the corridor.*

**Stéphanie, exasperated:** I can tell you they're... I can tell you they're...

**François:** Driving you nuts...

**Stéphanie:** Yeah because the project manager doesn't completely agree either, so it's getting nowhere... the scriptwriter is gone, the architect is telling me "I fear it might be a flop", uh...

(...)

**Patrick, to François:** (...) You know everything we talked about François, EVERYTHING we've written about... It didn't reach [Nicolas] M cos it wasn't opportune. This guy didn't even watch the video, there was this "Plant Park 2002" video (...) The [architect] makes us progress but the semiologist is totally up the spout (...) When you think about the reasons that struck off some names, you know, "polis", "cosmos" and all that jazz, it's because somewhere, in some countries in Europe and in the world, there were commercial failures, so they don't want to hear from them again... As Sébastien says er, they are black sheep, I mean black cats, they're fears, um... And we work in the middle of this... But you know what? It doesn't make me febrile. The problem is that we're doing too much politics. We're not saying what we believe in. That's what bugs me. By dint of kindness we get the opposite of what we want. We're asking for everybody's opinion, but in the end the president [of the local council] will come to your office at some point, and point-blank ask you: "so what's your advice?", full stop. That's what our job comes down to. Either you've got balls, because you've got a real conviction, a real passion AND you're paid for that; or you've got another attitude that's about saying "I'm taking the cash and I will think later". And I disagree with this one. (...)

This episode indicates that the agency found itself amidst a network of meaning makers –an architect, a scriptwriter, an “expert in theme parks”, a semiologist, people working in tourism, people working in local councils, consumers, etc. Fighting its way through contradictory information flows and lexical struggles, my informants felt like wasting time (“my feeling is that now, we’re getting nowhere...”). They also accused the superstitions of others (“it’s a “black cat” thing, it’s bloody stupid”) whilst failing to acknowledge their own (“I can already imagine the local press headlines if the park is in deficit”). Lastly, before submitting their pre-selection to focus groups they had to reassure themselves as to the “quality” of the candidates

(“one of these names will be the park’s”). They did so via “listening to the whole planet”, whose pessimism deteriorated g&a’s already fragile beliefs and affected St  phanie’s motivation in particular (“the architect is telling me “I fear it might be a flop”).

All in all, uncertainties were contagious and placed g&a into a “spiral of fear”. Lost in a polyphonic jungle where the same names were alternately poisonous flowers and manna from heaven, Patrick and St  phanie were less seeking expert advices than a consolidation of their own convictions (“our convictions are taking shape”; “that’s what our job comes down to (...) you’ve got a real conviction”). Patrick concluded that the exercise was one of verbal jousting or sophistry, not political negotiation. They had to deliver as persuasive a monologue as possible in order to consolidate faith in a highly contested project (“the problem is that we’re doing too much politics. We’re not saying what we believe in”). He thus opposed the “Heretics” (“this guy didn’t even watch the video”; “the semiologist is totally up the spout”) to the good believers (“the architect makes us progress”). The opinions g&a harvested disguised the agency’s convictions in a reliable, “scientific” discourse full of “evidences” such as the findings of focus groups. The agency converted people in this way, selling faith inside the shell of multipolar justifications where negotiations, regulations and marketing research came into play.

### *“I’m animating the debate in a sterile kind of way but...”*

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Patrick and St  phanie imagined the nightmarish destiny of the amusement parks ending in “world” and “ia” in the past (“there won’t be any “Edenia”, alright”); spectres of “polis” and “cosmos” frightened clients (“they don’t want to hear from them again”); meanwhile S  bastien envisioned a dystopic park guilty of its name in the near future<sup>113</sup>. The leader of the market research department had the same futurologist discourse which cultivated “black cats”.

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<sup>113</sup> Was the plant park not this odd “spectre” coming from the future, not the past? In Dickens’ “Christmas Tale” (1956) the Last of the Spirits is a ghost of Christmas-to-come, showing Scrooge what will happen to him if he keeps behaving miserly. Patrick, St  phanie and others had to play a similar role, except that they would reveal an idyllic future, not a bad omen. In other words, their temporal position with respect to the plant park inverted roles. It was more accurate to say (in the traditional sense conveyed by one of the French terms for “ghost”, “revenant” – “the one who returns”) that *they* were ghosts since they belonged to the past on a 2009 referent. This account might then turn them into

Kamila Nicolas (market research) Stéphanie	Day 45	14:04	Kamila's office
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*They met to analyse the first “trends” market research indicated regarding names for the plant park.*

(...)

**Kamila:** (...) I can already picture Béchu, the president of the county council [the client] unveiling the thingy, and hup *(she mimes the opening of a curtain to contextualise her action in a future inaugural ceremony)*: “Plant Planet”! “Botanipark”! you know, and at this point there’s a roar of laughter among journalists... *(to Stéphanie)* So I agree with you, the name has to be efficient in its logo as well, this logo’s gonna be eminently important to make them dream.

Sébastien Stéphanie Patrick Kamila	Day 51	9:40	Alban's office
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*Another place, another meeting, more trends.*

(...)

Kamila: (...) well I’m animating the debate in a sterile kind of way now but, erm... when the curtain opens... *(she mimes the opening of a curtain)* ‘Plaaaaaaaant Planet!!!’ *(as she utters the word “planet”, her smile vanishes and she looks doubtful)*

*Kamila laughs.*

This is how advertising people borrowed scenarios from an arrow of time they had themselves designed, founding their beliefs and restricting their choices from a haunted past and a dreadful future. Self-censorship delineated boundaries that turned endless processes (such as a research on brand names) into manageable tasks. Thus Sébastien reached “impossibilities” that prevented work in their direction and undermined anxieties with regard to creativity: “plant” was “too ugly” to be used and “Plantopia” already existed “somewhere”. Self-censorship thus contained the paradox of creative work –it made advertising work possible, and at the same time went against its *raison d’être* (“if you start rejecting things, the agency can close down”). It can be noted at this point that strategies were always soothing devices, not drugs that heightened faculties. They were curing pain, not enhancing critical judgement. Finally the unavowed superstition of the business (“it’s a ‘black cat’ thing, it’s bloody stupid” Sébastien deplores as if he were fearless) surprised me –what to think of creativity

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creepy shadows guilty of all evils (“I can already imagine the local press headlines if the park is in deficit, “the park that blew it””).

when most of it appeared outside the creation department, and when this department retreated into asceticism and repentance?

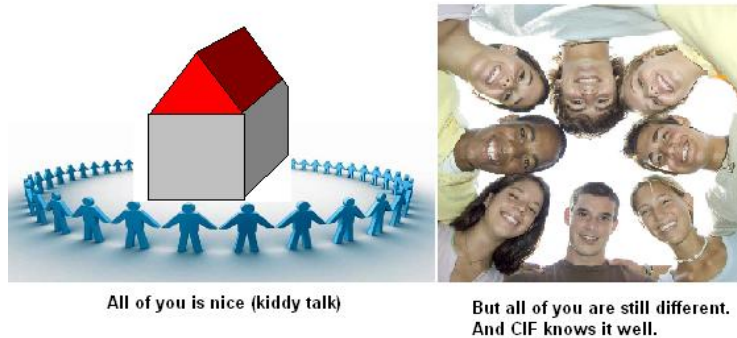
### 6.3.2 Clichés

At g&a strategies of trivialisation (chapter five) and self-censorship (this chapter) rationalised the time spent at work, and as a result the notion of a “productive” time. A productive time in advertising enabled creative production. Accordingly temporal strategies were also strategies “of” and “for” creativity. A strategy of self-censorship, in particular, constructed creativity in a structuralist fashion –creativity was defined through what it was *not*. The creatives called this non-creativity “clichés”. Clichés made their task easier since they could focus on a small number of ideas without being distracted by clichés. The following scenes show what this “negative” definition of creativity was all about:

Laurence James Gérald Sébastien	Day 5	17:15	Submarine
<p><i>Laurence’s brief on the C.I.F account (a bank) for 2006 first recalled the orientation of the 2005 campaign. There was one generic campaign and three thematic campaigns including the “YES/NO” communication. For the clients, the “NO to something” statements sounded like “strikers in the street with their placards”; moreover people would not always understand the message. Gérald had this disappointed look on his face.</i></p> <p><b>Gérald, complaining:</b> If we lose this duality YES/NO, the campaign will be dull.</p> <p><i>Laurence’s recommendations were to maintain the main communication axis, especially the “little house” (pictured further) that referred to C.I.F as a real-estate specialist. However the general discourse had to be simplified: Gérald had to focus on the “yes” and make the C.I.F solutions stand out. The promise (or USP) highlighted in this 2006 brief remained the same: the bank only dealt with private individuals, meaning it could deliver customised services.</i></p>			

In the morning of the next day, Gérald asked me to help him on the CIF account. We worked (but I did not feel like working) and this is what I showed to Gérald (next page).



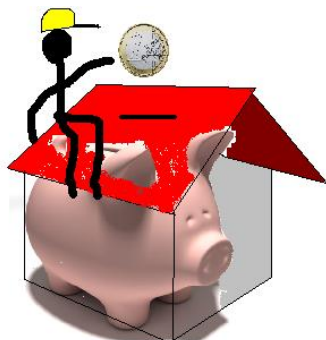


CIF: RECOMMENDED BY REAL ESTATE SPECIALISTS

Hardly had he glanced at it that he gave me a doubtful pout. As he commented on it, he looked more indifferent than disappointed. There were five main problems:

- It was not explicit enough.
- It was “graphically too complicated”.
- The promise was not meaningful enough.
- The budget could not afford such a realisation.
- Texts should be shorter and include the word “specialist” (evidence that he did not read my catch line).

Beyond the fact that there was no positive point, he was also reluctant to support his claims (when I asked him why it was too expensive to produce this, he said “too many elements” before staring back at his screen). So I tried to simplify the visual and produce a metaphor as “explicit” as possible. Perhaps knowing what went wrong in *my* advertisements would allow me to understand what made *him* a copywriter. This is what I came up with half an hour later:



As to mortgages, I trust specialists.

*concept: carpenter throwing a coin  
in the slot of a piggy bank-shaped house*



I must admit that this looked even worse than my first proposition. And once again Gérald's feedback was not too encouraging.

- The pig was a cliché.
- It was “graphically too complicated” –there would be scale issues<sup>114</sup>.
- The message was ambiguous –one could think the carpenter was a customer<sup>115</sup>.

Much advertising and in particular direct marketing took people for fools after all. Did Gérald expect me to toss a more stupid metaphor over them? In this line of thinking I first believed that the pig was a cliché because it did not embody the sophistication claimed by creative work. Perhaps the ad was “too explicit” this time. Ingeniously, the clichés also made Gérald's work more valuable since he had managed to avoid them in spite of their ubiquity. It is then through its negative definition of creativity that the cliché could be understood as a strategy of self-censorship. Like all strategies of rationalisation, self-censorship dissipated anxieties. It created automatisms and routines –*of course* a competition was lost for lack of time (chapter four); a piggy-bank was *obviously* a clichéd visual for money or savings (this chapter).

Integral parts of the culture of creation at g&a, these routines were in other words “psychologically linked to the minimizing of unconscious sources of anxiety” according to Giddens (1984: 282). They sustained a sense of “ontological security”<sup>116</sup>. They were also that by which people limited their questioning of the world. Strategies of trivialisation in chapter five had exactly the same effect –the creatives

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<sup>114</sup> Could their expensive software not enable them to adjust scales and make three different objects appear on the same picture? Later I realised that Gérald lied when he said that illustrations and photographs could not be combined. The agency did it elsewhere. Not a gratuitous lie to my mind but a roundabout incitement to stick to a certain aesthetic style.

<sup>115</sup> I found this last comment regarding ambiguity interesting. In connection to chapter two, it assumed that people whose activity was linked to buildings, such as mortgage specialists or carpenters, were *not* customers. But even so, I thought that the advertisement told other “customers” to imitate what the specialists would do in their case, and the ambiguity would no longer matter. As Gérald wore a busy, leave-me-alone look on his face, I kept my concern for myself.

<sup>116</sup> Routine and “routinization” play a vital role in Giddens' (1984: 50) “theory of structuration”, in which they express the reproduction of the social structure (“structure” for him is the creation of human activity, and also the means of shaping and directing this activity). This role is defined, in its most condensed form, as follows: “Ordinary day-to-day life (...) involves an *ontological security* expressing an *autonomy of bodily control* within *predictable routines*. The psychological origins of ontological security are to be found in basic anxiety-controlling mechanisms (...)”.

refused to question the usefulness or purpose of their work, and in their jokes and acting made criticisms of the industry derisory (5.4). In sum strategies of rationalisation substituted *commonsense* (a socially constructed normality) to the unresolved, hence intimidating complexities of the advertising business. The works of Barthes (1993) are imbued with contempt for this “commonsense”, by and large imputed to the bourgeoisie<sup>117</sup>. In chapter two Bourdieu (1979) was not less scornful of a “new” bourgeoisie (cultural intermediaries) participating, via “illegitimate” communication, in the *naturalisation* of the social (see also Bourdieu 1970, 1993). At g&a there was however more to self-censorship than just the cliché or “non creativity”. Existing creations, that is the work that was *not* cliché, tended on the other hand to acquire a precious, invaluable, untouchable status which was to advertising flawlessness what the cliché was to the evils of advertising. This status is the object of the next subsection.

### 6.3.3 Sacralisation

Most of the time clients did not request radical changes but modifications at the margin (Laurence’s brief above), i.e. small alterations of existing things. This meant that I would never be deemed worthy of helping copywriters if I did not conduct some kind of content analysis on previous works for the account in question. A number of elements repeated over and over again (a colour, an item, a metaphor, etc.) shaped the identity of this C.I.F campaign. There were two simple reasons for that –the story was always the same (same USP), and so was the storyteller (a copywriter with the same cultural capital and the same techniques). In previous advertisements for CIF, the little house was incorporated into a ready-made<sup>118</sup> photograph and played the role of something else (a medal, a token, etc.).

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<sup>117</sup> For him the bourgeois are fond of tautological reasoning, which kills two birds with one stone –not only is rationality killed because it resists them, but so too is language because it betrays them. When bourgeois parents cannot find a proper answer to their children’s questions for example, they hide behind authoritative arguments: “every penny counts” [*un sou est un sou*], “because, that’s that”, “that’s all there is to it”, etc. Words cannot be found, language is refused, and instead magical responses appear as “truths” negating otherness and praising the same.

<sup>118</sup> I use “ready-made” here because the creative rarely took pictures, but instead purchased them from a couple of specialised websites (see section 6.4.1). Had the creation room been a kitchen they would not have combined their own ingredients but microwaved pre-cooked meals if you like.



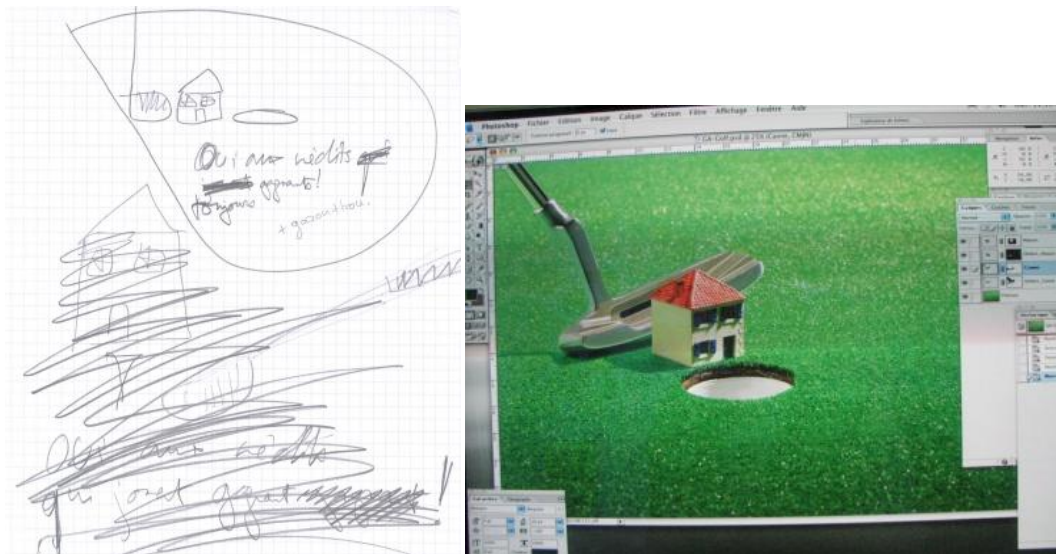
*An orgasmic “Yes to loans that bring you loads!”: winning two houses in the casino.*

Hence what I had to produce was a *synecdoche* –a part representing the whole –that would symbolise a “gain” or a “win”.



*Ideas materialising: from Gérald’s roughbook to the final advertisement.*

With this CIF account, I was learning that clichés referred to all ideas that ignored the *history* of a campaign. I was learning that clichés meant the “non historical”, making of creativity a temporal concept linked to the local history of the organisation. Thus I could not start with new eyes but had to take into account the permanencies, accidents, censored and must-be elements of a campaign – the house, the word “specialist”, but also the synecdoche here.



*Ideas materialising 2: from Gérald's roughbook to James's computer...*



*On to the final print.*

The creative character of the censoring function became more evident. The cliché was a strategy of self-censorship because it creatively (strategically) defined creativity through non-creativity. It was partly thanks to Gérald's creative style that the agency had won this particular client. The business respected and protected the first link of this reproductive chain, and consequently adopted conservative and self-referential habits. It was believed that if the link broke, so would the campaign. I was witnessing a huge aversion to risk<sup>119</sup> that led the organisation to *sacralise* its own production –an

<sup>119</sup> By the same token, Patrick would often notice that g&a's dependence on clients from the same banking and insurance sector showed the agency's tendency to withdraw into itself and refuse to think about what could be done differently. Creatives thought it vital to reproduce only the themes that clients had liked in the first place –perhaps disregarding the fact that they might have been even more seduced by others.



idea, a brief, an ad among other things. In other words this production was elevated from the profane to the religious and made “holy”, i.e. pure, inviolable and worthy of veneration. Thus Gérald believed that changing the YES/NO theme would result in a “dull campaign”. Abandoning the YES/NO theme amounted to desecrating its pious impetus.

*“A modified platform means we’re not talking about the same thing anymore”*

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By the same token, much of the work done on the plant park account was sacralised. One day I joined Stéphanie and Patrick who, following the debriefing with clients on day three, were engaging in a different “reading” of the future theme park. The clients were asking them to modify the brand platform. I liked them both, Stéphanie for her capacity to listen without interrupting and Patrick for talking without interruption:

Stéphanie Patrick	Day 5	10:32	Submarine
<p>(...)</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> You know, I’ve been thinking... But hold on a second, it’s like their project is incomplete. There are so many things they could include! What about biofuels? It’s energy for the future, isn’t it? That’s what people care about. Then, I mean (<i>she reads her notes</i>): cosmetics? Or medicinal plants for example? And mushrooms, have you seen any mushroom in their thingy? (...) And what about creating a thematic restaurant? You know, something on diets... eat well, eat vegetables, and bla bla bla.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> (...) The problem is, if the product changes, so too must the brand platform. And, and we need to be extremely cautious about that. A modified platform means we’re not talking about the same thing anymore, and this is why I’m a little bit reluctant about the whole thing (...) Cos according to the elements we’ve been given, we did produce the right platform. Anyway, I think –and you’ll tell me if I’m raving or if I’ve eaten cactuses –I think we’re heading towards a positioning of this kind... I’ve written that yesterday, trying to consider everything that’s been said so far: <i>“first park where you will experience the spectacular adventure of plants”</i>...</p>			

Patrick’s assumption that a change in the brand platform boiled down to an alteration of the theme park itself rested on a sacralisation of this platform. In this line of thinking g&a had accurately “translated” an offer, it had already created a “realistic” vision of the park (“according to the elements we’ve been given, we did produce the right platform”). So if the clients disagreed with the right platform, then it was the park that went wrong. Such reasoning framed g&a’s work as irreproachable

(inviolable i.e. *sacred*) –Patrick and Stéphanie believed they were changing “accurate” words within a stable platform. As a result they could not help reinventing the place from elements that were *not* given, from “negative data” (“it’s like their project is incomplete”). Moreover and as holy water “blessed” the child in the ritual of baptism, a sacralised platform consecrated the status of the park they had imagined prior to the first meeting.

Hence their dilemma (“I’m a bit reluctant about the whole thing”) –by bringing modifications they committed sacrilege and debased their expertise in translation (see section 6.4.1). Sacralisation is sometimes reported in the writings of practitioners. Duckworth (1997: 149) writes for instance:

The fact is, sometimes there is an unhealthy tendency for account teams, and especially planners, to “fetishize” the brief. The brief becomes treated as some precious, almost mystical object, filled with intellectual cleverness or obscurely written guidance. It becomes treated as something important in its own right, an end in itself.

Sacralisation was observable among both creatives and account leaders; but it also revealed management’s power over creatives, as the next “plant park” events suggest. This power came from the privileged relations executives had with key decision-makers –their clients (creatives seldom had any power of negotiation outside the agency). For example Patrick and Stéphanie used to filter the production of the creation room. They would tell clients what *they* thought was appropriate in the end, even if it involved discrediting and ignoring creative findings. Creative work was disposable. Thus I heard one afternoon that g&a had proposed “Edenia” to the plant park clients, despite my classifying it as ineligible (copyrighted). I had spent a whole day chasing copyrights on our list that contained more than 200 names. For nothing. So I began slipping ridiculous names into the list: “Green Gargoyles”, “Flowerpuke”, “The Plants of Love”, “Disgraceful Daffodils”, “Poppy Party”... Hopefully, I would know whether the list had been read or not. Having found out the odd ones, management and possibly creatives would bully me. I expected someone to come to my desk one day, brandishing the list and shouting “are you taking the piss”? In fact nobody did. This meant that Stéphanie, Patrick and others had not read it in full. I

finally learnt that further to St  phanie’s late decision this list had been passed on to the clients (including the odd ones).

But even the clients had probably skimmed a minute or two through the boring piece:

St��phanie	Day 35	10:29	Creation room
<p><b>St��phanie:</b> (...) and you know when they looked at the list? They looked at it after the meeting, between Nantes and Angers, they read the list in the car, period.</p> <p><b>Fran��ois:</b> Yeah...</p> <p><b>St��phanie:</b> I think this isn’t fair with respect to the work that’s been done...</p> <p><b>Fran��ois:</b> It’s strange they’re not that worried about... a name for a park, it’s really important, isn’t it? (...)</p>			

Revealed here was the staggering absurdity of a work that was carried out whilst not benefiting anyone. The agency kept producing names but none of the parties would bother reading them. I realised the extent to which it was not the exchange of a service that linked the agency to these clients but totally ungrounded relations of trust. As Rothenberg (1995: 328) points out in his ethnographic study, “in advertising, as in marriage, a loss of faith can be debilitating. It is the only quality, really, that binds a client to an agency”. The clients were looking for reassurance and g&a built its own self-confidence to assume its role. Eventually the clients were not interested in receiving a “list” but instead a prescriptive discourse in the line of “our research shows that A and B are the only possibilities, so choose between A or B.” (c.f. Patrick’s comment on day 41: “in the end the president [of the local council] will come to your office at some point, and point-blank ask you: “so what’s your advice?”, full stop”).

### *“So that we can show we kept on working”*

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However, if the list itself was not important, the *idea* of the list seemed crucial to the mechanism of reassurance. The *appearance* of work –a big, impressive list –mattered more than work itself. A concise statement would not make this work “behind the scenes” visible enough; by contrast, a compact and lengthy list persuaded g&a and its clients that “all possibilities had been explored” (as if they could be). Were they not

reported right here, on this tangible A3 paper? Once again, the agency's credibility and self-confidence depended on scandalous wastes of time. Despite the pointlessness of copywriting at this stage due to the lack of cooperation from the clients, Stéphanie felt that she had to provide them with "evidence" of work:

Stéphanie	Day 35	10:29	Jean-Phi's office
<p>(...)</p> <p><b>Stéphanie, to François:</b> Yeah, because if they like "Plant Planet", I can imagine that what they really like is "Planet", so, couldn't we work around that, finding things like "Plant Planet", "Flower Planet" er, "Planet... Planty Planet", well I'm just saying random things, I'm raving now but, can't we try, on the basis of each name, to think "ok, so they like this name –now what in the list contains the "planet" word for example?" We're having a second look, then we try and find others, you see, so that we can show we kept on working.</p>			

What still mattered was for g&a to demonstrate evidence of work. Fear of disappointing or losing this client incited the agency to carry out tasks whose purpose had little to do with the plant park itself, and more to do with *justifying* g&a's competence:

Patrick Stéphanie Alban	Day 56	12:20	Patrick's office
<p><i>In a previous meeting Stéphanie had told Patrick about Alban's idea of a "poster-teaser" g&amp;a should make ASAP for the plant park. They both believed it was a very bad idea. On his way to lunch Alban passed by Patrick's office.</i></p> <p>(...)</p> <p><b>Patrick, to Alban:</b> I think your idea of a poster/teaser is risky because...</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> Because of the content... not accurate enough. We wouldn't know what to put on it!</p> <p><b>Alban:</b> Well we've got to organise a meeting about that. A poster has nothing to do with the logo.</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> Yes it has! We have to create an atmosphere, a concept-board.</p> <p><b>Alban:</b> We could organise two [creative] teams that would compete in parallel...</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> I disagree, we need to create an atmosphere that the whole team would share.</p> <p><b>Alban:</b> We've got to change tack because they're building us a bad reputation, of an agency that's not creative enough. That's why we need this show, one logo is not enough er, we need to prove we're good.</p>			



Alban justified a task that Patrick and Stéphanie found useless by the fact that a client losing trust in the agency might jeopardize its reputation. The function of this “poster/teaser” was not to enhance the quality of the plant park’s communication; it was to enhance the mood of one of its key decision-makers. g&a endeavoured to repeatedly “demonstrate” it was creative (“we need to prove we’re good”).



*Fabio’s attempt at creating a “poster/teaser” for Alban.*

This is how I contributed to the construction of a fetish that allegedly drew the path towards truth, towards “The Name”. Amusingly enough, the fetishised list I had designed “for purposes of clarity” looked like Scriptures (a fragment follows).

	Lieu	Sensation, passion	Voyage	Autres
Végétal + qqchose	Paradis Végétal	Végétale Expérience	Végétal'Odyssée	Dimension Végétale
	Cœur Végétal	Végétal'Expérience	Végétale Aventure	Végétalika
	Planète Végétale	Big Bang Végétal	Saga Végétale	Millenium Végétal
	Végétale Planète	Végétal' Sensations	Epopée Végétale	Millénaire Végétal
	Galaxie Végétale	Sensation Végétale	Végétal Explorer	Génération Végétales
	Végétales Galaxies	Végétal' Vibrations	Exploration Végétale	Végétal'générations
	Arche Végétale	Végétale(s) Attraction(s)	Défi Végétal	Végétal Forever
	Végétal Valley	Végétal Show	Conquête Végétale	Végétal Hallucinant
	Terre Végétale	WonderVégétal	Destination Végétale	Célébration Végétale
	Vallée Végétale	Passion Végétale	Cap Végétal	Bulle Végétale
	Végétaland	Végémania	Le Tour du Monde Végétal	Végétal Génial
	Royaume Végétal	Festival Végétal	Parcours Végétaux	Végétal Love
	Règne Végétal	Végétal Festival	Equippée Végétale	Végétal Végétal
	La Cité du Végétal	Végétal'Emotion	Raid Végétal	Bravo Végétal
	Univers Végétal	Phénoménal Végétal	Mission Végétale	Harmonie Végétale
		Attirance Végétale	Voyageur Végétal	Grâce Végétale
		Les Plantes de l'Amour	Embarquement Végétal	Intensité Végétale
		Sentiments Végétaux	Voyage Buccolique	
		Tentation Végétale	La Piste du Végétal	
		Emerveillement Végétal	Voyage Végétal	
		Enchantement Végétal	VVV: Voyage Vraiment Végétal	
		Berceuse Végétale		
		Rêve Végétal		
		Illusion Végétale		
		Douceur Végétale		
		Intimité Végétale		
		Idylle Végétale		
		Magie Végétale		
		Envie Végétale		
		Désir Végétal		
		Osmose Végétale		
Végétal + monde	Les Mondes Végétaux			
	VégéWorldPark			
	Les Végémondes			
	Végémondo			
	Végétal Mundi			
	VégéMundi			
	Monde Végétal			
Végétal + parc	Végétal Parc	Oniriparc du Végétal		
	Ludoparc Végétal	Parc Passion du Végétal		
	Ecoparc du Végétal	Parc Rêve du Végétal		
	Encycloparc du Végétal	Intimiparc du Végétal		
	Parc Mondial du Végétal	Parc Idyllique du Végétal		
	Parc Universel du Végétal	Parc Buccolique du Végétal		
	Le Parc V	Parc Magique du Végétal		
	Le Parc Idéal Végétal			
	Super Parc du Végétal			
	Méga Parc du Végétal			
Botanicum, i (herbier)	Botanic Park	Botanikemotion	Voyage Botanique	Botanical Secrets
	Botanipark	Fantastic Botanic	Saga Botanique	Secrets Botaniques
	Terra Botanica	Fantastique Botanique	Epopée Botanique	Révélation Botaniques
	Botaniville	Magic Botanique	Botanikaventure	Botanical Revelations
	Botanica	Anjou Botanica	Exploration Botanique	Botanical Spirit
	Botanika	Magica Botanica	Défi Botanique	Esprit Botanique
	Botanova	Le Parc Magic Botanic	Conquête Botanique	Botanical Confidences
	Botanika	Sensation Botanique	Destination Botanique	Confidences Botaniques
	Botanicus	Emotion Botanique	Cap Botanique	Botanical Essence
		Rêverie Botanique	Le Tour du Monde Botanique	Essence Botanique
		Passion Botanique	Parcours Botanique	Excellence Botanique
		Emerveillement Botanique	Equippée Botanique	
		Enchantement Botanique	Raid Botanique	
		Illusion Botanique	Mission Botanique	
		Obsession Botanique	Voyageur Botanique	
		Intimité Botanique	Embarquement Botanique	
		Idylle Botanique		
		Magie Botanique		
		Envie Botanique		
		Désir Botanique		
		Osmose Botanique		
Chloros (vert)	Chlorocosmos	Chloropassion	Chlorovoyage	Chlorofun
	Chlorofeel Parc	Chlorophylla		La Chlorothèque d'Anjou
	Chloralia	Chloronirik		Chlorosome
	Chloroville	Chlorobsession		
		Chlorobuccolic		
		Chloromagic		
Flos, oris (fleur)	Flore			
	TerraFlora	Le Parc Flore Emotion	Voyage Fleuri	Florattitude
	Florcity	Le Parc Flore Expérience	Raid Floral	Fleurever
	Florapark	Le Parc Flore Sensation	Equippée Florale	Jolifleur
	Florama	Le Parc Flore Passion	Saga Florale	
	Fleurville	Floramania	Voyage Floral	
		Flore en Folie	Epopée Florale	
		FolieFlore	Exploration Florale	
		Flore en Fête	Défi Floral	
		Folie Végétale	Conquête Florale	
		Flore Trésor	Le Tour du Monde Floral	
		Magiflor	Embarquement Floral	
		Florobsession		
		Floréve		
		Flöreva		
		Flörever		
		Florintimi		
		Floridylle		
		Buccoliflor		



And there was no need for anyone to peruse the Scriptures; what mattered was their physical existence. Who needed to *read* the whole Bible to believe? To a stakeholder going through a crisis of confidence, g&a would only point at the sacred writings –“all was said

there”. Here was a catechism customised for the plant park client on the basis of different Gospels –the Gospel according to the Expert in Theme Parks, the Gospel according to the Copywriter, the Gospel according to the Strategic Planner, etc. In the end the agency made a prophet of itself by consulting other oracles:

Stéphanie	Day 35	10:29	Jean-Phi's office
<p><b>Stéphanie:</b> (...) and Danny Laurent, you know the expert in...</p> <p><b>François:</b> The expert in theme parks...</p> <p><b>Stéphanie:</b> He was like, “anyway, if you’re going for “Anjou Botanica”, people will end up thinking “Botanica”, people will only remember one name... one word. So they’ll have this shortcut in mind, “where have you been this weekend? Well I’ve been to Botanica...””.</p>			

Stéphanie Patrick Kamila (on the telephone)	Day 32	14:09	Patrick's office
<p><i>Stéphanie was on the phone in her office. The loudspeaker was on and another female voice conversed with her. Patrick was sitting on her desk with an attentive, frowned air on his face, as if he could not afford to miss any bit of dialogue. From time to time he was participating, talking loudly towards the receiver and repeating even louder when he was not understood. The voice was Kamila's, from the research department nearby. Kamila had “tested” the names with her husband. Among the eighteen short-listed names, her husband chose “Plant Planet” first, because it was “evocative” and “explicit at once”. You could think of an adventure in the trees and a journey through time, etc. Second, he liked “Plantopia” because it was “vivid” and “adventurous”. Terra Botanica, on the other hand, sounded too “precious”, too “scientific”. Delighted to hear that, Stéphanie and Patrick said that they too preferred these two. They had refocused on them after their last meeting. Quite firmly, Patrick asked Kamila to jot down the “exact points” she had just given them.</i></p>			

Patrick and Stéphanie thus sought opinions that consolidated their own beliefs. These could be found within “expert” voices but also less “official” Gospels. Thus that of Kamila’s husband (and it could have been that of Stéphanie’s grand-nephew) was devoutly respected because it fed g&a’s convictions. The choice of a name could never be rational; it lay on feelings, intuitions, convictions, in a word faith.

*“It can’t be called otherwise”*

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By the same token focus groups would yield the “Gospel according to the consumer”, which fulfilled the same purpose. Its power of influence was even greater since it stood for this unique voice or “trend” appearing, as if by magic, out of a cocktail of miscellaneous subjectivities. For focus groups organised *around the names the agency had already chosen* would never give “the opinion of consumers”... but g&a’s (mystical) “justification” that the work carried out so far was not vain, that it mattered, that it was not a hallucinatory delirium or a bad dream. Mazzarella (2003), Moeran (1996), Miller (1997) Schudson (1986) and Rothenberg (1995) all note that market research is a fetish used retrospectively to rationalise decisions made on an executive hunch. This is how advertising people spent a lot of time persuading themselves that they were right or that their work was useful. Copywriters would try autosuggestion –of course they struggled with uncertain or unfair situations; but why not get satisfaction out of the stupefying readership they generated?

Sébastien	Day 50	14:54	Creation
<i>Gérald was complaining: he would never get this “newsletter” right...</i>			
<b>Sébastien</b> , to <i>Gérald</i> : Hold on, don’t get discouraged, try and figure all the people who are gonna read you! It’s millions of people who are gonna read you, unlike writers that nobody reads... I mean, I’m sure that thanks to Système U [a retailer/client] I’m more read than... Mary Higgins Clark.			

Managers resorted to the same kind of self-persuasion. I was surprised by the weight of superstitions in the decision cell, whose fanciful layers piled up towards the sledgehammer argument that actually set decisions in motion...

Sébastien Stéphanie Patrick Kamila	Day 51	9:40	Alban’s office
<b>Kamila</b> : Anthony [a friend? husband?] was telling me the other day: “the day I was told the Stade de France [a stadium near Paris] would be called “Stade de France” I thought fucking hell, what’s this shit, etc... then I thought it over and I was like “yeah but of course, it’s inescapable, this is <i>The</i> Stade de France...”. And you know that makes perfect sense, if it had been called “Footballia” or something, today we’d know what a disaster it’d be! Today “Stade de France” is perfectly obvious. It can’t be called otherwise.			
<b>François</b> : Now it’s easy to say that after the event...			
<i>Everyone is talking at the same time.</i>			

(...)

**Patrick:** (...) The argument of the “Stade de France” is really good, I like that, er... You’ll give [the client] a little act on that please... (...) (to Kamila) I’m counting on you to tell them about the “Stade de France”.

Like Anthony, Kamila believed that there was *one* “right” name out there for the “Stade de France” and that luckily it had been discovered. This belief sounded as naive to me as the existence of a “Mr. Right” or “Miss Right” for you in the world –an ingenuous egocentrism or “primary narcissism”, as defined in psychoanalytic terms by the Oedipus complex.



*Preparing a presentation or “we need to prove we’re good” (Alban):  
How to **reveal** the creative **labour** embodied in these brand names (de-fetishisation)?*

### 6.3.4 Creativity as power-knowledge

The chapter now connects sacralisation as a strategy of self-censorship to the *historical* dimension of self-censorship. By “history” one means, as argued above,



that creativity has to do with a culture of creation that cannot be understood without reference to past campaigns and past relations with clients. The agency's expertise emerged from the time both parties had spent discussing what was desirable and what was possible. Creativity was history. This tacit type of creative knowledge was noteworthy in the *reproduction* of sacred elements (the graphic theme and other elements) that g&a believed essential to keep the "Lord" happy. As the number of feedbacks from clients increased over time, more and more restrictions applied to creative production. Reproduction thus traced the "best path" outside which more and more trials turned into impossible alternatives, "sins" or "clichés" to be avoided like the plague. This reproductive approach to production (and one could think of copyist practices in monasteries) traced the path of advertising creativity. It *rationalised* the creation process by *restricting* choice. Self-censorship wove the truth of creativity.

The formation of self-censorship has been extensively studied by Foucault (1975, 1994, 2001) and Elias (1978). Foucault insists for example on the *strategic* constitution of power-knowledge through self-censorship. He investigates how in 18<sup>th</sup> century France people attempted to regulate sexuality through useful and public discourses. In appearance, the function of censoring was to channel sexual behaviours. However power did not lie in censorship per se, but in incitements to "confess" –everywhere apparatuses and procedures were developed to observe, hear about, interrogate, record and eventually produce a multiplicity of discourses on sex. In this way sex was constructed as a "secret", as if it was one. People's awareness of multiple dangers incited them to talk about it, to produce even more discourses. Interdictions to say and to think (censorship) played a minor role compared to obligations to say everything (confessions<sup>120</sup>). Whilst such confessions had to do with sin and excess and transgression, they were also recoded towards the "normal" and the "pathological", indicating a "will to knowledge", a will to produce "true" discourses about sex. This is why Foucault understands sexuality as simultaneously a discursive practice and an apparatus of power, a "power-knowledge".

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<sup>120</sup> Depending on the context the French "aveu" also refers to "avowal", "admission", "confidence" or indeed "secret".

He concludes (1994a: 123, *emphasis added*) that

Power is not “a structure”, it is not some kind of strength certain people would be endowed with –it is what is recognised as a complex *strategic* situation in a given society.

By the same token (but also somewhat differently), it can be suggested that advertising practitioners’ “will to know” about the reasons for successes and failures motivated them to produce discursive strategies for rationalising creativity – trivialisation (chapter five) and self-censorship (chapter six). Self-censorship regulated creative work, gave it a direction, channelled it towards what was “good” and “normal” in advertising. In appearance creativity was opaque knowledge –there was Gérald’s refusal to comment on his work or mine, the clichés he would never linger on. But in fact the elaboration of creativity as a “secret” produced more discourses, more knowledge about creativity. Self-censorship did not aim to conceal but to *reveal* various interpretations of the same “mystery” that made a good or bad advertisement. It rationalised creativity through participating in its very construction. Creativity was therefore to creation what sexuality was to sex –a power-knowledge distinguishing the “good”, original advert the client would love from the “bad”, clichéd advert that would never work. This is how the truth of creativity already existed within the discourses that purported to reveal it. To conclude, Foucault’s approach on the history of sexuality in France applied to a briefer and narrower history of creativity in the advertising agency. Having established creativity as a power-knowledge emerging from a strategy of self-censorship, the last section of chapter six describes how this power-knowledge expressed itself at g&a.

## 6.4 Cre-g&a-tivity

So far the chapter has argued that creativity at g&a was a power-knowledge driven by strategies of self-censorship. This section further characterises creativity according to what it meant to insiders, putting forward five principles – “collage”, “translation”, “wounded art”, “gift” (6.4.1) and “recycling” (6.4.2). These principles define creativity at g&a but also creativity *for* g&a –“cre-g&a-tivity” (an equivalent of g&a-time on the issue of creativity).

### 6.4.1 From collage and translation to wounded art and gift

Collage was probably the overarching principle of cre-g&a-tivity. It consisted in borrowing material (words, images and narratives) from external sources and reassembling them. At g&a ADs would spend a lot of time browsing picture libraries on the Internet. Copywriters would also use them quite a lot. The most consulted websites were <http://www.gettyimages.fr> and <http://www.zefa.fr>, but ADs occasionally used others like <http://www.theispot.com>.

Gérald Aurélie	Day 53	15:36	Creation room
<p><b>Gérald:</b> Websites like “gettyimages” have only existed for four, five years...</p> <p><b>François:</b> Have they? And how did you do before?</p> <p><b>Gérald:</b> Before they sent us picture libraries (<i>he points at the books on the shelf</i>)</p> <p><b>Aurélie:</b> So it was less convenient before...</p> <p><b>François:</b> I guess so.</p>			

Before the Internet age things were more complicated –ADs would choose images from specialised books and order them. But back then AD Stéphanie, now in her early thirties, was not working yet. Once Stéphanie wanted a visual, one of the account managers would buy it. Prices varied according to the photographer and the use g&a would make of the visual (the size that would be reproduced, the number of copies that would be made, etc.). Then ADs and layout people resized them, retouched them, imprinted slogans on them, etc. This meant that ADs were more “art traders” than “artists”, purchasing existing creations; typically stereotyped photographs of happy businessmen at g&a:





As Sébastien told me on day 48, the role of an AD was to “orient” artistic choices, choosing visuals from photographers and illustrators’ portfolios, contacting them and so forth. Not an artist herself, an AD was a “decision-maker”, a “(wo)man of taste”; Sébastien’s description matched Aurélie’s identification with someone “born with good taste” (further down in this subsection).

### *“It’s an enslaved art”*

This chapter has described creatives at g&a as “receivers of instructions”, that is an “operational” group whose initiatives and room for manoeuvre were constantly curbed or put to the test. The brief itself was the synthesized interpretation account handlers made of an initial discourse, in which the client might have been unclear, incoherent or contradictory in the first place. At g&a creatives worked on what they saw as a (more or less accurate) “translation”. This fetishised conception of briefs made the AD profession more akin to craftsmanship than art on the one hand; it made the copywriting profession more akin to secretarial work than literature on the other hand. I liked to rely on Patrick’s experience of advertising to understand cre-g&a-tivity. He spoke of “collage”, “gift” and “wounded art”:

Patrick (interview excerpt)	Day 41	11:09	Submarine
<p><b>Patrick:</b> Well in the creative profession, we’re back to the copy-pasting discussion, it’s called “collages”. (...) Why are we talking today about scrapbooking (...), what are people doing? What are they doing with their silly blogs? (...) Let’s be honest! There are blogs full of talent out there, and bad blogs, and artistic blogs and others, and some people can stage themselves with words, others with sounds, but what the hell –everyone’s creative somehow. Well, more or less. Now what I’m asking [creatives] [in the context of] an account, it’s not to be “creative” for themselves, it’s to be creative for something that’s sometimes unmarketable. (...) Because when you’ve done three topics on insurance, well you’ve done five, all the same! Here [at g&amp;a] you’ve got a monocephalic side, which means you’d need more curiosity, more personal efforts to produce quality benchmarks (...) But it’s not simply copy-pasting, it’s a skilled form of copy-pasting. Um, advertising people are often criticised, you know, “you’re not creating anything”. Okay. So, regarding that, I’d say er, who really creates today? Not everyone’s a Leonardo, right... even in contemporary art, take a painting, it’s the capture of an atmosphere, er... of extremely personal emotions but it’s got to be the fruit of a personal research that [will still be assimilated to an existing current], for example you’ll say “it’s dada”, “it’s this” or “that”...</p> <p><b>François:</b> But precisely, what’s creation for you?</p> <p><b>Patrick:</b> Well, creation in <i>advertising</i>: it’s an enslaved art. It’s obvious that it’s a commercial art. But I put “art” in front.</p> <p><b>François:</b> Yes...</p>			

**Patrick:** Because, between the [magazine] recipe you follow, you've got all the ingredients, but it's still gonna be disgusting, simply because of the oven, or the way you made your caramel, the sugar you've chosen er, well I'm sorry but there are good cooks and bad ones. You can't explain it. Everyone's got the books, right, I can tell you, creation's the same thing. Everyone's got the same weapons, everyone's got computers, the same stuff, thingy. But it's the recipe as a whole, the combination of these ingredients that will make you a 4-star place or a restaurant like so many others. And when sometimes I say er, that our restaurant here is just like any other, it's true that we've had lunch and that's it. I say we've just fed ourselves.

**François:** So expertise, art, is in the way you mix the ingredients...

**Patrick:** It's the way in which you add value on things, on the cocktail you've chosen, on all the ingredients, think of cuisine!

**François:** Yes...

**Patrick:** Choice of products, choice of the season to get them, understanding of your desire: I'm gonna make you a *pot-au-feu* today, and I've understood it was freezing outside, and since you have your feet firmly on the ground you're gonna like them, I'm telling you, and I've bought you some brisket of veal, and I've got the most succulent potato in the world, and the leeks –that's fibres for you, cos I care about your digestion... Isn't that fucking talent?

**François:** Yeah...

**Patrick:** Cos in the meantime someone else's gonna make you a quetsch pie and... you'll have put him out of the running...

(...)

**Patrick:** What makes someone creative? At the beginning, it's er, a "sponge" character, that is, the capacity to be permeable to what's happening around you. To receive and understand faster than others. It's intuition, association of ideas, you see what's needed to work. You can't always let your frenzy imagination speak, you can see that frenzy is channelled here... You're not asked to hang up any painting in your personal gallery, you're asked to hang the painting that's gonna meet an audience at a specific moment to fulfil commercial objectives: it's a commercial art. It's not spontaneous creation. That's why I'm always saying that the major frustration the creatives deal with is that of the non-existence of their creation. And why do I have problems everywhere, with some generations [of copywriters]? It's about maturity. When you're forced to say in a closing "this isn't good enough", the bloke flies off the handle, he takes it personally. He thinks he hasn't found an idea and so on.

**François:** Yep...

**Patrick:** And when you put too much of yourself in a creation, since instead of working on a target, you're working on what *you* think is reality, you can't stand back from your work... and you make yourself an extremely frustrated person.

**François:** Sure... Are the creatives aware of that then?

**Patrick:** Oh yeah, yeah, well not all of them. Some of them, the most mature –they've become directors of creation by the way –understand that passion needs to be put into the way you'll surf on things, and you're not gonna blame the sea, or the shape of the waves! You need to surf the right one, that's all...

**François:** And you think frustration comes from commercial art, or from...

**Patrick:** And because the client's the boss.

**François:** That's it. So it's the "commercial" rather than the "art" part. [Creatives] are artists that, er...

**Patrick:** Constrained artists. (...) It's a situation that's appreciated by a sort of triumvirate that's the customer-king, and the client-king.

(...)

**Patrick:** (...) And if I'm lucid, you can make the *comedia dell'arte*. You'll see that the more creatives fight each other within this sort of comedy of difference ("I'm not thinking like you do", er, blabla), er, (...) in the end it will only annoy everyone. (...) By the way there's no food account here: spot the deliberate mistake! It's because Alban can't tackle them, and every time there's a food business coming here it's a disaster! And yet, what is he flicking through all the time? *Stratégies*, *Archives*, er, *Mademoiselle thingy*, *Figaro*, *Elle*... they all dream of doing what they're not doing. So eclecticism, which should be the rule right from the start, can't always exist. Because somehow it's always in the reassurance of their specialty that people work faster, that the company's profitability finds its justification and so on.

Collage in advertising was an art, a *skilled* form of copy-pasting. Patrick used the cuisine metaphor to explain that its "quality" depended on the combination of ingredients ("choice of products") but also on visionary intuitions ("understanding of your desire"; "to receive and understand faster than others"). But this notion of collage was also imbued with scepticism apropos originality in art ("who creates today?"); a creation would imitate a style, reproduce a category that had inspired it in the first place ("for example you will say "it's dada", "it's this" or "it's that""). Advertising copy-pasting also entailed a "monocephalic" routine –creatives at g&a worked for the same clients in the same industry with the same tastes and mania ("when you've done three topics on insurance, well you've done five, all the same!").

### *"Something you feel, it's in you"*

Hence routine was not a mind-opener but a mind-destroyer, which impoverished the quality of work ("you'd need more curiosity, more personal efforts to produce quality benchmarks; "our restaurant here is just like any other"). The fact that people remained stuck in this routine could be explained by its reassuring power, on which the advertising business survived ("somehow it's always in the reassurance of their specialty that the company's profitability finds its justification"). Finally collage was very much about creation under constraints, imagination *at the service* of other parties ("it's an enslaved art"; "frenzy is channelled here"; "constrained artists"). Such enslavement explained the immaturity of some creatives who refused their condition,

trying instead to free themselves from commercial bounds. As soon as they blamed constraints of the environment (“the shape of the waves”) they made themselves “extremely frustrated” persons engaged in a pointless “comedy of difference” – gesticulating puppets in g&a’s commedia dell’arte, schizophrenic Harlequins working on what *they* thought was reality. Perhaps Patrick’s comment on immaturity was a veiled reference to Sébastien:

Aurélié Claire	Day 45	16:15	Creation room
<p><b>Aurélié:</b> He [Sébastien] was not on form this morning...</p> <p><b>Claire:</b> Why?</p> <p><b>Aurélié:</b> Well, it’s as if he’d been told “your creation sucks” ...</p>			

Sébastien was “taking it personally”. But perhaps he had good reasons to feel upset since “intuition” and the “sponge character” present in Patrick’s understanding of creativity could not be rationalised (“you can’t explain it”):

Patrick (interview excerpt)	Day 41	11:09	Submarine
<p><b>Patrick:</b> It’s not about “asking people what they want”, it’s “feeling what they could potentially buy”. So I’m very strict with regards to market research as it’s conducted today –placing a thermometer in somebody’s arse and say “gosh, it’s 38.2”, well I don’t need them... I know that society is worried, I know that society sustains fears, and I know that people still want to consume, that they’ll never sacrifice their share of dreaming.</p>			

Here was an optimistic vision of g&a’s role in society –the organisation did not “respond” to desires but anticipated them. And if intuition had nothing to do with methodical research, it had to be a genetic attribute (this is what much of the academic literature calls the “myth of creativity”):

Aurélié The rest of the clan (interview excerpt)	Day 52	15:12	Creation room
<p><b>François:</b> (...) What makes an AD an expert compared to the average citizen?</p> <p><b>Aurélié:</b> Intuition first, and then experience too...</p> <p><b>François:</b> Alright, so you’re telling me about experience, that’s, that’s understandable, but intuition is, er...?</p>			

(...)

**Aurélié:** Well you have it, you have it...

**François:** It's an aptitude you receive at birth?

**Aurélié:** Yes, something you just have.

**Stéphanie:** Something you feel, it's in you.

Intuition was “something you just had”, “something you felt”. Since the intuitions a given individual had were likely to endure over time (Bourdieu having highlighted the stable and reproductive character of cultural capital), creativity involved a permanent recycling of creations.

#### 6.4.2 Principles of collage: recycling

This recycling began with what Patrick called above the “sponge” character of creative work –an absorption of cultural trends. In the creation room illegal copies of American TV series *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives* (and occasionally official DVDs and VHS recorded from TV) were exchanged for example.



On AD Stéphanie's desk: a “Desperate Housewives” VHS

Everyone arguably shared a taste for these series, but perhaps more importantly the physical circulation of these DivX CDs, VHS, etc., embodied the formation of a common taste, a referent system or shared imagination which knitted the community

together. The creatives watched the same stories but would be at different stages or would have missed episodes; such narrative disruptions, as well as technical problems in playing the videos stimulated talks during the exchange of cultural artefacts. *Harry Potter* was one of the favourite topics of conversation. Sébastien, Stéphanie, Mélanie, Fanny and Élisabeth had read the books and watched the films. Sébastien and Stéphanie were the two biggest fans of the teenage wizard (who had for me the sort of face that just asked to be smacked). They would sometimes explain how the books they read and the films they watched influenced their vision of the world, hence their work:

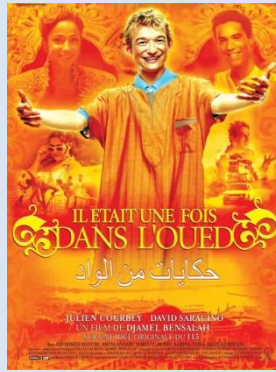
Stéphanie AD	Day 13	14:03	Creation room
<p><i>She was about to finish her Harry Potter book. She had been devouring it, and now she felt as if she lived in the world of Harry Potter, as if she had thrown herself into “another dimension”. When she saw a mirror for instance, she thought of Harry Potter. Henceforth she would not see “visuals of a mirror” [advertising images] in the same way.</i></p>			



*Sketches of a freelance illustrator working for g&a: “mother making up on a pocket mirror”, “wizard/electrical plug” ... influences of Desperate Housewives and Harry Potter?*

Creatives would find inspiration from the advertisements they saw around them:




Sébastien	Day 20	10:45	Creation room
<p><i>Sébastien had just found a title for a leaflet: “Once Upon a Time in the Web”. Earlier this week I had seen a “Once Upon a Time in the Wadi” poster –a film shown at cinema.</i></p>			



Sébastien’s advertisement was then the pastiche of a pastiche. Copywriters brought “hyperreality” (Baudrillard 1988) into being:

<b>Sébastien</b>	<b>Day 38</b>	<b>17:05</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
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*The banner right above my hotmail’s inbox looked familiar. It was a “magic search” logo that was almost identical to the “magic sequence” logo on Sébastien’s desk (note the ☆ both). Sébastien had created the “magic sequence” name for the scratch cards that the agency designed for a retailer.*

<b>Aurélié</b> The rest of the clan	<b>Day 52</b>	<b>15:12</b>	<b>Creation room</b>
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**François:** Erm, you’ll find inspiration from things or people...

**Aurélié:** From what I can see around me, er, even when I go to the market you see...

**François:** Yeah? From everyday life?

**Aurélié:** Yeah from everyday life and adverts I can see, but also from, from, you know, trends and stuff...

They also related advertisements made by competitors to their own; this process of appropriation valorised g&a’s production.



Sébastien James	Day 36	15:48	Pierre's office
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*Sébastien asked Jean-Philippe, the account manager in charge of the Groupama account, to “validate the spirit” of his creative orientation to the competition. He was referring here to the existing Young & Rubicam campaign.*

**Sébastien**, to James: (...) When I saw their TV ad, I thought to myself, that's what we've done for Harmonie [a client], when we're telling a story, er, of an unspeakable banality and we do (...) funny stuff to punctuate what we're saying. Now in my opinion yeah, that's what people should recognize, what they [Young & Rubicam] do on the radio, it's gotta be on the poster.

(...)

**Jean-Philippe**, sounding bored: Okay, that's fine, it's good to know you've deciphered the structure of the TV ads, cos that's important...

**Sébastien**, to Jean-Philippe: Yeah er, it's more like, the other way around, I mean when I saw the ad for the first time, I thought to myself, they're doing exactly what we've done on, erm, Harmonie... you're telling a simple story, “hey, what's wrong?” and then “fortunately there's Harmonie, it's great...” and based on this structure that's as easy as pie, you just flourish it to make it nicer.

Sébastien drew a parallel between a TV ad made by a leading agency (Young & Rubicam) to their below-the-line production for a local client (Harmonie). Perhaps surprisingly he stated that Young & Rubicam's campaign reminded him of their own work and not the contrary, thereby placing g&a's work at the centre of the advertising world. In general people at g&a preferred to refer to their own past campaigns even when it was clear that those were adapted from the media:

Nicolas Françoise Aurélie Sébastien	Day 35	11:25	Patrick's office
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*Brief about a long-standing client, “Marché-U” (g&a designs promotional campaigns for this retailer).*

**Nicolas**: We had called our operation “4 in a row”, Françoise is going to come with all the artwork... but we can't use this generalisation because we might come into conflict with the [TV] game “Questions for a Champion”, they've got the “4 in a row” at some point...

**Sébastien**: That's why James proposed “4 in a row” by the way, he was thinking of “Questions for a Champion”...

**Aurélie**, ironical: Ah! Very clever...

*Françoise comes in. She lays previous “Marché U” campaigns on the table.*

**Françoise**, looking in her folder that contains past campaigns: We'd done that, you remember, the little sheep jumping around?

**Sébastien**: Ah yeeeeees... T'was the 4 to 4... that was nice... No, it was the 4 in a row, there were

many names, er...

**Françoise:** I don't have the puppy anymore?

**Nicolas, pointing at a coloured picture on the table:** Yes you do, it's here...

**Françoise:** Yes but not that one, we had done a kakemono with the dog...

**Aurélie:** Wow the sheep are great!

**Sébastien:** Sheep are fun, yeah...

**Françoise, still looking into her folder:** Yeah and it's timeless, isn't it... I'd like to find the dog again but I dunno if...

(...)

**Françoise:** (...) And eventually that's what we had (*showing a poster*), we had done this cos we had to talk about Punta Cana, so that was better than a « 4 in a row »... Here we had palm trees... But it's weird I don't have the... The kakemono with the dog was just great... and the card had become... you had vouchers, and if you aligned the four palm trees you won the trip to Punta Cana.

(...)

**Nicolas:** What tone of communication? Well I guess it's, it's exactly like the work we've done the first time, it's a world of fun and games, disconnected from the communication we're used to doing; we just change our style. I think our principle of communication should borrow the communication codes of the National Lottery you know, which systematically creates a world proper to a specific game, er, "noughts and crosses" has its own world, er (...) er the last one that's been released is with *XIII* [a comic]... (...)

(...)

**Nicolas:** (...) The best thing to do is, we're gonna buy scratch cards during lunch break... Here we go, we'll play the lottery...

**Sébastien:** That's nice...

**Nicolas:** If we win we'll share the thing, otherwise we'll claim them as expenses...

*Aurélie and Sébastien laugh.*

**Nicolas:** We're okay with this?

**Aurélie:** We're okay... I'll ask for an expenses form then...

**Nicolas:** Yeah yeah, no but I'm serious, I'm not kidding, right... (...) Instead of "4 in a row", can we work again on a name?

(...)

**Sébastien:** We should come up with something dynamic, so er, let's see...

**Nicolas:** It should be playful, dynamic... animals are quite good, aren't they, er... Look at what the National Lottery does, as soon as they've got animals on their games, well it's obvious that... even if we imitate them, we copy things, er, it's still funny to show a sheep knocking out another...



Designing the ad: from the sketches of an illustrator (external to g&a) to the draft of a promotional kakemono corrected by Françoise. The French play “leapsheep” and not leapfrog (they are frogs already).

Here some ideas were taken from a TV game of the “Mastermind” type (“Questions for a Champion”) and the National Lottery (“we’re gonna buy scratch cards during lunch break”). But the most valorised ideas were provided by g&a’s own campaigns (“yeeeeees... that was nice” / “I’d like to find the dog again”) which could be recycled because they were “timeless” according to Françoise. Therefore the routine of collage often involved copy-pasting *within* the agency’s own production, which has led the outsider literature to qualify advertising organisations as self-referential systems (e.g. Nixon 2003).

Stéphanie AD Sébastien Séverine Marie-Astrid	Day 51	17:10	Alban’s office
<p><b>Marie-Astrid:</b> Yes, it’s always the same thing, right... (...) So what we’re gonna do is... we’re gonna cheat a little, we’ll re-use the article we’ve already written (...) for AG2R [a client] and we’ll illustrate it just like Idica [another client].</p>			

Modifications would be brought “at the margins”. Advertising for insurance companies was “always the same thing” –here a transposition of existing words (written for “AG2R”) and visuals (created for “Idica”) from two campaigns to another. Collage very often meant internal recycling. Gérald told me once that creatives did keep the ideas they really liked in reserve, whether rejected or not, because they could be recycled for the same client later or for other clients. All ideas were phoenixes that could rise from their ashes. Yet when copywriters unburied old scenarios account managers would tease them:

Stéphanie AD Sébastien Séverine Marie-Astrid	Day 51	17:10	Alban’s office
<p><b>Sébastien:</b> (...) Erm, other possibility, so at first I had these blokes in mind, chatting you know, like we did for Axa [a client], and then I thought to myself “it’s useless to have these blokes, what’s interesting is what they’re saying”. So er, it was something like that: (<i>he shows a few sketches</i>)</p> <p><b>Marie-Astrid:</b> To sum up, you’ve done the Évêché [a client] thing, haven’t you? (<i>she laughs</i>)</p>			

### *“Gérald’s the king of recycling!”*

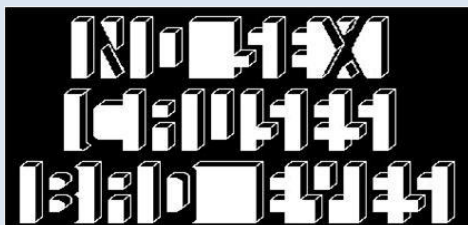
Gérald was confronted to the same remarks:

Gérald Élizabeth Stéphanie Aurélie	Day 25	16:21	Creation room
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*A brief on the IPO greeting card –Gérald presents his ideas.*

**Gérald:** (...) Um, let’s see what else I had on “visions”, er... oh yeah:

*He shows an indecipherable text at normal distance, but with more distance appears the sentence “no sex causes bad eyes”. I also received this joke by email this morning; it must have circulated everywhere.*



**Stéphanie:** You’re not rescuing “appearances”, are you?

**Gérald:** Ahhh, well, kind of... And you’ve got a message erm, incomprehensible, and...

*He points at a space above the coded message, where he has written “to discover 2006, go beyond appearances”.*

**Stéphanie, bursting out laughing:** Wait a minute boy! He’s recycling me Euler [another client] now!

**Aurélie, laughing louder:** aaaaaaahh, Gérald!

**Gérald, smiling:** I’m in trouble...

**James:** Gérald’s the king of recycling!

(...)

**Stéphanie:** This being said it’s never easy on these greeting cards, right... I mean, finding new things after four years, on a greeting that, erm, that’s nothing more than a greeting, it’s not so simple...

**James:** (...) It’s true that the enthusiasm of a marketing team, right from the start, has got hell of an impact on the final result... When you’re giving a brief on a topic like, whatever, er, AXA for the umpteenth time, well it’s true that if you don’t make it a bit, a bit lively, like saying “there’s new stuff to do”, if you don’t give it this little boost, then... well, [the creatives] struggle...

Recycling seemed to be the inevitable trick creating an impression of “renewal”. It was not easy, but at the same time vital for Stéphanie to motivate creatives when the same things had to be repeated over and over again (“finding new things (...) is not so

simple”; “the enthusiasm of a marketing team (...) has got hell of an impact on the final result”). As a consequence James expected Stéphanie to invent “novelty” out of the “same” (“like saying, “there’s new stuff to do”).

### **6.4.3 Conclusion**

The four sections of this chapter have looked at how time was creatively commodified and how the notion of creativity could be understood at g&a. They resituated creativity at the level of management and showed how strategies of self-censorship imbued notions of collage, translation, wounded art, gift and recycling. The next chapter brings the thesis to a close.

# Chapter Seven

## *Conclusion*

**T**his final chapter contains three sections that bring the thesis to a close. Section 7.1 recalls the theoretical premises of the thesis, its objectives, methods and substantive findings. Section 7.2 outlines the three principal contributions this thesis makes to advertising knowledge. Section 7.3 recommends directions for future research.

### **7.1 Synthesis**

This section synthesizes what has been said in the previous chapters. It first reiterates the theoretical groundings, objectives and methods of the thesis (7.1.1). Then it summarises the substantive findings (7.1.2) before answering in bright lights the question posed in introduction: what is the nature of uncertainty in an advertising agency?

#### **7.1.1 Theoretical groundings, objectives and methods**

The thesis presented a monograph of an advertising organisation. Following an introduction, a literature review set out the conceptual terrain for the project. It started with a critique of producer-led and consumer-led perspectives on advertising, including Bourdieu's account of cultural intermediaries. The problem with these perspectives was twofold –on the one hand, they reified advertising practice as an omnipotent power; on the other hand, they focused on consumption to the neglect of an understanding of production. Aware of this problem, more recent cultural economy scholarship advised researchers to produce historical or anthropological studies of advertising practice. Thus emerged a number of “outsider” accounts which pointed to



the instability of the business and the insecurities of advertising work, as confirmed by practitioners in their “insider” accounts.

Next the thesis questioned the ways in which outsider accounts read advertising practice. Outsiders deploy generic concepts of “myth”, “magic”, “ideology” or “doubt” that do not account for the day-to-day experience of uncertainty in advertising organisations. In this way they elide the contradictions, paradoxes and illegitimacies to which this uncertainty is connected in practice. Due to a lack of methodological rigour, they receded from the actual concerns of practitioners and notably from their quotidian management of anxiety –thus practice-based accounts do not deliver the thorough ethnographic descriptions desired by cultural economy scholars. This thesis aimed to remedy this tendency and to reconnect with the productive reality of advertising work.

A more detailed picture of this reality was achieved in a French advertising agency through multiple ethnographic methods. My relations to the field shaped the methods I adopted as well as the substance of the fieldwork. Uncertainty was linked to temporal issues for two simple reasons –I was mostly affected by my own experience of spending time in the agency, and mostly surprised by the way in which people used their time and talked about it. An orientation to rationalisation was then combined with the anthropological approach of cultural economy. This orientation involved examining the reasons practitioners invoked to explain the unsettling phenomena that affected them. To this end, three chapters engaged in the rhythmanalysis of the organisation identified strategies of rationalisation. In resolving time-based uncertainties and constructing time at work, these strategies enabled practitioners to recover certainty and confidence in their professions. The next subsection briefly recapitulates the substantive findings.

### **7.1.2 Substantive findings**

Chapter four presented the temporal discourses, practices and devices that channelled the irregularities and uncertainties of advertising work (anomie, arrhythmy) and constructed the regularities and certainties of g&a-time. g&a-time was both displayed in the creation room and sold to clients. By introducing a timely rather than timeless

reality in the agency, temporal strategies shaped time and identities in the image of the advertising business. They endowed time with a purpose and a value that relieved temporal anomie *inside* the organisation (e.g. in the creation room) and *outside* it (clients expected a clear set of timely procedures and predictions). To throw light on such constructions, the chapter established homologies between temporal strategies at g&a and analogous strategies found in different temporal and spatial contexts.

Chapter five extended chapter four by listing more homologies of time, and by describing wastes of time in the advertising agency as the most striking expressions of temporal anomie. It highlighted the paradoxes of advertising practice through the negative perceptions the business had of its own production of waste. These paradoxes characterised g&a-time as an ironic construction achieved through specific strategies of rationalisation –*strategies of trivialisation*.

In continuation of chapter five, chapter six examined how this paradoxically constructed g&a-time was displayed for purposes of seduction or “commodified”. This commodification showed that temporal strategies were also strategies for creativity. The chapter identified in this respect a second set of strategies that synergistically worked with the trivialisation of chapter five –*strategies of self-censorship*. The analysis ended with the mundane techniques of creation embodying these strategies at g&a.

### **7.1.3 What is the nature of uncertainty in an advertising agency?**

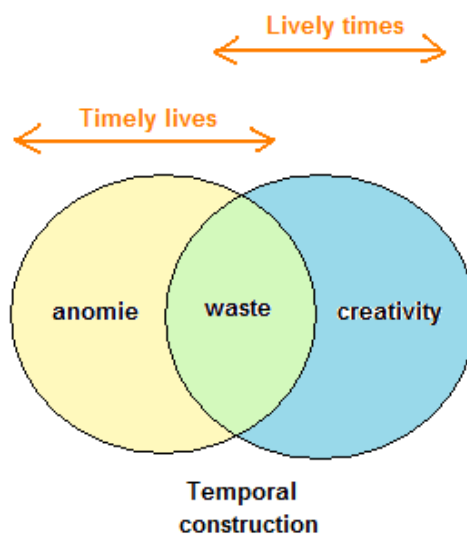
It is now time to give an informed answer to the question that the introduction posed in these terms: what is the nature of uncertainty in an advertising agency?

All strategies of rationalisation (trivialisation in chapter four, self-censorship in chapter five) underscored the paradoxical nature<sup>121</sup> of advertising work. They made creative work possible, and at the same time went against its reason of being. This

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<sup>121</sup> This paradox echoes Bourdieu’s portrayal of illegitimate professions, in that a paradox is by definition illegitimate –it “should not” occur normally. At the same time, it distances itself from Bourdieu’s thesis because it is seen within the nature of advertising work as described by ethnographic data, and not within the way in which a diabolised class as described by consumer intuitions (however accurate and convincing the point of an intellectual consumer like Bourdieu is) influences tastes.

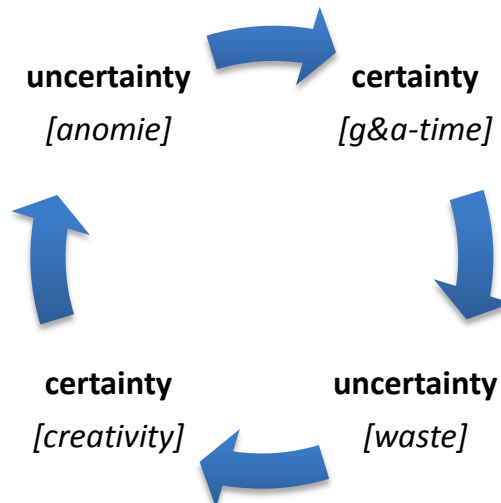
paradox was reflected in the title of the thesis –“timely lives” refer to the lives of advertising people deploring the time they waste, whilst “lively times” refer to the time they delight in wasting whilst playing, chatting and performing outside their duties. Whilst “timely lives” embodies the pathological effects of temporal self-regulation, “lively times” speaks to the therapeutic measures taken toward deregulation. Timely lives and lively times ran through all three analysis chapters and in their intertwining made sense of temporal construction at g&a:



Langholz Leymore (1975) and others suggested in chapter two that advertising solves the anxieties it created in the first place. This thesis reaches a similar conclusion with regard to advertising work, given that producers at g&a were engaged in problem-solving practices within which symptoms were also effects and causes. In other words temporal anomie was caused by “what had been said about time”, literally by temporal rationalisation. As long as it emerged from parallels between duration and clock time, anomie would never be “solved” in a definitive manner at g&a. Rather, it was temporarily or *partially* solved in *permanence* –like a bottomless equation in which new unknown variables would appear with each new elucidation.

Anomie stimulated the production of g&a-time. Yet the functions of clock-time were reproduced and the spirit of capitalism preserved in this production, meaning that g&a-time persisted in demonising *waste*. Strategies of trivialisation rationalised this negative waste, turning it into “productive waste” –an oxymoron indicative of the

paradoxical nature of advertising work. Strategies of self-censorship rationalised the oxymoron, delineating boundaries for productive waste to be regarded as *creativity*. But self-censorship rationalised creativity at the cost of making creative work both possible and impossible, thereby consolidating the anomic situation. Anomie therefore circulated along the vicious circle of temporal construction.



**Uncertainty in an advertising agency is the outcome of this anomic process and its impossible resolution.**

## 7.2 Contribution to advertising research

This thesis makes three principal contributions to advertising knowledge. Besides working toward filling a “gap” in the literature (7.2.1) it puts forward a substantive (7.2.2) and a methodological (7.2.3) contribution.

### 7.2.1 A contribution to cultural economy

As an outsider account of advertising work first, the thesis adds to the very few practice-based studies available in the field, thus responding to the recent call for more anthropological research in business organisations (du Gay and Pryke 2002). At the same time suspicious of current approaches to cultural intermediation, it borrows ideas from classical sociology to see advertising practice through the lens of illegitimacies and rationalisation rather than just legitimization.

### **7.2.2 A contribution to our understanding of advertising uncertainty**

On the substantial plane next, the thesis contributes to our understanding of the underexplored nature of uncertainty in an advertising organisation –it attributes this nature to the anomic relationships practitioners entertain with *time*. Until now, practice-based accounts have rather broadly linked uncertainty to the dependency of the industry on other businesses, or to discourses of practitioners construed as ideologies, but rarely to their actual activities. By contrast this thesis describes and analyses not only the discourses, but also the everyday working practices inspired by uncertainty.

### **7.2.3 A contribution to the methods of cultural economy**

This description and analysis relate to a third contribution on the methodological plane. Time can only be emphasised as the key concept to articulate uncertainty through thorough participant observations and recordings of advertising practice. The final contribution thus lies in the inclusion of more data than is usually found in practice-based accounts. Visual data representing key spaces and artefacts (the objects and places important to informants) enhance the argumentation.

## **7.3 Directions for future research**

Directions for future research must concern the way in which the nascent field of cultural economy could be developed. The thesis offers three suggestions as to the theoretical groundings, objectives and methods of cultural economy.

Enhanced by the approach of rationalisation, cultural economy should first discover and analyse more analogies between advertising and religious structures. This approach is more adapted to the realities of advertising work than academic debates on creativity for example, hence I like to think of it as a “down-to-earth” theoretical frame. Of course creativity *is* debated in the industry, but on a very different plane. Whilst practitioners understand creativity through tangible advertisements and actions, scholars rely a lot on what these practitioners say in organisations (reports

from insider writings, interviews, etc.). From this observation arises the second recommendation.

The problem with an overreliance on discourses, as outlined in chapter three, is that there is often a difference between what people say and what they do. Scholars identify through vague or episodic descriptions of work concepts of “authenticity”, “ideologies” of creativity and self-referential notions of the sort. They speak of creative value without insisting, oddly enough, on the *time* spent at work. Time is nevertheless an obvious area of focus when uncertainties, predictions and all too simply production come into play. Hence the neglected issue of time should be further investigated in future studies of advertising work.

The final suggestion for expanding cultural economy is to take full advantage of the narrative possibilities of ethnography by avoiding “anecdotalism” and including a convincing amount of data, and by working in general towards a delicate balance between theory and practice (at present insider accounts lack theory and outsider accounts lack practice). It will be in the patient description of daily tasks, roles and internal relations that the picture of an organisation will become more vivid, more realistic, and that puzzling over-conceptualisations such as “cultural intermediation” will be profitably dropped.

# Appendix

## *Contributors*

This appendix provides short portrayals of the participants in the ethnographic study – decision makers (app. 1.1), creatives (app. 1.2), marketing research people (app. 1.3) and clients (app. 1.4).

### **app. 1.1 Marketing leaders**

#### **Vincent (CEO)**

Vincent was the first person I talked to in the agency, but I seldom saw him afterwards. His roomy office had two desks forming a “T” and another small round table, perhaps for guests. On one of the desks was a laptop and a massive phone. The office chair, covered with burgundy leather, looked luxurious.

#### **Alban (associate CEO, communication department)**

The least we could say about Alban is that he was not very popular in the agency. He was subject to frequent criticisms from his own staff. He had this “protestant” and “austere” side according to Sébastien; he was “not a funny chap” for Élisabeth. And I found him rather aloof during staff briefings. Outside work however, I found him more approachable and even really good company. I came across him on a Saturday night by accident, in a cinema theatre. He was accompanied by his Australian wife (but you could hardly tell she was not French) and a female friend of them. After the movie they invited me for a drink and we talked about the movie (Woody Allen’s *Match Point*). I thought that he was smart and open-minded. After the drinks they were going to join friends in a restaurant nearby; Alban invited me again but this time



I kindly declined. He was so friendly that I felt sorry for his unpopularity in the organisation.

### **Patrick (account executive/strategic planner)**

Patrick was a rather short and red-faced man with grey thinning hair and a high-pitched voice. He shared an office with Nicolas opposite Alban's, but did not respect or fear Alban as much as others because he was Alban's former boss. They were two very different characters. Patrick was talkative and loud and his relationships with a quieter Alban could be tumultuous. He worked in two agencies in Nantes, spending one day per week at g&a (Wednesdays), occasionally two, and dedicating the rest of the week to the other organisation, "Nouvelle Vague". He loved his job and had "travelled to the five continents". He wangled himself some leave, four times a year, to go "far away". An "active person", he had "stopped reading" when he was twelve. Prior to his advertising career he was a journalist and then a "technical assistant" in advertising, that is, "the degree zero on the Richter scale of advertising". Then he climbed the career ladder –account manager, junior copywriter, senior copywriter, associate director of creation, director of creation, CEO.

The best "school" of advertising was where you could work with people who were "better than you", people who gave you nasty blows, but from whom you really learnt. He had always been in "the big agencies" (before g&a) such as Havas in Paris where he started as an account manager. In 1985 he created the "Western branch" (as in west of France) of Young & Rubicam with Jean-Michel Carlot and Bernard Lebas, towards the multimedia library in Nantes. Back then the premises were "a bit crazy", there was a pinball right after the gate and the three of them were "full of hope". They even worked with media students who did a movie about them because they thought they were "not all there". The market was "easy", companies were not as overcautious as they are today. He managed 37 people but it was "too much of a hassle". People and "ridiculous things bugged [him] every day –the toilet flush, the 35-hour week, clients who wanted to see him but called him at the last minute, etc". So in 1989 he created "Nouvelle Vague". "Nouvelle Vague" still built on ten years of a "glorious past" that saw the emergence of famous campaigns that were "strong" yesterday and now "forgotten".

Finally Patrick was a great orator using a colourful, imaginative and sometimes fanciful language. He had this extremely rapid delivery, this cheerful, convincing, passionate tone. A confident and charismatic man, he made theatrical gestures as if in possession of an incontestable truth. He would draw circles in the air with his fingers and stare at us with a sharp eye. Should you disagree with him, he asserted that you were wrong because he was right. To my mind he was the archetype of the proud, quick-witted advertising man and I really liked him. He would rely on his acting talents by means of intimidation, in an effort to enhance the persuasiveness of a speech he “performed” more than uttered. Although his overconfidence made him quite a detestable character at times (he never hesitated to cut somebody short), I realised that I would learn mostly from his improvisations. Thinking faster than he talked, he somehow managed to minimise incoherencies in his speech, and regularly called you to witness to it by touching your hand or shoulder and waiting for your approbatory nod.

### **Stéphanie (account executive/director of consulting)**

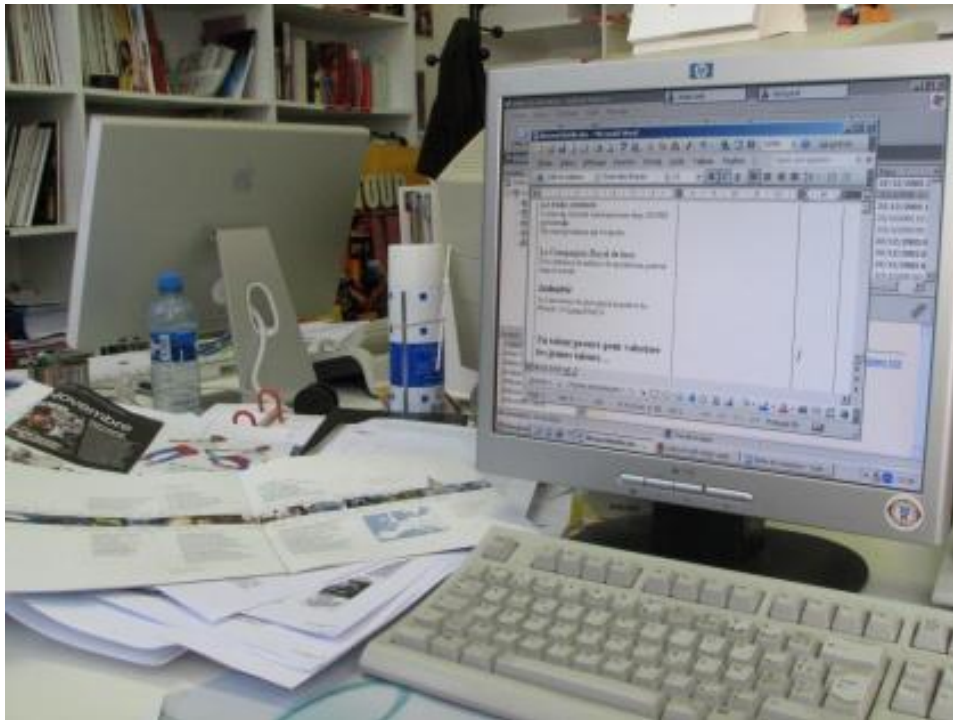
Stéphanie was married and she had a 4 ½ year-old girl when I met her. She had been working for g&a for eight years. Before taking her first job as an engineering consultant in a software company, she studied in a business school. Then she met Vincent by accident and he was looking for someone to develop an additional direct marketing department, on top of the existing one. She jumped in, attracted by the “consulting” dimension the new job involved (rather than just “sales”). Coming from a sales job, it was not easy at the beginning but she progressively learnt, and embraced her new career. Then Vincent gave her the possibility to upgrade within the company.

## **app. 1.2 Creatives**

### **Sébastien and Gérald (copywriters)**

Amongst all creatives Sébastien had the longest experience at g&a –ten years. He was married and had two children. Unlike ADs and layout people who worked on Mac, the two copywriters worked on PCs. When in the creation room Sébastien typed

slogans and other advertising messages: bold, at least 14 font size, some lines in italics and a lot of space between them:



*Sébastien's screen. In bold characters: slogans and other headlines.*

Sometimes he cut people short and kept talking when people tried to interrupt him. He would also mumble and moan. He spoke haltingly like a child whose shyness makes nervous, and his voice had the consistency of soap bubbles –you could hear snatches of speech suspended in the air, which faded away as bubbles burst after one another.

Gérald wore two big silver rings, one for each hand. He had rather long, curly hair and a deep voice. Sometimes he withdrew into total silence. Sometimes he seemed overexcited. Alternation of such attitudes made him an odd character, and for Sébastien he did not “exteriorize what he feels”. Like Sébastien, Gérald did not express himself very clearly.

### **James (AD/director of creation)**

James was a tall man wearing baggy jeans and I found him antipathetic. He had a red, angry face, and he mumbled to express himself, even more than the copywriters. I did not always understand his language:

James	Day 53	15:50	Creation room
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*James had been on the phone for 25 minutes now, talking about a photograph on his screen that would become the ad for a mattress. It showed some kind of curled up sleeper. Colours were too dark in some places, or too light, or the light had to be changed, as well as the position of objects, and some effects had to be added, etc.*

**James**, on the phone: Can you feel the tension in places? See, it's like a tug... Pull, pull a little bit more on the buttocks... Can you see how it generates textures? (...) The foam rubber will get plenty of depth... There's this sequined, gleaming aspect of the snow you need to change for me, will you? It must be darker... It's this snow that will make a difference, you get me? The light's not logical here...



*James's desk (above: James's screen).*

### **Aurélie and Stéphanie (ADs)**

After her A-level Aurélie did a 2-year diploma in communication (BTS) followed by a graphical arts school. She guffawed all the time in the creation room.

AD Stéphanie could look younger than her age (thirty-something) in her trendy clothes. She was interested in design, decoration and enjoyed new French music.

## **Mélanie, Olivier, Fanny, and Élizabeth aka “Zabeth” (layout)**

A 20-something layout person, Mélanie spent her time polishing up the visuals the ADs sent to her. She did it with a design software she introduced me with, and that made me think that technology rationalised art. Computers helped musicians in exactly the same way. People could create beautiful things by following steps.

Olivier was a funny character and I liked him very much. I often wondered how he had managed to stay 3 years in this creation room (when he handed in his resignation a month after I was in, I was not surprised). He had long hair, a deep voice, went to work on a big scooter and wore iPod headphones at his desk. After his resignation Fabio, a Brazilian AD, would take his place.

Fanny is a popular name in France, not in the UK (I knew another Fanny in Leicester when I completed the thesis and of course could not help but joke around –“I kissed Fanny yesterday”). Almost every day at around 11:45, Fanny’s office neighbour Elizabeth would say out loud, “I’m hungry!” and Fanny would respond, “yeah me too!”. The oldest layout person, Elizabeth was rather quiet like Fanny. They would often have lunch together.

## **app. 1.3 Market research people**

### **Kamila and Nicolas (market research)**

I worked with Kamila on a couple of occasions. She was head of the market research department and a very friendly person.

A young graduate in marketing, Nicolas completed his work placement at g&a before integrating the company on a full time basis. I witnessed the telephone interviews he made in relation to the “plant park” project. Interviews were very structured, responses sometimes very funny. Then I interviewed him, although his data like many other data could not be included in this thesis.

## **App. 1.4 Account managers**

I interacted very little with account managers, although I worked with Klervi for a couple of days. They were lively and approachable people. Marie-Astrid's monkey was an excuse for a nice chat one day:



## **app. 1.5 Clients**

### **Nicolas and Xavier (clients –not from g&a)**

The only clients I saw, and only once, they were leaders of the “plant park” project.

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