

Fantastic creative problems:
advertising and autological subjects in Montreal

Jennifer Elizabeth Campbell

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2023

Department of Anthropology
Faculty of Arts
McGill University, Montreal

@Jennifer Elizabeth Campbell, 2023

ABSTRACT	IV
RÉSUMÉ	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
BEING CREATIVE IN MONTREAL	2
ANTHROPOLOGY, ADVERTISING, AND EXPERTISE	6
CREATIVITY AS ETHNOGRAPHIC OBJECT	11
THE AFFECTS AND AESTHETICS OF CREATIVE LABOUR	19
ENTERING THE FIELD	27
FIELDWORK IN (AND AROUND) ADVERTISING: METHODS AND LIMITATIONS	33
CHAPTER OVERVIEW	40
CHAPTER 1: THE SELF AS SITE OF AESTHETIC RECUPERATION	46
ON THE HEELS OF A DILEMMA: PROTESTING NEOLIBERAL REFORM AS NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTS	49
THE SELF AS SITE OF CAPITALIST RECUPERATION	54
CREATIVITY AND THE LIBERAL AUTOLOGICAL SUBJECT	66
<i>Development I: Aesthetic sensibility in the Age of Reason</i>	70
<i>Development II: Fine arts and good taste</i>	78
<i>Development III: Imagining the autological subject</i>	88
FROM FREEDOM OF IMAGINATION TO NEOLIBERAL IMPERATIVE	101
CHAPTER 2: CREATIVE DISTINCTIONS	105
ADVERTISING AND THE MODERN CRISIS IN ATTENTION	111
“THE NEW WAVE IS OLD NEWS”: BEING ON THE AVANT-GARDE	128
INCORPORATING CREATIVITY: MODERN ART MARKETS AND “FULL-SERVICE” AGENCIES	141
CREATIVE BEING	153
CHAPTER 3: GAGNER LE GRAND COQ: CREATIVITY AND EXCEPTIONALISM IN QUEBEC	156
ADVERTISING AS “CULTURE INDUSTRY” IN MONTREAL: A BRIEF HISTORY	162
FROM QUIET TO CREATIVE REVOLUTION	181
CREATIVITY AS CAPITAL IN MONTREAL	201
CHAPTER 4: TRICKLING UP: PROMOTING THE CREATIVE CLASS IN MONTREAL	216
A GRAPHIC DESIGNER, A VENTURE CAPITALIST, AND A NOBEL LAUREATE WALK INTO A REPURPOSED SHIPYARD	217
PROMOTING MONTREAL AS A “CREATIVE CITY”	226
CREATIVITY AS CLASS MERITOCRACY	236
SPECTACLE IN THE CITY: “CURATING” CREATIVITY AS CAPITAL	252
CHAPTER 5: THE DOUBLE BINDS OF THE CREATIVE SELF	265
CREATIVELY AMBIVALENT	270
THE GUYS THAT BIND: CLAIMING—AND CONTAINING—CREATIVE OPPORTUNITY	285
HOMO FABER AND THE FREELANCER	311
CHAPTER 6: AUTOLOGICAL INTIMACIES	324
WHEN THE AUTOLOGICAL SUBJECT SHITS THE BED	332
CREATIVE EXCEPTIONALISM AND CRISES OF COMMENSURATION	341
CREATIVE EXPECTATIONS IN TIMES OF “ANGUISHED LIBERATION”	349
ALWAYS HAVE A PLAN B: HEDONISTIC INDIVIDUALISM, THE MORNING AFTER	356

UNRESOLVED REFLECTIONS	370
CONCLUSION	375
CRITIQUING CREATIVITY: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES	379
REFERENCES.....	384

Abstract

This dissertation is an anthropological investigation of creativity, as it is understood, articulated, and given value by advertising professionals living and working in Montreal, Quebec. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2014, it examines creativity as an indeterminate and often contradictory ideal, at times asserted as a marker of exceptional individual or group status that embeds “creatives” in capitalist hierarchies, and at other times imagined as a free and autonomous mode of being-in-the-world believed to counter the alienations and utilitarian reductions of capitalism itself. Such contradictions highlight the need to approach creativity as a genealogical construct. Accordingly, this dissertation outlines key ideological developments through which creativity was reimagined over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in dialogue with the accelerations of capitalism in Britain, Europe, and North America. Tracing this genealogy illuminates how the concept became intimately associated to the ideal autological subject of liberal modernity in ways that remain relevant for understanding how creativity is claimed and contested in late capitalist fields of aesthetic production, like Montreal advertising.

Interviews with creative ad workers, analyses of industry discourses, and ethnographic observation of the patterns of sociality that constitute and surround the work of advertising are discussed as evidence for the ongoing association between creativity and the liberal autological ideal. Examining this association as a key to understanding processes of neoliberal subject-making, the ethnography relays how ad workers’ optimistic desires for creative flourishing and recognition are harnessed to increasingly precarious socio-economic arrangements and structures of inequality. By attending to the affective atmospheres born of such arrangements, this dissertation documents how the widespread cultural veneration of creativity within this context is accompanied by affectively charged experiences that vacillate between ones of effervescent potentiality and optimism, and ones of frustration, ambivalence, and anxiety. Investigating creative ad workers’ attempts to reconcile these more ambivalent experiences with their tenacious attachments to *being creative* illuminates the impacts of neoliberal subjectification on individual and collective life.

Résumé

Cette thèse présente une recherche anthropologique sur la créativité, telle que comprise, articulée et valorisée par des professionnels du domaine de la publicité à Montréal, au Québec. Fondée sur un travail ethnographique réalisé entre 2011 et 2014, elle explore la créativité en tant qu'idéal indéfini et souvent contradictoire. Cet idéal est parfois mis de l'avant comme un marqueur du statut exceptionnel d'un individu ou d'un groupe qui inscrit les personnes « créatives » dans des hiérarchies capitalistes ; et qui, paradoxalement, est parfois aussi imaginé comme une manière libre et autonome d'être-au-monde qui s'opposerait aux aliénations et aux réductions utilitaristes du capitalisme lui-même. Ces contradictions soulignent l'importance d'aborder la créativité comme une construction généalogique. À cet égard, cette thèse présente les développements idéologiques clés au travers desquels la créativité a été réimaginée au cours des 18^e et 19^e siècles en lien avec l'accélération du capitalisme en Grande-Bretagne, en Europe et en Amérique du Nord. Le fait de retracer cette généalogie met en lumière la manière dont le concept de la créativité est devenu intimement associé au sujet autologique idéal de la modernité libérale, ce qui demeure toujours pertinent pour comprendre comment la créativité est revendiquée et contestée dans les domaines de production esthétique du capitalisme tardif, comme celui de la publicité à Montréal.

Pour mettre en évidence l'association continue entre la créativité et l'idéal autologique libéral, cette thèse s'appuie sur des entretiens avec des travailleurs publicitaires créatifs, sur des analyses de discours de l'industrie et sur des observations ethnographiques des dynamiques de sociabilité qui constituent et entourent le travail en publicité. En étudiant cette association comme un élément clé pour comprendre les processus de construction du sujet néolibéral, cette ethnographie examine de quelles manières les désirs optimistes des publicitaires en matière d'épanouissement créatif et de reconnaissance sont mis au service de structures inégalitaires et d'arrangements socioéconomiques de plus en plus précaires. En portant attention aux atmosphères affectives issues de ces arrangements, cette thèse montre que la vénération culturelle généralisée de la créativité dans ce contexte s'accompagne d'expériences chargées sur le plan affectif. Ces expériences oscillent entre, d'un côté, de l'optimisme et une potentialité effervescente, et, de l'autre côté, de la frustration, de l'ambivalence et de l'anxiété. L'étude des

moyens par lesquels les travailleurs publicitaires créatifs tentent de réconcilier ces expériences plus ambivalentes avec leur attachement tenace à l'état d'*être créatif* met en lumière les effets de la subjectivation néolibérale sur les plans individuel et collectif.

List of Figures

Figure 0.1: Clown party rejection email sent to Diane, 2011.....	28
Figure 1.1: <i>Printemps Québécois</i> 2012, Simon Beaudry	59
Figure 1.2: “Swipe and Be Blessed” l’Église catholique de Montréal, 2013 (DentsuBos).....	60
Figure 1.3: Boris Beer campaign, 2012 (Lg2)	61
Figure 2.1: Print ad for Jeep, 2014 (Publicis)	141
Figure 3.1: “Semaine de la publicité” news coverage (La Presse October 20, 1959)	168
Figure 3.2: <i>Les 36 cordes sensibles des Québécois</i> , book cover (Bouchard 1978)	172
Figure 3.3: “Spécifiquement anglais, et cependant amiable” print ad. Gilbey’s Dry Gin (1967)..	175
Figure 3.4: “On est six millions, faut se parler” still frame. Labatt 50 beer, 1975 (BCP).....	175
Figure 3.5: “Après-Ski” still frame. Pepsi-Cola, featuring Claude Meunier, 1989 (JWT).....	176
Figure 3.6: “Fausse pub” (Croc magazine 1980).....	180
Figure 3.7: “Bonjour Toto” still frame. Bell ExpressVu, 2001 (Cossette).....	196
Figure 4.1: “The Happy Show” exhibit photograph. Stephan Sagmeister, 2012.....	218
Figure 4.2: “The Happy Show” exhibit photograph. Stephan Sagmeister, 2012.....	218
Figure 4.3: Catherine Hoke and fellow entrepreneurs of Defy Ventures, 2016.....	219
Figure 4.4: Muhammad Yunus with loan borrowers in rural Bangladesh, 2019.....	219
Figure 4.5: “The Pool,” C2MTL, 2014	253
Figure 4.6: “NEST” by C-Lab (Cirque du Soleil), C2MTL, 2015.....	253
Figure 4.7: “The Plaza,” C2MTL, 2014	254
Figure 5.1: “We Only Judge Your Work,” print ad. 2014 Marketing Awards (Lg2)	283
Figure 5.2: “We Only Judge Your Work,” print ad. 2014 Marketing Awards (Lg2)	283
Figure 5.3: “We Only Judge Your Work,” still frame. 2014 Marketing Awards (Lg2).....	284
Figure 5.4: “Vouz pouvez le battre,” print ad. 2014 Créa Awards (Sid Lee).....	289
Figure 5.5: “Vouz pouvez le battre,” print ad. 2014 Créa Awards (Sid Lee).....	290
Figure 5.6: “Vouz pouvez le battre,” print ad. 2014 Créa Awards (Sid Lee).....	290
Figure 6.1: “Share Your Oops” print ad. Plan B, 2007 (Taxi).....	360
Figure 6.2: “Share Your Oops” disposable panties. Plan B, 2007 (Taxi).....	360

Acknowledgements

This thesis was made possible thanks to the friends and acquaintances I met during fieldwork, who invited me into their social worlds, who graciously agreed to be interviewed, who brought me to industry events, and who occasionally hired me for advertising gigs. Thank you for your time, candour, and insights. Balancing the critical thrust of my theoretical interests in the creative ideal with the affective attachments of friendship was not always an easy endeavour. I hope that in this thesis I have managed to capture a complexity of experience that rings true for those individuals whose lives are most intimately depicted in the pages to follow.

Special gratitude goes to my co-supervisors, Kristin Norget and Setrag Manoukian, whose ways of thinking anthropologically continue to inspire. I am deeply thankful for their patience and support in helping me crystalize this project into a thesis. Thanks as well to committee member Ismael Vaccaro, for additional support and research advice.

Matthew Wyman-McCarthy provided expert editorial services that helped bring rough drafts to final ones. His writerly feedback, stylistic suggestions, and critical insights strengthened this dissertation in a myriad of ways.

Many friends and colleagues supported me throughout the various stages of this project. Thanks especially to Julia Bailey, Janelle Baker, Gillian Chilibeck, Gabriella Djerrahian, Giulia El Dardiry, and Carolina Pineda for their camaraderie in navigating the particular trials of graduate school, fieldwork, and writing. Thanks as well to Mandeep Basi, Nancy Berman, Dolores Chew, Leanne D'Antoni, Sarah Etezadi, Yon Hsu, Julie Johnson, Annie Khatchadourian, Elliot Kerr, Kareen Latour, Rebecca Lee, Anne-Marie Linnen, Wendy Richardson, Jen Smith and Lisa Sumner for various forms of intellectual exchange, moral support, and everyday diversions in and out of the workplace. A special thank you to Maria Salomon, for all the conversations about modernity, and much more. Special thanks as well to Carolyn and Michael, for always making space at their table, especially in the lean years. Un immense merci à Lily Soucy pour son aide à traduire le résumé, et pour avoir partagé avec moi le refuge et les roses sauvages de Métis quand j'en avais tellement besoin.

My greatest debts are to my family, especially my parents: thanks for the unwavering love and support, and for knowing when to stop asking how the thesis is going. See you in Campbell River soon.

Alex: thanks for turning up at just the right time. And for being steadier than you think, through the precarity of it all.

And to Jacob, who turned out brilliantly: thanks for growing up with me, and for staying so kind and funny along the way.

Funding for this project was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship), from McGill University (Abner Kingman Fellowship; Department of Anthropology Graduate Fellowship), and from the J.W. McConnell Foundation (J.W. McConnell Memorial Fellowship).

Introduction

“A client wants to reconcile the fact that they use children in Asian sweatshops to make t-shirts, with their image as a socially conscious brand. That’s a terrible – and *fantastic* – creative problem.”

(Lars, “Freelance Senior Creative”)¹

“A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.”

(Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p.1)

Field notes, June 21st, 2011

The first “creative” I interview when I start fieldwork is Grégoire—a thirty-something French copywriter from Paris, who moved to Montreal a few years earlier. I meet him on rue St. Laurent in the Plateau neighborhood, on a sidewalk terrasse outside Laïka, a now defunct café/bar/restaurant popular for its weekend brunch, its nighttime DJ scene, and its laptop-friendly weekday vibe. Grégoire works for a local ad agency, and makes music videos on the side. Our mutual friend, Jean-Paul, arranged for us to meet.

I speak to Grégoire about his work, about his philosophy of creativity, about his feelings towards the industry that pays for his rent and surf trips. He’s generous with his time and thoughts.

Our conversation is punctuated with frequent interruptions from passersby—art directors and producers and the guy who owns the bike shop down the street. People Grégoire knows who also work or live in the neighborhood. More than once that evening Grégoire gestures down the street and towards the sky, to the industrial loft where he lives. We can see the windows from the bar. It’s clear he feels at home here. That he’s comfortable in his belonging in this city, on this street, outside this bar.

Dusk falls. Grégoire introduces me to DJ Champion, a local musician who stops to chat about the *canicule* that is trickling sweat between our shoulder blades and making our mojitos perspire. He and Grégoire make plans to meet the next day to talk about a project they want to collaborate on. When he saunters away down the street I admit to Grégoire that I have no idea who DJ Champion is. Grégoire seems unimpressed. “Really? You should. He’s a big deal right now.” I ask him how they met. “Advertising,” he tells me. “He used to make jingles and soundtracks. He got fed up with that work, though. He’s focused on his own music now.”

¹ Personal interview. Unless otherwise indicated, all names used in reference to individual informants are pseudonyms.

Conversation continues. Grégoire invites me to an art show for the following week. The artist is a friend of his. An art director he used to work with at his last agency. There will be plenty of industry people at the show he can introduce me to, he tells me. He laughs when I begin to write the details down in my agenda. “Very charming,” he says, taking out his iPhone, “but I’ll just email it to you.”

We share cigarettes. I pay for our drinks with my student loan.

It is summer 2011.

Later, as we wheel our bikes down the sidewalk about to part ways, I ask Grégoire what made him want to work as a copywriter. He tells me that he didn’t start out in advertising as a creative, and that he studied business in university. His first job was on “the client side,” working in the marketing department of a multinational corporation that makes laundry detergent and a hundred other things.

“One day,” he recounts, “I’m in a meeting for a campaign we want to run, and these guys from an agency come in to pitch their concept. They’re wearing t-shirts and Converse shoes, and they have this idea that is really out in left field, but it works. And my boss doesn’t go for it at all. He didn’t get it. He worried it wouldn’t resonate, because the idea wasn’t a straight line. It communicated the core message, but it also escaped it a bit. And that is something that freaks most clients out. That’s when I knew I was on the wrong side of the table.”

This dissertation is about the belief that to *be creative*, one must be seated on the right side of the table.

It is also, inescapably, about the table itself.

Being creative in Montreal

Put differently: This dissertation is an anthropological exploration of the concept of creativity, as a key to understanding processes of subjectification in a late modern capitalist context. More specifically, I consider what it means to “be creative” within the field of advertising production in

Montreal, Québec—that is, how creativity is understood, articulated, and given value by ad workers living and working in the city. In documenting a range of practices and discourses that shape this social field—from the spectacular aesthetics of industry awards and creativity conferences, to the micro-level dynamics of interpersonal exchanges between “creatives” and other workers in agencies and on commercial shoots—I illuminate how creativity in this context becomes intimately intertwined with notions of individual and group exceptionalism. In so doing, the ethnographic lens I adopt also captures how an ideology of creative exceptionalism, while not unique to this context, has a particular resonance in Montreal, as a city that is often seen within Canada as the exceptionally creative epicentre of cultural production for a distinctive Québécois society.

Montreal is a place where the so-called “creative industries” have become central not just to a local economy, but also to ongoing processes through which the post-industrial city is continuously reimagined, reconfigured, and re-signified accordingly. That advertising production is both economically and culturally central to such processes is clear; according to the Association des Agences de Communication Créative (A2C), working in advertising is the second most common source of revenue for artists in Quebec, with 24% of total artist earnings coming from advertising creation (2015).² As the central hub of advertising production within the province, Montreal provides an especially relevant site for observing how the pursuit of an idealized creative life is harnessed to processes of neoliberal subjectification and emergent forms of class distinction in North America and elsewhere. With this in mind, I situate Montreal

² Comparatively, 42% of artist earnings in the province come from working in cinema, which is the most common source of revenue for local artists. Source: <https://a2c.quebec/uploads/medias/pres-a2c-portrait-industrie-communication-marketing-quebec-cmm.pdf>, last accessed May 19th 2022.

advertising as a localized site within a globalized industry of capitalist aesthetic production, wherein the claim to be (a) creative is a means through which individuals imagine and assert belonging to a highly mobile, cosmopolitan, and educated class—a class that bridges middle and upper socioeconomic strata, and is defined primarily instead through professional affiliations, patterns of consumption, and performed aesthetic tastes.

Likewise, I approach Montreal as one node within an expanding international network of “creative cities,” wherein urban development policies increasingly promote creativity as a form of human capital integral to the interrelated pursuits of continuous technological innovation (equated with notions of cultural progress) and the production of novel aesthetic experience (upon which the commodity fetishism of contemporary consumer capitalism depends). One of the primary contributions of this thesis is thus how it records the ways in which particular groups of local actors work to give this ideation of creativity traction “on the ground” of specific lifeworlds by translating the creative imperatives of neoliberalism into localized vernaculars and existent cultural forms, in this case through the efforts and expertise of ad industry stakeholders and professionals.³

At the same time, close examination of creativity through an ethnographic lens also reveals how the concept carries residual and alternative meanings that cannot be reduced entirely to the logics of capitalism, even within hyper-capitalist spaces like advertising. These other, often competing experiences and understandings imbue the idea of creativity with a

³ While many of the ideas about creativity that I document and examine in the chapters to follow are themselves universalistic in nature, in this thesis I am less concerned with evaluating their inherent truth value as such, and more interested in considering how such ideas “can only be charged and encountered in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Tsing 2005: 1).

vitality that both escapes and energizes contemporary class politics in paradoxical ways. There is, in other words, a productive tension inherent to the idea of creativity, which makes it both highly contested and symbolically rich for those who work to claim and define it. In recounting a range of ethnographic encounters and exchanges that shaped my fieldwork, I show how the concept of creativity is variously (and often contradictorily) invoked by the ad workers with whom I conducted research as a universal human capacity, as a particular form of expertise that distinguishes groups of people according to class or profession, as the expression of individual genius or talent, as the experience of inalienable human freedom, and as a mode of autonomous engagement with and in the world. In examining how people attempt to navigate the social and existential tensions to which these contradictions give rise, I pay particular attention to how the social status of “being creative” is also often seen to exempt certain individuals from conventional rules of etiquette, relational obligations, or questions of ethical conduct (as Lars, cited in the epigraph above, suggests).

To better understand the contemporary significance of these layered and often contradictory meanings, attending to creativity as an ethnographic object necessarily thus depends upon a culturally contingent and historically situated understanding of the concept itself. In seeking to understand how and why it became such a salient orienting ideal within both a globalized advertising industry and in Montreal specifically, I reveal creativity to be an inherently nebulous concept, mired in ideological tensions that can be traced back to the foundational dialectics of an Enlightenment ideology of the aesthetic. Situating contemporary claims to creative exceptionalism that characterize Montreal advertising within this broader genealogy, I argue that an idealized creative self within this context can be read as a particular

iteration of what Povinelli (2006) terms “the autological subject” of Western liberalism—that is, a subject that is self-made, self-sovereign, and thus firmly positioned at one end of liberalism’s binary construction of individual freedom versus social constraint. Throughout this thesis I therefore examine the ideological tensions that inform contemporary claims to creativity in such terms, and document how these tensions shape the lived experiences of ad workers for whom “being creative” is foundational to their sense of self. In so doing, I also trace how, in its ongoing association with the liberal autological subject, the pursuit of a venerated creative exceptionalism can become one of “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011)—an impossible ideal that impedes rather than sustains conditions for individual and collective flourishing.

Anthropology, advertising, and expertise

Scholars of post/late modernity have highlighted social fragmentation and cultural fluidity as characteristic features of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (e.g., Bauman 2000; Berman 1982; Harvey 1990; Lipovetsky 2005). Such conditions have required that anthropologists re-conceptualize how they delineate the boundaries of field sites and identify the cultural subjects who constitute them. In response, ethnographic research within the discipline has increasingly focused on groups that are “defined less by physical contiguity or geography and more by epistemological affinity, shared meanings and common interpretive tendencies” (Schwegler and Powell 2008: 5). Isolating advertising as a significant field of social practice in such terms, my research therefore contributes to the existing ethnographic literature on “expert” groups that examines both the ideological and institutional dimensions of

knowledge production and that accounts for the ways in which expertise is embodied in everyday practice.

Such an approach answers Dominic Boyer's call for anthropologists to "humanise the expert" (2008: 44). On this point Boyer argues that while experts "may occupy or perform a 'social role' as a particular kind of 'modern subject,'" they are, foremost, "enmeshed in all the complexities anthropology acknowledges human life to entail" (44). Accordingly, there now exists a wealth of ethnographic studies that insightfully explore the complexities of life and work across a wide range of expert groups, including but not limited to those that constitute the "creative industries." From derivative traders (Miyazaki 2013), software developers (Coleman 2009), architects (Yarrow 2019), and Swedish designers (Murphy 2015), to Jazz musicians (Wilf 2014a), news journalists (Boyer 2013), Tamil filmmakers (Pandian 2015), and artists in London and Berlin (Forkert 2013), such studies make significant contributions to our understanding of various fields of expertise—not just as fields for observing the social production of knowledge, but also, crucially, as ones for observing the *production of selves*.

Within this growing body of scholarship, William Mazzarella's ethnographic research with ad workers in Bombay, India, sets an important precedent for re-directing anthropological attention away from "the cultural politics of consumption," towards the "people who make advertisements" (2003: 4). In so doing, he illuminates the complexities of advertising production as a particular field of cultural expertise and "mediation," attending to the experiences and perspectives of advertising producers themselves as they work not just to create resonant commodity images for an Indian consumer public, but also as they work to "sell" their own

expertise to clients. Treating advertising as embedded in (rather than working upon) public culture, Mazzearella resists what he sees as “the subsumption of concrete particulars to abstract universals” (27) that results from the “totalization narrative” advanced in much critical scholarship on advertising aesthetics and institutions (particularly within Marxian and structuralist approaches). Focusing instead on how advertising acts as a site of struggle “to define and control the dialectical articulation of discursive truth-claims and embodied experience” (127), he illuminates how ad workers actively mediate between “the local and the global, between culture and capital” (3).

Michael Schudson’s earlier work, *Advertising the Uneasy Persuasion* (1984), similarly attends not just to the symbolic content of advertising but also “to the social situation of the symbol-makers and to the responses of the audiences or clients for the symbols” (12). Describing his study as “an essay in the sociology of culture,” Schudson offers readers a comprehensive analysis of advertising as a primary institution of aesthetic production and influence within what he considers to be the inescapably “promotional culture” of the United States (13). One of Schudson’s primary arguments—namely, that advertising is in fact much less influential than both its critics and proponents suggest—is similarly explored in Brian Moeran’s ethnography, *A Japanese Advertising Agency* (1996). Through careful observation and analysis of the everyday work of Japanese advertising professionals, Moeran presents a persuasive case study in organizational anthropology that effectively challenges what Mazzearella describes as the “postwar paranoiac discourses on advertising as a sinister centralized agency of mass manipulation” (2003: 27). According to Mazzearella, the de-mythologizing approach of such studies make important contributions to our understanding of “the complex dynamics of the

media system of which advertising is a part, on the internal structural tensions of the business, and on the ambiguous role played by market research in the making and selling of advertising” (2003: 27). Such studies thus invite closer attention to the complex dynamics that shape advertising as a particular field of cultural production and sociality in other cultural contexts, as well as more nuanced readings of how particular commodity images and messages are interpreted by their intended audiences.

Along this vein, the edited volume, *Advertising Cultures* (Moeran and de Waal Malefyt 2003), compiles a number of anthropological essays that similarly examine advertising practice as both public culture and as a particular field of expertise. These include ethnographic studies that document the internal dynamics of advertising agencies and relationships between agencies and clients, that advance anthropological analyses of marketing theory and research, and that investigate the dialectical relationship between commodity image aesthetics and the broader symbolic cultures of local lifeworlds. Such themes are expanded upon in Malefyt’s *Advertising and Anthropology* (2012), co-authored by Robert J. Morais—a book geared not just to students and scholars in anthropology and cultural studies, but also to advertising practitioners themselves. While both volumes are rich in ethnographic detail, their explorations of the intersections between anthropological research and advertising practice are limited by an implicit attempt to promote the potential relevance and application of ethnographic methods and theories of culture to advertising organizations and stakeholders. These limitations speak to a need for more careful consideration of the implicit assumptions and beliefs that inform cultural valuations of expertise amongst the subjects and intended audiences of such studies.

The ethnographic focus of my own research, as well as the theoretical framework I adopt in analysis, differ considerably from these existing anthropological studies of advertising as both a key site for the production of a distinctly capitalist aesthetics and as “an institutionalized system of commercial information and persuasion” (Williams 1980: 170). Working from the premise that advertising has since its advent specialized in the affective harnessing of selves to the projects of capitalism, I am less concerned with how commodity image production mediates between local cultural worlds and global capitalist interests than I am in *how the creative endeavour of advertising work is experienced and given meaning by ad workers*. In this way, I explore how advertising becomes a field of practice shaped by particular patterns of interpersonal relating, performances of creative personhood, and affective experiences through which individuals become harnessed to the projects of neoliberal capitalism not through the *consumption* of commodity images, *but through a sense of belonging to the expert cultural groups that produce them*. Insofar as this attachment hinges upon a *shared reverence of creativity as autological pursuit*, in the chapters that follow I therefore direct attention towards the various ways that creativity is discussed, performed, experienced, and given meaning by ad workers—both in assertions of professional expertise, but also simultaneously in discourses and practices that invoke notions of individual exceptionalism and class distinction. Considered together, these observations illuminate a complexity of ideological intersections between advertising and other fields of aesthetic production in late capitalist contexts where *being creative* is similarly defined.

Creativity as ethnographic object

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) recently published an issue of their digital journal, *Open Anthropology*, dedicated entirely to the theme of “Creativity and Innovation” (2021). The collected articles within this issue are diverse in scope and focus, including but not limited to the archaeological analysis of aesthetic innovation in pre-Huron artifacts made by children (Smith 2005); theorization of the distinction between imitation and creation amongst student jazz musicians (Wilf 2012); and critical discussion of anthropology’s tendency to see creativity as a purely cultural practice that thus fails to account for “the possibility of a creativity... immanent to the material substance of the universe and therefore not dependent on the human assignment of cultural meaning (McLean 2009: 214).⁴ Read together, this collection of texts provides a vast window onto a range of generative practices that illuminate the human (and non-human) capacity for innovation. In their introduction to the issue, the editors describe creativity as “cognitive fluidity—the ability to link seemingly disparate ideas in new ways” (Costin and Ennis-McMillan 2021). Exploring how this cognitive fluidity manifests in different cultural practices across time and place, they advance the anthropological argument that “creativity and a capacity for innovation are not innate qualities of a few talented individuals or members of a

⁴ On this point, McLean argues: “Anthropological treatments of creativity have thus tended to engage the nonhuman only as mediated through language and culture, creativity being understood, implicitly or explicitly, as the processual encompassment by culture of the contingent, the new, and the unforeseen. What has tended to remain unthought is the possibility of a creativity issuing from this putative outside, a creativity immanent to the material substance of the universe and therefore not dependent on the human assignment of cultural meaning” (2009: 214).

particular ethnic, national, or other social group”, but are, rather, “fundamental characteristic[s] of all human beings” (Ibid).⁵

Without discrediting the political significance of such an argument, this dissertation breaks from these anthropological approaches to the study of creativity insofar as my primary goal is not to generate a universal theory of creativity through ethnological research, nor to document and analyze the creative potential or innovative contributions of localized cultural practice.⁶ Instead, I take the concept of creativity itself as my primary object of analysis, examining it as an historically contingent cultural construct that must be understood through ethnographic and genealogical contextualization. I am in this way interested in *when and how creativity came to be ontologically associated with cultural innovation in Western thought, how this occurred in dialogue with the rise of modern capitalism, and why this ongoing association renders creativity such a fertile concept for contemporary class politics in Montreal and other post-industrial urban contexts today*. I explore these questions by attending to the ways in which ad workers *themselves* speak of, make claims to, and often critically question how advertising is (or is not) a creative endeavour.⁷ Moreover, I argue that the aesthetic practices and discourses

⁵ The equation of creativity with cultural innovation similarly informs many of the essays and case studies in *Locating Cultural Creativity* (Liep 2001).

⁶ See, for example, the edited volume, *Creativity/Anthropology* (Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo 1993), which presents a collection of ethnographic case studies of creativity, broadly defined as “human activities that transform existing cultural practices in a manner that a community or certain of its members find of value” (5).

⁷ Kirin Narayan’s ethnography of Kangra women’s song and storytelling practices in the Himalayan foothills is a notable exception within existing anthropological scholarship on creativity. By attending to the ways in which her subjects themselves speak about the role of song in their own everyday lives, Narayan challenges dominant Western understandings of creativity that equate it with innovation. Instead, she invites us to consider how creativity can be associated with other modes of human engagement and activity, such as improvisation: “*Innovation* as making something radically new can be distinguished from *improvisation* as playing with possibilities within cultural rules; further, innovation can be identified as privileging products, while improvisation brings attention to the processes of creativity” (2016: 29). Exploring how Kangra women use “cultural metaphors of songs as plants [that] connect creative practice and flourishing well-being” (29), Narayan shows Kangra song traditions and the discourses that

that are dominant within creative industries like advertising have significant parallels with the ways in which creativity is often theorized in the social sciences, anthropology included (as the title of the *Open Anthropology* journal issue on “Creativity and Innovation” discussed above suggests).⁸

My own research consequently contributes to an emergent body of scholarship that takes the contemporary cultural emphasis on *creativity as innovation* not as a universal truth, but as “a crucial organizing principle of Western societies” in the twenty-first century (Reckwitz 2012: 2). Such scholarship seeks to critically examine (rather than employ) Western philosophies and social science paradigms that attempt to define and locate creativity in universal or metaphysical terms. It also thus provides an important counter to the growing body of applied research on creativity that dominates the fields of organizational psychology, urban economics, marketing, and business, and which typically focuses on the problem of how to measure, encourage, and harness creativity as a particular form of human capital; where I address such theorizations of creativity in this thesis, I do so in order to examine how they work within and

surround them as informed by an understanding of creativity as practice that “can bestow a feeling of wholeness” (31).

⁸ Löfgren (2001) similarly explores “the ways in which ideas of creativity have developed in popular usage as well as in academic studies and the ways in which they may be linked” (71). He considers how anthropological analyses that seek to locate creativity in areas of life that escape conventional association with “the gifted, or artists, writers, intellectuals”, are also characterized by “a tendency to rationalize cultural activities—to invest them with purpose and direction: [e.g.] a teenage rebellion becomes an act of resistance, a play with cultural forms constitutes a process of learning, an improvisation is seen as an attempt to transcend cultural limitations through experiments, ambiguity as a subaltern strategy, etc.” (72). Paradoxically, such analyses “echo the restless credo of hypermodernity, the constant need for change, improvement, flexibility and experimentation” (78). Löfgren’s observations in this regard invite us to attend to the beliefs that inform such tendencies—namely, that creative engagement in the world must always be productive or politically purposeful.

alongside advertising, as discourses and aesthetic forms that reinforce the organizing logics of neoliberal capitalism.⁹

Against these tendencies, Reckwitz' treatise on *The Invention of Creativity* (2012) provides valuable historical context for creativity's contemporary meanings and importance within what he describes as a new era of "aesthetic capitalism" (a distinction I return to below). Throughout this thesis I relate Reckwitz's macro-level social analysis to my own grounded ethnographic observations, in order to consider how the pursuit of an idealized state of *being creative* works to harness individual ad workers in Montreal to globalized processes of neoliberal subjectification. I also draw upon Reckwitz' historical insights in order to trace a genealogy of key developments within Western philosophical and scientific theorizations of creativity, as these entered into debates about the triangulation of aesthetics, ethics, and commerce under capitalism. Through analysis of a range of ethnographic encounters and exchanges with Montreal ad workers, I show how this genealogy of creativity in Western modernity is of emic relevance to the subjects of my research, without arguing such developments to be all-encompassing or universal in reach.

⁹ See especially Teresa Amabile's works, *The Social Psychology of Creativity* (1983), *Growing Up Creative* (1989), *Creativity in Context* (1996), and *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement and Creativity at Work* (2011), as representative studies from the field of organizational psychology. The edited volume, *Creativity at Work: A Festschrift in Honor of Teresa Amabile* (2021) highlights Amabile's ongoing influence within the field of organizational creativity, as an intersection of psychological research and management theory. *Individual Creativity in the Workplace* (edited by Reiter-Palmon, Kennel, and Kaufman 2018) discusses recent research on creativity by organizational psychologists, as well as the potential applications of such studies for fostering employee creativity. Kaufman and Gregoire's *Wired to Create: Unravelling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind* (2015) focuses more on creativity as a form of individual genius, from the perspective of neuroscience and psychology. It offers readers advice on how to develop habits, practices, and tricks for "living more creatively". Within the field of urban economics, Richard Florida's ideas on *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) have undoubtedly been the most influential (and most widely critiqued). Throughout this thesis I engage with Florida's work, insofar as it has been readily embraced by creative industry stakeholders, like advertising executives, and continues to inform urban development initiatives across the creative city network, Montreal included.

Within anthropology, Eitan Wilf's attention to the particular "intellectual history" of creativity as it came to be imbued with notions of individual genius and exceptionalism is also of utmost relevance to understanding processes of creative subject-making in Montreal today. In his article, "Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity" (2014b), Wilf outlines key ideological developments through which these notions became "part of the fabric of the popular imagination in the West, a taken-for-granted script about creative agency that is disseminated and circulated in different artifacts and narratives" (2014b: 398). Insofar as I take such "scripts of creative agency" as objects of analysis, this dissertation contributes to what Wilf describes as the potential of anthropology to clarify "three dimensions of the ethnographic context of "creativity":

(a) the nature and ubiquity of creative processes as communicative, interactional, and improvisational events, with real-time emergent properties, involving human and nonhuman agents in the context of pre-existing yet malleable genres, conventions, and constraints; (b) the role of socialization, apprenticeship, and pedagogy/learning in the making of creative individuals, implicating processes of social reproduction; and (c) the processes by which certain objects and individuals are recognized, constructed, and authenticated as bearers and exemplars of creativity and thus acquire their value. (398)

Examining creativity in these ways invites attention to the contemporary processes of neoliberal subjectification and class politics that constitute what Reckwitz (2017) terms the emergence of a new "creativity dispositif" (more on this below) and that Wilf sees as integral to "the rise of a 'neoliberal agency' that requires subjects to imagine and fashion their own future by engaging with risk and making decisions under conditions of increased uncertainty" (407).¹⁰ I would add to these observations that attending ethnographically to creativity also requires consideration of

¹⁰ In her article, "Neoliberal Agency" (2011), Ilana Gershon describes how this form of agency presupposes "a self that is a flexible bundle of skills that reflexively manages oneself as though the self was a business" (537).

the *affective atmospheres* that accompany such processes, and of the impacts these have on the lives of “creatives,” as particular kinds of neoliberal subjects.¹¹ This attention is necessary, I argue, if we are to understand the aspirational *pull* of the creativity dispositif—what McRobbie (2016) describes as the “encouraging rather than coercive” imperative to “be creative” (15).

Additionally, the edited volume, *Critique of Creativity* (Raunig, Ray, and Wuggenig 2011) provides an overview of the growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship that explores the place of creativity within processes of neoliberal subjectification and class politics. Addressing “the aesthetics of genius and charismatic imagination” that inform modern ideological constructions of creativity, included authors examine how “the resonant conceptual ground of creativity” becomes a key site where “new social functions are unfolding – or are projected” (1). Along this vein, Stefan Nowotny’s analysis of the neoliberal rhetoric of creativity effectively “detheologizes” the concept and its “mythically individualist quality.” Ulf Wuggenig’s examination of the role of the nineteenth-century modern art dealer as an “heroic entrepreneur” illuminates how Western idealizations of creative exceptionalism were born, at least in part, at the intersection of modernist avant-garde art and the rise of consumer capitalism. Maurizio Lazzarato¹² reconsiders the significance of the “artistic critique” of capitalism (as theorized by Boltanski and Chiapello), while Isabell Lorey explores how discourses of creativity that emphasize flexibility and freedom

¹¹ Here, I draw on Anderson’s (2009) definition of affective atmospheres as “a class of experience that occur before and alongside the formation of subjectivity,” as well as his observation that, as such, “atmospheres are the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge” (78).

¹² Lazzarato’s essay in this volume adds to his broader body of work on the rise of “immaterial labour” under neoliberalism. See especially his examination of the experiences of casual (i.e. flexible and precarious) workers in the French entertainment industry in *Experimental Politics: Work, Welfare, and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age* (2017).

relate to intensifying experiences of precarity and ambivalence amongst cultural producers in the so-called “creative industries”.¹³

As the editors of *Critique of Creativity* write in their introduction, these theorizations and case studies make significant contributions to the contemporary scholarship on creativity, as they “advance a critique of contemporary creative industries both as ideology and as specific material relations of exploitation” (4). Importantly, however, the volume also raises questions about the critical frameworks best suited for such a task; contributions by Ray, Leslie, and Raunig revisit Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory of the “culture industry” as a totalizing system of cultural commodification, particularly in light of the *self-precarization* Lorey (same volume) identifies as accompanying the discursive shift from cultural to creative industries across Europe and North America. In the concluding chapter to the volume, Raunig challenges Horkheimer and Adorno’s treatment of the culture industries as “an abstract system” within which “both consumers and producers appear as slaves of a totality and ideology” (194). Observing that in the contemporary context of the creative industries “it is hardly appropriate to speak of ‘mass deception,’” Raunig suggests instead that “it would thus be more apt to speak of a ‘massive self-deception’ as an aspect of self-precarization” (202). This perspective is a particularly apt one for attending to how creativity is experienced as *imperative* in late capitalist conditions, where permanent innovation and the production of aesthetic novelty are seen not just as necessary elements of economic growth, but also as definitive traits of the ideal neoliberal subject.

¹³ These theoretical and historical contributions are complemented by a number of chapters within the same volume that attend more closely to local iterations of creative industry discourse and policy, as these are experienced and negotiated by creative workers within particular fields of practice in London (McRobbie), Vienna (Mokre), Zurich (von Osten), and Lisbon (Minichbauer).

Crucially, however, Raunig insists that within this “self-deception” there remains “the possibility of resistance, which is actualized in the plane of immanence of what is still labeled as creative industries today” (202)—a possibility that was often palpable in my own fieldwork with ad workers, and which I address throughout this thesis.

Yet, while the authors cited above offer salient insights into how creativity becomes a central site of neoliberal subjectification that sustains “material relations of exploitation” in a post-Fordist context, noticeably absent from most of the volume are the voices of “creatives” themselves—i.e. those individuals for whom an idealized good life, expressed through the idiom of *being creative*, is seen as dependent upon the neoliberal forms of labour, aesthetic production, and practices of class distinction that they engage in.¹⁴ Through grounded ethnographic research with Montreal ad workers as one such group, this dissertation adds to the emergent critical scholarship on creativity by attending more closely to the ways in which self-identifying “creatives” actively construct and give meaning to *being creative* as a particular kind of personhood, illuminating how and why this becomes an ideal around which they orient their work and lives. In so doing, I question the theoretical assumption that choosing to work in the creative industries is inevitably an act of self-deception.

Taking up Raunig’s call for closer attention to “the modes of subjectivation in the fields, structures and institutions that were and are described with the terms culture industry and creative industries” (192), I examine how many ad workers *embrace* the creative imperatives of neoliberalism, while nevertheless retaining capacity for critical questioning, self-reflection, and

¹⁴ The chapters by McRobbie and von Osten are notable exceptions in this regard.

awareness of how the advertising industry they constitute reinforces an oppressive and exploitative capitalist social order. In this way, the ethnographic encounters and interviews I recount support Raunig's theoretical challenge to Horkheimer and Adorno's "rigid image [of]... strangely passive producers trapped in the totality of the culture industry" (192-193). Indeed, I argue that the critical perspectives of advertising shared with me by ad workers themselves reveal ideological fissures and cracks that open possibilities for imagining—and sometimes enacting—alternative notions of creative flourishing. We cannot deny the momentum and reach of neoliberal rationalities and practices, as these work to subsume and recuperate emergent cultural forms into a logic of capital and consumption in ways that foreclose such forms to other meanings. (Indeed, throughout this dissertation I regularly attend to how ad work does exactly this). Yet, ongoing contestation over what (and *who*) can be considered creative within the field of advertising requires us to investigate experiences of creative subjectification within this field as occurring along a "plane of immanence" (Raunig 202). Like Raunig, I see these experiences as challenging dominant paradigms that reduce capitalist aesthetic producers to "slaves of a totality and ideology, shaped and moved by an abstract system" (194).

The affects and aesthetics of creative labour

My friend Michel—a commercial director who appears throughout this dissertation as one of my key "informants"—once described advertising to me as "the lube of consumer capitalism." Elaborating, he said: "maybe it isn't the machine itself, but without it everything would rust and jam." Michel's comments parallel Reckwitz's (2017) observation that advertising

functions as a primary site of cultural production and economic activity through which a new “aesthetic capitalism” has replaced industrial capitalism in the post-Fordist era.¹⁵ This new form of capitalism, Reckwitz suggests, is distinct from earlier arrangements insofar as it relies upon “work activities that demand the constant production of new things, in particular of signs and symbols—texts, images, communication, procedures, aesthetic objects, body modifications—for a consumer public in search of originality” (2). According to Reckwitz, the changes involved in the rise of aesthetic capitalism constitute a specific “social constellation” in late modernity, which “prioritizes and systematically promotes creativity” as a core cultural value and driver of economic growth (128).¹⁶ Within such a context, “creative industries” (like advertising) act as central sites of economic activity *and* subject formation, wherein both the objects (commodities and commodity images) as well as the *practices* of production (processes and performances of “creative labour”) are oriented by the desire for novel aesthetic experience.

In examining how the pursuit of an idealized creative life harnesses individuals to neoliberal arrangements in Montreal advertising (as a key site of aesthetic capitalist activity), the analytic lens I adopt in this dissertation is informed by Foucault’s theorization of subjectification,

¹⁵ In his analysis, Reckwitz shows how early industries of capitalist aesthetic production (like fashion, design, and advertising) incorporated aesthetic producers in ways that not only foreshadowed, but in fact introduced the innovation-oriented, flexible, and individualized arrangements that came to define post-Fordist production. This process was *buttressed* (rather than undermined) by the same understandings of creativity and creative genius that oriented and distinguished “artists” and “authors” in the fine art and literary fields. This historical argument counters the critique advanced by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), which regarded the “culture industry” as “something which replaced bourgeois art and the avant-gardes in the cultural field and translated a Fordist model that was developed elsewhere, outside culture, into the cultural field” (Raunig 2011: 196). Raunig reads a similar “inversion” of the Frankfurt School theory of culture industry in the work of Paolo Virno, who considers “the role that the culture industry assumed with relation to overcoming Fordism and Taylorism” (ibid).

¹⁶ Reckwitz situates this transformation historically as “the phase since the 1970s and 1980s” (128).

which he defines as “a history of the modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects” (1997: 326). As May (2015) describes,

In coining the term “subjectification” (*subjectivation*), Foucault is making a double reference. On the one hand, he refers to the philosophical tradition, and in particular the modern philosophical tradition, in which the concept of the subject as a centre of experience plays a central role. On the other hand, he refers to political subjection as a mode of having power exercised over oneself. The histories he develops can be seen as ways of bringing this double reference together, of showing how the historical development of the subject of experience is at the same time the formation of someone who is politically subjected or subjugated. (496-497).

Central to this theory of subjectification is Foucault’s attention to modern power not just in its potentially repressive or coercive forms, but also in its potentially more optimistic or aspirational forms, whereby the individual *subjects herself* in practices of self-fashioning and self-governance.¹⁷ Tracing the contours of particular (socially-situated) modes of subjectification consequently allows us to better understand the nature and experience of this second form of power, as “it incites, it induces, “it seduces” us into making (and thinking of) ourselves *as subjects*, and of how we are in turn “made subject to the political orders in which we find ourselves” (498).¹⁸

With this in mind, the analytical thrust of this dissertation works from the premise that *being creative* has become an especially salient mode of neoliberal subjectification across a range of industries and fields of aesthetic production in late capitalist contexts. Following Reckwitz (2017), in the chapters to follow I document “a whole social network of scattered practices, discourses, systems of artefacts and types of subjectivity, recognizably coordinated

¹⁷ On this point, Wiede (2020) argues that Foucault’s theory of subjectification accounts for how power can take be experienced as *empowerment*, with potentially more “amiable” effects for the self.

¹⁸ For a discussion of contemporary debates surrounding the concepts of subject, subjectification, and subjectivity in sociological enquiry, see Rebughini (2014).

with one another by orders of knowledge,” which have come to constitute a “creativity dispositif” in late modernity (28-29). In this regard, McRobbie’s (2016) study of the rise of London’s creative industries in a context of increasing austerity provides a helpful model for thinking about creativity as dispositif. Documenting the various discourses, state policies, and institutional arrangements that encourage individuals to accept the terms of increasingly precarious forms of “creative labour” (freelancing, self-employment, project-based contracts), McRobbie demonstrates how the “romance” of creative work is instrumentalized in ways that ultimately advance neoliberal state agendas and corporate interests (38). Arguing that the creativity dispositif is integral to enacting widespread socio-economic transition from a welfare to neoliberal state, McRobbie illuminates how “being creative” becomes “a self-monitoring, self-regulating mechanism” that encourages individuals (especially young, university-educated, middle-class professionals) to not just participate in, but *affectively embrace* such change.

My own research attempts to flesh out theorizations of creativity as dispositif through similar ethnographic attention to the lived experiences and everyday interactions of creative ad work in Montreal. In order to do so, I employ a phenomenologically grounded understanding of the inherently affective dimensions that accompany local processes of subjectification within the industry—along the lines of what Raymond Williams terms “structures of feeling” (1977), or what Lauren Berlant describes as the *affective atmospheres* of neoliberalism.¹⁹ As I outline in greater detail below, through a methodology of participant observation (involving formal and

¹⁹ In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams defines “structures of feeling” as the “specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships” of a society at a particular moment in history (132). Specifically, Williams is interested in shared experiences of emergent cultural phenomena—what he metaphorically describes as “social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and immediately available” (133-34).

informal interviewing, contract work for local ad agencies, observation of creative practice on commercial shoots, as well as time spent attending and interacting with creative ad workers at industry events and more intimate social encounters), I document how the creativity dispositif is actively embodied and negotiated by individuals for whom creativity is ontologically associated to the production of aesthetic novelty.

A primary observation that emerges from my research with ad workers thus pertains to how the pursuit of creativity as an exceptional form of personhood (a cultural construct I examine genealogically in chapters 1 and 2) is *lived* (or phenomenologically encountered) in affectively charged experiences that vacillate between ones of effervescent potentiality and optimism (chapter 4), and ones of frustration, ambivalence, and anxiety (chapters 5 and 6). Indeed, for many (though certainly not all) of the ad workers I came to know, over time the latter came to eclipse the former—particularly as some such workers underwent experiences of “ageing out” of the industry (chapter 5). The “cruel optimism” of an ideology of creative exceptionalism that harnesses individuals to the work of advertising is therefore one whereby the impossibilities of creative autological subjectivity (total freedom, autonomy, self-actualization) are encountered *as such* (i.e. as “fantasy”), through the intersubjective processes and relations of power that shape experiences of creative ad work.

By attending to these affective dimensions of ad work as they illuminate the tensions of an autotelic creative ideal, my research contributes to a body of scholarship that examines contemporary forms of “immaterial labor,” defined by Hardt and Negri (2004) as “labor that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or

an emotional response” (108).²⁰ As other scholars of immaterial labour in late modern capitalist contexts have emphasized (Berlant 2007; Muehlebach 2011; Terranova 2004), individuals become tethered to neoliberal projects not through material needs or discursive persuasion alone, but through *the immediacy of affective experience*—what Mazzarella (2009) describes as “a zone where emotion intersects with processes taking place at a more corporeal level” (Mazzarella 2009: 291). From this perspective, the forms of affective labour involved in advertising production can be seen as sites of “resonation” between “two simultaneous registers” that constitute social life: “on the one hand, a register of affective, embodied intensity and, on the other, a register of symbolic mediation and discursive elaboration” (Mazzarella 293).

With this in mind, I make observations about the affective dimensions of advertising work in two main ways: firstly, in the emphasis that advertising creatives themselves place on the role of embodied aesthetic expertise and intuition as these inform their abilities to create resonant commodity images for broader consumer publics. Secondly, in the “passionate attachment” such workers have to the pursuit of being creative, as a distinctive form of personhood imbued with notions of freedom, autonomy, and individual exceptionalism (e.g., genius, talent).²¹ Whereas the former is spoken of by ad workers as the “creative challenge” that intellectually engages “creatives” in the work of advertising production (at least sometimes), the latter is often

²⁰ See also Maurizio Lazzarato’s seminal essay, “Immaterial Labor” (1996), for further discussion of the “great transformation” to immaterial labour that accompanied the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies.

²¹ Berlant (2007) draws on Judith Butler’s use of the term “passionate attachment,” in order to understand “passionate or irrational attachments to normative authority and normative worlds” (295). Berlant’s attention to how such attachments can form not just in relation to a particular object, but to an environment as “a scene that magnetizes a noncoherent cluster of desires for reciprocity, acknowledgement, or recognition” (296) is of particular relevance to my study of creativity amongst ad workers. Specifically, I consider how the pursuit of an idealized state of being creative exists as “a scene where the subject negotiates an overdetermined set of promises and potentials for recognition and even thriving” (296), and consider how this can lead to a dependency of the subject upon the corporate capitalist advertising, as the latter promises opportunity for creative thriving.

paradoxically described as variously supported *and* constrained by the institutional arrangements that define advertising as a particular “creative industry.”

As I expand upon in the chapters to follow, this paradoxical experience of creative self-actualization through advertising work is one whereby the desire for freedom and autonomy associated with an idealized creative life is capitalized upon as a form of “flexible subjectivity” that buttresses neoliberal interests and socio-economic arrangements in ways that often *impede* rather than sustain individual and collective well-being.²² This occurs, in part, by transferring qualities previously associated primarily with the figure of the artist (especially in association to bohemianism), to a diversity of workers in the so-called “creative industries”—not just through their involvement in the work of aesthetic production, but also in their adoption of an aestheticized creative “lifestyle.”²³ Indeed, as Forkert (2013) argues, it is through “the transformation of this lifestyle” (29) from one of perceived social transgression and counter-cultural critique embodied by the bohemian artist, to a dominant form of flexible labour defined by “entrepreneurial self-reliance” (49), that creativity is made into an imperative of neoliberal capitalism. Hence, while the self-precarization that accompanies *being [a] creative* is often seen as an intentional choice against the oppressive constraints of other forms of labour, I document how such precarity is intimately experienced by many ad workers as profoundly negative, even while they remain affectively committed (or *passionately attached*) to their identities as creative selves. Such experiences testify to Lorey’s (2011) description of self-precarization as

²² For further discussion of the paradoxes of this “flexible subjectivity,” see also Forkert (2013), McRobbie (2016), and Rolnik (2011).

²³ Forkert describes this transference as one whereby “the early days of bohemia were marked by a shift in the definition of the artist, whose primary function was no longer only to produce aesthetic objects, but to also lead unconventional lifestyle – and this lifestyle transgressed society’s limits and boundaries” (2013: 29).

characterized by “anxiety and loss of control, feelings of insecurity as well as the fear and the actual experience of failure, a drop in social status and poverty” (87).²⁴

Insofar as the dimensions of advertising work I explore in this dissertation centre upon the cultivation and promotion of creative expertise and personhood through particular institutional relationships and forms of practice, I take these as integral elements of immaterial labour that, both in terms of process (advertising production) and product (advertisements) work to affectively (if ambivalently) harness individuals to neoliberal ideals and arrangements. Like other ethnographies that examine the affective atmospheres of late capitalist societies and professional fields (Alison 2013; Miyazaki 2013) my own research on creativity with Montreal advertisers illuminates how processes of neoliberal subjectification are intimately related to intensifying experiences of precarity in such contexts. Yet, as Kathleen Stewart argues, approaching neoliberalism as “a totalized system, of which everything is always already somehow a part, is not helpful (to say the least) in the effort to approach a weighted and reeling present” (2007: 1). Rather, in tracing the particular affective contours of an idealized creativity as it variously celebrates, frustrates, alienates, worries, and optimistically orients people to pursue particular lines of work and life, I approach the neoliberal imperative to *be creative* as “a scene of

²⁴ In her ethnography, *Precarious Japan* (2013), Anne Allison states: “Precarity references a particular notion of, and social contract around, work. Work that is secure; work that secures not only income and job but identity and lifestyle, linking capitalism and intimacy in an affective desire for security itself. ... Precarity marks the loss of this—the loss of something that only certain countries, at certain historical periods, and certain workers ever had in the first place” (6-7). This sense of precarity is not contained to places of work or experiences of labour, however; Alison attends to how it becomes an embodied affect that is also translated into intimate experiences of home, family, and community.

immanent force,” rather than as one of “dead effects imposed on an innocent world” (Stewart 2007: 1).²⁵

Entering the field

Diane is another friend of a friend. When I meet her in the summer of 2013 she’s working on her doctoral dissertation, which she describes as “falling squarely within the interdisciplinary murkiness of cultural studies.” We’re sitting at a table in the corner of Sparrow, a trendy bar on rue St. Laurent, after attending a fringe dance show (aptly named *Piss in the Pool*) that was staged in the empty swimming pool of an historic bathhouse nearby. A few blocks north of where I first met Grégoire two years earlier, we’re in the heart of the Mile End—a neighborhood considered by many locals to be the centre of the city’s music and arts scenes, though intensifying gentrification has been raising rents and shifting demographics.

Our mutual friend, Justine, has just introduced us. Diane talks a bit about her research with graffiti artists in Montreal. She asks about my fieldwork. Incidentally, she’s also been doing freelance design work “on the side” for a local advertising agency, she tells me.

I ask her if she likes it. She shrugs. “The work isn’t the most exciting, but it pays well,” she says. “It’s a nice break from academic stuff sometimes.”

I ask her if she would consider working fulltime for an agency. She tells me that she doesn’t think so. “The ad industry kind of sucks,” she explains. “Some people are cool. But you also have to deal with a lot of self-important assholes. I don’t think I could handle it on a daily basis.”

Diane then recounts an experience she had when she first started “dabbling in advertising.” An art director she was working with on a project told her about a party hosted by a local sound studio his agency regularly worked with, and encouraged her to meet him and other colleagues there.

²⁵ Here, I build on Reckwitz’s (2012) observation that in late modern capitalist contexts “the *wish* to be creative” (i.e. subjective desire) is coupled to “the *imperative* to be creative” (i.e. social expectations that compel neoliberal subjects to permanently innovate, produce and appreciate aesthetic novelty, and flexibly adapt to precarious socio-economic arrangements) (2). For further scholarship on creativity as imperative, see the edited volume, *Critique of Creativity* (Raunig, Ray and Wuggenig 2011), as well as McRobbie’s (2016) expanded ethnographic study of this imperative as “a potent and highly appealing mode of new governmentality” in late capitalism.

“He gives me an email address to contact the studio, so that I can request an invite to the party,” Diane tells us. “So I do. Then I get this reply informing me that my application to attend the party has been rejected. And that if I still want to come, I have to dress up as a clown to be allowed in. I mean, what the fuck, right?”

From: [REDACTED] <party2011@[REDACTED].com>
 Date: 2011/9/22
 Subject: REJET DE CANDIDATURE, Party [REDACTED], Édition 2011: CLOWN
 To: Diane [REDACTED] <diane.[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].ca>

Salut Diane,

C'est avec regret, que nous devons vous informer que votre candidature pour le party annuel de [REDACTED] a été rejetée. Différentes raisons nous obligent à limiter le nombre d'invités. Si vous vous sentez lésé, nous vous laissons une dernière chance : vous devrez être déguisés en CLOWN pour obtenir un accès.

REQUIS MINIMUM POUR DÉGUISEMENT DE CLOWN :
 (minimum clown requirements)

- perruque
- maquillage
- nez de clown
- robe de clown

Les détails figurent en attachement.

Au plaisir de voir des clowns, sinon nous pourrons peut-être vous voir l'an prochain.

Figure 0.1: The email Diane received from the sound studio, rejecting her candidature to attend their annual party. Shared with me by Diane in 2013.

I ask Diane if she went to the party anyway. “Absolutely not,” she replies. She describes feeling insulted and confused, uncertain as to whether the reply was just a joke or gimmick email that everyone had received. She thought about showing up to the party in normal clothes, but decided against it.

Justine wonders aloud whether anyone showed up to the party as a clown.

“Apparently there were a few,” Diane responds. “I get it. If you’re some young professional desperate to network with the cool kids, then you might be willing to put a red wig on to get into a party. But honestly, I’m almost forty years old, I have a bunch of degrees, and I have better things to do.”

Diane pauses to sip her cocktail, leaving red lipstick on the rim of her glass. I notice that she’s wearing jean shorts and a MUTEK t-shirt.²⁶ She has bobbed hair and a delicate tattoo

²⁶ MUTEK is an electronic music and digital arts festival held annually in Montreal.

on the inside of her wrist. She's stylish, attractive, cool. I can't imagine her being turned away from a party.

"I don't know whether the clown thing was random, or whether they really did just reach capacity and thought this was a funny way to turn people down," she continues. "But it felt like some weird hazing thing."

With a nonchalant shrug, Diane then tells me: "You know, advertising people act like they're at the centre of something, but really they're peripheral."

I ask her what she means.

"Creatives in advertising are good at branding themselves as being cutting edge," she elaborates. "But by the time an idea or aesthetic makes its way into a commercial, it's already old news in the art world."

When I get home later that night, I check the sound studio's Facebook page to see if they posted photos from the party. They had. The photos are sleek and photoshopped. Amidst the crowd of mostly young and stylish attendees there are a small handful of clowns, hamming it up, seemingly happy to be there.

My conversation with Diane did not occur in the context of a formal interview, but after a happenstance encounter at a fringe dance show held in the empty swimming pool of an historic building in the Mile End (the Bain Saint-Michel), now used primarily for various sorts of music and art performances. When Diane, Justine, and I attended in 2013, *Piss in the Pool* had been running annually for almost a decade, and had become a popular event within a particular scene of mostly young, "hip," cosmopolitan urbanites interested in the arts.

With this context in mind, allow me to return, briefly, to the critique of advertising that Diane voiced to me that evening—a critique born, in part, of the displeasure she experienced upon having her "candidature" to attend an ad industry party rejected. What was apparent as Diane recounted this experience, was that being denied access to this space of "insider" ad

industry sociality ran counter to the relative ease with which she is typically able to otherwise access what she perceives to be culturally central spaces of “cutting edge” aesthetic production (like fringe dance events) and sociality (like nearby hipster bars) in the city. It seems to me that this incongruence was jarring for Diane because she assumed (as many of us might) that the cultural capital she had already acquired (multiple academic degrees, knowledge of the arts, aesthetic taste, a network of friends and colleagues who are academics and artists) should have been enough to grant her access. Particularly since, in her view, an advertising party was a relatively mundane thing when compared to many of the other creative spaces she was already in the habit of frequenting.

At the same time, I suspect that Diane’s critique was not born only of the offence she took upon receiving the clown party rejection. There was a specific *aesthetic education* that informed Diane’s judgment of advertising as being “on the periphery” of a cultural centre, and of trailing behind what she perceives to be more innovative aesthetic fields. Such judgments reflect longstanding cultural critiques and debates surrounding the triangulation of aesthetics, ethics, and commerce under capitalism—debates that I return to throughout this thesis, and that I suggest are key to understanding how creativity is claimed (and contested) as a particular kind of expertise under capitalism.

And yet, despite the distinctions that Diane draws between advertising and what she sees as an inherently more creative “art world,” there are some significant parallels between the sound studio party peppered with clowns and our own dive into the deep end of fringe dance performance and expensive cocktails at a trendy bar in a rapidly gentrifying Montreal

neighborhood. From my experience, the evening closely resembled many other evenings I spent in the company of advertising “creatives” over the course of my fieldwork. In fact, many of the ad workers I befriended also lived and worked in the Mile End, often frequenting the same arts venues, restaurants, bars, and cafes, as Diane and Justine (and me, even when not “doing fieldwork”). Moreover, cultural events like *Piss in the Pool* are also undeniably ones where “access” is, at least informally, determined by membership to a particular cultural world. This is a world where acquired aesthetic tastes, rules of etiquette, patterns of relating, and personal networks clearly inform who does or does not feel like they belong, despite the fact that anyone is theoretically free to buy a ticket. Though it may not have been intentional, the rejection email Diane received with explicit instructions on how to clown her way into that sound studio party seems to highlight these very things—how, in other words, *not everyone can be let in*, if the space or event is to remain something exclusive, cool, or “cutting edge.”

What, then, is the difference that makes the people who create advertisements a “them,” against whom Diane asserts a clear distinction as an academic and artist herself? While Diane’s remark that ad workers are often “self-important assholes” may or may not be true (who am I to judge?), such descriptions could easily apply to my own experiences of academia, where self-promotion and individual ambition often seem to overshadow intellectual curiosity, or an idealized pursuit of knowledge-for-knowledge’s sake. Undoubtedly this has something to do with the highly competitive nature of academic work today (neoliberalism etc.), though understanding this does not make working with assholes any easier.

Is it just that advertising creatives make ads—an aesthetic form that escapes the philosophical insistence upon the *disinterestedness* of art and aesthetic experience? (An insistence which, in “Western” contexts like Montreal, can be traced back to foundational Enlightenment debates, and which remain dominant in many academic and contemporary art circles, as I outline in Chapters 1 and 2). Maybe that’s it, in fact, although even this seems to unravel when I consider how many of the people who make ads make other things, too. And that many of these other things they create do not seem to have much to do with selling products. (Or making money, even).

While Diane’s description of ad workers implies that such individuals constitute a distinct and easily identifiable social group (i.e. the “they” of advertising), my own fieldwork experiences trouble the notion that this social field can be so easily circumscribed. The fact that Diane dipped her own toes into freelance ad work is part of the troubling, in fact. Over the course of my fieldwork I also met many advertising creatives (creative directors, art directors, copywriters, filmmakers, sound and graphic designers) who considered themselves artists more than ad workers, despite earning the entirety of their income through ad work (like Michel—a filmmaker whose experiences I describe in Chapters 3 and 5). I met others who left ad work to pursue careers in other professional fields, often related to the arts (like Nikita, a creative producer who appears in Chapters 2 and 5). Some spoke to me about leaving advertising entirely in order to devote themselves to “their own” art (like Grégoire, who I revisit at several points in this thesis), and there was the occasional person who actually did it (like DJ Champion, discussed above). To be sure, many other creatives I met and interviewed were much less conflicted about working in advertising, variously perceiving this work as a meaningful creative challenge, as a good way to

acquire money and social status, as a space of in-group belonging, or as variable combinations of all these things (like Jean-Paul and, eventually, Carmen—Chapter 6). The less critical, more celebratory stances of such individuals do not negate the fact that advertising continues to be embroiled in debates surrounding its ethics and aesthetics. Rather, I suggest that the pursuit of an idealized state of *being creative* defined in *autotelic terms* (i.e. as purpose in and of itself, regardless of the ethics and aesthetics of creative output) is key to understanding how many ad workers *find their way through* the dilemmas raised by these debates.

Fieldwork in (and around) advertising: methods and limitations

There are numerous formal and informal ways in which the boundaries of advertising as a particular social field are often closed to outsiders. This can be quite literally, in things like restricted access to agency offices, closed-door meetings, or private events and parties. How easily these doors open depends upon one's cultural capital, for example in the form of professional accreditations or personal networks. These things are unarguably shaped by structures of economic power and privilege. Being able to afford the expensive restaurants and bars, or the price of a conference ticket, or a certain attire that communicates one's identity as a member of a professional class, are things that can either ease or obstruct one's ability to "break into" the industry—whether this be as a young (or not-so-young) professional seeking employment, or as an anthropologist looking to do fieldwork. Nevertheless, the relative porousness of advertising as a "creative industry" constituted by a relatively young, university-

educated, and socially mobile class of professionals allowed me to gain access to spaces of advertising sociality with relative ease, as a person who generally fit this description myself.

Importantly, I should note here that at the outset of my research I already had several friends and personal contacts who worked in advertising. One of these—my friend Jean-Paul, who appears throughout this dissertation—was particularly integral to my research. A creative director at the height of his career when I began fieldwork, Jean-Paul introduced me to a number of his colleagues and personal friends who also worked in creative positions in the industry. I have no doubt that their willingness to be interviewed, to invite me to their dinner parties, to talk to me about their work, and to share their personal experiences with me in candid and generous ways, were testament in large part to the influence and general likeability of Jean-Paul. Having him vouch for me in the early days of fieldwork allowed me to snowball my way into the field, making new contacts through the initial introductions he provided.

It was ultimately through these initial relationships I established via Jean-Paul's network, as well as through additional introductions provided by other friends with contacts in the industry, that over the course of a three-year fieldwork period (from summer 2011 to spring 2014) I was able to do many of the things that anthropologists do and define as ethnographic research. In my case, a significant component of this research centred upon conducting formal and informal interviews with people working in advertising. At the outset of my fieldwork I focused on conducting interviews with people employed directly at advertising agencies, including individuals not directly involved in "creation" (like strategists and account directors). As my research progressed, however, I directed more of my time and attention to interviewing and

spending time with individuals who defined themselves as “creatives”—a distinction that is given significant meaning within this field.

The proliferation of the term “creative” in job titles, department names, industry awards, and everyday conversations raised questions for me about how such individuals understand what it means to be creative, and why this is so central to their work and identities. I refer to this group of people throughout this dissertation as “creative ad workers”—a term that includes their emic designator, while also specifying the field within which this designator is used. (There are other industries and social fields where the title “creative” is also used, possibly in different ways, but I do not account for these here). Moreover, the term “worker” is a relevant distinction here because it underscores how creativity is used to designate *specific forms of labour* involved in advertising production, while also capturing how many creative ad workers see their advertising work as distinct from their other creative pursuits.

The creative ad workers I interviewed, spent time with, and discuss in this thesis include individuals who generally fall into three categories: 1) individuals employed in the creative departments of ad agencies (creative directors, art directors, copywriters); 2) freelance workers who perform these roles in full or part-time capacities; and 3) individuals employed in “orbiting” industries, like film, sound production, or graphic design. Regarding the latter specifically, while such individuals often made most or all of their income through commercial and advertising work, they were also often substantially engaged in other forms of aesthetic production (like film, video game design, music production, or visual arts). As I discuss in subsequent chapters, such distinctions often informed the ways in which different individuals defined themselves in

creative terms, and certainly played a role in shaping how such workers felt about working in advertising.

In addition to interviews, I also engaged in participant observation across a diversity of settings. This involved spending considerable periods of time with the creative ad workers I met in spaces of both “work” and “play” (though the boundaries between these were often blurred—which is part of my argument). Amongst other activities, attending informal social events like dinners, after work drinks, and parties with friends—particularly those where the majority of attendees knew each other through ad work—was a central means through which I met new “informants” and became privy to the kind of after-hours job talk that often reveals more about the nature and experience of “work” than what is said in the workplace itself. Some of the most candid stories and insights were shared with me in such contexts, sometimes in group conversation, and often in more intimate asides.

These informal social events were also opportunities to observe how the experience of working in advertising is, crucially, one where the boundaries between work and leisure are often unclear. This is so not just because, like in many other professions, ad workers often make friends with the people they work with, but also because maintaining positive relationships and a large social network of industry contacts undoubtedly impacts the success of one’s career. Without denying that individual work ethic, talent, and professionalism play an important role in determining promotions, winning pitches, being given the “good” accounts, or earning higher salaries, spending time with ad workers quickly made it clear that knowing more people and maintaining positive relationships with industry decision makers is also crucial. While this kind of

“networking” is often taken for granted as an inescapable part of the job, many of the people I met spoke about this aspect of the industry more candidly, variously acknowledging that they benefitted from “unapologetic nepotism” (Lars), expressing frustrations about the ways in which these patterns of sociality benefitted particular kinds of creative selves over others (Nikita), or conceding a certain level of resignation about being perceived as “no longer being relevant” themselves (Michel).

In addition to regularly attending informal social gatherings, I was also able to participate in and observe more formal processes of advertising conceptualization and production. Gaining access to institutional spaces where such processes occur, however, often proved challenging. While several of the freelancers I met let me hang around while they worked on campaigns with colleagues, finding ways to spend time in agency offices proved more difficult than I had initially imagined. Though several of my “key informants” offered to have me come visit the agencies at which they worked, such offers never fully panned out. Neither did cold calls or formal requests to agency executives (even ones I had already met). It simply never seemed to be “the right time.”

On the one hand, such hesitations are perfectly understandable—inviting an outside observer to one’s place of work can be an intrusive and discomfiting thing, especially in a highly competitive environment where people are constantly required to defend their ideas and professional expertise to their colleagues, employers, and clients. (Or, in the words of my friend, Michel, “justify their jobs”). On the other hand, these challenges also reflect a particular power dynamic that often informs the challenges anthropologists face when “studying up.” As Ortner

(2010) describes about her experiences conducting ethnographic research in Hollywood, while issues of access are common across many ethnographic settings, researchers are nevertheless “more likely to get ‘inside’ if that inside is, as with so much classic anthropological work, among the less powerful” (213). For this reason, much of my own research with creative ad workers consisted of what Ortner’s describes as “interface ethnography,” characterized by “doing participant observation in the border areas where the closed community or organization or institution interfaces with the public” (ibid). While this was frustrating at the time, in hindsight I now appreciate how entering the field through the front doors of agencies might have erected other kinds of barriers, insofar as interpersonal exchanges in professional contexts are often more guarded than ones had in informal social contexts. In this sense, meeting people initially in spaces of friendship and commensality rather than at the workplace likely enabled me to establish relationships of trust more easily with the people I did come to know, though I would be lying if I said this was an intentional choice from the get-go.

Nevertheless, because I was interested in how creativity is understood and experienced by creative ad workers in the business of making ads, it seemed important to participate in and observe processes of advertising conceptualization, design, and production. I was ultimately able to do so by taking ad jobs myself (back to the troubling). This involved working as a freelance English copywriter and sometimes translator, as well as taking a contract position as an ethnographic researcher for a local ad agency. Through personal contacts I was also able to attend two commercial shoots: once as an unpaid “assistant” to a commercial director (I was asked to fetch a lot of coffee and roll a few joints), and another time as an English dialect expert, where my job was to ensure that the bilingual and francophone Québécois actors in the

commercial spoke an English that would “sound right” to a pan-Canadian audience outside the province of Quebec. Having no real expertise in this regard, beyond the accident of being born into an anglophone family in Alberta, this was a job that I was grossly underqualified for, and totally unsuited to in terms of personality—much to the chagrin of my creative director friend who had hoped that bringing me along would help him out while also cutting costs (I did it for free).

These experiences certainly deepened my understanding of the labour involved in advertising production, and gave me a particular appreciation for the types of frustrations that were frequently shared with me in conversations and interviews. What was equally as illuminating in my investigation of what it means to *be creative* in advertising, however, were the more formal industry events I attended, where beliefs about and valuations of creativity in advertising were explicitly articulated, promoted, and celebrated. Industry awards events (as well as the after-parties) provided especially salient opportunities for observing how a particular idealization of creativity is celebrated within the industry, through ritualistic and effervescent patterns of sociality. This ideology of creativity was especially (and spectacularly) on display at C2MTL—a “creativity + commerce” conference held annually in the city, and organized by the Montreal advertising agency, Sid Lee. I attended C2MTL in the spring of 2014—an experience I describe and analyze in Chapter 4. At the wrap party on the final day of this event I decided, somewhat arbitrarily, to put an “end” to my fieldwork. I say arbitrarily because I continued to live in Montreal and maintain friendships with many of the individuals featured in the pages that follow.

Finally, I should acknowledge here that the ongoing overlap between home and field, as well as my own (sometimes frustrated) experiences of pursuing creative aspirations in conditions of neoliberal precarity, undoubtedly shaped the primary questions and trajectory of my research with creative ad workers. Relatedly, these are also the primary reasons why my fieldwork extended over a period of three years—a period during which I did not (and could not) remain entirely “in the field.” Instead, I spent these years regularly moving between “doing research” and “doing life.” Meaning, in other words, that this was a period during which I was also raising a child as a single parent, teaching full-time at a local college, maintaining relationships that predated and post-dated fieldwork, participating in a local cultural world that was (often though not always) one I identified as “my own,” and generally just inhabiting the city I still call home, with varying levels of comfort and degrees of belonging. In many of these ways, in fact, my life was and remains very similar to those of the people I met, interviewed, spent time with, and describe in the pages to follow.

Chapter overview

This dissertation has six chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion. In these chapters I use pseudonyms to protect the identities and professional reputations of specific interlocutors. Additionally, because the individuals who are the subjects of my research could potentially be identified through association with the campaigns they produce, through agency affiliations, or through professional networks that are easily traced, I have chosen to create composite characters who appear and reappear throughout the dissertation. Attributing potentially

compromising statements, behaviours, or attitudes to composite characters is an established method for protecting participant confidentiality in contexts where there are risks of reputational harm (Arjomand 2022). Moreover, this approach to ethnographic writing can also help to identify and interpret cultural themes and common experiences by combining empirically gathered details from multiple sources into single narratives (Willis 2018). Finally, wherever I identify individual ad workers by their real names, I do so in order to discuss statements already publicly attributed to such individuals in existent publications (e.g. agency websites, trade magazines, personal blogs).

Chapter 1 opens with an ethnographic vignette that provides a window onto the neoliberal dynamics that characterized the city of Montreal at the time of my fieldwork. Situating the subjects of my research within these dynamics, I raise the question of how and why individual ad workers become harnessed to the recuperative work of advertising, as a central site of aesthetic production under capitalism. I argue that the optimistic desire to *be creative* is a primary motivator in this regard. However, ethnographic attention to how creativity is defined within this social field quickly reveals the concept to be an indeterminate and often inherently contradictory ideal, at times asserted as a marker of exceptional individual or class status that embeds “creatives” in capitalist hierarchies, and at others as a free and autonomous mode of being-in-the-world believed to counter the alienations and utilitarian reductions of capitalism itself. In order to better understand and unravel these ideological knots, in the second part of the chapter I examine creativity as a genealogical construct that underwent key transformations during the Enlightenment, in dialogue with the socio-economic changes of early modern capitalism.

I continue this genealogical work in Chapter 2, examining the historical conditions under which creativity was imbued with competing autotelic and transcendental meanings in the nineteenth century, in dialogue with the institutionalization and expansion of advertising across Britain, Europe, and North America. Focusing on this period as a crucial moment of transformation in Western constructions of creativity, I outline how Enlightenment interest in the “freedom of the imagination” was more fully elaborated alongside growing bourgeois fascination with the overlapping figures of the *flâneur*, the bohemian, and the modern artist. In so doing, I illuminate the ways in which theorizations of creativity as a form of exceptional talent (or “genius”) became associated with the ideal (white, male) autological subject of European liberalism. I discuss how this further embroiled creativity in a bourgeois class politics, in ways that remain relevant to creative subject formation and practices of social distinction in late capitalist fields of aesthetic production, like Montreal advertising.

Chapter 3 explores how an ideology of creative exceptionalism has had particular traction in Montreal, as a city that is often seen within Canada as the exceptionally creative epicentre of cultural production for a distinctive Québécois society. More specifically, I address how these associations were embraced during the Quiet Revolution by Francophone ad workers who promoted themselves as creative experts specialized in the creation of culturally-relevant campaigns to a regional Québécois “target market.” I show how this occurred alongside broader historical developments that shaped an increasingly globalized advertising industry in the 1960s and 70s—a period considered, in emic terms, as one of “creative revolution” characterized by considerable institutional and ideological changes. I discuss how these changes transformed the role and valuation of creative ad workers in ad agencies and production processes, in ways that

imagined creativity as a particular kind of professional expertise and form of human *capital*. I argue that these meanings were layered onto existing understandings of creativity in ways that extended to processes of creative subject-formation well beyond the field of advertising.

In Chapter 4 I examine how these ideological developments remain foundational to more contemporary “creative industry,” “creative class,” and “creative city” discourses and initiatives that have shaped the post-industrial urban context of Montreal since the turn of the twenty-first century. In order to do so, I provide an ethnographic account of attending C2MTL—a “creativity + commerce” conference held annually in Montreal, and “curated” by the advertising agency, Sid Lee. Analyzing C2MTL as one node within a broader “creativity circuit” of similar events, I demonstrate how the spectacular aesthetics and dominant discourses that characterize such initiatives reinforce capitalist mythologies of class meritocracy, and reframe socio-economic inequalities as the natural outcome of innate individual abilities and distributions of creative “talent.”

In Chapter 5, I consider how the pursuit of an idealized state of *being creative*—especially in its association to the fantasy of the (neo)liberal autological subject—relates to patterns of social exclusion, experiences of ethical discomfort, and feelings of ambivalence amongst Montreal ad workers. Through an analysis of interviews, observations, advertising campaigns, and personal manifestos by and about creative ad workers, I show how the social structures and everyday practices that characterize and shape Montreal advertising place individuals in ethical, social, and existential “double-binds”—i.e. situations where ongoing attachment to an autological creative ideal comes into conflict with other personal and collective values, desires,

and needs. Through the exploration of these double-binds, I document how the otherwise positive desire to *be creative* is transformed into a negatively-experienced *imperative* in neoliberal conditions, and show how these experiences often impede rather than encourage a sense of creative flourishing amongst individuals employed in the industry.

Chapter 6 explores how aspirations to creative exceptionalism (as a particular form of autological subjectification in late capitalism) shape patterns of interpersonal relating and expectations of intimacy in the context of Montreal advertising. More specifically, I describe how stories of sexual encounters are regularly recounted amongst peers and colleagues within the industry in ways that interpret hedonistic and self-interested behaviours as expressions of an exceptionally free and autonomous creative subjectivity. I examine how these stories buttress fantasies of the autological subject, as well as how they record unequal distributions of sexual power and freedom in neoliberal conditions. At the same time, I suggest that storytelling about sex also illuminates how sexuality sometimes troubles and *undoes* the (neo)liberal fantasy of self-sovereignty, through contradictory desires and experiences explored in themes of embarrassment, disillusionment, and remorse. Ultimately, in attending to the ways that ad workers speak about (and *worry over*) experiences of intimate (dis)connection, I argue that we gain deeper understanding of how (neo)liberalism's "internal incoherencies" are variously encountered and navigated by individuals for whom an idealized autological subjectivity is imagined in terms of being (a) creative.

Collectively, these chapters examine the complex, layered, and often contradictory meanings associated with *being creative* in the context of Montreal advertising. It is written from

the standpoint that treating creativity as a genealogical construct is necessary in order to illuminate the implicit beliefs and ideas about what—and who—constitutes the ideal creative subject of (neo)liberal modernity. In employing this lens, I examine why creativity acts as such a fertile ideal in late capitalist conditions, and document how it is invoked by individuals and groups in ways that often legitimate exploitative socio-economic systems. While macro-level analysis of institutional practice, historical transformation, and dominant discourse is key to this endeavor, this dissertation adds to the existing scholarship on creativity by ethnographically attending to the ways that people encounter, navigate, and make sense of neoliberal arrangements through adherence to an ideology of creative exceptionalism.

Chapter 1

The Self as Site of Aesthetic Recuperation

“Curating is like cultivating, but it’s not about natural development; rather, it’s about collecting phenomena for the purpose of their gaining value.”

(Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p.87)

“Consumption... involves belonging to a world, adhering to a certain universe... this world is constituted by the arrangement of statements, by regimes of signs where the expression is called advertisement/publicity and the expressed constitutes a solicitation, an order which are in themselves judgements and beliefs about the world, of oneself and others. The expressed is not an ideological valuation but an incitement (it forms a sign), an invitation to espouse a way of life: a way of dressing, or having a body, of eating, communicating and travelling, a way of having a style, a way of speaking etc.”

(Maurizio Lazzarato, *From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life*, p.189)

Field notes, April 28th, 2012:

Pierre—a freelance creative director in his late forties—invites me to join him for dinner. When he comes to pick me up, he tells me that we’ll be meeting a few of his friends who also work in advertising for “*une manif*,” before all going out to eat. This is said in passing as I climb into his SUV, with the casualness of an invitation to pre-dinner drinks.

An hour later we are in the centre of downtown Montreal, making our way along rue Sainte-Catherine at the tail end of a large protest, with a row of mounted police in riot gear at our heels. It’s cold. A spring rain seeps into our bones, despite sweaters and scarves and pocketed hands. Pierre and his friends wear small red felt squares pinned to their designer wool coats. As we walk, we talk about their motivations to demonstrate tonight in support of the student strikes.

Étienne, another creative director, is perhaps the most vocal in his opinions. He talks at length about how his values were shaped by his parents, both of whom were public school teachers, and about how he sees the proposed tuition hikes as counter to “everything Quebec stands for as a distinct society within North America.” He describes the spirit of the student strikes as something that separates Quebecers from other Canadians — “nowhere else in Canada would students fight for access to education like this,” he tells me. He connects the current student strikes to the Quiet Revolution of the late 1960s, when equal access to education resulted in major reforms to post-secondary education in the province.

In contrast, Sophie—a production coordinator at a local advertising agency—is relatively quiet throughout the demonstration. She says little about her motivations for participating.

But she walks with exaggerated slowness in provocation of the police, who vigilantly clomp their horses behind us, urging the protest along. She stops to light a cigarette, forcing the police line to reign in their steeds. Étienne (her husband) takes pictures of the moment with his iPhone, uploading images of Sophie's performative defiance to Facebook even as we walk. (By the end of the evening, his album, "*Soirée manif*," will receive over one hundred "likes," and multiple comments about how beautiful Sophie looks: e.g. "*magnifique*"; "*elle est superbe, ta Sophie*"; "*la révolution te va bien, Sophie!*").

Halfway along the protest route Pierre grows cold and bored, and tells his friends that we'll meet them at the restaurant.

Later, at a bistro on Saint-Denis, he speaks ardently about how important it is to demonstrate in support of the student cause, and voices his agreement with one of the proposals made by the student organization, CLASSE (la Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante)¹: that Quebec adopt a bank tax to offset the cost of funding post-secondary education, rather than impose burdensome fees on students. Pierre describes how the proposed tax would generate enough money to make university education completely free for all Quebec residents. Over the course of the evening he repeatedly compares what he perceives as severely lacking Quebec public services to his experiences and expectations growing up in France, and sees no reason why taxing banks would hurt the Quebec economy—a point of view that is raised by several of his friends across the table, including Étienne.

More friends and colleagues arrive. More bottles of wine are ordered. Not everyone at the table supports the student strikes.

Celeste—a marketing strategist in her early forties who recently became vice president and partner at her agency—expresses impatience towards the inconveniences caused by the student demonstrations. She complains about the traffic jams, about the negative impacts on businesses along protest routes, and about taxpayer money being wasted on paying police to maintain order. She is most sympathetic towards those students who voted against the strike, and who want to "graduate, get a job, and move on with life" rather than protest, she tells us. She rolls her eyes at Pierre and Étienne for their "immature ideologies." Though she recognizes that rising tuition fees makes post-secondary education less accessible for lower-income students, Celeste argues that deserving students can still earn scholarships if they "have talent and the right work ethic." It is those students, she says, who are the "future of Quebec"—a province she perceives as stagnating economically from overly bureaucratic and resource-draining social programs.

Disagreements grow heated and a tense silence falls upon the table. The clink of cutlery is suddenly loud. A phone vibrates. A bracelet rattles.

Pierre cracks a joke. Laughter. Relief.

¹ Translates to "broad coalition of the Association for Student Union Solidarity."

The conversation then changes to talk of work: Stéphane (a film director) is leaving tomorrow for a commercial shoot in Chile; Jean-François (an art director) talks about his recent trip to Austin, Texas, for SXSW; Nikita (a creative producer) is unhappy in her job – she’s thinking about getting out of the advertising industry entirely, and going back to school to get a degree in art history. Everyone talks about the pros and cons of freelance versus agency positions.

Sophie orders horse tartare. Étienne takes a photograph.

The events and conversations that characterized the evening I describe above were distinctive to the context of Montreal during this period of my fieldwork. This context was one in which ongoing neoliberal reform—in this instance taking the form of proposed increases to post-secondary tuition costs—was met with widespread resistance and popular discontent. Like many other people living in the city at this time, the advertising professionals with whom I was conducting research became caught up in the zeitgeist of the moment, variously participating (or not) in the student demonstrations that frequently occupied the city, and passionately debating the political legitimacy of the movement.

The differing opinions and levels of support for the student movement expressed by the ad workers in attendance on this particular evening speak to the complexity of ways in which professional identities and interests intersect with other cultural attachments, political views, and class affiliations—sometimes in uneasy or contradictory ways. Such intersections are certainly not unique to the experiences of creative ad workers. Nevertheless, by participating in evenings like the one I describe above, I came to observe how many individuals within this sector adopted a *curatorial* stance towards the dominant aesthetics, events, and experiences of the student movement. I consider this stance to be curatorial because it involved two primary

elements: first, an acquisitive attitude towards the aesthetics of the student strikes; and, second, the resignification and display of such aesthetics within capitalist processes of self-promotion and commodity image production. In this chapter I consider how, through these curatorial stances, creative ad workers attempted to navigate the tensions between the capitalist goals of their advertising work, the anti-capitalist goals of the student movement, and their own personal interests and identities as “creatives.”

On the heels of a dilemma: protesting neoliberal reform as neoliberal subjects

Over the course of the three years during which I conducted ethnographic research with advertising professionals in Montreal (summer 2011 to spring 2014), legislative power in the province of Quebec changed hands twice: when Jean Charest’s Liberal government was replaced by a Parti Québécois minority led by Pauline Marois in September 2012, and when the latter was replaced by another Liberal majority led by Philippe Couillard in April 2014. On the one hand, this political back-and-forth reflects a tumultuous political culture in the province, which since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s has consistently been informed by differing views on federalism and the prospect of Quebec independence. On the other hand, the civic movements that characterized Montreal during this period of rapid electoral shifts also illuminate a new set of political preoccupations that have emerged as a result of the province’s turn towards neoliberal governance over the past several decades.

Insofar as partisan politics in Quebec have remained mired in deep-rooted anxieties of cultural and linguistic loss among Québécois communities, they often obscure contemporary

processes of class formation and inequality in the province that no longer easily align with linguistic or cultural divides. As the civic movements and subsequent elections during the period of my research reveal, rising levels of popular discontent in Quebec are, in many ways, responses to recent austerity measures that work to undermine social democratic values and institutions in the province through a process of neoliberal modernization that Pineault (2012) describes as “similar to the offensive waged against the last remnants of the welfare state and labour rights waged elsewhere in North America” (37).² In Quebec, as elsewhere, this has involved what Klein (2014) outlines as the three pillars of neoliberal policy: “privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and the lowering of income and corporate taxes, paid for with cuts to public spending” (72). For ad workers in Montreal—like many other “creative industry” professionals living and working under neoliberal conditions—such policies have been accompanied by a profound shift towards increasingly “flexible” (i.e. insecure, casual, irregular) employment through the widespread restructuring of labour markets (Rantisi and Leslie 2021: 351-352).³

Around the same time as I was beginning fieldwork, the Liberal government announced that it would be increasing university tuition fees by eighty-three percent over five years. This triggered a massive student movement that culminated in the widespread protests—or *manifestations*—during the spring of 2012, in what became widely referred to as the *printemps*

² See Pineault (2012) for further discussion of neoliberal reforms in Québec, as a set of social practices that aim to “restore hegemonic class power by the economic elite” through a politics of what David Harvey describes as “accumulation through dispossession” (32). Pineault’s analysis of the strikes as a direct response to such processes contributes to a growing body of critical scholarship that focuses on local governance and policy-making as key sites of neoliberalism.

³ See Gattinger and Saint-Pierre (2010), for an analysis of the impacts of neoliberalism on Quebec’s culture industries specifically.

érable.⁴ Over the course of a few months, hundreds of thousands of university and college students in the province went on strike against the proposed increases, with public demonstrations lasting until mid-August 2012 (Pineault 2012: 29). The protests not only continued, but in fact gained popular support and momentum even after the government managed to pass the highly controversial Bill 78 (which became Law 12) in the National Assembly of Quebec on May 18th, whereby “all unauthorized public demonstrations by more than 50 people were effectively banned and criminalized, as were symbols of the strike” (Pineault 48). Publicly condemned by the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Quebec Human Rights Commission, as well as by Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the new legislation was most vehemently challenged on the streets of the city itself, where protests swelled to include a growing body of citizens insistent on exercising their democratic rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Anyone living in Montreal during that time can likely attest to a palpable change that occurred in the city’s social climate, as the student protests gained momentum and popular support, eventually growing into a much broader civic movement that worked to “displace the meaning of the struggle from the single issue of tuition fees to the larger issue of the predominant political economic regime” (Pineault 2012:30). By the time the weather was warm

⁴ The use of the term *printemps érable* (or “Maple Spring”) is a clear reference to the *printemps arabe* (Arab Spring). The use of the term explicitly positions the Québec student movements within a global wave of democratic civil protest, while also asserting a localized regional identity through the symbol of the maple leaf. At the same time, the symbol of the maple leaf reflects how the boundaries of “local” identity and cultural belonging in the province are often ambiguous, riddled with tension and contestation; while the maple leaf is an official national symbol of Canada, in Québec it also references localized traditions of maple syrup production and consumption (the *cabane à sucre*) that are seen as part of a regional *patrimoine*. Rather than linking the movement to federalism, here the term instead connects the groundswell of popular discontent against the provincial government to the seasonal flow of maple syrup, suggesting the former to be an inevitable, life-affirming response to sweeping austerity measures, of which the proposed tuition hikes are but one dimension of the broader shift to neoliberal governance.

enough for nude demonstrations, the aesthetics of the student movement had become a ubiquitous presence in the city; in particular, the *carrés rouges* (red squares)—the emblem of the student protests—were everywhere, pinned to backpacks and bike helmets, displayed in windows, graffitied onto bus stops, and digitized on Facebook profiles.⁵ Police in riot gear became commonplace on street corners throughout the downtown core, mounted on horseback in impressive displays of state power as they corralled the swarms of protestors who habitually disrupted attempts to maintain business-as-usual. And every night at 8 p.m. across the city, the clanging of *casseroles* would ring with the regularity of church bells, calling people to the streets, pots and pans in hand. For the span of one summer, these *manifs casseroles* gathered neighbours together in collective, cacophonous expressions of discontent—scenes described by Barney (2012) as “noisy sites in which neoliberalism’s devastating effects on political and community engagement are giving way to a resurgence of the democratic spirit.”⁶

The ad workers I met and interviewed that spring and summer expressed varying levels of support for the student protests, with some jovially participating in the evening *casseroles* that grew to become an integral part of Montreal’s cultural life, and others remaining strongly opposed. In this sense, the April evening of protest and commensality described above was

⁵ The red squares, first adopted by Québec students in 2005 when the Charest government cut \$103 million in grants and bursaries for post-secondary education, invokes the phrase, “*carrément dans le rouge*” (squarely in the red). It is thus a clear symbol of protest against rising student debt levels resulting from austerity measures that have cut public funding to education. See Asselin (2012) for a more detailed analysis of the history and political meanings of the symbol.

⁶ The clanging of casseroles during the student protests draws on the modern tradition of *cacerolazo*—a popular form of protest in Latin America throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Student protestors in Québec began to implement the practice in response to Bill 78. Sterne (2012) suggests that this practice can also be connected to European and British traditions of *charivari*, or “rough music”—non-violent cultural practices that call attention to the violation of social contract, using (loud) public shaming as social sanction and political pressure.

characteristic of many experiences and exchanges within and beyond the industry that took place across the city during this period; while such vignettes may not capture the full range of opinions and perspectives that circulated amongst ad workers during the *printemps érable*, they do nevertheless illuminate a diversity of class positions and competing political ideologies that have emerged in dialogue with intensifying neoliberal reforms in Quebec—and elsewhere—since the 1980s.

There is, furthermore, an additional tension that characterizes the various ways in which ad workers engaged with the Quebec protests *from their positions as ad workers specifically*. Insofar as the student movement—as well as public contestation of its legitimacy and values—emerged in direct response to neoliberal policies and rising inequality, ad workers were inevitably implicated through their ongoing contributions to an industry that acts as an institutionalized system of corporate capitalist communication and persuasion. In an unambiguous way, the direct economic investments and everyday labour of ad workers serve to uphold the very system that the protests sought to undermine, through the ongoing production and reproduction of *regimes of signs* that incessantly solicit individuals to consume through an aestheticization of *lifeways* as *lifestyle*. This was especially clear in the ways that different ad workers navigated these tensions through curatorial modes of participating in the student movement that transformed its aesthetics into novel commodity images and individual cultural capital. (More on this below).

With this in mind, the vignette that opened this chapter draws attention to how a particular moment of social crisis arising from the pressures and constrictions of neoliberal

governmentality was given meaning by individuals whose everyday labour and identities as “creatives” are intimately—if ambivalently—entangled in processes of neoliberal aestheticization and recuperation. The curatorial attitudes that ad workers adopted towards emergent aesthetic forms within this context must therefore be recognized as an integral way in which they engage in the work of capitalist recuperation while also attempting to resist the discipline and alienations of capitalism by constructing themselves *as creatives*. As the tensions between the different views and values of the ad workers I describe in this chapter begin to illuminate, however, while the shared pursuit of being creative provides an ideological bridge between elite and upwardly-mobile (or at least aspirationally so) middle classes, it also affectively harnesses the latter to neoliberal institutions and ideologies in ways that paradoxically exacerbate their own experiences of *failing to flourish* in idealized creative terms.

The self as site of capitalist recuperation

As the various positions and perspectives of Pierre, Celeste, and Étienne illuminate, being engaged in advertising work does not always engender easy or straightforward class affiliations. Rather, those individuals who are part of the industry inhabit a dynamic social space where diverse actors variously attempt to negotiate tensions that emerge between their own competing class interests, professional aspirations, political views, and cultural values. They do so in ways that inform not just their personal attitudes towards advertising work, but also how they perceive—and *curate*—themselves as individuals. Crucially, I argue, within this space the emphasis on *creativity* as a marker of social distinction is a primary means through which many

individuals employed in the field attempt to negotiate such tensions. More specifically, to *be (a) creative* is invoked within the advertising industry as a *culturally exceptional* social status that is both solidly *of* a bourgeois class (thus benefitting from associated socio-economic privileges and freedoms), while also (often simultaneously) associated with a “counter-cultural” stance that (at least ostensibly) rejects the dominant values of this class, as constraints upon the freedom and autonomy of the individual. This tension can be directly observed in the ways that creative ad workers articulated counter-cultural affiliation with the student movement while simultaneously reinforcing a dominant capitalist order through their own creative work and aestheticized performances of self.

Take Étienne, for example, who easily earns a six-figure salary, yet still identifies primarily with his lower middle-class upbringing and with the social democratic tradition he perceives as central to Québécois identity. Both he and Pierre saw the issue of tuition hikes as a threat to what Pineault (2012) describes as a tradition of “humanist and democratized postsecondary education... linked to the question of accessibility—not to human capital but to an emancipatory higher education aimed at forming an enlightened and critical citizenry” (44). However, while Pierre connected this aim to a broader French tradition, Étienne saw it as a form of Québécois exceptionalism. In comparison, Celeste clearly identified with a francophone economic elite in Quebec that has grown out of “the emerging francophone business class of the 1980s” (Pineault 2012: 40), for whom “adapting Quebec’s cultural and political economy to an imagined North American standard and pushing the province out of its “social-democratic exceptionalism”” is a clear political and economic priority (37).

These competing perspectives and positions, on display during our dinner conversation after the protest, highlight how the contemporary Quebec context is in many ways characterized by a central paradox that the aestheticized positions of the “creative class” attempt to navigate, and within which they must be situated. On the one hand, the province’s history of socialist-democratic policies (such as low-cost post-secondary education) are taken as evidence of its unique cultural and political position within Canada. Yet on the other hand, Quebec also has entrenched socio-economic class divisions, reinforced through a number of institutional and legislative arrangements. For example, contrary to what the *zeitgeist* of the *printemps d’érable* might suggest, national statistics revealed that in 2012 the province in fact had “one of the most unequal high school systems in Canada,’ with 20 to 30 per cent [of students] attending private high schools” (Michael 2013). The percentage was even higher in Montreal, where 35% of high school students were enrolled in private schools compared to a Canadian average of 5% (Cukier 2015).⁷ Moreover, not only do the majority of private schools in Quebec receive 50 to 60% of their funding through public subsidies, but because many also have the status of a charitable organization, parents who can afford to send their children to private schools can also claim tuition fees as tax deductions (Cukier 2012). Indeed, the three primary leaders/spokespeople of the FECQ, FEUQ, and CLASSE student organizations that led the protests against the tuition hikes themselves all attended private high schools.⁸ This fact was quickly seized upon by many critics of the strike, who highlighted the “solid middle-class backgrounds” of protesting students in

⁷ See Cukier’s article, “Québec’s Subsidized Private Schools: The Elephant Lurking Inside the Student Movement” (2012) for a more detailed overview and critique of the tensions between the ideological basis of the 2012 student strikes, and how the private school system in Québec reinforces entrenched class inequalities within the province.

⁸ Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), and Coalition large de l’Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE).

their attempts to delegitimize the movement by implying it was underpinned by bourgeois entitlement and hypocrisy.⁹

At the same time as the legitimacy of the student protests was being hotly debated within the ad industry and throughout the city, the dominant aesthetics of the student movement (the red square, the casseroles, the anarchist cachet) were being rapidly recuperated by ad workers.¹⁰ This recuperation occurred at two levels: first, in the harnessing of the key symbols of the strikes to particular brands and commodities through the production of novel commodity images. Second, in curatorial constructions of self—processes through which ad workers captured and re-signified the aesthetics of the student movement in localized articulations of aesthetic expertise and belonging to a creative class. Insofar as these recuperations variously harnessed the key symbols of the student movement to the goals of corporate profit and the accumulation of individual cultural capital, they ultimately worked to negate the collectivist meanings and subversive potential of such symbols, by subsuming them within the same neoliberal capitalist logics that the student movement sought to challenge. While many of these appropriations were subtle and perhaps even unintentional—such as Étienne’s publicizing of Sophie’s protest performance on Facebook in ways that enhanced their

⁹ See, for example, the Globe and Mail article, “The Faces of the Québec Education Protests” (Perreux 2012).

¹⁰ My use of the “recuperation” draws on the work of Guy Debord and the Situationist International (SI). As Trier (2019) writes: “‘Recuperation’ is a term that Debord and SI members used to identify the strategies that Spectacle (Capitalism in its totality) deploys to trivialize and sterilize subversive discoveries and co-opt revolutionary individuals and groups.” Trier cites SI co-founder Michele Bernstein “summation of the dialectical nature of detournement and recuperation: “‘Power creates nothing, it recuperates,’ meaning that the Spectacle never consciously creates anything that is threateningly subversive to its domination. On the contrary, the Spectacle works relentlessly to depoliticize or to de-radicalize—i.e. to recuperate—anything that attempts to destabilize and undermine its authority and control” (3). As Campbell (2018) observes in his study of migrant workers’ struggles on the Myanmar border in northwest Thailand, “capitalist recuperation is always an ambivalent process, whereby contradiction is embraced, as it were, within the bosom of capital” (162).

respective cultural capital as fashionably anti-establishment or even irreverently avant-garde—others were more blatant.

For example, shortly after our *soirée manif*, Pierre purchased a limited-edition artwork made by Simon Beaudry—a visual artist who at the time also worked as Creative Director at DentsuBos (a local advertising agency), and who Pierre knew personally as a friend and colleague. Entitled *Printemps Québécois 2012*, the artwork consists of a 30 cm x 30 cm square, printed with a graphic design reminiscent of the Québécois *ceinture fléchée* in red ink on Hahnemühle paper (Figure 1.1). Pierre acquired the print when he attended Beaudry's exhibition, *Câliboire*. That Beaudry had taken a popular symbol of collective resistance and transformed it into a form of individual cultural (and economic) capital by claiming artistic authorship did not strike Pierre—nor, presumably, the artist himself—as antithetical to the goals and spirit of the student movement. Indeed, Pierre saw the artwork as evidence of Beaudry's ability to tap into the cultural pulse of the moment in order to create something “original,” and thus as testament to his exceptional individual creativity. (Pierre hung his purchase of *Printemps Québécois 2012* on the wall of his downtown agency office, where he worked as Creative Director until he left to “go freelance” the subsequent year).

From such a perspective, Beaudry's capturing of this symbol further legitimized his reputation as an intuitive “creative,” capable of discerning the salience of emergent cultural aesthetics and transforming them into images for sale. In this way, Beaudry's *Printemps Québécois 2012* ultimately also enhanced his reputation in the advertising sector, despite the fact that the *carré rouge* had initially emerged as a symbol of resistance to the very forms of

corporate and financial capitalism embodied by most of Beaudry's commercial clients, such as Videotron, Dr. Pepper, and even the Catholic Church of Montréal (Figure 1.2). Through Beaudry's resignification of the red square as an art object for display within the art world and for sale to private buyers, the symbol's original reference to rising levels of student debt ("carrément dans le rouge"), as well as its shared meanings within a collective experience of popular protest, are effectively erased.



Figure 1.1: Simon Beaudry, *Printemps Québécois* 2012

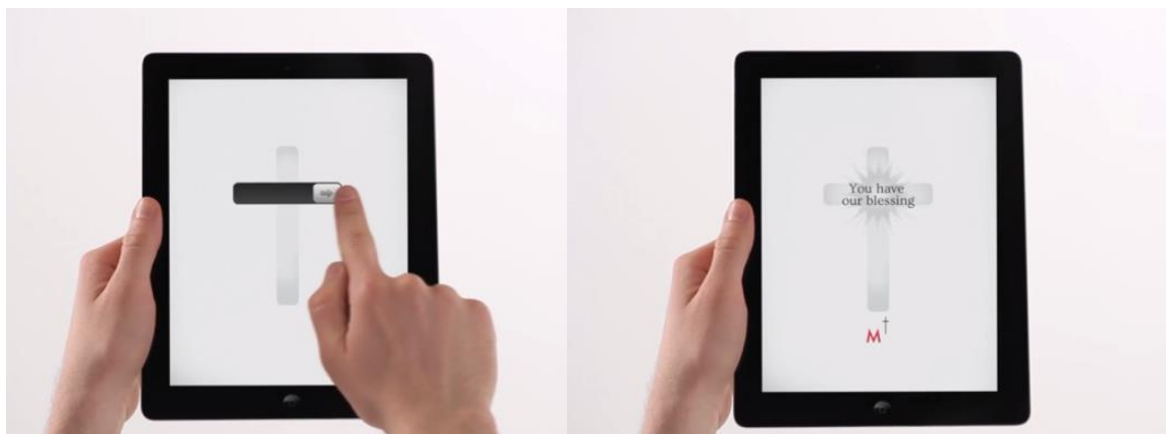


Figure 1.2: “Be Blessed” campaign for l’Église catholique de Montréal, DentsuBos¹¹

The symbolic salience of the *carrés rouges* in Montreal during the *printemps érable* was also seized in timely marketing initiatives that sought to harness the cultural momentum of the movement directly to commodity consumption. For example, at the height of the spring protests, the advertising agency lg2 created an ad for Boris beer in which the brand’s logo—a person running with a Boris flag, styled to invoke the street art aesthetics of the anti-authoritarian graffiti artist Banksy—was altered to be shown running with the *carré rouge*, “in honour” of the student protests (Figure 1.3).¹² In addition to appearing in local newspapers, lg2 plastered the print ad around the city in what the agency dubbed a “postering offensive,” adopting a militant technique clearly meant to resonate with student protestors and their supporters.

¹¹ Campaign created for l’Église catholique de Montréal, by advertising agency DentsuBos under the creative direction of Simon Beaudry.

¹² <http://lg2boutique.com/en/work/328/boris-affichage-sauvage-poster-and-print-campaign-advertising>, accessed July 7, 2015.



Figure 1.3: Boris campaign by Ig2, and Boris logo

But perhaps most surprising of all was when the Canadian advertising industry magazine *Strategy* declared the *carré rouge* “Instant Brand of the Year.”¹³ In subsuming the most iconic symbol of the student strike into a lexicon of advertising production and consumer capitalism, such “recognition” exemplifies how processes of capitalist recuperation occur not just through “the conversion of subcultural signs... into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form),” but also through what Hebdige describes as “the ‘labelling’ and re-definition of deviant behavior by dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the ideological form)” (1979: 94).¹⁴

The examples of the Boris Beer campaign, Beaudry’s transformation of the red square into an individually-authored art object for sale, and *Strategy*’s ideological re-situating of the symbol as a “brand” collectively illuminate how advertising acts as a key site of aesthetic recuperation through the continuous resignification of subversive or dissenting cultural forms. Specifically, these examples show how the revolutionary potential of the student movement was

¹³ <http://strategyonline.ca/2012/09/28/instant-brand-of-the-year-the-red-square/>, accessed July 7, 2015

¹⁴ Here Hebdige draws on Stuart Hall’s observation that the media “not only record resistance, they ‘situate it within the dominant framework of meanings’” (1979: 94).

subsumed—at least partially—into the same capitalist order and cultural logics against which students were protesting in the first place. Such appropriations speak to the innate mutability of symbols, and reflect how multiple meanings can be layered onto images and objects in ways that create new interpretations and associations. They also illuminate the fractal nature of advanced capitalist forms of aesthetic recuperation, as processes of privatization and resource accumulation through which agents of capitalism (like creative ad workers) work to quickly capture the symbolic potential of emergent social movements through ever-expanding modes of aesthetic re-signification and reconfiguration. These aesthetic processes absorb potentially subversive cultural symbols into existing capitalist ideologies and practices of consumerism in what Žižek describes as the “capitalist reappropriation of revolutionary dynamics” (2008: 204).

Such forms of advertising practice are pervasive; they are central to the advertising industry rather than aberrations. Underscoring this ubiquity, such practices are aptly captured in the final episode of the popular television show *Mad Men*.¹⁵ In this episode, tragic hero Don Draper, Creative Director at the New York advertising agency McCann-Erickson, finds himself at a spiritual retreat centre on the coast of California after fleeing his job and home two episodes earlier. The year is 1970, and the California retreat that is the setting for this episode is a quintessential site of bohemian counterculture: hippie fashion and mannerisms abound amongst the retreat’s patrons, and it is clear that the *raison-d’être* of the centre itself is to provide a space for holistic healing, an escape for people suffering the alienating effects of capitalist modernity.

¹⁵ Created by Matthew Weiner and produced by Lionsgate Television, *Mad Men* is a period drama that chronicles the personal and professional lives of advertising executives working at agencies on Madison Avenue during the 1960s. The show ran for seven seasons, from 2007 to 2015.

In the final scene of the episode (and of the series), we find Don barefoot in the grass on a cliff overlooking the ocean, sitting in lotus position amidst a racially-diverse group of men and women with long hair and tie-dye shirts. Has Don forsaken his previous life? As he joins the others chanting *Om*, the camera slowly closes in on his face: his eyes are shut, and he has seemingly surrendered to this moment of collective spiritual communion. Then, subtly, the corners of Don's mouth turn up in a grin and: *ding!* Over the sound of ocean waves, a jingle begins: "*I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony...*" The show then cuts to a very similar scene of young men and women standing on a hilltop, singing the same song, all holding bottles of Coca-Cola. "*I'd like to buy the world a Coke, and keep it company.*"¹⁶ What is clear, of course, is that Don has used his brief foray into the hippie movement as inspiration for a new campaign. And he has done so not under duress, but in a moment the audience is clearly meant to read as one of *creative imagination*.

The same process is at work in the ways that Montreal advertisers harnessed the symbols of the student strikes to capitalist goals in 2012. Like Don Draper, Montreal ad workers used capitalist commodity logic to channel a subversive cultural movement into saleable aesthetic products in ways that clearly undermined the movement's political foundations. What the *Mad Men* episode so aptly captures is not only how a multinational corporate giant was able to capitalize upon the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and '70s by associating their

¹⁶ This is not simply an apt ending to the fictional series, but a direct reference to an iconic Coca-Cola commercial, produced by the advertising agency in 1979. The ad, "Hilltop," is widely considered to be one of the most influential advertisements of the twentieth century and, at the time it was released, was the most expensive commercial ever made. See Wolly (2015) for an interview with historian Kathleen Franz, regarding the cultural importance of "Hilltop," and why it was selected for inclusion in the American Enterprise exhibition at the National Museum of American History.

dominant aesthetics with a specific commodity image, but also how this ultimately occurred—in fact, *could only* occur—through *the person* of Don; the show captures, in other words, the inherently affective, inter-subjective and phenomenological nature of aesthetic recuperation itself. The ways that advertising professionals in Montreal engaged with, re-signified, and commodified the collective symbols of the 2012 student movement—through their own direct participation in and observation of its dynamics—similarly highlights the aesthetic work of advertising production to be a mode of capitalist subjectification, through which ad workers draw from and give meaning to their own lived experiences as sources of creative “capital.” Moreover, as I elaborate below and in subsequent chapters, what becomes apparent through ethnographic attention to such experiences is how the social status and cultural exceptionalism associated with an aesthetic ideology of being (a) creative in this context is a primary means through which individual ad workers are incited to perform such work.

Much of the critical scholarship on neoliberalism has examined it as “a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2007: 22). Far from leading to widespread human well-being, however, neoliberalism instead involves practices that redistribute wealth *upwards* in what Harvey (2007) describes as a process of “accumulation through dispossession” (34). This occurs, in part, through state policies that empower and enable elites to “transfer assets and channel wealth and income either from the mass of the population toward the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries” (34).

The ways in which ad workers engaged with the Quebec student protests draws our attention to how the aesthetic work of advertising is an equally vital form of capitalist “accumulation through dispossession.” Crucially, such observations invite critical examination of the *cultural processes through which commodity images are produced*, and not just of the content and dissemination of commodity images themselves. In other words, in addition to exemplifying how advertising recuperates potentially subversive aesthetics into a capitalist system of value, the engagements described above also illustrate how *the productive processes of creativity* are themselves reconfigured under capitalism. Attending to how “the continuous raiding of cultural meanings for the purpose of generating commodity sign values” takes particular forms in advanced capitalism (Goldman and Papson 2006: 350), we can then begin to observe how a cultural logic of *curating as self-actualization* is born of a broader history of aestheticizing *being (a) creative* under capitalism. This logic informs processes of social distinction that include (but are not limited to) ad workers, through practices that cultivate and perform creativity as an exceptional social status.

Through an ethnographic lens, advertising practice is revealed as a nexus for the simultaneous production of both commodity images *and* subjectivities, and curation as an aesthetic mode that mediates between these, in dialogue with neoliberal forms of capitalist accumulation. The ways in which ad workers in Montreal engaged in the student movement during the *printemps érable* illuminate how this involves the ongoing recuperation of emergent aesthetics and experiences, in ways that transfer the affective power of such forms “upwards.” This then begs the question: how—and *why*—does the idealized pursuit of *being [a] creative* incite ad workers to participate in such processes? What renders creativity into such a salient

site of subjectification in late modern capitalism? Put differently: how does the desire to *be creative* provide “occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility” (Butler 1997: 11) as a particular kind of subject?

Creativity and the liberal autological subject

Pierre’s appreciation of Beaudry’s red square “limited edition” print as testament of the latter’s individual creativity, despite the collective cultural origins of the symbol, highlights longstanding associations between creativity and notions of originality and genius that can be traced back to Enlightenment discourse on the aesthetic. These associations can also be observed in the *individuating* way that Sophie participated in the protest, as well as in Étienne’s impulse to document and display this on his Facebook account. In each example, the subject’s *distinctive* engagement with the symbols and aesthetics of the student movement is emphasized over and above the political goals and collectivist ethos of the student movement, through assertions of individual creativity in relation to the work of art (Beaudry), the counter-cultural or provocative stance (Sophie), and the aestheticizing gaze of the observer (Étienne).¹⁷

¹⁷ I see these engagements with the student movement as illustrative of Foucault’s theorization of “the regime of individualization” (Montag 1995: 75). This is so for two reasons: first, such engagements recuperated the key symbols and aesthetics of the student movement as forms of individual cultural capital, in ways that worked against the revolutionary potential of mass protest. As such, they exemplify how the creative ad worker’s impulse to *separate* and *distinguish* herself from the crowd/masses is itself a form of capitalist discipline. Second, such examples provide evidence of how subjectification occurs through embodied and material practice, rather than through “disembodied ideals, existing in consciousness and representations” (74). On this second point, as Montag observes, “for Foucault, the individual does not preexist his or her interpellation as a subject but emerges as a result of strategies and practices of individualization” (75).

The fashioning (and interpretation) of objects, images, and identities *as inherently creative* (and not just as the output of creative acts) reveals an underlying ideology of creativity as an aesthetics in itself—and *of* the self. Entangled in processes of class distinction, this idealized pursuit of being (a) creative can be observed in orienting discourses and sets of practices through which creative ad workers constitute themselves as ideal subjects under capitalism. Insofar as creativity *affectively* harnesses individuals to the work of aesthetic recuperation, however, it is clear that the desire of ad workers to be creative cannot be reduced entirely to a politics of class distinction. Rather, as I elaborate below, this desire is also very much informed by ongoing idealizations of creativity as the experience and expression of a free and autonomous individuality.

In my discussion below, I examine creativity as a genealogical construct that underwent key ideological transformations during the Enlightenment, in dialogue with the acceleration of capitalism. I do so in order to consider the enduring legacy of such transformations on contemporary claims to creativity made by ad workers in Montreal, as subjects inevitably engaged in processes of aesthetic recuperation like the ones described above. Tracing these genealogical developments illuminates how a particular ideology of creativity—as both an exceptional social status and unalienated mode of being—was born of a bourgeois class politics in early modern Europe, and elaborated over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in ways that remain relevant to ongoing processes of creative subject formation and class distinction today. With this in mind, I outline and examine three key philosophical developments through which an aesthetic ideology of creativity became interwoven with the freedoms (and privileges) of the *liberal autological subject* born of Enlightenment concerns.

An etymology of creativity reveals significant changes in the word's semantic meaning as it became embroiled within philosophical debates surrounding the triangulation of aesthetics, ethics, and commerce under capitalism. While the term *create* first entered into English through the past participle of the Latin root word, *creare* (to make or produce), prior to the sixteenth century the concept applied exclusively to divine creation. During the Renaissance it was extended to refer to human activity—especially art—and while it continued to carry connotations of divinity, it was during this period that creation also came to be perceived as a distinctive human capacity. As Williams (2011) describes, for this reason Renaissance humanism marks a pivotal point of transformation away from classical understandings of art *as imitation*, towards a conceptualization of art *as creation*. At the same time, Renaissance veneration of artistic endeavour as a creative process that brings original works into being, elevating the artist/poet as closer to God, reflects an intertwining of residual and emergent ideas, and illustrates how the conceptual transformation of creativity leading up to the Enlightenment constituted gradual transfigurations in perceptions of art and the artist, rather than a complete replacement of one set of beliefs by another.

Despite historical continuities, a new understanding of art as involving *original* acts of human creation was embraced and elaborated by Enlightenment thinkers during the eighteenth century in ways that radically transformed dominant understandings of art and aesthetic experience more broadly. The demarcation of the so-called “fine arts” as a distinct and distinctive field of bourgeois sociality in the eighteenth century therefore marks a crucial

development in European philosophy and artistic practice.¹⁸ First, this involved a reconceptualization of the objects of art in autotelic terms—that is, as “self-sufficient, autonomous, independent” things, appreciated for their intrinsic aesthetic value, rather than in their capacity to “serve practical ends or have moral effects” (Abrams 1985: 8). This was, second, accompanied by a parallel shift towards the adoption of a “disinterested” stance on the part of the viewer or audience—an idealized state of contemplation and aesthetic appreciation originally theorized by the British sentimentalists (or moral sense philosophers) and widely embraced by later Enlightenment philosophers (*Development I*).

Within a context of rapid social change, wrought by the interrelated processes of technological modernisation and capitalist expansion, definitions of creativity thus became entangled within a foundational Enlightenment dialectic. This dialectic is one whereby art and aesthetic experience are idealized as unalienated modes of human activity that escape the utilitarianism and discipline of capitalism, while simultaneously serving as sites for the cultivation and expression of refined *taste* within processes of bourgeois class distinction and legitimization (*Development II*). By the turn of the nineteenth century, the importance accorded to the *creative imagination* in association with interrelated notions of individual genius and originality made creativity into a site for the negotiation of these ideological tensions. To *be creative* became, in this context, both an exceptional social status accorded to certain individuals within a bourgeois cultural order, as well as an idealized state of being that held the possibility to escape the “social

¹⁸ For further discussion of this demarcation and its consequences for the field of art history, see M.H. Abrams. “The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics” (1985).

constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances” (Povinelli 2006: 4) within this same order (*Development III*).

Development I: Aesthetic sensibility in the Age of Reason

In the context of Montreal advertising, *being creative* is understood not only as a process of aesthetic production (i.e. the generation of the ad), but also as the adoption of a particular kind of *aesthetic attitude*. For this reason, Enlightenment discourse on the aesthetic marks a decisive turning point that begs closer examination.

The German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762), in declaring aesthetics to be the “science of sensible cognition,” is often credited with distinguishing it as a distinct field of philosophical inquiry, within which “the relationship between aesthetic experience and knowledge in general... has remained controversial within, and arguably even constitutive of, aesthetics ever since” (Ngai 2015: 119). Addressing this relationship, Baumgarten himself suggests that the aesthetic is akin to reason but not synonymous with it, constituting instead a lower, feminized faculty he considers the ‘sister’ of logic—a faculty that is nevertheless crucial for comprehending the truth of sensate phenomena. Arguing that the conceptual abstraction involved in logical analysis results in an apperceptive loss of material richness, Baumgarten describes aesthetics as a mode of awareness and appreciation better suited to grasping sensorial complexity and perfection, which cannot be fully comprehended through abstract universal laws alone.¹⁹ In this sense, the aesthetic is construed not as a *conceptual* form

¹⁹ See Eagleton (1990: 15-17) for a succinct summary of Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (1750).

of knowledge, but as a *sensible* one, manifest in both the experience of beauty (as perceived in objects of nature and poetry/art), and in its design (through poetic/artistic acts of imagination).²⁰ In this way, the establishment of aesthetics as a distinct branch of philosophical inquiry during the early modern period held the potential to rescue the knowing body from its devaluation within Cartesian dualism, by positioning sensate cognition in *continuity with*—rather than in binary opposition to—logical reason.

Moreover, as I outline below, it is ultimately within Enlightenment aesthetic philosophy that the concept of creativity eventually comes to take on its “modern” meaning, with profound and lasting consequences for understanding art and artistic practice, and of the social value these are accorded both within and against capitalist cultural logics. Baumgarten is not the earliest Enlightenment thinker, however, to take as his central concern the relationship between aesthetic experience and other forms of cognition. Guyer (2016) notes, for example, that Baumgarten’s interest in aesthetics can be situated within a much longer European philosophical tradition concerned with the relationship between art and truth, stretching back at least as far as Classical Greece, to the debates between Plato and Aristotle on this very subject.²¹ Yet, the concerted effort of eighteenth-century philosophers to name and delineate aesthetics as a distinct field of inquiry—articulated in clear and direct dialogue with concerns over the broader

²⁰ Hammermeister (2002) describes Baumgarten’s aesthetics as taking “a double approach to its subject matter, namely, as a theory of sensual perception and as a philosophy of art” (11-12).

²¹ Guyer writes: “without the benefit of a name, aesthetics had been part of philosophy since Plato attacked the educational value of many forms of art in the *Republic* and Aristotle briefly defended them in his fragmentary *Poetics*” (2016).

socio-economic transformations taking shape in Britain and Europe during this time—signals a renewed relevance of these debates within the context of early modernity.

In order to understand how the aesthetic eventually comes to be considered an autonomous field of experience and cultural activity by the end of the eighteenth century—a conceptual transformation widely considered to mark the advent of “modern aesthetics”—it is necessary to address the idea of *disinterestedness*, first articulated in relation to experiences of beauty in the writings of the British moral sense philosophers (or sentimentalists) in the early decades of the eighteenth century.²² Indeed, the sentimentalist concept of disinterestedness, especially in its relevance for later theorizations of *taste* and the *freedom of imagination* (more on these below), provides fertile ground for an eventual reimagining of both the aesthetic object in auto-dynamic terms (i.e. having purpose in and of itself beyond iconic, moral, or political meaning), as well as of the detached and contemplative relationship between percipient and aesthetic object, in what comes to be termed the “aesthetic attitude.”²³ As Stolnitz (1961) argues, such re-imaginings not only initiated major paradigm shifts within the specialized fields of philosophy and art criticism, but have proven equally transformational to Western “habits of seeing and judging” as part of “the quotidian appreciation of art and nature” (131). Yet, while

²² British “sentimentalism” (or moral sense theory) refers to a school of philosophical thought associated most notably with Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, as well as with Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith. Guyer (2005) describes the work of these thinkers during the second and third decades of the eighteenth century as constituting a “foundational epoch of modern aesthetics”, within which the idea of the freedom of the imagination is first articulated (4-5). Scholarship on the contributions of the sentimentalists to Western aesthetic theory tends to focus on Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume. For a discussion of how Smith’s aesthetic philosophy disputes many of the central tenets of the former, see Siraki (2013).

²³ Though arguably expressing continuity with the eighteenth-century concepts of aesthetic disinterestedness and contemplation, the term “aesthetic attitude” itself only appears in print in the late nineteenth century, elaborated especially in the twentieth century by aesthetic philosophers such as Jerome Stolnitz and Edward Bullough (King 2012).

these new understandings of aesthetic objects, experiences, and subjectivities in autotelic terms may have been an eventual outcome of eighteenth-century ideologies of the aesthetic, they were not in fact characteristic of dominant theoretical positions on the subject throughout most of that century. Rather, philosophical treatises during this period instead reflect a continued concern with the inherent *interrelatedness* of ethics and aesthetics, rather than a bracketing of one from the other.

With this in mind, it is significant that the Enlightenment concept of *disinterestedness* initially enters into eighteenth-century discourse on the aesthetic as part of a broader theory of *taste*, or judgment, first articulated by Shaftesbury and subsequently elaborated by Hutcheson and Hume, ultimately in moral argument against Hobbesian egoism.²⁴ As a whole, philosophers working within this school of thought adamantly refute the egoistic argument that the individual perceives virtue in and derives pleasure only from those things that serve his own interest.²⁵ The sentimentalists' primary point of contention with the Hobbesian position is consequently what they perceive to be the reduction of virtuous behaviour to rational acts of self-interest. While for Hobbes the individual is motivated to abide by moral laws because they promote a social order

²⁴ Shaftesbury's writings on aesthetics (framed as a dialogue on beauty and virtue) are widely recognized to have been an important influence on Enlightenment philosophers not just in Britain, but also especially in Germany, where his ideas likely first entered into German Enlightenment thinking through Leibniz (Engell 1981: 25). Indeed, Friday (1994) argues that, "Although it first appeared in the seventeenth century, there was no well-worked notion of an inner moral or aesthetic sense until Shaftesbury and Hutcheson" (550).

²⁵ Shaftesbury, for example, explicitly takes issue with Hobbes' emphasis on self-interest as the basis for human motivation when he condemns those who "wou'd new-frame the human Heart; and have a mighty fancy to reduce all its Motions, Balances and Weights, to that one Principle and Foundation of a cool and deliberate *Selfishness*" (*Characteristics* 1.116). The question of whether Hobbes actually advances a purely selfish (i.e. egoistic) theory of mankind has been widely debated, with some contemporary scholars suggesting that such an interpretation oversimplifies and thus misrepresents what is in fact a more complex account of human motivation in Hobbes' thinking (see Lloyd and Sreedhar 2019). What is relevant here, however, is how Hobbes was read and interpreted by Shaftesbury and his followers, as it is this interpretation that informs their treatises on aesthetics.

conducive to his own self-preservation—an equation that hinges upon an understanding of society “as a rational construction to restrain the destructive elements in individuals and to enforce cooperation” (Williams 2011: 100)—for Shaftesbury and his followers, virtue is an innate and universal human sensibility that naturally inclines us towards social harmony.²⁶

Crucially, Shaftesbury develops his theory of moral sentiment in large part through analogy to what he considers a related (at times synonymous) sense of *beauty*.²⁷ Indeed, in the writings of the British sentimentalists by and large, the question of aesthetic experience is deeply embedded within an Enlightenment concern with human virtue as the foundation of civil society and bourgeois political legitimacy. In comparing what he sees to be innate human affection both for what is *beautiful* and for what is *good*, Shaftesbury suggests that the pleasure we take in such things is ultimately *disinterested*, evidenced by the fact that our reactions to specific experiences or objects take the form of immediate sensation, rather than abstract reflection.²⁸ In other words, it is our very *sensibility* to virtue—that is, the immediacy of our affective response to it—that informs the sentimentalist argument that judgments of virtue are essentially ones of *taste*, in the same manner as judgments of beauty; because we judge something to be beautiful even

²⁶ Hobbes argues that in the absence of social contract humans otherwise exist in a constant state of violence and conflict that defines their “state of nature”. The Hobbesian perspective of personhood, which begins with an understanding of the individual “as a bare human being” must therefore be seen as foundational to the liberal tradition and its emphasis on abstract rights. As Williams writes: “It is rare, in this tradition, to start from the fact that man is born into relationships. The abstraction of the bare human being, as a separate substance, is ordinarily taken for granted. In other systems of thinking, the community would be the axiom, and society the derivative. Here individual man is the axiom, and society the derivative” (2011: 100).

²⁷ Guyer (1993) argues that Shaftesbury “used the sense of beauty to prove the existence of a moral sense, which it could readily do because it was not just analogous but identical to it” (49).

²⁸ “No sooner the Eye opens upon Figures, the Ear to Sounds, than straight the Beautiful results and Grace and Harmony are known and acknowledg’d,” Shaftesbury writes of beauty (*Characteristics* 2.231). And, analogously: “No sooner are Actions view’d, no sooner the human Affections and Passions discerned... than straight an Inward Eye distinguishes and sees the Fair and Shapely, the Amiable and the Admirable, apart from the Deform’d, the Foul, the Odious or the Despicable” (*Characteristics* 2.231).

when we do not stand to personally gain anything from it, we can say that the pleasure we derive in its appreciation is disinterested. Insofar as the pleasure we take in perceiving what is good derives from an equally innate affective disposition to appreciate social balance and harmony, and not from any potential personal reward or gain, we can similarly argue that the moral sense is equally disinterested.²⁹

From the sentimentalist position, then, ethics is not separate to aesthetics, but rather inherently analogous—even intrinsic—to it. With his emphasis on “an ethics entwined with the sensuous affections,” Shaftesbury firmly locates morality within the feeling subject, whom he perceives to be naturally endowed with an intuitive ability to recognize and take pleasure in both beauty and virtue (Eagleton 1991: 36). Moreover, within Shaftesbury’s theory of taste, virtue ultimately manifests in harmony and order: when a person’s motives are virtuous he exists in social harmony not only with the world around him, but also within himself, living thus in a balanced emotional or psychological state (Engell 1983: 23). The same principles hold true for beauty: for Shaftesbury, the pleasure taken in perceiving order and proportion in both nature and art ultimately reflects natural human inclinations to appreciate and desire these very things in a social and psychological sense (Gill 2017). Working from the premise of innate human goodness, Shaftesbury consequently argues that abstract reason or duty alone cannot motivate a person to abide by moral laws, but rather that it is our *affective* responses that do so.³⁰ In this

²⁹ Mortensen (1994) argues that Shaftesbury’s distinctions in this regard should be read as constituting a direct challenge to the “commonly held opinion”—espoused by many of Shaftesbury’s most influential contemporaries, including Locke, Hobbes and Descartes— “that appreciation and desire to possess could be conflated, or that the one (appreciation, admiration) would naturally lead to the other (desire to possess)” (637-638).

³⁰ Gill (2017) identifies competing interpretations of Shaftesbury’s writings on this point: those that suggest Shaftesbury’s affective response to be immediate, without “discursive reflection”, and those that suggest he articulates it to be a form of contemplation that is not entirely synonymous with reason, but equally reflective nonetheless.

way, the cultivation of an appreciation of beauty, both in nature and in art, becomes a vital element within a construction of self as both culturally refined *and* virtuous—for Shaftesbury, such qualities are mutually interdependent.³¹

Within a history of Enlightenment philosophy on the aesthetic, Shaftesbury's thinking on such matters marks a critical shift; his primary concern with the aesthetic lay not necessarily in its relevance to art as *techne*, nor within the formal properties of art as object, but in the *contemplation of art* as aesthetic experience. Accordingly, Shaftesbury's intertwining of aesthetics, as contemplative practice, with an innate moral sensibility must, as Mortensen argues, be read "against the background of the attempt to create a new social and moral order in England after the revolution in 1688, particularly as these attempts were expressed in the movement to reform manners" (1994: 631). The sentimentalist emphasis on disinterested aesthetic appreciation is therefore construed as a means to achieve a refinement of sensibility that is itself then interpreted as a marker of social distinction—an ideological development integral to broader processes of cultural transformation accompanying the shift from feudalism to commercial and then industrial capitalism.

³¹ Hence, Shaftesbury exalts the figure of the *virtuoso* as the embodiment of the ideal self, furthering an ideology of the aesthetic as ethics; "I am persuaded that to be a virtuoso (so far as befits a gentleman)", he writes in his *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* (2017 [1710]: 35), "is a higher step towards the becoming a man of virtue and good sense than the being what in this age we call a scholar." According to Donougho (2016), "The word 'virtuoso' came to England from Italy, where it designated learned lovers of arts and antiquities" (330). In seventeenth-century England the term comes to reference an idealized 'gentleman-scholar', the earliest known usage of it in this sense appearing in Henry Peacham's 1622 book *The Complete Gentleman*, described by M.H. Abrams as a work "on the requisites of an upper-class education." Over the course of the seventeenth century the term thus "came to be applied to a mode of life increasingly engaged in by gentlemen of the leisure class", for whom appraising and collecting antiquities was a common practice (1985a: 15).

Through the reimagining of art and aesthetic appreciation as sites for the cultivation of an innately virtuous self, expressed in performances of *good taste* and *polite manners*, aesthetics becomes riddled with paradox. For the sentimentalists, beginning with Shaftesbury, it becomes a key site for the social legitimization of a rising middle class bent on displacing the social authority of the landed gentry. Aesthetics in this sense became tethered to new forms of class distinction increasingly articulated in terms of an unbridgeable divide between the “polite arts” associated with bourgeois civility, and what was perceived as the vulgar popular culture of the masses. Yet, reducing sentimentalist concerns with beauty and art to a rhetoric of social distinction, ultimately rooted in self-interest, ignores the ways in which such thinkers explicitly refute the egoistic logics of economic rationalism. In fact, in their emphasis on the innate *sensibility* and *disinterestedness* of aesthetic judgment, Shaftesbury and his followers resist subsuming aesthetics entirely into a cultural politics of class distinction. This is especially significant insofar as later Enlightenment philosophers find within the sentimentalist notion of disinterestedness fertile ground for more fully reimagining aesthetics as a site of unalienated experience that eludes the rationalist reach of commercial activity, and counteracts the reduction of human *being* to *capital* within the increasingly hegemonic cultural logics of market economics. As I elaborate further below, philosophical interest in the *creative imagination* emerges in dialogue with these philosophical tensions, in ways that accord the concept of creativity a new significance within processes of liberal autological subjectification.

Nevertheless, as the examples of aesthetic recuperation that occurred during the 2012 *printemps érable* illuminate, while an Enlightenment interest in creativity may have been born of a desire to carve a space of unalienated aesthetic experience and expression *against* the

utilitarian reductions of capitalism, today creativity is continuously knitted back into a dominant capitalist regime through its contemporary conceptualization *as capital*. In tracing the genealogy through which creativity comes to be associated with the Enlightenment ideals of individual freedom and autonomy, I show how contemporary claims to creativity as capital are not in fact antithetical to an Enlightenment ideology of the aesthetic. Rather, they are logical developments within a philosophical tradition that has long claimed creativity to be an exceptional form of personhood.

Development II: Fine arts and good taste

We can begin to observe how disinterestedness acts as a conceptual hinge between mid-Enlightenment moral ideals and intensifying interest not only in the nature of aesthetic experience, but also in its potential social function as a force for cultural and political edification within bourgeois civil society. In this regard, sentimentalist aesthetic philosophy can be read as part of a broader effort to establish the moral foundations of a liberal political state absent of authoritarian rule.³² Crucially, Shaftesbury not only suggests that it is political freedom (rather than abstract duty or political coercion) that provides the necessary conditions for both virtuous action and social harmony, but also that such conditions are ultimately achieved through the

³² Consider, for example, Shaftesbury's assertion that: "We polish one another, and rub off our Corner and rough Sides by a sort of *amicable Collision*. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring Rust upon Men's understandings. 'Tis a destroying of Civility, Good Breeding and even Charity it-self, under pretence of maintaining it" (*Characteristics* 1.64-65).

cultivation of good taste and its demonstration in performances of refined manners and politeness.³³

Shaftesbury's thinking on this point exemplifies what has been termed the "reformation of manners" that characterized eighteenth-century British society during the transition from a feudal to commercial society. Within this discourse, notions of *judgment* and *taste* reflect an intensifying aestheticization of social life amongst a growing middle class seeking to legitimize its rising social status and political influence. It is therefore significant that, despite his insistence upon the disinterestedness and immediacy of the pleasure we take in beauty and virtue, Shaftesbury refrains from rendering morality and subjective feeling entirely synonymous. Rather, he makes a clear distinction between what he terms 'moral sense' from other human passions by arguing that the former involves a level of reflection that our other affections do not. The latter, 'first-order' affections must, therefore, be regulated and refined by the 'second-order' (moral/aesthetic) sense that allows us to cultivate and recognize true beauty and virtue, and to shape our behaviours accordingly (Gill 2017). Thus, for Shaftesbury, it is both aesthetic judgment (i.e. expressions of taste) *and* the regulation of the self through embodied manners that constitute the basis of morality. In making this argument, Shaftesbury advances one of the earliest iterations of an Enlightenment theory of manners as an inherently aestheticized moral philosophy—what Eagleton (1991) describes as "that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style... [through which] moral imperatives no longer impose themselves

³³ As Gill (2017), describes, Shaftesbury "opposes absolutism and tyranny in all forms, arguing vociferously for free public discourse and toleration of different religious practices. He tries to show that control by church and court is not necessary—is in fact counterproductive—to the virtue, sociability, and politeness of citizens."

with the leaden weight of some Kantian duty, but infiltrate the very textures of lived experience as tact or know-how, intuitive good sense or inbred decorum” (41).

Notions of *taste* and *judgment* feature prominently in much eighteenth-century philosophy of the aesthetic, within which Hume’s treatise *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757) remains one of the most influential inquiries into whether a universal standard of beauty exists, despite the apparent relativity of taste.³⁴ Taking as his premise the sentimentalist understanding of beauty as consisting of an aesthetic experience (i.e. arising from sense perception), Hume argues that it cannot be an objective property of the thing itself, thus “dismissing the possibility that any rules of art could be formulated a priori by abstract reasoning” (Friday 1994: 552).³⁵ Yet, as Guyer (2005) summarizes, such a position “assumes that because beauty concerns mind-dependent sentiments rather than purely objective properties, all sentiments of beauty are [potentially] equally valid” (21). In other words, inner sense theory risks making of beauty an entirely subjective thing—a notion that Hume goes on to determinedly reject.³⁶

In order to overcome this theoretical conundrum, Hume argues that beauty lies neither in the object *nor* in subjective sentiment, but rather in *cultural consensus*, suggesting that it is

³⁴ As Friday (1994) writes, “It is generally agreed that Hume’s essay “Of the Standard of Taste” is the most valuable of the large number of works on what we now call aesthetics to emerge from the intellectual and cultural flowering of the Scottish Enlightenment” (545).

³⁵ “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others” (Hume 1993 [1757], 136).

³⁶ Hume’s rejection of the subjectivist interpretation of beauty is representative of dominant philosophical positions of the time, particularly within the sentimentalist tradition. A notable exception during this period, however, is Adam Smith, who argues against the idea of a universal standard of taste, emphasizing instead the inherently contingent and arbitrary nature of custom and fashion, as well as the role of social class in informing dominant aesthetics. In this way, Siraki (2013) thus argues that Smith “anticipates the work of Thorstein Veblen, Georg Simmel, Roland Barthes, and Pierre Bourdieu” through a historicization and deconstruction of taste (4-5).

through shared or “common sense” that the standard of taste arises. Hume’s arguments in this regard expound upon previous ideas advanced both by Shaftesbury as well as by Francis Hutcheson, both of whom turn to the concept of *sensus communis*, or “fellow-feeling,” as constituting the basis of civil society.³⁷ According to Hume, as Engell (1981) observes, “within our sympathetic power the same principle operates in considerations of aesthetics as in judgments of morality” (148). From this position it is therefore logical that “a refinement in the aesthetic taste can *improve* our moral sense” (Church 2007: 177).³⁸ In elaborating his theory of aesthetic judgment as one of sympathy and consensus, Hume attempts to overcome the objective/subjective dichotomy by proposing instead an *intersubjective* basis for a standard of taste, which he describes as consisting of “general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages” (*Taste*).³⁹

Hume’s emphasis on consensus, like his argument that men naturally seek out a standard of taste, reflects a keen interest in the role of aesthetic judgment within processes of socio-political legitimization.⁴⁰ It is therefore significant that Hume describes the *critic* as embodying the ideal characteristics of a genteel class, who, through individual practice, education, and

³⁷ Hume’s philosophy is thus able to further the sentimentalist intertwining of aesthetic and moral sense, particularly through his emphasis on sympathy, which he defines as “the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination” (*Treatise on Human Nature* 427).

³⁸ Insofar as it furthers a sentimentalist understanding of the interrelationship between the aesthetic and moral sense, Hume’s aesthetic ideology must therefore be distinguished from later constructions of an idealized ‘aesthetic attitude’ in autotelic terms – terms that are generally seen to have their first clear elaboration in Kant.

³⁹ As Guyer (2005) argues, Hume therefore articulates a theory of the standard of taste as “an empirically discoverable fact that there is agreement about the validity of some preferences and absurdity of others” (39).

⁴⁰ In the figure of the critic Hume presents us not just with an idealized model for the embodiment of ‘true’ aesthetic judgment, but also with a category of cultural expert whose performances and pronouncements of good taste must ultimately be seen to legitimate the social institutions and cultural mores of a rising bourgeois class. This has prompted scholars such as Shusterman (1989) to argue that “Hume’s primary aim was normative stability rather than epistemological certainty or ontological grounding”, and that his “deep purpose, a purpose he himself did not fully fathom, was social stability under the aegis of the increasingly ascendant bourgeoisie and its liberal ideology” (215).

refined judgment, acts as a barometer for what constitutes beauty not only in art, but also in life. At the same time as he argues for the existence of a universal standard, Hume is therefore careful to specify that *true* taste is ultimately only to be found in consensus amongst the *right kind* of people; acknowledging that divergence of individual preference would otherwise imply beauty to be an inescapably subjective experience, he instead insists throughout his essay that only the “joint verdict” of *true judges* reflects a “true standard of taste and beauty.”⁴¹

Yet at the same time as Hume describes taste as a quality held by men who have acquired the cultivated sensibilities of gentility, he also argues that the individual capable of true judgment must be “endowed with good sense and a delicate imagination” while also being “free from prejudice.”^{42,43} He elaborates on this point by proposing an ideal attitudinal mode for approaching the aesthetic object, whereby one must “bring the fancy to a suitable situation and disposition,” which he describes as consisting of “a perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, [and] a due attention to the object.”⁴⁴ Here, Hume presents a model for disinterested aesthetic judgment that appears to emphasize the very same qualities associated with what eventually becomes termed the “aesthetic attitude”: namely, a detached and contemplative mode of attention to a work of art as an autonomous aesthetic object.⁴⁵ Insofar as assertions of

⁴¹ Of the “true judge in the finer arts,” Hume writes: “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty” (Hume 1993[1757], 147).

⁴² Hume claims, for example, that “though the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely, the same in all men... few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty” (1993[1757], 147).

⁴³ Hume (1993[1757]), 148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 139

⁴⁵ This idealized aesthetic attitude is often seen as originating in the transcendental aesthetics of Immanuel Kant, elaborated more fully by Schopenhauer in the nineteenth century, and widely embraced by a range of artists associated with the rise of a distinctly modern art. Yet, though the term, “aesthetic attitude,” only appears in print in

good taste are understood as expressions of an innate aesthetic (and moral) sensibility—rather than as preferences formed by the habits of class—they are paradoxically seen to legitimate the political influence of those individuals capable such “disinterested” judgment. (In Chapter 4 I consider how a similar myth of class meritocracy informs contemporary discourses and practices of the “creative class”).

Crucially, Enlightenment discourse on the aesthetic not only altered dominant understandings and valuations of aesthetic objects and experience amongst “polite society” in Britain and Europe, but also coincided with the appearance of entirely new aesthetic forms (e.g. the novel, *belles lettres*, the critical essay) and institutions (e.g. the first museums for public art collections, art auctions, concert halls) (Abrams 1985a). As Abrams (1985a) outlines, it is also during this period that poetry, music, painting, and sculpture are, for the first time, explicitly brought together under the term “fine arts,” as the paradigmatic objects of genteel aesthetic attention and the exercising of the judgment of taste.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it is significant that these aesthetic forms were newly categorized together “not on the ground that these arts possess a common nature or shared objective features, but solely on the ground that they are all *capable of a common function or social role*” (Abrams 16, italics added). This is particularly evident in the burgeoning body of writing that appears during this period focusing on the capacity of the fine

the late nineteenth century and is often more directly associated with the aesthetic theories of Kant and Schopenhauer, there is clear continuity between these latter developments and the writings of the British moral sense theorists. As King (2012) writes, “while it is in Schopenhauer that some notion of the aesthetic attitude is most noticeable and the similarities to modern theories most apparent”, the origins of the concept are to be found in Shaftesbury and the British sentimentalist discourse on beauty and taste, later elaborated by Kant.

⁴⁶ The codification of this “modern system” of the arts is generally credited to Charles Batteux, whose philosophical treatise *Les beaux-arts réduits à un même principe* (1746) was widely embraced within France and across Europe upon its publication (Iseminger 2004: 2). The publication of Batteux’s philosophical work coincided with the emergence of a new set of cultural practices, within which specific modes of aesthetic contemplation became increasingly seen as definitive of class status.

arts to encourage *contemplative aesthetic experience*, rather than on artistic practice or *techne* alone. According to Stolnitz (1961), the demarcation of the fine arts in such terms is therefore inextricably intertwined with the rise of the modern “aesthetic attitude”—i.e. a specific set of dispositional stances towards the aesthetic object that is one of “spectatorial distance or detachment.”

Insofar as such developments served to further promote and nurture the particular kind of disinterested aesthetic encounter elaborated by early modern philosophers like Shaftesbury and Hume, creating new spaces for public performances of cultural refinement, genteel manners, and judgments of taste, they must therefore be recognized as salient sites for the negotiation of what—and who—was considered to constitute ‘polite’ society under a new capitalist order. Intensifying interest in disinterested aesthetic experience over the course of the eighteenth century also reveals mounting concerns about the consequences of capitalist pursuits on civil society. Widespread public criticism of the aesthetics and ethics of advertising during this period—particularly regarding the proliferation of ads in the pages of the press—reflect commonplace perceptions of advertising as a morally dubious practice, offensive to the sensibilities of an increasingly powerful bourgeois class. These concerns about the morality of advertising—which in the British context were more commonly, and suggestively, referred to during this period as “puffery”—illuminate key tensions within Enlightenment constructions of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe, whereby an emergent bourgeois political order sought to distinguish and morally legitimize itself against the authoritarianism of the absolutist state.

Within this context, the rise of the public sphere and the spread of print communication were interdependent processes, with the latter playing a central role in “the transmission and amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public” (Habermas 1989: 180). The increasing amount of advertising content within such communications, however, which often attempted to influence the public for private interest through blatantly dubious claims, was clearly discordant with the liberal democratic ideals of informed communication and reasoned agreement, which the independent press was ideally meant to foster. Moreover, insofar as much of the criticism wielded against advertising during this period was expressed in terms of concern for public *passions* and *sensibilities*, early modern advertising and the debates surrounding it reflect nascent understandings of—and contestation over—the role of *aesthetic experience* in shaping moral subjects within bourgeois civil society, and for determining who does (and does not) belong.

The newly delineated ‘fine arts’ provided opportunity for the negotiation of such belonging, asserted through embodied manners and dispositions associated with a disinterested aesthetic attitude. So too did new forms of advertising and their associated consumer behaviours, however, which acted as sites for the judgment and display of good taste—but within an explicitly *interested* aesthetic register. Alongside intensifying debates about the morality of puffery, attention paid to the aesthetics of advertising during this period—both in the pages of the press, but also in more visual forms like trade cards—reflect simultaneous attempts on the part of bourgeois stakeholders (printers, merchants, shopkeepers) to legitimize the

practice of advertising and to solidify their own positions within an emergent social order.⁴⁷ The aesthetics of these emergent advertising forms did not simply *reflect* dominant tastes and values of polite society, but in fact *became a primary means through which such tastes and values were redefined and reconfigured*. Along this vein, Stobart (2008) argues that insofar as these “played on the idea of taste and discernment as a means of social differentiation,” eighteenth-century advertising comprised a new “representational order for politeness” through which commercial activity and consumer discernment were reimagined as crucial to the foundation of polite society. This increasing interest in and attention paid to the aesthetics of advertising occurred alongside and in clear tension with contemporaneous bourgeois interest in disinterested aesthetic experience and the demarcation of the fine arts as spaces for paradoxical expressions of both class distinction and disinterested taste. What is crucial to observe here, then, is how both emergent advertising practice *as well as the philosophical grounds for its critique* in aesthetic terms were ultimately born of the same political project.

In an essay entitled “On Beauty and Being Just,” Scarry (1998) observes that “at the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering” (77). She goes on to describe how this “causes a cluster of feelings that normally promote the self... to fall away. It is

⁴⁷ Berg and Clifford (2007), for example, highlight how advertisements in the form of trade cards proliferated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both England and France. Indeed, they argue that the trade card was not only “the earliest widely circulated form of advertising combining image and printed text”, but also that “it was more central to pre-nineteenth century advertising than were newspapers and newssheets” (146). Unlike the poster, which gained popularity as a form of mass advertising in the late nineteenth century, trade cards were used to target bourgeois consumer markets specifically, through an aesthetics of exclusivity and class-based distinction. In fact, trade cards were distributed *after*, not before, a purchase, and in this sense served not only as a form of commercial promotion for the merchant, but also as a token of good taste and social status for the bourgeois consumer. Their purpose, according to Berg and Clifford, “was to encourage the customer to return, and to act as a means of encouraging the dissemination of knowledge about a business from existing to potential customers” (151).

not just that she becomes ‘self-forgetful’ but that some more capacious mental act is possible: all the space formerly in the service of protecting, guarding, advancing the self (or its ‘prestige’) is now free to be in the service of something else” (78). Writing more than two hundred years after Shaftesbury and Hume, Scarry’s insistence on the disinterestedness of aesthetic experience illuminates the ongoing legacy of key Enlightenment ideas and tensions within Western art and aesthetic philosophy, first elaborated by the British moral sense philosophers. The persistence of such ideas continue to trouble the practice of advertising today, and are often the basis of social criticism wielded against the practice, in interrelated ethical and aesthetic terms. As I explore in subsequent chapters, however, for individuals employed in the work of making ads, the valuation of advertising as *creative practice*, over and above the aesthetic merits or ethics of its output (i.e. the ad itself) becomes a central means through which people become harnessed to the work of advertising, often despite their own conflicted feelings about its broader social consequences.

Before returning to the more contemporary ethnographic moment of my fieldwork, in the following section I trace how creativity came to be associated with what Povinelli (2006) describes as the liberal “fantasy” of *autological subjectivity*. As a particular iteration of this fantasy, I argue, *being (a) creative* is made into an idealized subjectivity—one that remains mired in the Enlightenment’s fundamentally paradoxical formulation of aesthetics as both a culturally coercive as well as potentially emancipatory force. In subsequent chapters I ethnographically attend to how the pursuit of this ideal affectively harnesses individuals to the work of advertising, as an “institutionalized system of commercial information and persuasion” (Williams 1980: 170) that is also, crucially, a salient site of creative subjectification under capitalism.

Examining creativity as a genealogical construct that underwent significant ideological transformations within the Enlightenment dialectic described above thus helps to elucidate the impossibilities and contradictions that frustrate its contemporary pursuit, as well as the profound ambivalence many ad workers in Montreal come to feel about their own work—and *selves*—as “creatives.”

Development III: Imagining the autological subject

It is within Enlightenment treatises on aesthetics that the terms *create* and *creation* first “acquired a conscious association with art,” while the term *creative* first appears specifically in reference to *imagination* (Williams 1983: 83; Engell 1981: vii). Moreover, as Engell notes, while the phrase ‘creative imagination’ entered into philosophical discourse as early as the 1730s, by 1780 it had become “an ideal to believe in wholeheartedly, a goal, *a state of mind or being toward which to aspire*—something it had never been before” (1981: viii, italics added). The relatively rapid progression of such a concept speaks to its fecundity for Enlightenment and then Romantic thinkers, for whom “the idea of the imagination dramatized and made articulate a great dialectic between matter and spirit, nature and the inner psyche, materialism and transcendentalism” (viii). Such a concept was particularly relevant to Enlightenment interest in the aesthetic as a site of disinterested experience, within which human judgment of both *beauty* and *goodness* were examined and debated as innate and interrelated sensibilities. As I outlined above, the proliferation of philosophical treatises focused on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics that appear throughout the eighteenth century reflect shifting

understandings of the social role and cultural importance accorded to the newly delineated ‘fine arts’ in early modern Europe. Alongside a growing emphasis on the creative imagination as a site of individual freedom and agency, such developments signal the birth of a new kind of ideal subject—as well as visions of what constitutes the *good life*—within modern civil society.⁴⁸

Philosophical concerns with aesthetic judgment (or *taste*) during this same period can be read as attempts to demarcate aesthetics itself as a distinct sphere of bourgeois sociality—a process that Eagleton (1990) interprets as one of socio-political legitimization amongst a rising bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century Britain and Europe. At the same time, Enlightenment interest in the disinterestedness of aesthetic experience also clearly reflects attempts to carve a space of unalienated human experience in contradistinction to the utilitarian reduction of labour under industrial capitalism (Ngai 2012: 239-240).⁴⁹ Within a genealogy of creativity specifically, it is especially pertinent that the concept of artistic genius is reconceptualized within this discursive context and elevated as “a special form of human mentality” in association with new understandings of the imagination as an expression of human freedom (Guyer 2005: 4). These emergent theorizations of the creative imagination, articulated in dialogue with eighteenth-century ideologies of the aesthetic, reflect attempts to overcome a number of central problematics within Enlightenment thinking.

⁴⁸ Norton (2015) argues that “early aesthetic theory is less an academic study of the principles of art than it is a kind of art of living, one that pursues affective well-being through intensifying and enlivening our experiences of the world” (89).

⁴⁹ This pervasive interest in aesthetic taste, or judgment, has prompted the philosopher George Dickie to pronounce the eighteenth century, *The Century of Taste* (1996).

The imagination is consequently accorded a particularly significant role within eighteenth-century philosophical discourse concerned with the rationalist bifurcation of sensory experience from reason, as well as with the (im)possibilities for social harmony within a stratified bourgeois state founded upon an ethos of possessive individualism.⁵⁰ This can be read in a proliferation of philosophical treatises on the imagination that appear during this period; the writings of Francis Hutcheson (1725) and Joseph Addison (1712) were notably influential in this regard.⁵¹ Working within the sentimentalist tradition, Hutcheson, for example, treats the aesthetic to be of the same kind as the moral sense and, through the concept of disinterestedness, continues to promote a philosophical belief in man's benevolent nature against the doctrine of egoism. In addition to his emphasis on the disinterestedness of both moral and aesthetic sensibility, however, Hutcheson also outlines a formal theoretical model for distinguishing between what he considers the *external senses* (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) and the *internal senses*—senses that are similarly immediate but that depend upon a reflexive faculty (rather than external stimuli), and which include both the moral sense and the sense of beauty (among others). Hutcheson's theorization of the internal senses in such terms

⁵⁰ For example, in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke* (2011), C.B. Macpherson argues that "the difficulties of modern liberal-democratic theory... lay in its possessive quality... found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself" (3). In this context, the individual subject herself becomes a central site of ideological tension.

⁵¹ Importantly, Hutcheson is careful to define the internal sense in contradistinction to both universal reason *and* subjective will and feeling. For this reason, Guyer sees Hutcheson as introducing "a clearly negative conception of the freedom of the imagination in aesthetic response," defined as "an immediate gratification in perceptual form that is free of the influence of all other forms of thought and value" (2005: 12). Kubota (2015: 68) sees the distinction that Hutcheson makes in this regard as being a likely influence on Kant's treatment of the imagination in later decades.

foreshadows a new and distinct role accorded to the *imagination* as a specific faculty of mind, which subsequently becomes predominant within a dialectical Enlightenment aesthetic.

It is likely that Hutcheson's theorizations of the internal senses were inspired, at least in part, by Addison's influential essays on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," published as a series in *The Spectator* (1712). Engell (1981) claims that after the publication of Addison's essays, "the imagination as a critical concept gathers force quickly," so that "by the 1720s and 1730s many critics and poets consider it the highest gift and the value of art" (34). Reflecting the broader cultural context already described above, Addison's examination of the imagination is, at least on one level, deeply embroiled within pervasive eighteenth-century concerns about taste. This is particularly evident in his description of the "Man of Polite Imagination" as embodying an aesthetic sensibility that distinguishes him from "the generality of Mankind."⁵² Yet, like his sentimentalist contemporaries, Addison also insists that the particular pleasures of the imagination are fundamentally disinterested.⁵³ In this way, the imagination is accorded an inherently dialectical function: on the one hand, it is seen as rooted in a disinterested aesthetic sensibility—an innate and theoretically universal human sensibility seen to counter the dominant capitalist ethos of possessive individualism.⁵⁴ On the other hand, however, the emancipatory

⁵² This is reflected in Addison's claim that "A Man of Polite Imagination is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving".

⁵³ This is evident when Addison pronounces the 'Man of Polite Imagination' to be one who "feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession", though he continues to insist that these pleasures are distinctive of such a man's ability to perceive "a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind" (*Pleasures, Spectator*).

⁵⁴ In this regard, Norton (2015) argues that Addison's *Spectator* series is representative of an "early aesthetic theory [that] is less an academic study of the principles of art than it is a kind of art of living, one that pursues affective well-being through intensifying and enlivening our experiences of the world" (89). Elaborating, Norton perceives that Addison's theorization of the imagination captures a fundamental tension between "aesthetic ideas of the good life" and "mainstream conceptions of happiness... as a kind of pursuit, an unending cycle of desire-possession-desire" (100). The emphasis on disinterestedness in eighteenth-century treatments of aesthetic experiences,

potential with which Addison imbues the imagination remains inevitably frustrated by the very political project it might otherwise undermine; for Addison, the “Man of Polite Imagination” is, like Hume’s critic, not an “everyman.” Rather, his heightened imaginative sensibilities and capacity for cultivated aesthetic judgment are evidence of his *exceptional personhood*.

This ideological harnessing of the imagination to an idealized bourgeois subjectivity is a crucial development for later idealizations of creativity in similar terms—i.e. as evidence of an exceptional (and therefore not universally-attainable) form of personhood. In this way, interest in the creative imagination must be contextualized within an Enlightenment ideology of the aesthetic as a key site of bourgeois subjectification. Creativity becomes, in other words, central to the “discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism” (Povinelli 2006: 4). This is particularly apparent in emergent theorizations of individual *invention* and *genius* as wellsprings of artistic achievement; insofar as such concepts are increasingly understood over the course of this period as a special property of individual mind, they become integral to an Enlightenment reimagining of creativity in autological terms. Such a reimagining not only eroded previous definitions of creativity in relation to notions of divine inspiration, but through a focus on the *generative* function of imaginative genius also firmly positioned the individual artist-creator, and not just the contemplative or disinterested spectator, at the centre of an Enlightenment ideology of the aesthetic.

according to Norton, “seeks to suspend or interrupt that dialectic; it is a way of enjoying the meadow without owning the land. This is not a happiness of wanting and acquiring, but of experiencing and being” (100).

Enlightenment discourse on creativity in connection to the freedom of the imagination also offers a salient window onto the increasing importance accorded to notions of *innovation*, *originality*, and *novelty* in aesthetic experience and artistic creation.⁵⁵ In the writings of philosophers from Hume to Gerard, the imagination is conceived as an overarching structure of the mind that unites reason with feeling.⁵⁶ At the same time, within such discourse there also continues to be an inescapable emphasis on the regulatory role played by judgment. Gerard, for example, argues that while genius may be defined as “a comprehensive, regular, and active imagination... it can never attain perfection, or exert itself successfully on any subject, except it be united with a sound and piercing judgment” (*Essay on Genius* 71). Imagination, then, must inevitably be *disciplined* by judgment in order to result in genius, lest it risks dissolving into mere flights of fancy or—worse—delusion.⁵⁷ On this point Gerard not only maintains Hume’s premise that a standard of taste exists—he asserts, for example, that when “a taste so perfect is united to a vigorous imagination, it produces genius in some sense universal”—but also argues that the outcome of genius is ultimately measured in the creator’s ability to produce works with *universal* appeal, however inventive or novel their aesthetics might be (*Genius* 410). He presents, in other

⁵⁵ In his *Essay on Genius* (1774), for example, Gerard thus asserts that: “Genius is properly the faculty of *invention*; by means of which a man is qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original works in art” (*Essay on Genius* 8). He then proposes a theory of the “structure of imagination”, as divisible into two distinct forms of genius: 1) “penetration”, which “implies such a force of imagination as leads to the comprehension and explication of a subject” (associated with science); and 2) “brightness of imagination”, which “fits a man for adorning a subject” (associated with art). Elaborating this distinction, he argues that “a penetrating mind emits the rays by which truth is discovered; a bright fancy supplies the colours by which beauty is produced” (323).

⁵⁶ Hume writes, for example, that “the memory, senses, and understanding are therefore all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas” (*Treatise* 265).

⁵⁷ Gerard argues that, “the vigour of imagination carries it forward to invention; but understanding must always conduct it and regulate its motions. ... [A] fine imagination left to itself, will break out into bold sallies and wild extravagance, and overleap the bounds of truth or probability: but when it is put under the management of sound judgement, it leads to solid and useful invention, without having its natural sprightliness in the least impaired” (*Essay on Genius* 71).

words, an inherently dialectical ideal of creative genius as rooted in both the individual imagination, as well as in the cultivated aesthetic sensibility of good taste.

While the association between the imagination and genius was in many ways elucidated in decidedly positive terms in the decades between Hume and Gerard, the perceived need for the disciplining of imagination by reason reveals a contemporaneous distrust of the faculty on the part of many early modern writers, philosophers, and moralists. Such concerns are particularly relevant when situated alongside critiques of advertising's effects on public sensibilities in early modern Britain and Europe. If we read eighteenth-century discourse on the aesthetic as part of a broader ideological project of bourgeois legitimization, there is a clear parallel to be drawn between the distrust of the individual imagination in Enlightenment treatises on genius, and pervasive anxieties about the revolutionary potential of an unbridled liberal individualism.⁵⁸ In such writings, the creative imagination is seen as integral not only in processes of poetic or artistic genius, but equally in the aesthetic experience of the public, who in the absence of sound judgment or reason risks becoming tyrannized by the fanciful tendencies of imagination.

The cultural significance accorded to the imagination within eighteenth-century aesthetic and moral philosophy, as well as the tensions that surround it, ultimately highlight this period to

⁵⁸ Such concerns are prevalent, for example, in the work of Samuel Johnson, who explores what Engell (1981: 58) describes as “the darker potentialities of the imagination”, perhaps far more so than many of his contemporaries. In a chapter he entitles, “The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination” (*Rasselas* 1759), Johnson argues that, “All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity ... it is not pronounced madness but when it comes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech or action”. It is significant, too, that Johnson *feminizes* fancy as an unruly sister to imagination, describing how “she grows first imperious, and in time despotic. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.” Reminiscent of Baumgarten's feminizing of aesthetics as a subjugate sensibility to reason, here Johnson treats the imagination—at least in its most ‘ungovernable’ feminine form, ‘fancy’—as similarly in need of a paternal guidance from reason.

be a pivotal moment of transition within Western conceptualizations of creativity, whereby the “mimetic and pragmatic” understandings of art in classical philosophy are seen to eventually give way to the “Romantic, or expressive orientation” (Abrams 1985: 17).⁵⁹ Insofar as Enlightenment theories of the imagination provide the context within which creativity is newly understood as a form of individual genius, particularly in relationship to the modern artist, we can also observe the gradual erosion of theological understandings of aesthetic practice and experience, and a corresponding transference of disinterested love for the divine subject of art to the disinterested aesthetic object. These developments are described by Stolnitz as involving the rise of the “aesthetic attitude” (1961), and by Abrams as a turn towards a theory of “art-as-such” (1985). Both descriptions capture how the aesthetic object is within such a context increasingly valued for its inherent aesthetic qualities rather than for its ability to serve a broader social purpose.

This autotelic turn is most often seen as first instigated by Kant, in whose work the eighteenth-century constellation of disinterestedness, taste, and imagination is ultimately reconfigured. In significant ways, Kant’s deontological ethics consists of a rationalist response to key tenets of British moral sense theory, within which disinterestedness is first conceptualized as a phenomenological bridge between beauty, morality, and manners. In contrast to the sentimentalist tradition, Kant makes a clear distinction between the pleasure one takes in behaving virtuously, versus the pleasure one takes in perceiving beauty; while the latter may be disinterested, it is significant that the former, for Kant, cannot. The distinction Kant draws in this regard does not involve a return to Hobbesian egoism, however. Rather, Kant suggests that the

⁵⁹ According to Abrams, this shift is one whereby, “a work of poetry or art is not primarily an imitation, but the expression of the emotions and feelingful imaginative process of the artist” (1985: 17).

subjective desire which motivates an individual to fulfil moral duty (i.e. to be virtuous) precludes the possibility that virtue can be disinterested, precisely because the pleasure derived therein is not an end in itself (i.e. the purpose remains one of upholding moral duty, regardless of the benefit to the self). Kant therefore suggests that the inherent *interestedness* (contra *self-interestedness*) of virtuous behaviour is evidence of *the freedom of the human will* to act according to reflective judgment.

Kant argues that when considering the inherent virtue of an act, “it is not enough to do what is right, but it must also be performed solely on the ground that it is right” (CJ §53, p.327). In this sense, Kant’s moral theory rests upon an understanding of human agency as the freedom to conduct oneself in a virtuous way that is ultimately informed by reason. This theorization allows Kant to maintain his rationalist position while simultaneously rejecting the egoistic argument that human nature is fundamentally self-interested.⁶⁰ For Kant, then, freedom constitutes a *wiling subjectification* to the moral order.

Unlike the inherently interested (i.e. purposeful) desire to be virtuous, however, for Kant judgments of taste *can* be considered ends in themselves, serving no other purpose beyond an immediate experience of pleasure. Like that of the sentimentalists, Kant’s philosophical framework for comprehending the pleasure inspired in the contemplation of aesthetic beauty relies entirely upon the nature of aesthetic experience as fundamentally disinterested. Importantly, here Kant turns to the concept of the imagination as a hinge between aesthetic

⁶⁰ On this point Guyer argues that “Kant’s idea that human morality is human autonomy, the governance of our freedom by a supreme principle of morality that we generate out of our own reason, is a welcome liberation from the idea that we can govern our behaviour only by fear of punishment or hope of reward from a human or superhuman lawgiver” (2000: 4).

judgment and moral duty. More specifically, Kant sees the *freedom of the imagination* (or the “free play” of the imagination in aesthetic judgment) not as the same faculty used in moral judgment, but as its parallel. For Kant, this parallel can be drawn because he sees aesthetic judgment as involving a “subsumption of the *faculty* of intuitions or presentations (i.e. the Imagination) under the *faculty* of the concepts (i.e. the Understanding)” (CJ §35, p.161-162). In this way, Kant argues that the imagination harmonises with understanding (or reason) “*in its conformity to law*” (CJ §35, p.161-162). Guyer (2005) therefore argues that for Kant, “the beautiful can serve as *a symbol* of the morally good because the freedom of imagination that is the essence of the experience of beauty can serve as *a symbol* of the freedom of the will that is the basis of morality” (186, italics added).

Though Kant is now often associated with the emergence of an autotelic ideology of the aesthetic, it is clear that he does not in fact fully dissolve the relationship between ethics and aesthetics within his own philosophy.⁶¹ Rather, in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant describes how aesthetic sensibility works to *imaginatively* and *affectively* harness the subject to moral duty, casting it thus in a supporting role vis-à-vis reason. Kant consequently presents a very similar argument to Hume in this regard when he suggests that the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility (i.e. the judgment of taste) helps to sensitize a person towards the “moral feeling” needed for

⁶¹ Reckwitz (2017) highlights Kant’s notion of ‘disinterested pleasure’ as being particularly foundational for a modern “social regime of aesthetic novelty”, which, he argues, depends upon an autotelic understandings of the aesthetic that can be traced back to Kant: “In its narrower sense... the aesthetic does not encompass all processes of sense perception; it embraces only those perceptual acts which are enjoyed for their own sakes – auto-dynamic perceptions, which have broken loose from their embeddedness in purposive rationality. ... The defining characteristic of aesthetic perception is that it is an end in itself and refers to itself; it is centred on its own performance in the present moment. ... Relating the aesthetic to purpose-free sensuousness in this way follows an impulse from the classical discourse of modern aesthetics originating in Kant’s notion of ‘disinterested pleasure’” (11). Conversely, Guyer (1993: 2) argues that a Kantian aesthetics is not as autotelic as many scholars have suggested.

social harmony: “The Beautiful prepares us to love disinterestedly something, even nature itself; the Sublime prepares us to esteem something highly even in opposition to our own (sensible) interest” (CJ §29 p.134). In this way, as Guyer (1990) argues, Kant “makes it clear that moral perfection requires *the development of feelings* compatible with and *conducive to* those intentions dictated by pure practical reason alone” (138, italics added).

The role Kant accords to aesthetic sensibility in cultivating moral feeling not only reflects the sentimentalist influence upon his thinking, but arguably also provides a theoretical resolution to the central Enlightenment problematic of how to create social harmony amongst free, self-determining subjects. Without abdicating his rationalist belief in abstract moral duty, Kant develops a theory of taste as an *affective process of subjectification* through which the individual freely and *feelingly* subjugates self-interest to the collective good.⁶² In this way, the Kantian ideal becomes one whereby “feeling [is brought] into harmony with the rational demands of duty” (Guyer 1990: 139).

Often treated in tandem with Kant as heralding the philosophical shift towards the autodynamism of modern Western aesthetics, Schiller similarly takes as his primary subject the role of aesthetics in establishing the subjective preconditions of political freedom. Indeed, Schiller accords an even greater importance to aesthetics on this subject than does Kant, suggesting that an “aesthetic education” is in fact *integral to* political freedom, rather than merely conducive to an affective instilling of the desire to perform an otherwise abstract moral duty. In the second of his *Letters on the Aesthetical* (1793), written in part as a response to the perceived failures of the

⁶² On this point Guyer (1990) suggests that for Kant, “moral perfection requires the development of feelings compatible with and conducive to those intentions dictated by pure practical reason alone” (138).

French Revolution, Schiller writes that “if man is ever to solve the problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom” (2.5).⁶³ In this way, Schiller bestows upon aesthetic experience the potential to overcome the dualisms that perplex Enlightenment thought by turning to the free play of the imagination as a force for reconciling the conflict between reason (the “formal drive”) and passion (the “the sensuous drive”) in experiences of aesthetic pleasure (Sommer 2009: 86).

Crucially, Schiller directs our attention not only to aesthetic contemplation as an inherently emancipatory space of unalienated experience, but also to the *act of creating* as a potentially liberating process. In so doing, he shifts the ongoing emphasis within Enlightenment aesthetic philosophy away from the disinterested judgment of Kant’s spectator to the redemptive figure of the artist himself. Yet such a shift does not involve a full return to the classical emphasis on “the maker’s stance” and its focus on *techne* (Abrams 2012: 154-155). Rather, Schiller’s artist is depicted as embodying an emergent conceptualization of *creativity as a site of agency*, in which aesthetic creation and experience are seen not just to constitute the purest expressions of human liberty, but are in fact argued to be primary means through which political freedom is achieved.

⁶³ Schiller’s conceptualization of the aesthetic in this regard involves a clear refutation of Kant’s political position, reflecting intensified interest in the possibility for a civil liberty achieved through aesthetic education, and the role to be played by the middle class therein, particularly in the context of the perceived failures of the French Revolution. As Guyer describes, “For Schiller’s analysis of political disaster—with the spectre of the French Terror before him – is that it arises when political ideals become mere abstractions, and people in power come to think that goals like justice in the abstract can be achieved even with or indeed only through the unjust treatment of individuals” (2008: 361).

The associations that Kant and Schiller make between the free will of moral duty and the “free play” of the imagination is a pivotal ideological development within a genealogy of creativity in Enlightenment thought, whereby the capacity to *be creative* is accorded a new significance as evidence and expression of the inalienable freedom of the autological subject. For his part, Kant interprets the faculty of imagination within aesthetic experience as a fundamental expression of human freedom and autonomy, whereby the “radically indeterminate activity” of the “free play” of the cognitive faculties is taken as an essential dimension of aesthetic experience (Ngai 2012: 38). Insofar as Schiller builds on such ideas, presenting an argument for aesthetic experience as the basis of human freedom, we can observe a profound reimagination of creativity to be fully underway by the turn of the nineteenth century.

This valuation of creativity as evidence and expression of individual freedom has remained central within dominant Western philosophies of the aesthetic ever since. The tenacity of such ideas can be clearly observed in contemporary idealizations of creative personhood and aesthetic experience across a wide range of cultural fields, as my fieldwork with creative ad workers based in Montreal reflects. Moreover, I argue that ongoing debates about the ethics and aesthetics of advertising production illuminate how foundational tensions informing Enlightenment preoccupations with aesthetic disinterestedness are far from resolved. The experiences of ad workers engaged in the “interested” work of advertising production therefore provide a salient window for observing how such tensions are variously navigated, evaded, and *lived*, through the continued pursuit of an idealized creative personhood that is imagined as autonomous, free, and self-made—even when this proves, time and again, to be an impossible ideal.

From freedom of imagination to neoliberal imperative

The ethnographic moment I describe at the start of this chapter provides an initial window onto the unique socio-historical context of my fieldwork with ad workers who live in Montreal (designated a “City of Design” within UNESCO’s “Creative Cities” network), who work in advertising (a major “creative industry” within the local economy), and who regularly claim creativity as a professional title and personal identity. Upon first glance, these layered uses of the term might suggest creativity to have travelled far from its Enlightenment construction as a site of unalienated experience bracketed from capitalist activity, whereby the call to *be creative* now serves as a primary imperative that harnesses people to neoliberal processes of subjectification and aesthetic recuperation. And yet, as I describe in chapters to follow, for the subjects of this dissertation it is clear that an idealized state of *being creative* is not something easily achieved or sustained through advertising work. Rather, the pervasive ambivalence that many creative ad workers come to feel towards their work suggests how creative subjectification under capitalism regularly engenders existential dilemmas. These dilemmas are ones whereby ad workers’ desires to construct themselves *as creatives*—to render themselves *intelligible* as free, autonomous, and self-fashioned selves—paradoxically incites them into modes of aesthetic production that serve to legitimate capitalist conditions of exploitation and alienation, and which they themselves often experience as ones of *creative constraint*. This dilemma, which I explore more closely in subsequent chapters, was frequently described to me in terms of “creative frustration”—an existential state that I take as a paradigmatic example of the creative subject’s *failure to flourish* under neoliberal conditions (Berlant 2011).

Attending to the genealogical construction of creativity under capitalism quickly reveals that the ideological tensions informing such a dilemma are not new, but in fact deeply rooted in the foundational Enlightenment dialectic I have outlined above. A central tension that I explore throughout this dissertation is therefore how creative ad workers become committed to the work of advertising (as a site for the “capitalist reappropriation of revolutionary dynamics”), while remaining “passionately attached” to seeing themselves as somehow standing outside of (or even in opposition to) a dominant capitalist regime—a tension that I read as an ideological inheritance of Enlightenment discourse on the aesthetic and the freedom of the imagination. The ways in which Beaudry, Pierre, Sophie, and Étienne supported and participated in the 2012 student movements in Montreal, while also actively recuperating its aesthetics for self-promotion and commodity image creation, provide initial examples of how this central tension plays out in the lives and work of creative ad workers.

Insofar as such engagements implicate individuals in the appropriation of collective cultural symbols and emergent aesthetic forms through curatorial displays of individual aesthetic expertise, they also exemplify Berlant’s observation that, unlike cultivation, curating involves “collecting phenomena for the purpose of their gaining value” (2011: 87). And yet, as Berlant goes on to elaborate, while curation as a particular mode of being/engaging may indeed be instrumental (or inherently *interested*, in the language of Enlightenment aesthetic philosophy) it is also inherently “optimistic... because the penetration of the intuition by encounters with objects, people, and scenarios actually creates a sense of solidarity and recognition, based on a sense of the collective desire to survive what might have otherwise seemed like the fate of traumatic inscription” (87).

With this in mind, the pursuit of an idealized creative identity through curatorial modes of aesthetic recuperation signals the subject's desire for recognition as an exceptional individual within an existing capitalist social order, *as well as* her desire for unalienated experience and the exercising of agency in aesthetic discernment in ways that escape the discipline of capitalism. Examining creativity as a site of subjectification in late capitalist contexts therefore participates in an intellectual project that Butler (1997) describes as a "critical evaluation of subject formation [which] may well offer a better comprehension of the double binds to which our emancipatory efforts occasionally lead without, in consequence, evacuating the political" (29). Crucially, my research with creative ad workers reveals how this critical project is not the sole prerogative of academics, but is in fact frequently encountered in the ways that such individuals reflect upon and often critically question their own creative work and identities as *creative subjects*. Like Butler, many (though certainly not all) of the ad workers I interviewed and spent time with themselves regularly question whether it is possible "to affirm complicity as the basis of political agency, yet insist that political agency may do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination" (30). For such individuals, *being creative* provides an anchoring language and set of practices through which they understand and navigate this dilemma.

In the chapters that follow I explore how and why ad workers come to occupy a remarkably aestheticized (in its modern autotelic sense) stance towards their own labour and lives *as creative*, even while the inherently self-interested nature of the aesthetic objects of advertising they create (i.e. commodity images), as well as the possessive ethos such creation incites (i.e. commodity fetishism), renders any claim to the aesthetic autonomy of the output of their work an impossibility. I also examine how this aestheticized stance—reinforced by

dominant industry narratives and practices of creative exceptionalism—often allows individuals to evade critical questioning of the broader ethical and political implications of their work, through an accompanying veneration of creativity in autotelic terms. In other words, ad workers derive meaning from their work (and lives) within an autotelic ideology of creativity, as a “creativity which is a purpose in itself” (Ossowski 1978: 316).⁶⁴

As I will describe, the valuation of creativity in autotelic terms is actively reinforced through key institutional arrangements, patterns of relating, and modes of subjectivation that defined advertising practice in Montreal at the time of my research. Documenting such practice highlights how the cultural importance previously accorded to the role of the disinterested or contemplative spectator is transferred to the contemporary creative worker (as a particular kind of neoliberal subject) within this social field. We might also then begin to consider how the frenzied pursuit and promotion of a *creative good life* can be observed to transfer the promise of transcendence that contemplation of the beautiful and the sublime once held within Enlightenment ideologies of the aesthetic, to the affective and (supposedly) non-alienated forms of labour and lifestyle that are increasingly believed to define—and distinguish—the lives of the so-called “creative class.” It is crucial to recognize the affective pull of such promises, I argue, if we are to better comprehend—and potentially resist—the subordinations that accompany the contemporary neoliberal imperative to *be creative*.

⁶⁴ Ossowski explains the concept of autotelic creativity through a discussion of autotelic art: “By autotelic art—in contrast to heterotelic art—we shall understand art which does not serve religion, knowledge, politics or medicine, but has its own proper, distinct aims. On the whole, these aims have a hedonistic character; autotelic art is supposed to satisfy the creative needs of the artist and to provide aesthetic emotions to the spectator or listener” (1978: 316).

Chapter 2

Creative Distinctions

“Creatives are indulged to the point of absurdity. My boss comes into my office to tell me that Creative X didn’t fill in his timesheet properly, and I need to sort it out. I ask him why Creative X couldn’t just fill it out properly to begin with. ‘What do you expect? He’s a creative’ is the response I get. Like, so what? Does being a Creative mean you can’t read or count to ten?

Because if you can’t do those things, that’s fine. But I need to know how deep your incompetence runs, so I can be better prepared to accommodate that.”

- (Nikita, Creative Producer)

“Their everyday existence is a work of genius.”

(Henry Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, 1851)

Fieldnotes, March 26th 2013

I meet Nico at Big in Japan, a speakeasy style bar on rue Saint Laurent in the heart of the Plateau. There’s no signage outside. It’s easy to walk right past the place, if you don’t know to look for the red door. I enter through a narrow corridor that opens onto a large room, where white-shirted bartenders pour cocktails and provide sake recommendations from behind the u-shaped bar. Curtains drape the walls and candles dot the tables. The vibe is swanky. Coupled with the decision to rely on word of mouth to gain a certain kind of clientele, it’s clear that whoever designed the place wanted it to feel exclusive. This seems to be resonating with the creatives I’ve been interviewing and hanging out with lately: it’s the third time I’ve come to meet one here this week.

Nico is a creative director in his mid-forties, who works for a big-name agency in town. A mutual friend introduced us the previous summer. He has an annoying habit of scanning the room while talking to you, to see who else might be around. I told him as much when we first met, which made him laugh and say: “I like you.”

Nico invited me out tonight to gossip about last week’s Créa awards.¹ I find him perched on a leather barstool, absorbed by the screen of his iPhone. He stands to kiss me on each cheek, and waves the bartender over. I ask him how he’s been. The following conversation ensues:

¹ The Créa was an advertising awards competition held annually in Montreal from 2006 – 2019. See Chapter 5 for further discussion of the Créa and other local advertising awards events.

NICO: Alice broke it off.

ME: Sorry to hear that. How are you?

NICO: Fine. It wouldn't have worked out in the long run.

ME: Why not?

NICO: She didn't respect my work.

ME: How so?

NICO: She couldn't understand why I like my job.

ME: Why not?

NICO: She thinks advertising is bullshit.

ME: Isn't it?

NICO: Very funny. Of course a lot of ads are shit. But the work itself isn't bullshit.

ME: What's the distinction?

NICO: Most of the time advertising is promoting shit people don't need. But that doesn't mean advertising can't also be *good*.

ME: Define good.

NICO: Funny. Or beautiful. Interesting. If you're going to be sitting at a bus stop, staring at an ad for potato chips, wouldn't you rather that that ad makes you laugh? (*Tu préférerais pas que ça soit marrant?*)

ME: I suppose. Though maybe I'd rather not have to look at an ad for potato chips at all.

NICO: You sound like Alice.

ME: You had a fight?

NICO: *Bof*. A disagreement.

ME: What happened?

NICO: You know this new show she's been working on?

I nod my head – I had met Alice, a modern dance choreographer, at previous social gatherings with Nico, where she had frequently spoken to me about her work. She and Nico had been dating for a couple of months.

NICO: She's pissed because I wanted to use one of the songs from her show in a commercial I'm working on.

ME: (Pause). Ah.

NICO: I can already tell that you agree with her.

ME: Not necessarily. Why did it upset her?

NICO: Who knows. (Pauses). Something about taking creative inspiration from her work, and contaminating it with mine.

ME: What exactly did she say?

Nico opens his phone and passes it to me. I read the following text message exchange:

ALICE: The music is sublime. And you want to put it in a LIFE INSURANCE COMMERCIAL???

NICO: What's the problem

ALICE: The problem is that you can't see why this would be a problem for me

NICO: You should take it as a compliment

ALICE: How is this a compliment?

NICO: I appreciate your taste

ALICE: You have taken music that awakens something new in me each time I hear it and you want to put it in a commercial where a bunch of boring people in an office building are dancing around because the affordability of their life insurance plan has apparently thrilled them to the core? It's bullshit. You're ruining it. It will be reduced to an association with (INSURANCE COMPANY).

NICO: I don't see how this is different from you using the song for your show. It's not your song. Maybe (MUSICIAN) would actually like to make some money from it for once

ALICE: We shouldn't see each other anymore.

NICO: You're overreacting

ALICE: You have just compared my work to making a life insurance commercial

NICO: T'es snob

I pass Nico his phone.

NICO: Don't you think she overreacted?

ME: I don't know. I see her point, I guess. Though I understand why you're hurt.

NICO: I'm not hurt. I'm insulted.

The disagreement between Nico and Alice illuminates fundamentally different attitudes towards the nature and purpose of aesthetic experience under capitalism—differences that are rooted in the Enlightenment dialectic I outlined in Chapter 1. In this chapter, I treat these differences as emerging from a central aesthetic antagonism that has animated ongoing debates about the ethics and aesthetics of advertising since its institutionalization in nineteenth-century Britain and Europe. Taking Nico and Alice's impasse about the life insurance commercial as an entry point, here I am especially interested in how ongoing debates about the aesthetic effects of advertising centre upon how it serves as a site of consumer capitalist *subjection*. Insofar as the inherently interested purposes and forms of advertising can be argued to aesthetically *work upon* the consumer/viewer in a manner that counters an ideal of aesthetic disinterestedness, they also raise questions about the possibility of a liberal civil society built upon the inalienable freedom of autological subjects.

The distinction that Alice draws between her choreography work and Nico's advertising campaign reflects an insistent delineation of the "fine arts" as being of greater aesthetic value than advertising—a delineation that might be read as one of bourgeois class distinction (hence Nico's accusation of snobbery). And yet, it is clear that this distinction is also informed by something more. Specifically, Alice's concern that a piece of music she finds "sublime" would be "reduced" to a singular commercial association through its use in Nico's life insurance campaign highlights how she perceives the primary function of the commodity image to be one of

aesthetic *foreclosure* rather than open-ended dynamism. It seems to me that it is *this* distinction (rather than the distinctions of class) that explains the impasse for Alice and Nico, and why Alice cannot bear the comparison that Nico makes between her choreography practice and his commercial work.

In this and other conversations we had, Nico consistently defined *being creative* primarily as a dynamic process of aesthetic production that is *in itself* a worthwhile pursuit, regardless of the function of the aesthetic output. In this way, the meaning he gives to creativity in autotelic terms is key to understanding why and how he enjoys advertising work. For Alice, however, creativity is inextricably intertwined with the openness (or opening) of the aesthetic form—an aesthetic stance that locates the value of the aesthetic object (and the artist herself) in its (or her) ability to *transcend* the banality of commercial interest through disinterested aesthetic experience. Within a cultural tradition that imbues the work of art with this *transcendental purpose* (or potential), the commodity image exists as a banal and vulgar form that risks making aesthetic experience into something that *subjects the self*, rather than something that, in Alice's words, "awakens." Alice's decision to break off her relationship with Nico speaks to the stakes of their aesthetic antagonism as more than ones of class identity; insofar as his commercial use threatened to recuperate something of transcendental aesthetic experience into a capitalist system of value (i.e. the selling of life insurance), this was, for Alice, an aesthetic "reduction" that was also an inherently existential one.

In this chapter I examine the historical conditions under which a liberal creative ideal became imbued with these competing autotelic and transcendental meanings. Specifically, I take

the nineteenth century as a crucial moment of transformation in Western constructions of creativity, through which Enlightenment interest in the “freedom of the imagination” was more fully elaborated in dialogue with the accelerations of modern capitalism. I examine three interrelated developments that contributed to this transformation: 1) the rise of a perceived “crisis in attention” as a characteristic condition of modern consumer capitalism; 2) the elaboration of creativity as the expression and experience of an unalienated personhood in response to this crisis, particularly as this came to be associated with the aestheticized, counter-cultural stances of the flâneur, the bohemian, and the avant-garde artist; and 3) the “liberation” of the creative subject from aristocratic patronage through the establishment of the modern art market and the first “full-service” advertising agencies that incorporated artists as salaried employees. While tracing these developments is not a comprehensive overview of why or how modern notions of creativity emerged, it nonetheless provides crucial historical context for the primary themes I examine in subsequent chapters.

In discussing the philosophical and cultural shifts associated with these developments, my goal is to demonstrate how *being creative* was made into a salient site for the formation and expression of a free and autonomous personhood that attempted to overcome what Povinelli (2006) describes as the “internal incoherence” of liberal discourses about individual freedom and social constraint (5). However, insofar as these developments further embedded understandings and valuations of creativity in processes of individual and class distinction, I argue that the modern creative ideal became paradoxically imbued with the same ideological tensions it attempted to overcome. These tensions continue to animate—and frustrate—the pursuit of an idealized *creative good life* today.

Advertising and the modern crisis in attention

Increasing interest in and discourse on creativity in nineteenth-century Britain and Europe must be read, in part, as a response to contemporaneous anxieties over the encroachments of capitalist interests into a public sphere imagined as the foundation of a liberal civil society. Within this context, the increasing ubiquity of advertising in both the pages of the press as well as in urban space became the subject of considerable public debate. Insofar as such debates centred upon the nature and aesthetics of advertising, they illuminate what Crary (2001) describes as the perceived “crisis in attention” of capitalist modernity.² This crisis involved both the problematization of (in)attention as a particular form of capitalist alienation *as well as* the ongoing idealization of “sustained attentiveness as a constitutive element of a creative and free subjectivity” (1-2). Regarding the former, Crary notes that critical analyses of capitalism’s effects on modes of perception since the mid-1800s have focused on experiences of “subjective disintegration” through “fragmentation, shock, and dispersal” (1). These are but part of the story, however; Crary suggests that the “revolution in perception” of capitalist modernity was equally defined by “an imperative of a concentrated attentiveness within the disciplinary organization of labor, education, and mass consumption” (1-2).

The ideal of “sustained attentiveness” inherent in Enlightenment constructions of a disinterested aesthetic attitude continued to be imagined throughout the nineteenth century as

² That pervasive levels of distraction amongst a consuming public—produced in large part through the fragmenting aesthetic effects of poster advertising—was in fact perceived *as* a crisis is evidenced in the way that attention itself became a central problem of inquiry within scholarship of the human sciences during this period. This is especially pronounced within the “nascent field of scientific psychology,” which not only sought to understand attention from a physiological perspective, but which also became a distinct discipline of expertise heavily invested in the management of human attentiveness for the purpose of capitalist productivity (Crary 13).

an agentive mode of perception that countered the alienating distractions and discipline of modern capitalism. As industrialization accelerated, this ideal came to exist uneasily alongside the intensifying imperatives of “concentrated attentiveness” that served capitalist interests. Insofar as the potential *subjectifications* of capitalist labour and consumption risked undermining the liberal ideals of individual freedom and autonomy, cultural anxieties surrounding the crisis in attention thus speak to pervasive uncertainties about the foundational contradictions of the bourgeois political project, including the possibilities of individuation through consumption.

The rise of the promotional poster as a novel form of visual advertising in the late nineteenth century, as well as the debates surrounding its aesthetics and ubiquity in public space, provide a particularly illuminating window onto the crisis in attention Crary identifies. Indeed, the latter half of the nineteenth century is widely considered to have been a period of creative blossoming within the field of visual advertising, as industrial manufacturing accelerated and advertisers devoted increased attention to the construction of distinctive commodity images through the visual aesthetics of packaging and posters. These developments were supported by the invention of the steam-powered press, the availability of cheap ink and paper, and by new lithography techniques that allowed for printing in colour and for much larger print runs (Guffey 2012: 41; O’Barr 2005; Tungate 2013: 9; Williams 1980). Over the course of this period, public space in the industrializing cities of Britain, Europe, and North America became so saturated with ads that the work of “fly-posting” (the unlicensed adhering of notices or posters to walls and other public surfaces) became an increasingly ruthless and criminalized activity.³ The

³ In London, for example, fly-posters held affiliations with rival gangs, and were employed by advertisers not just to paste posters but also to blacken those of competitors (Williams 1980). In New York, fights between bill posters frequently ended up in arrests and sometimes stints in the state penitentiary (Guffey 2015). While such workers

competitiveness and proliferation of fly-posting reflects its perceived effectiveness; despite its illicit associations, by the 1870s the full-colour illustrated poster had become a favoured promotional strategy among advertisers that continued to accelerate over the next several decades.

The printing houses of Paris in particular are widely perceived by historians of art and advertising to have “led the field in exploiting the visual potential of the poster” during this period, though Guffey (2012) notes that artistic developments in the Parisian context were “quickly rivalled in London and New York” (13).⁴ Sontag (1999) suggests that insofar as the late nineteenth-century poster aimed “to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal” within urban environments increasingly saturated by competing commodity images and commercial messages, its dominant aesthetics became increasingly *visually aggressive* in response (196). In this way, the ubiquity and aggressive aesthetics of the lithographic poster during the late nineteenth century were interdependent developments, whereby the aesthetics of poster printing evolved “not only because of changes in printing technology and the

were increasingly policed for their “violent turf wars,” they were in fact only rarely arrested for the illegal posting that advertisers hired them for (Guffey 2015: 57-59).

⁴ In Paris, Jules Chéret’s depictions of dancing girls for the Folies Bergère, followed shortly thereafter by those of Toulouse-Lautrec for rival Moulin Rouge, became iconic examples of the form at its best (McFall 2004: 171). The prolific works of both Chéret and Toulouse-Lautrec provide quintessential examples of the aesthetic sensibilities and content that defined lithographic poster printing in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, which centred upon the promotion of “soft consumer goods, entertainments, and the arts, ... from cabarets, music halls, dance halls, and operas to oil lamps, aperitifs, and cigarette papers” (Sontag 1999: 198). According to Guffey (2012), artistic developments in the Parisian context were “quickly rivalled in London and New York” (13). Sontag (1999) notes that “the first important English poster makers, the Beggarstuffs... began in the early 1890s, and were broadly derivative of the French poster makers. ... In America, the first distinguished poster work was done for magazines. Will Bradley, Louis Rhead, Edward Penfield, and Maxfield Parrish were employed by such magazines as *Harper’s*, *Century*, *Lippincott’s*, and *Scribner’s* to design a different cover for each issue; these cover designs were then reproduced as posters to sell the magazines to the expanding middle-class reading public” (198).

liberalization of poster distribution (*affichage*) but also in response to the competing distractions of the modern city of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century” (Carter 2012: 11-12).

Nineteenth-century public commentary on the promotional poster registers how its dominant aesthetics were experienced as inherently aggressive and unrelenting—an aesthetics that both Sontag (1999) and Carter (2012) argue to be a definitive feature of the poster in its ‘modern’ historical form, and which distinguishes it from earlier forms of visual advertising like tradecards.⁵ For advertisers themselves, these aesthetic impacts were considered positive and desirable. Indeed, nineteenth-century industry discourse pragmatically identified the need for posters to be “bold” or “explosive” in design, applauded effective posters as ones that “arrest attention” or “harpoon the eye,” and celebrated their sensorially overwhelming effects through synesthetic descriptions of specific posters as “rowdy”, “uproarious,” and “loud” (Carter 2012: 17).

Within a context of accelerating consumer capitalism, the dominant visual aesthetics of the illustrated poster as a preferred advertising strategy both invited and responded to a new “mobile spectatorship” that increasingly defined modes of (in)attention within the modern industrial city. These modes presented a worrisome antithesis to a disinterested contemplation idealized by Enlightenment aesthetic philosophers. Scholarship on visual advertising during this

⁵ Some critical commentators went so far as to portray advertising as a villainous and sinister presence in the city; in his book, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris*, for example—which Carter (2012) describes as “a book intended as a guide for the dandy (or *flâneur*)”—the writer Victor Fournel bemoans: “Nowadays, Paris is nothing more than an immense wall of posters... where advertising lies in wait for you on all the sidewalks, stops you, besieges you, hunts you down, snatches you by the eyes and ears, sneaks in your pocket, sits down in your theatre box, follows you home [...] sometimes comes out of the ground like a jack-in-the-box, and doesn’t even leave you alone in the water closet” (cited in Carter 2012: 19).

period consequently highlights how the mass-produced, illustrated poster was fundamentally different from the “public notices” of the early modern period. Differences pertained not just to the function of the poster within the construction of the public sphere, but also in terms of its aesthetic impacts upon the individual viewer (Guffey 2015; Carter 2012). Describing these changes within the context of late nineteenth-century London, Guffey suggests that the new promotional poster “transformed the nature of reading and communications,” and argues that the “brash” and “crass” aesthetics of Victorian posters “cut across class lines and bent reading from a leisurely and physically private exercise into a *distracted* public art” (2015: 8, italics added). Along a different line of comparison, Carter (2012) suggests that poster creation and consumption in late nineteenth-century Paris involved a shift from an early modern form meant to be read (*lu*) in ways that encouraged public congregation and political engagement, to a quintessentially modern form meant to be *seen* (*vu*), as it aggressively competed for the distracted attention of the individual passer-by.

Furthermore, according to Carter, insofar as the poster required “a type of viewing in which the individual—rather than an audience, group or crowd—was the expected consumer,” we can understand it to have been an integral element in shifting modes of aesthetic attention. Such shifts arguably also contributed to a “disengagement from public life and a larger atomization of the individual in the modern period” (12). Indeed, when compared with earlier practices of poster production and consumption, it is clear that the commercial function and visual aesthetics of the mass-produced, colour lithographic poster invited new forms of perceptual (dis)engagement inherent to the “crisis” described above.

Shifts in the political function and dominant aesthetics of the modern promotional poster were accompanied by considerable changes in its dissemination on the ground of the late nineteenth-century city. Such changes were integral components of a broader program of urban modernization that profoundly altered the dynamics and directions of everyday life in the city.⁶ In Paris, for example, Haussmann's "urban renewal" of the city centre is widely considered to be "an early instance of what would become the unremitting sequence of destruction and modernization of urban space" (Crary 2001: 84). It is therefore significant that, in addition to the construction of new sewers, fountains, aqueducts, parks and public squares, Haussmann's renovation involved the annexation of Parisian suburbs, the demolition of medieval neighbourhoods, and the building of a network of wide boulevards throughout the city centre that were ultimately designed to facilitate the circulation of "commodities, money, and people" (Harvey 2003: 207). These boulevards provided the ideal setting for the establishment of the *grands magasins*—vast and sprawling department stores that ran the length of entire city blocks and which, by consolidating under one roof a plethora of consumer goods, effectively replaced the smaller specialty shops previously housed along the narrow, winding streets of the historic city centre and within the arcades (the 'detritus' of which Benjamin archived in the *Arcades Project*).⁷

⁶ The ways in which the city was re-envisioned and reconstructed as a space of accelerated commodity production and consumption during this period—in dialogue with discursive, administrative, and architectural processes of 'modernization'—has been well documented. For these reasons, Harvey has argued that Haussmann's project was nothing short of a "coherent plan to reorganize the spatial frame of social and economic life in the capital"—a plan that constituted an inherently rationalist and systematizing approach to the city as an urban "working whole", where the goal was ultimately to subjugate "unruly development" to a distinctly modern spatial order that could be more easily administered by the state (106).

⁷ The rise of department stores in other metropolitan contexts occurred during roughly the same period. For example, while Harding Howell and Company's Grand Fashionable Magazine, first opened in London in 1796, can arguably be considered the very first department store, Selfridge's (established in 1909 by American Harry Gordon

The rise of the department store as a salient space of bourgeois consumption and sociality fundamentally restructured relations between manufacturers and merchants through the selling of mass-produced goods.⁸ Within an examination of the conditions that gave rise to the perceived “crisis in attention” of modern capitalism, it is significant that the department store also radically reshaped consumer experience through an emphatically *spectacular* aesthetics of commodity fetishism in ways that paralleled the aggressions of the promotional poster. In this regard the department store became just as much a site for the advertising of commodities as it was a place for their acquisition; intended to seduce the bourgeois woman consumer especially, the spectacular displays of goods within the store—as well as in its storefront windows to be viewed from the *boulevards* when passing by—effectively transformed the experience of *shopping* into a new form of middle-class leisure.⁹ This intensified attention paid to the aesthetics of commodity display was itself “a marker of changing sights and changing

Selfridge), is, in terms of organization and consumer aesthetics, generally considered as the first “modern” British example. In the United States, Marshall Field & Company in Chicago, and Macy’s in New York city were early examples (Abelson 1989: 5). The first department stores in Canada were Eaton’s, Simpson’s and the Hudson’s Bay Company; for a history of the department store in the Canadian context specifically, see Donica Belisle’s *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (2011), which provides critical discussion of the role played by Canadian department stores between the 1880s and 1920s, in ostensibly “bringing the wares of progress to the corners of the dominion,” within a broader process of Canadian modernization.

⁸ Harvey (2003) describes how, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, “the rise of the large department stores meant the formation of ready-to-wear mass markets”—a development that both responded and contributed to transformations in the manufacturing of commodities under industrial capitalism, whereby the rise of mass production coincided with the “deskilling of work in the craft tradition” (161).

⁹ In her book, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (2001), Rachel Bowlby demonstrates how the emergence of the department store, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, provided middle-class women with an acceptable reason and space for a public outing: “Their splendid new buildings and permanent exhibitions of lovely new things brought middle-class women into town to engage in what was historically a new activity: a day’s shopping. They were places of leisure and luxury, offering women the image of a life that they could then, in fantasy if not in substance, take home with them” (7). While Bowlby acknowledges that the early nineteenth-century arcades of London and Paris “predate the great department stores by several decades... [and] are the first point of reference in histories from every period of the development of shopping as a specialized leisure activity” (77), it is clear the department store more fully harnesses this mode of leisure to a spectacularized aesthetics of commodity fetishism.

norms and possibilities of perception; it reveals or suggests the shifting forms of day-dreaming urban subjectivity” (Bowlby 2001: 50-51). Alongside the fragmented (in)attention of the “mobile spectator” (the imagined viewer of the promotional poster), the state of “day-dreaming” distraction embodied by the bourgeois woman consumer (the intended target of the department store display) suggests how modern capitalism’s crisis in attention came to be associated with a particular consumer subjectivity that was not just worrisomely passive, but also worrisomely *feminine*.¹⁰

Incitements to these shifting apperceptive modes, or “daydreaming subjectivities,” were perhaps even more spectacularly manifest in the Universal Exhibitions meant to showcase the city in its modern splendour, which Benjamin describes as “places of pilgrimage to the fetish commodity”, where “the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture attained its most radiant unfurling” (1997: 165-167).¹¹ Similarities between the aesthetics of the exhibitions and those of the department store highlight how both were imagined and constructed as quintessentially modern spaces for the display of commodities, and thus for the promotion of commodity consumption as a central dimension of the nation-building process.¹² This aesthetic symbiosis

¹⁰ In her book, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving* (1989), Elaine Abelson documents the prevalence of middle-class shoplifting in department stores as “a major social fact in the emergence of consumer society” (4). Abelson describes how the shoplifting habits of middle-class women specifically were first identified during this period as *kleptomania*. This diagnosis, she argues, illuminates the inherent contradictions of modern consumer capitalism, which simultaneously targeted the female shopper through relentless enticements to commodity fetishism, while also perpetuating hegemonic gender ideologies in which women were perceived as weak and susceptible to mania. Notably, working class women caught shoplifting were rarely diagnosed as kleptomaniacs, but were treated as criminals.

¹¹ London’s *Great Exhibition* of 1851—held almost forty years before the first of the Paris exhibitions, and for which the Crystal Palace was famously constructed—can be seen to have provided an initial blueprint for the department stores that were subsequently built not just in Paris, but in cities across Europe and North America throughout the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century.

¹² Iskin (1995), for example, documents how in Paris the art of “*étalage*” (display) was honed by department stores in ways that directly influenced the design of exhibits at the world fairs, “where the vitrines often looked like shop

illuminates how the logic of spectacle and its correlated modes of attention were ultimately produced through a nexus of commercial activity and state initiatives that worked to equate consumer capitalism with the rise of the modern nation. This can be equally observed in the institutional arrangements and infrastructures that emerged around the promotional poster within the public space of the modern city during the same period.

In Paris, for example, insofar as Haussmann's boulevards served as thoroughfares for pedestrian traffic, the city street became prime advertising real-estate where commodity images could be displayed to urban dwellers increasingly imagined as a consumer public but also, more worrisomely, as a frenzied and potentially insurgent "crowd." Both were increasingly theorized within emergent discourses of mass psychology.¹³ It was along these new thoroughfares, connecting and transecting the densely-populated modern city, that the mass-produced lithographic poster became the most ubiquitous advertising form of the *fin-de-siècle* era. In

windows or, in some instances, actually simulated them," while in turn department stores invited the public to visit "expositions" of new merchandise, which they advertised in the press (1995: 29).

¹³ Of particular influence in this regard was the work of Gustave Le Bon. In his seminal work on this subject, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895), Le Bon argues that the crowd must be theorized as an entity unto itself (i.e. as more than simply a group of individuals), with its own psychological characteristics: "impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of sentiments, and others." Within Le Bon's theoretical framework, the capacity for rational thought typically accorded to the (masculine) individual self in Enlightenment thought is ultimately overwhelmed by the psychology of the crowd when the former finds himself immersed in the latter. Notably, the psychological traits Le Bon associates with crowd psychology were remarkably close in kind to those typically associated to the feminine consumer subject during this same period. Le Bon's work was foundational to later theorizations of mass psychology, including the work of Sigmund Freud (particularly his 1921 treatise on *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*). Contemporaneously to Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde's *L'opinion et la foule* (Opinion and the Crowd) reflects a philosophical concern with distinguishing between the irrational impulsivity of the crowd, versus the public as the rational body politic of democracy. Conversely, by the turn of the twentieth century insights from crowd psychology were taken up within an emergent field of marketing 'science' and practice; perhaps most notably, Edward Bernays—often considered the "father" of public relations—drew extensively on the work of Le Bon as a means to influence public opinion and control mass consumption. In his 1928 treatise, *Propaganda*, Bernays is explicit in this regard: "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, and our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. ... It is they who pull the wires that control the public mind."

order to accommodate and capitalize upon the exponential increase in lithographic printing during this period, both municipal governments and private owners began to lease a wide range of surfaces and structures in public space to advertisers, from the façades of entire apartment buildings to the sides of *pissoirs*. The construction of new structures and forms of “street furniture,” built for the sole purpose of poster advertising, also became integral elements of urban modernization. This included the erection of dedicated panels on the walls of buildings, trams and carriages, kiosks, and in Paris specifically, the now-iconic *colonnes Morris*, all of which could be leased for promotional purposes.¹⁴ The appearance of these licensed spaces dedicated entirely to visual advertising marks a pivotal turn towards the privatization and regulation of poster display in the modern city in ways that aesthetically and structurally reoriented public life towards new forms of consumption.

These forms of urban modernization are prime examples of the ways in which advertising brokers, aided by local governments, sought to control and profit from what had previously been a spontaneous (and thus potentially subversive) popular culture of fly-posting. The conversion of fly-posting from political activity into private enterprise was further assisted by new taxes and

¹⁴ The latter are perhaps most quintessentially associated with the Parisian boulevard, and were frequently depicted in many notable artworks from the period that capture the dynamics of the street during the *belle époque*. However, the first freestanding cylindrical advertising columns were in fact designed and constructed in Berlin by the German printer Ernst Litfaß in 1854, as a means to regulate the rampant fly-posting that many felt defaced the local urban landscape, by containing it to designated (and privately leased) space. The first advertising columns built in Paris in 1868 were modelled after the German design, though in France they became referred to as *colonnes Morris* when Gabriel Morris—a local printer who specialized in event posters—submitted the idea for a network of advertising columns to a competition launched by the city, and in winning was granted exclusive rights to the advertising space of the entire network. By 1879 this included a total of 451 columns. By 1900 the Morris company had become “La Société Fermière des Colonnes-Affiches,” and in 1986 was eventually acquired by the outdoor advertising company, JCDecaux—a multinational company that also now owns the public advertising space of bus-stop systems, billboards, kiosks and other “street furniture”, as well as bicycle rental networks, in cities throughout the world. Shortly after its Parisian acquisition, JCDecaux began to ‘export’ the Morris column model “whenever the Group’s subsidiaries won tenders abroad” (<https://www.jcdecaux.com/blog/morris-column-historical-and-mythical-advertising-support>).

laws that rendered the freedom to post (*liberté de l’affichage*) a right that many individuals and non-commercial groups simply could not afford to exercise (Carter 2012: 16).¹⁵ As a result, as Carter documents, while “posters for the purposes of publicity flourished” in the late nineteenth-century, political posters declined dramatically during this same period (2012: 16). And, while the regulation of poster advertising through taxation and the privatization of public surfaces was often justified by the state as a means to protect the aesthetics of urban landscapes from the chaos and clutter of “unlicensed” fly-posting, these were also primary ways in which the promotional poster—as well as the industrial capitalist project of mass consumption it supported—were more concretely integrated into the built environment of the city.

* * *

With these historical conditions in mind, here I would like to consider how late nineteenth-century public debates surrounding the visual aesthetics and growing ubiquity of the promotional poster provide an illuminating lens onto the ideological knots at the centre of the perceived “crisis in attention” that the mobile spectator, or “passer-by,” embodied.

To begin, it is clear that people both within and outside the world of fine art have, since the advent of the modern form, often considered especially beautiful, original, or innovative posters to be legitimate artistic achievements.¹⁶ Indeed, by the turn of the twentieth century, posters advertising diverse commodities and entertainment had become fashionable aesthetic

¹⁵ Carter discusses how, in Paris specifically, the 1881 Press Law “established the right of individuals to post material but contradictorily required a tax stamp” (2012: 16).

¹⁶ For example, in his “Outline of the Art of Advertising Manifesto” (1929), the futurist artist and writer, Fortunato Depero, celebrated visual advertising as an art “free from any academic refrain,” describing it as “cheerfully bold, exhilarating, hygienic and optimistic” (44).

objects to collect, the subject of numerous books and articles, and the focus of multiple gallery and museum exhibits (Sontag 1999: 198).¹⁷ In Paris specifically, the creative flourishing and celebrated works of notable poster artists in the late nineteenth century shaped a widespread embracing of the form as a distinctly modern and culturally relevant medium of artistic expression. This is reflected in the writings of many critics and artists of the time who praised the aesthetic merits of especially pleasing or innovative posters, and who enthusiastically championed the talents of particular artists. Moreover, while public appreciation of novel poster aesthetics clearly reached across class lines, the opening of dedicated poster-selling shops on Paris' right bank, as well as the printing of smaller copies of popular posters for purchase by middle-class collectors, are evidence that the form was increasingly embraced within bourgeois spheres of sociality and performances of aesthetic taste (Guffey 2012: 51-52).

The increasingly spectacular aesthetics of mass consumption that the poster form promoted did not go uncontested, however; as the spread of commodity images in public space intensified, so too did public criticism of its broader cultural impacts. In Britain, for example, cultural commentary in the latter half of the nineteenth century regularly condemned the 'vulgar' aesthetics of promotional posters, placards, billboards, and other forms of visual advertising displayed in public space, reflecting widespread social concerns that these were degrading the beauty of local landscapes, urban architecture, and even 'culture' in a general sense.¹⁸ These concerns were not unique to the British context; in France, contemporaneous

¹⁷ Sontag discusses two public art exhibits on the poster in 1890s London. The nineteenth-century French historian Ernest Maindron argued that the poster should be elevated to a distinct category of fine art, writing two books on the subject and curating an exhibit on the history of advertising in 1889 (Verhagen 1995: 110).

¹⁸ For example, in 1893 the civil servant and journalist, Richardson Evans, published a treatise entitled *The Age of Disfigurement*, in which he wrote: "There have been some gratifying indications of late that the March of

discourse on the ubiquity of visual advertising in public space was often just as critical. Satirical texts like Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's short story "*L'Affichage celeste*," for example, record a pervasive nineteenth-century anxiety that advertising was not just disfiguring landscapes, but also colonizing imaginations.¹⁹ According to Williams (1982), such texts presented prophetic "forebodings of the moral consequences when commerce seizes all visions, even heavenly ones, to hawk its wares" (86). As the dominant aesthetic modality of an unchecked industrial capitalism governed by an abstract economic rationalism, the saturation of public space with advertising messages was perceived not just as an encroachment of capitalist interests into the public sphere, but also as a direct threat to the transcendental realm of human experience.

Public displeasure expressed towards the impacts of an inherently aggressive aesthetics of poster advertising on the beauty of lived space and the moral fabric of the public sphere were echoed by many art critics and artists, who argued that posters for 'vulgar' or mundane commodities devalued the medium. Read alongside competing appreciations of the form, these debates about poster aesthetics reflect considerable contestation over the rightful relationship

Disfigurement is not absolutely or universally accepted as the inexorable law of progress. ... Several months ago, someone discovered that a huge advertising board was a reprehensible intrusion in one of the sweetest stretches of the Thames, and wrote to tell the public so. ... [there is] evidence of a lingering belief that the community should not be unreservedly at the mercy of the bill-sticker; and now several persons appear to have become simultaneously aware that the sky-line advertising goes beyond the permissible limit of Philistinism" (1). These forms of public commentary were accompanied by the establishment of citizen organizations and regulatory bodies during this period, such as the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising (SCAPA), which formed in London in 1898 and worked locally against advertising's disfigurement of both rural scenery and urban space.

¹⁹ In "*L'Affichage celeste*," the narrator describes a regime of "absolute Publicity" that projects advertising messages into the constellations of the night sky: "Wouldn't it be something to surprise the Great Bear himself if, suddenly, between his sublime paws, this disturbing message were to appear: *Are corsets necessary, yes or no?*" Then, anticipating the reader's discomfort, Villiers' ironic narrator insists that this "instructive spectacle... is not a question here of feelings. Business is business. ... Heaven will finally make something of itself and acquire an intrinsic value" (cited in Williams 1982: 86).

between “art” and “commerce” in ways that continue to trouble advertising practice to this day, as the impasse between Alice and Nico in the vignette that opened this chapter exemplifies.²⁰

It is therefore vital to consider how popular cultural appreciation of posters as collectible aesthetic objects or artworks in their own right coexisted uneasily during this period with pervasive social criticism about the ubiquity and dominant aesthetics of advertising in the public sphere. Supporters argued that the mass distribution of artistic works as commodity images—reproduced not only in the form of posters, but also in the pages of newspapers and magazines—democratically allowed “fine art” to be shared with broader publics. This not only increased recognition for artists, but also allowed reproduced artworks to be enjoyed by the working class, who were historically excluded from spaces of bourgeois sociality where such works were typically displayed. Conversely, advertising’s critics derided the practice as a vulgar devaluation of the autonomous art object—a commodification that reduced an artwork’s inherent aesthetic value as well as the creative integrity of the artist to the utilitarian function of commercial persuasion. Such criticism was often wielded by artists whose original works were acquired and then reproduced in altered form by advertisers, often without the consent of the original artist (McFall 2004; Garvey 1996).

²⁰ Such debates intensified in the late-nineteenth century, as advertisers began not only to commission original pieces from visual artists, but also to purchase existing artworks and, once rights were acquired, to modify them with promotional messages and brand logos. These replicated and newly-branded copies would then be mass produced as promotional posters, displayed in large form or printed within the pages of magazines. Such practices were clear strategies that attempted to counteract public distrust and perception of advertising as crass or vulgar—attempts on the part of advertisers to improve the perceived cultural legitimacy of mass consumption through an aesthetic association with the refinement and good taste of ‘high culture’. See McFall (2004) for more detailed discussion.

Debates about the negative cultural impacts of commercial posters consequently reflect a growing schism between bourgeois economic interests on the one hand, and a reigning ideology of aesthetic disinterestedness on the other.²¹ While the former were advanced through new institutional arrangements that supported and promoted mass production, the latter was challenged by the spectacle of mass consumption that pervaded the city, as well as by the aggressive aesthetics of modern advertising that accompanied it. From one perspective, public concern about the moral and cultural implications of poster promotion can be read as reflecting a bourgeois cultural conservatism, whereby the form was seen as “an intrusive presence in the public scene” (Verhagen 1995: 109). In its appeal to a broad cross-section of society, the poster was also seen as inviting a worrisome “intimate mingling of the classes” (ibid).²² In this sense, appreciation of modern poster aesthetics—especially amongst middle-class collectors and art critics—can be read as undermining existing hierarchies of taste, and as therefore presenting a potential challenge to the bourgeois social order that such hierarchies legitimized.

From another perspective, however, middle-class debates about poster aesthetics illuminate intensifying worries that the form extended commodity consumption into new areas of public life and subjective experience in ways that risked engendering a state of *perceptual alienation* within the self.²³ Cultural reticence related to the poster’s growing ubiquity, especially when considered alongside other forms of consumer spectacle (or *phantasmagoria*), consequently signals a growing middle class wariness about the perceived encroachments of

²¹ Pope (1978) states that in this regard posters were often perceived as “harbingers and causes of the dissolution of traditional moral standards” (123).

²² Georges d’Avenel, cited in Verhagen (1995: 109).

²³ This perceptual alienation is dramatized in the particular disassociation first diagnosed as *kleptomania* in the bourgeois woman consumer during this same period. See Abelson (1989).

capitalist interests in the public sphere, under conditions of accelerating industrialization and consumption. These concerns speak to how the unbridled pursuit of profit, visibly manifest in the saturation of public space with commodity images and promoted through a correlated discourse of modern progress, was perceived by many as fundamentally incompatible with the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality that the disinterested contemplation of beauty and virtue in aesthetic experience was theoretically meant to advance. Anxieties about the effects of the nineteenth-century poster on individual attention—and public *reason*—are not unique to this moment; these have been echoed throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century in ways that suggest such anxiety to be a defining feature of both modern and late modern eras.²⁴

As Sontag observes, “posters are aggressive because they appear in the context of *other* posters” (1999: 196). Public responses to the form’s dominant aesthetics, as described above, illuminate this fact. These responses centred not just upon the aesthetic qualities of specific posters, but also—especially—upon their ubiquitous presence in public space, as the modern city itself was variously celebrated *and* worried over as a sensorium of frenzied consumption and never-ending spectacle. The aggressive aesthetics of poster design during this period were explicitly identified by advertisers and poster artists as an intentional tactic for halting and commanding the attention of the urban passer-by: a “mobile spectator” whose hurried movement through the city was both symptomatic and constitutive of the accelerated pace of

²⁴ See anxieties are reflected, for example, in Postman’s discussion of the effects of television in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985). More recently, Wu’s *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* (2017) as well as Crary’s *Scorched Earth: Beyond the Digital Age to a Post-Capitalist World* (2022) consider the effects of the internet and digital media upon individual attention and, in consequence, public life.

urban life under industrial capitalism. It is consequently this figure (alongside the bourgeois woman consumer) in which a “crisis of attention” is first diagnosed—both as a distinctly modern condition with potentially profound political implications, but also, within the field of advertising, as a *creative challenge* for the artist and advertiser.

Ultimately, while the individual poster attempted to command the attention of the spectator through its aggressive visual aesthetics, the spectacular proliferation of visual advertising paradoxically created conditions in which the dominant mode of aesthetic attention the passer-by embodied became increasingly one of distraction. Put another way, “attention and distraction cannot be thought outside of a continuum in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another, as part of a social field in which the same imperatives and forces incite one and the other” (Crary 2001: 51). As a quintessential form of consumer capitalist aesthetics, the modern promotional poster illuminates Crary’s arguments in this regard: while it demands the attention of the spectator in its aggressive aesthetic design, its ubiquity also paradoxically transforms public space into a site for the perpetual distractedness of consumer spectacle in ways that engender widespread *inattention* within a civil society increasingly defined as a consuming public. Consequently, as Buck-Morss argues, the overall aesthetic effect of these “phantasmagorias” is ultimately *anaesthetic*, achieved “through flooding the senses” (1992: 22).

Against this crisis of attention, the ongoing elaboration of an “ideal of sustained attentiveness as a constitutive element of a creative and free subjectivity” is significant. Insofar as this idealized aesthetic attitude of sustained attention continues to be heralded as a key site for the cultivation of a “free and creative subjectivity” that resists the alienating effects and

discipline of the modern capitalist apparatus, I argue that it has also paradoxically been incorporated into a capitalist logic through which the artist employed in commercial promotion comes to construe *the creative process of aesthetic production* (even if for banal consumer items) as an end in itself. (Hence why Nico was unable to recognize the “problem” of comparing his commercial work to Alice’s choreography practice). This aestheticized stance towards the perceived agency and active imagination involved in advertising creation enables the individual ad worker to evade critical consideration of advertising’s aesthetic effects within the public sphere through a focus on the pursuit of *being creative* as a mode of individual self-actualization and a marker of exceptional social status. Crucially, I argue that in this way creativity also becomes more firmly tethered to the fantasy of autological subjectivity; it becomes, in other words, imagined as an exceptional form of personhood defined in opposition to theoretically *uncreative* (and therefore passive, subjugated, *occupied*) selves who, presumably, would rather the potato chip ad at the bus stop be funny.

“The new wave is old news”: Being on the avant-garde

Lars invites me to Bethlehem XXX on rue St. Laurent, where the Mile End becomes Little Italy. The aesthetic of the venue is maximalist irreverent meets flea market fever dream. It’s an abundance of: Jesus art, Christmas lights, stuffed animals, dinosaur figurines. A wall of Taliban portraits. A framed painting of Pope Jean-Paul II on the bathroom door. A limbless mannequin nailed to the wall, illuminated from the inside. Televisions streaming disorienting loops of pornographic anime and camel-riding Arabs in the desert.

I don’t know where to rest my eyes.

Bethlehem XXX is technically a restaurant and bar, with tables to sit at and a menu that changes weekly. It’s also a hangout for a revolving crew of local artists and “more vulgar

creative types,” as Lars (an advertising copywriter) describes himself, grinning. The kitchen closes at variable hours according to the whims of the chef, Beaver, who on this particular night is already performing a musical set with his band when I arrive at 10:00 p.m. People move from table to table, socializing, dancing, and drinking copiously. Beaver wears a captain hat.

Dinner has run out, but Lars instructs me to take a seat at the bar as he pops his head into the kitchen. He’s shoed out by the waitress, who reappears a minute later carrying a dessert plate. “With our condolences,” she says, raising her eyebrows in Lars’ direction. It’s some kind of sweet potato mousse, laced with saffron and topped with whipped cream. It’s delicious. Lars is pleased.

I get the sense that Lars is coked up, but I can’t tell for sure because I don’t know him well enough. He wears thick-rimmed glasses, a white t-shirt, and a black suit. He runs a hand through his blonde hair as he tells me about his website, *sublimities.ac*, which he describes as “aesthetic musings on things of no importance.” It’s an encyclopedic meandering through everything that catches Lars’ fancy, from cinema and Italian futurism, to Bernie Madoff and the man with the world’s largest nose (Mehmet Özyürek). When I make the mistake of calling it a blog, Lars corrects me: “it’s more of an anti-blog.”

Lars and I are talking about Agnes Varda when a man in leather shorts and a wolf mask comes over, interrupting our conversation. “The new wave is old news,” he informs us. He lifts his mask to lick Lars’ face before picking up a harmonica and joining Beaver’s band.

“That’s Bernardino.”

Danish by origin, Lars tells me that he moved to Montreal when he got a job as an English copywriter for the local branch of an international agency. He speaks four languages. He’s erudite, and easily distracted. We decide to do our interview another day, and spend the rest of the night drinking and dancing with Lars’ friends, which as far as I can tell includes pretty much everyone here.

I wake up the next morning to a Facebook friend request from Lars. I accept. I see that the agency where he works recently ran a profile of him.

Under Lars’ headshot, the post lists a number of “things to know about Lars,” including: 1) his interests range from the Renaissance to the avant-garde; and 2) he owns an elephant.

According to Walter Benjamin: “Around 1840 it was elegant to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. (This gives a conception of the tempo of flânerie)” (1999: V, 532). Whereas the figure of

the anonymous passer-by can be seen to embody a distinctly modern ‘crisis in attention’ that emerges in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as I have described above, we might now consider how she meets her antithesis in the *flâneur*.²⁵ Why is it that the flâneur becomes a paradigmatic figure of urban modernity during this particular period? Appearing in the mid-nineteenth century as both a literary archetype and as the embodiment of an aestheticized non-conformity embraced by certain segments of the middle class, it is clear that the figure of the flâneur dramatizes central tensions inherent to bourgeois experiences of capitalist modernity.

Generally charted as originating with Balzac, celebrated by Baudelaire, and critically theorized by Benjamin (amongst others), the flâneur begs historicizing as a distinct type of urban spectator who, in all his various permutations, saunters around in direct contradistinction to the pace and purpose of the passer-by. If the passer-by is associated with a distracted passivity that is both the effect and perpetual promotional challenge of industrial consumer capitalism, the flâneur presents a diametric form of agency in the active and penetrating aesthetic attention he brings to the observation of modern urban life, and in the generative creativity through which he refracts such experience into works of art and literature. Whereas the passer-by hurriedly moves

²⁵ Here I deliberately gender the passer-by as feminine and the flâneur as masculine, as the former’s association with the feminized masses was in fact a predominant trope during this period, against which the flâneur was defined as a masculine antithesis. Indeed, as Parsons (2000) describes, nineteenth-century anxieties about the disruptive and uncontrollable potential of the crowd were highly gendered: “Popular news and theories tended to equate mass culture with feminization. In particular, the crowd in all its strata was depicted as female. *Punch* cartoons of proletarian protests in London in the 1880s and 1890s depicted a raging mob of grotesque women, alluding to stereotypical images of the guillotine mobs of the French Revolution. More frequently the female crowd on the streets were shoppers and prostitutes, indistinguishable both in terms of their adherence to fashion and their uncontrolled desires” (28-29). The gendering of the crowd within popular culture was paralleled within the emergent social sciences, particularly in the influential work of Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud, whose theories of crowd psychology “continued the identification by describing the mass with highly feminine adjectives” (29). Ultimately, Parsons argues, “common to all these studies is the orientation of ‘femininity’ towards the unconscious, amorality, materiality, and sexuality, and of ‘masculinity’ towards rationality and consciousness” (29).

through the city according to the productive imperatives of capitalist time, the flâneur transcends these disciplinary effects, embodying instead a free subjectivity in his leisurely and self-directed lingering—a capacity for *dwelling* in the otherwise transient public space of the street that enables him to enter into the heart of the crowd whilst nevertheless resisting its frenetic pull (hence the turtle).²⁶ And, while the passer-by remains vulnerable to the aggressive spectacle of commodity display and promotion that distracts attention and fragments experience, the flâneur, by contrast, masterfully “interprets and reorganizes the city’s images and messages to make it intelligible” (Murail 2013).

For these reasons, the flâneur provides an especially illuminating vantage point for examining shifts in Western understandings of creativity and aesthetic philosophy that occurred in dialogue with the technological, political, and economic transformations of modernity. As an imaginative space and performative mode for the negotiation of competing ideological constructions, aesthetic philosophies, and social aspirations within the middle class, *flânerie* involves historically variable engagements with and experiences of modern capitalist conditions. On this point, Boutin (2012) observes: “variously defined as a fashionable male idler, a leisurely stroller, an expert reader of urban signs, an artist or writer, and a sociologist *avant la lettre*, the flâneur remains as multifarious and elusive as the city with which he is associated” (124). In analysing this variability, Gluck (2003) argues that representations and narratives of *flânerie* during the mid-nineteenth century can nevertheless be categorized into two specific types: the

²⁶ This distinctive relationship to the modern crowd was emphasized as a definitive feature of the flâneur by Baudelaire: “In “Le Peintre de la vie modern,” Baudelaire compares the flâneur to Poe’s ‘man of the crowd’. As he who chooses to dwell at the centre of the movement of the crowd but who resists being sucked into it, he remains disengaged, masterful, princely, invisible, superior, and omniscient” (Boutin 2012: 128).

popular flâneur, associated with the emergent consumer culture of the modern city within which he is seen to embody both “expert knowledge” and “discriminating taste” (69), and the avant-garde flâneur, more closely associated with artistic originality and the aestheticized lifestyle of bohemianism.

While at first glance these two flâneurs may seem to embody paradoxical responses to the “maelstrom” of modern experience, Gluck suggests that their aesthetic and ideological similarities in fact illuminate how “the boundaries between modernist art and popular culture were more porous than has been hitherto imagined, and that the opposition between avant-garde aesthetics and popular commercial culture was far more complicated than appears on the surface” (55).²⁷ What are the implications of this porousness on elaborations of creativity in modern capitalist contexts, particularly as these responded to the perceived crisis in attention, examined above? What remains common across nineteenth-century engagements with the flâneur is a cultural insistence on the flâneur as an *exceptional* individual—an individual inescapably born of and sustained by bourgeois wealth and the particular aesthetic education of that class, while simultaneously seen to occupy a position outside (or above) the banality of middle-class manners and commercial interests.

Nineteenth-century representations and discourse on the flâneur reflect how emergent constructions of creativity as a site of individual freedom and autonomy became associated with

²⁷ As Berman writes: “To be a modern... is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows” (1982: 346).

an idealized capacity for aesthetic discernment that resisted the subjections of an accelerating consumer capitalism. As Gluck demonstrates, what becomes apparent through an examination of early representations of the flâneur is a pronounced tendency to define the figure primarily in terms of *his distinction from other social types*.²⁸ A number of popular texts about the flâneur appear in the mid-nineteenth century, the authors of which insist that their middle-class readers “not confound the knave with the flâneur,” that the authentic flâneur must be distinguished from “ridiculous imitators, who walk all day, their idleness both tiresome and irritating,” and that the flâneur exists apart from a whole host of common bourgeois characters (lawyers and doctors with “dilettantish interest in the arts”, the tourist, the family man, the shopper), all of whom serve as banal foils for the elusive, yet heroically discriminating flâneur (Gluck 65-68). As a negation of these other contemporaneous types, Gluck argues, the popular flâneur came to occupy “a privileged, even transcendental, position within urban modernity.” Put differently, the most essential trait of the popular flâneur was his capacity for remaining *apart from* while simultaneously *immersed in* and *aesthetically attuned to* the urban public. This unique position endowed the flâneur with a certain “scopic power” that enabled him to render modern experience more transparent (Murail 2013). It also accorded him an esteemed cultural status: “He rose above the fragmented world of social types and became a cultural archetype, with access to the totality of urban culture, unavailable to other characters” (Gluck 69).

²⁸ Gluck (2003) describes how the popular flâneur of the 1830s and 1840s (a precursor of the later avant-garde version elaborated especially by Baudelaire in the 1850s) was a particularly popular subject within a range of commercial publications, including the panorama essays (“collectively authored vignettes of Parisian life and characters, bound in multivolume deluxe albums and conspicuously displayed in bourgeois homes”), and the Parisian *physiologies* (a genre of “pocket-size illustrated booklets about social stereotypes, sold to a mass audience at 1 franc a piece”) (61-62).

Unlike the avant-garde flâneur of the late-nineteenth century who becomes more clearly associated with the generative creativity of the modern artist, the exceptionalism of the mid-century popular flâneur lies primarily in the *discerning aesthetic attitude* he brings to the observation of modern life and, especially, to the spectacle of consumer capitalist display that increasingly defined the nineteenth-century cities of Europe, Britain, and North America. In this way, we can read narratives and (self)representations of the flâneur as extensions of a dialectical aesthetic ideology born of the Enlightenment. This dialectic is one whereby freedom associated with individual imagination exists in perpetual tension with bourgeois class aspirations and concerns about social order, expressed in the preoccupation with *taste* as a form of cultural legitimization. Within the context of the nineteenth century—a period characterized by ongoing political upheaval, especially in France, as well as by accelerated technological revolution and profound cultural change across Britain, Europe, and North America—this dialectic was imbued with a new urgency. Increasing attention paid to the flâneur during this period signals how such a dialectic began to be articulated in novel ways, as emergent anxieties about the boundaries and functions of bourgeois civil society increased in dialogue with intensifying commercial capitalist attempts to harness the impulses of the *crowd* to *consumption*.

Within this cultural context, the contrast between the distracted passer-by and the discerning flâneur was therefore not merely the stuff of flippant cultural commentary, but was in fact a dramatizing of pervasive bourgeois anxieties. If the feminised passer-by was imagined as *acted upon* (harpooned, arrested) by the spectacle of commodity fetishism, the masculine flâneur actively inverted this by subjecting the commodity to the virtuosity of his own imagination: “What appeared as an isolated, and self-contained, commodity to the common

observer, was transformed by the flâneur's imagination into a coherent story of exotic adventure and heroic creation" (Gluck 70). The flâneur's exceptional ability to bring an aesthetic attitude to *bear upon* the spectacular distractions of industrial capitalism and modern progress must therefore be seen as a distinctly bourgeois attempt to assert what Crary describes as "an ideal of sustained attentiveness as a constitutive element of a creative and free subjectivity" (1999: 1-2) against the discipline and alienations of its own class projects.

With this in mind, sustained cultural attention and interest in the flâneur throughout the nineteenth century—and arguably into the contemporary moment—illuminates a broader transference of an Enlightenment emancipatory ideal to the realm of aesthetic experience and artistic creation. For a genealogy of creativity in Western thought, such developments were pivotal ideological transformations through which the concept became associated with an emergent cultural archetype characterized especially by his aestheticized stance towards the commodity fetishism of modern capitalism. Furthermore, it is significant that over the course of the nineteenth century the flâneur becomes more explicitly associated not just with an exceptional capacity for aesthetic discernment (as embodied in the popular flâneur described above), but also increasingly with the figure of the artist as genius. In this second form the flâneur "represented a principle of differentiation and originality" not only in the discerning aesthetic attitude he brought to the maelstrom of the modern city, but also and especially in his aesthetic *representation* of such things within an emergent consumer market for modern art and literature (Gluck 2005: 102). "Few men are gifted with the capacity of seeing," writes Baudelaire

of “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863). But “there are fewer still who *possess the power of expression*” (12, italics added).²⁹

It is noteworthy that the convergence of the flâneur with the modern or avant-garde artist by the late nineteenth century occurred in their shared relation to *bohemia*. Seigel (1999) argues that both the bohemian and the avant-garde flâneur performed a “dramatization of distance from bourgeois life” that ultimately became “modern art’s best form of self-advertisement” (1999: 365). This dramatization hinged on the adoption of a countercultural stance and subversive aesthetics in both art *and* life. Both were meant to provoke reactions from a bourgeois audience; the bohemian writer Gerard de Nerval, for example, was (in)famous for his strolls in the Luxembourg Gardens, accompanied by his pet lobster, Thibault, who he kept tied to the end of a blue silk ribbon leash (Seigel 1999: 26). In similarly eccentric fashion, the novelist and literary critic Barbey D'Aurevilly carried a bejewelled walking stick, which he referred to as “my wife” (Burton 2016). Such behaviours are notable not simply because they are outlandish social provocations, but also because they underscore how a bohemian distancing from bourgeois conventions enhanced the artist’s creative “aura” in ways that, as I elaborate in the section to follow, made his work more marketable to a bourgeois consuming public.

²⁹ Genealogical accounts of the avant-garde flâneur generally trace the literary origins of this particular type to Baudelaire, and specifically to his essay, “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863). While Baudelaire focused on the artist Constantin Guys, the essay is more broadly a treatise on artistic creativity as original genius, as well as an attempt to define the nature and social value of modern art. It is significant that the publication of the essay coincided with the infamous Salon des Refusés, insofar as both Baudelaire and the artists who exhibited works there (especially Manet, with whom Baudelaire had a close friendship) are generally seen as bridging Romantic and modern aesthetic movements. It is significant that Baudelaire elevates *the modern artist* as an exceptional individual with unique *aesthetic sensibility*, but also how he does so through a redefinition of creativity. Specifically, Baudelaire’s essay associates artistic creativity with imaginative genius and a contemplative (or curious) attention, to be distinguished from its previous associations with skill, artisanship or *techné*.

Increased middle-class interest in the lifestyle and persona of the avant-garde flâneur, as testament of his creative and thus exceptional social status, reflects salient changes to what Charles Taylor describes as “a kind of piety which still surrounds art and the artist in our times which comes from the sense that what they reveal has great moral and spiritual significance; that in it lies the key to a certain depth, or fullness, or seriousness, or intensity of life, or to a certain wholeness” (1989: 422). This can be observed not only in the aestheticized stance of non-conformity that the flâneur or artist himself asserts in insisting upon his individual exceptionalism, but also and especially in the bourgeois public’s *fascination with* such figures in their relation to bohemia.³⁰ According to Bourdieu (1996), the *creative distinction* of the modern artist is asserted as a “double rupture” from both bourgeois and popular culture, involving a “permanent exhibition of paradoxical singularity” in both art and life (78). Constitutive of this transformation, the avant-garde’s “will to stand out and to astonish” consequently reflects “an ostentation of difference or even the pleasure of displeasing [through] the concerted intention to disconcert, to scandalize” (78).

As the vignette with which I opened this section illustrates, it is clear that this double-rupture continues to animate how creativity is understood, claimed, and given value in late modern capitalist contexts, like Montreal.³¹ The particularly ostentatious aesthetics of Bethlehem XXX and the subjects/denizens who made and inhabited it (like Beaver, Lars, and

³⁰ See Seigel (1999) for further discussion of bourgeois interest in bohemianism. His examination of *fin de siècle* Parisian cabarets provides an especially illuminating lens onto this “new kind of symbiosis between *la Bohème* and the bourgeoisie, and to the existence of a broad public seeking a taste of Bohemia” (216).

³¹ This is evidenced in the positive reviews and attention Bethlehem XXX received from mainstream media publications, like the Montreal daily newspaper *La Presse*, the Canadian news magazine *Maclean’s*, and the local lifestyle magazines and websites, Cult MTL and nightlife.ca. The restaurant was also profiled in a “Munchies: Chef’s Night Out” video produced by Vice Media. Though these publications reach across demographic and linguistic differences, they undeniably target an urban middle-class audience seeking novel aesthetic experiences.

Bernardino) speak to how the foundational tensions the aestheticized stance of the flâneur attempted to overcome remain persistently unresolved.³² In this regard, insofar as the flâneur is perceived as a distinctly *creative* iteration of the ideal autological subject, we can read both the historical and contemporary appeal of flânerie as reflecting distinctively bourgeois desires for a free and un-alienated existence that resists the disciplinary and alienating imperatives of (late) modern capitalism.

In recognizing how the “double-rupture” of the avant-garde or modern artist and the correlated reimagining of creativity as an exceptional form of personhood remain embroiled within processes of class distinction, I do not wish to suggest that the artist’s desire for an existential “wholeness” is not genuine. Nor do I wish to suggest that public fascination with avant-garde figures and spaces is only commodity fetish; indeed, my own experiences of spending time with such individuals, in such spaces, were often riotously fun, sensually pleasurable, and socially effervescent. Rather, I argue that the developments outlined above created salient cultural conditions for a reimagining of creativity in terms that reflected and reinforced, rather than resisted, a commodity logic. Under these conditions, the avant-garde flâneur’s aestheticized performances of *being creative* claimed creativity as a sovereign and singular agency that *distinguished* him, as a “good” (self-fashioned, sovereign, liberated) autological subject from other, more socially-determined selves.

³² On this point, I find it significant that Bethelme XXX closed after three years, despite its ongoing popularity. Beaver continues to move between his different careers of chef, musician, and visual artist. Lars is no longer working as an agency copywriter, and is now working as a “Freelance Senior Creative.” Bernardino remains an iconoclastic musician and entertainer, though he has left Montreal for Paris.

* * *

In considering the implications of the myth of autogenesis for modern art, Buck-Morss takes Kant's *Critique of Judgment* as a turning point in Western aesthetic philosophy, towards an increasing embrace of aesthetic autotelism. This occurred in dialogue with the rise of the autological subject, in whom "the narcissistic illusion of total control" that comes to preoccupy "modern man" becomes prominent. (Here I am interested not necessarily in the accuracy of such a reading of Kant, but rather in how Kant's writings on the aesthetic were taken up and interpreted in this way across a range of avant-garde aesthetic philosophies and modern art movements). Crucially, this turn is one that involved stripping from aesthetics its original associations with *the sensual*, in favour of new associations with the abstractions of art, imagination, and the *transcendental ideal*. According to Buck-Morss, "Kant's transcendental subject purges himself of the senses which endanger autonomy not only because they unavoidably entangle him in the world, but, specifically, because they make him passive ('languid' [*schmelzend*] is Kant's word) instead of active ('vigorous' [*wacker*])" (9).

The consequences of this "autotelic turn" upon emergent ideas of creativity were considerable. It is therefore significant that the aesthetic attention the flâneur/modern artist is seen to embody is one of penetrating *scopic mastery*, asserted in contradistinction to the sensory-overwhelm and passive experience associated with the feminized passer-by and consumer. These interrelated developments illuminate Tzanelli's (2020) observation that, "early on in modernity, Western and European discourse of *being* sought to connect the myth of creative imagination to the masculinisation of human freedom at large." Such observations

speak to how new definitions of creativity embedded the concept into nested liberal binaries (individual freedom/social constraint, masculine/feminine, creative/un-creative, producer/consumer) in ways that drew upon and reinforced the particular forms of domination that liberalism perpetuates and obscures. By the turn of the twentieth century, this gendering of creativity is formally theorized by Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* (1901) as a distinction between “*Weibesaesthetik*”—a “feminine aesthetics” that he associates with a “receptivity to sensations from the outside” (Buck-Morss 1992: 10)—against which an idealized masculine artist-philosopher can be defined as a self-contained and self-directed “autopoietic subject,” or *Übermensch*, who embodies “unlimited creation and enjoyment... freed from moral control” (Reckwitz 2017: 50-51).³³ The overlapping figures of the avant-garde flâneur, the bohemian, and the modern artist exemplify how creativity came to be associated with this idealized “autopoietic subject”—a subject I have shown above as defined primarily in negation to other (feminine, passive, socially-determined) selves. Nietzsche’s distinctions in this regard are not unique; rather, this autological ideal was deployed within a range of aesthetic movements throughout the modern period, and continues to inform what—and who—is claimed to *be creative* today.

³³ See Caroline Joan S. Picart’s *Resentment and the “Feminine” in Nietzsche’s Politico-Aesthetics* (1999) for further discussion of the implications of Nietzsche’s misogyny on his political philosophy.

Incorporating creativity: modern art markets and “full-service” agencies

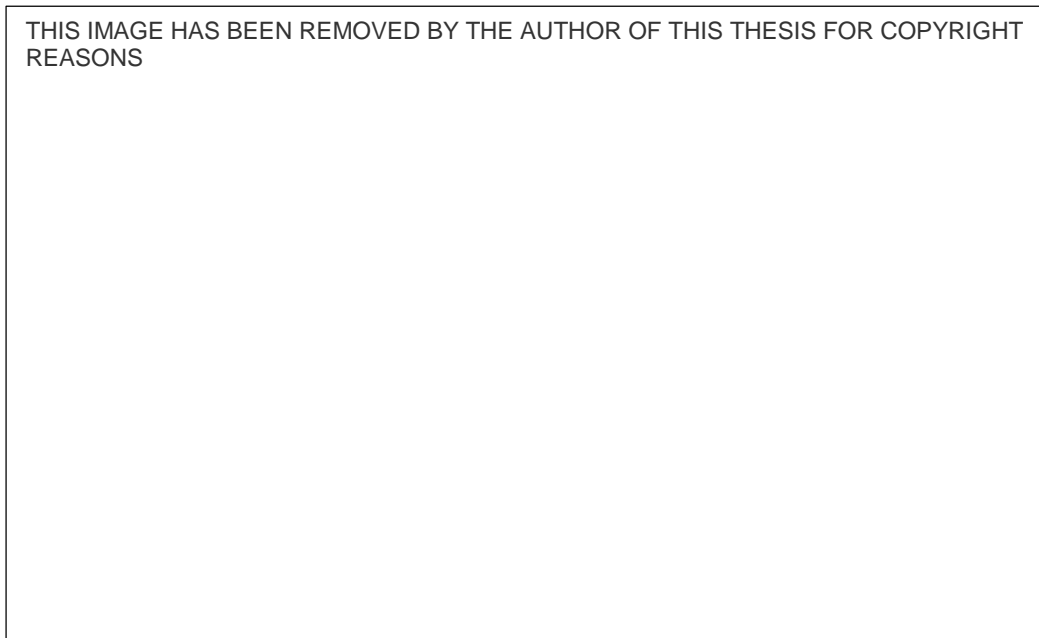


Figure 2.1: “Mountain” print ad for Jeep. The ad shows a view of mountains as seen through a Jeep windshield, ornately framed and hung as though on a gallery wall. Created by the Montreal ad agency, Publicis. 2014.

Interest in the role of the creative imagination as a site of individual agency, first theorized by Enlightenment thinkers, was elaborated by the Romantics in the early decades of the nineteenth century. These elaborations were vital contributions to what Krauss (1986) describes as the “cult of originality” that came to surround the figure of the artist in modernity, with ongoing relevance to dominant understandings of creativity in late capitalist contexts today. As Wilf (2014) observes, insofar as “Romantic ideologies conceptualize creativity as the solitary, ex nihilo creation of products of self-evident and universal value... by highly exceptional and gifted individuals,” these ideas have remained “part the fabric of the popular imagination in the West, a taken-for-granted script about creative agency” (398). In this section I examine how nineteenth century ideas of creativity that attempted to counteract the utilitarian reductions of capitalism,

beginning with Romanticism and extending to the avant-garde, were recuperated into a capitalist system of value by the end of the century. This occurred, in part, through two institutional developments that “liberated” the artist from aristocratic patronage: 1) the rise of a modern art market organized according to principles of speculative investment; and 2) the incorporation of the artist into the first “full service” advertising agencies, by the turn of the twentieth century.

Enlightenment theorization of the *creative imagination* and a correlated emphasis on *original genius* were taken up by the Romantics in ways that worked to accord a new social importance to the role of the artist in Europe of the modern era. Indeed, Engell (1981) argues that “the idea of the imagination forms a hinge connecting the Enlightenment and Romanticism. It pivots and swings from one period to the other in a fashion that tells more about both of them than does any other point of contact” (6). It is therefore significant that, as Blanning (2012) observes, “by 1800 ‘genius’ had ceased to be one characteristic among many that an individual might possess and had progressed to *encompass the whole person*” (30, italics added).³⁴ These discursive shifts are significant; they illustrate how Romanticism involved a series of conceptual amplifications and reconfigurations of Enlightenment concerns through which a modern creative

³⁴ According to Adorno (1997), “prior to the age of genius the idea of originality bore no authority. That in their new works composers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries made use of whole sections of their own earlier works and those of others, or that painters and architects entrusted their designs to students for completion, is easily misused to justify the stereotypical and routine and to denounce subjective freedom. Yet what this practice demonstrates is that originality had yet to become the object of critical reflection, by no means that there was no originality in artworks; one glance at the difference between Bach and his contemporaries suffices to make the point. ... If, however, originality arose historically, it is also enmeshed in historical injustice, in the predominance of bourgeois commodities that must touch up the every-same as the every-new in order to win customers” (172).

ideal was elaborated as a rare or unique quality that distinguished the “true artist” as an exceptional person.³⁵

The emphasis Romanticism placed on *expressive individualism* was critical in this regard; while the Romantics “shared the Enlightenment’s emphasis on individual self-determination... [they] interpreted this as the right to *self-expression* and *self-discovery*,” (Petrie 1991: 3, italics added). This involved a transference of the Enlightenment emancipatory ideal to the realm of aesthetic experience and artistic creation. It also reoriented philosophical interest in creativity towards the *experience of the artist as creator*. On this point, Blanning (2012) describes Romanticism as involving a profound transition “from a *mimetic* aesthetic centered on the work to an *expressive* aesthetic that put the creator at the center” (15). Consequently, insofar as Romanticism made art into a site for the expression of the artist’s unique individual imagination, it also helped to establish foundational ideological conditions for the reimagining of creativity as a mode of autological subject formation in capitalist contexts. The Romantic elevation of the artist as an exceptional individual is therefore often understood as a pivotal historical moment for the rise of the modern “cult of originality” that became dominant in Western aesthetic

³⁵ It is significant that for the Romantics, the artist—and especially the figure of the poet—is an individual to be venerated as a distinctively special human being, whose creative works are elevated both as authentic and intuitive forms of *self-realization* (what the German Romantics refer to as *bildung*), and as aesthetic/poetic (re)enchantments of nature, often associated with awe-inspiring experience of *the sublime*. According to Engell (1981), for the Romantics, “the creative imagination became the way to unify man’s psyche and, by extension, to reunify man with nature, to return by the paths of self-consciousness to a state of higher nature, a state of the sublime where senses, mind, and spirit elevate the world around them even as they elevate themselves” (8). The particular Romantic preoccupation with the sublime therefore illuminates how the movement’s primary aesthetic tenets were developed not only in response to the perceived disenchantments of nature by scientific investigation and economic utilitarianism, but were also in fact part of a broader philosophical program meant to counter the alienating impacts that these had on *the self*.

movements and understandings of creativity over the course of the nineteenth century, with lasting legacy.

The Romantic elevation of the creative artist from one who *possesses* talent to an exceptional individual defined *as* genius occurred in dialogue with the elevation of art itself as a “supreme form of human activity” that held the potential to counteract the alienations of modernity (Blanning 2012: 30). This is especially apparent in Romantic interest in *the sublime*, as a particularly salient theme that reflected widespread middle-class concerns about the disenchanting effects of industrialization, scientific rationalism, and capitalist utilitarianism upon the human condition. Poetic engagement with the sublime (in both art and nature) offered possibilities for the re-enchantment of the modern world, according transcendental value to aesthetic experience. That the Romantics understood aesthetic experience in art and nature as not fully graspable by reason alone is undeniable. As Berlin (2013) writes, for the Romantics,

The only works of art... which have any value at all... are those which are similar to nature in conveying the pulsations of a not wholly conscious life. ... Any work of art which is simply a piece of knowledge, something which, like science, is simply the product of careful observation and then of noting down in scrupulous terms what you have seen in a fully lucid, accurate and scientific manner—that is death. Life in a work of art is analogous with... what we admire in nature, namely some kind of power, force, energy, life, vitality bursting forth. (113-114)

This importance accorded to art—not just as an object of beauty, but as *a dynamic force constitutive of life itself*—reflects how Romanticism accorded a transcendental purpose to aesthetic experience. The tenacity of these ideas continue to carry implications for what can be considered “true” art; recall Alice’s description of listening to the music she selected for her choreography as an experience that “awakens.” Recall, too, the distinction she draws between her own artistic practice and Nico’s commercial work.

At the same time, within Romantic formulations it is not just disinterestedness but in fact the very *unknowability* of aesthetic experience that distinguishes true art from mere representation—an integral quality of the authentically “original” artwork. It is this quality that Benjamin (1969) later elaborates as one of “aura,” and that Taylor (1989) describes as the “epiphanic” quality of modern art. These associations elevated the artist to a revered cultural status, not just as a unique individual with remarkable skill or talent, but as an almost mythical figure capable of grasping the transcendent “pulsations” of life through an original and generative creativity—a creativity that is imagined accordingly as a vital, or *immanent*, lifeforce in itself. Through these formulations, Romanticism accorded a transcendental role not only to art, *but also to the artist himself*. As Krauss (1986) describes, the modern artist thus came to see himself as “the form giver [who] is the maker of originals, exultant in his own originality. ... And we are encouraged in this belief by the cult of originality that grew up around [him]” (155-156). As the celebration of an ideal autological subjectivity, this “cult” pivoted upon a conceptualization of creativity as inborn; insofar as the Romantic turn was one whereby the *interiority of the self* was perceived as the source of creative inspiration/artistic genius, it constituted a crucial development through which the “myth of autogenesis” was more fully established.³⁶

³⁶ M.H. Abrams has documented how these conceptual shifts involved a profound transformation in Western understandings not just of art, but of creativity and the nature of the human mind itself. This is perhaps most vividly captured in a shift in dominant metaphors used to refer to aesthetic inspiration, whereby the Enlightenment image of the *mirror* is supplanted by the Romantic image of *the lamp*: “the movement from eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century schemes of the mind and its place in nature is indicated by a mutation of metaphors almost exactly parallel to that in contemporary discussions of the nature of art,” writes Abrams. Thus, while the former conceives of the mind as a receptor of knowledge and of art as a reflection of nature, the latter emphasizes the subject as the *source* or *origin* of aesthetic illumination—a “radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives” (Abrams 1953: viii).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Romantic idealization of creativity as “cult of originality” was enshrined in a number of new institutions and cultural practices that helped to untether the artist from aristocratic patronage—an untethering upon which the Romantic re-conceptualization of art as a site of free and unalienated self-expression was entirely dependent (Blanning 2012).³⁷ Indeed, insofar as Romantic elevations of art and the artist continued to inform late nineteenth-century ideas of creativity embraced by the avant-garde (discussed above), it is significant that this occurred in a context where the artist was already freed of his dependency on the court. In the eighteenth century this involved the opening of dedicated spaces for bourgeois aesthetic consumption such as museums and concert halls, followed by the emergence of private art dealers and galleries in the nineteenth century.

Constitutive of the latter, the rise of the “dealer-critic” system that came to define the modern art market by the end of the nineteenth century was a pivotal development through which Romantic ideas of innate creativity—or “originality”—were recuperated into a capitalist system of value. Specifically, in this system dealers engaged in “speculations in taste,” which involved purchasing individual works of art they assessed as likely to increase in value. Dealers also invested directly in individual (often unknown) artists through advancements and contracts that guaranteed the dealer a monopoly in the selling of a given artist’s works (Wuggenig 2011:

³⁷ Blanning (2012) describes how the career of the Austrian composer, Joseph Haydn, reflects this transition to modern understandings of the artist that occurred through the Romantic movement. He describes how Haydn worked for much of his career as a musician tied to the Esterházy court—an arrangement through which any music Haydn composed was considered property of his patron, Prince Anton Esterházy. However, Haydn subsequently renegotiated his contract in order to be able to publish his work for sale within the public sphere, where he earned a renowned reputation as a composer of genius, and enjoyed a flourishing career well outside the confines of the court. As Blanning thus argues, with Haydn we can thus observe “a neat reversal of roles, in that when Haydn first goes to work for the Esterházy in the 1760s, he’s famous because he’s the Kapellmeister, director of music to Prince Esterházy. By 1809 when he dies, the Esterházy are famous because Haydn is their composer” (23:49-24:01).

63). In these ways, the dealer-critic system hinged upon a commodification not just of the art object, but of the artist himself; within the modern art market the valuation of a given work was no longer based purely on its own intrinsic merits but, increasingly, in its relation to the individual artist as a uniquely creative genius.

Single-artist exhibitions at private galleries also became common practice within this new system. These helped artists circumvent the control and conservatism of state and academic establishments by offering alternative spaces to display avant-garde work.³⁸ Dealers also actively championed the artists they invested in through various promotional strategies, including the sponsoring of art journals “devoted to publicizing the new styles” (Seigel 1999: 307). In these ways, in addition to providing financial support for artists themselves, the dealer became an expert of the avant-garde in his own right—a role that involved *educating* new audiences of potential buyers about new artists and novel aesthetic movements, “rather than simply satisfying the tastes of an already existing market” (Seigel 1999: 306–307). For all these reasons, the dealer became an influential intermediary who not only connected artists to collectors, but who also actively worked to foster public interest in individual artists based upon the latter’s perceived originality. Importantly, he did so in ways that “shifted the artist to the centre of attention,” over and above the work of art itself (Wuggenig 2011: 63).³⁹

³⁸ See Nochlin (1989), Seigel (1999), and Wuggenig (2011) for further discussion of these developments, particularly in terms of the avant-garde movements of late nineteenth-century France.

³⁹ The rise of the avant-garde and the establishment of the modern art market undoubtedly instituted major shifts in the valuation of art and the artist in modernity. However, the full extent to which the new “dealer-critic” system replaced previous institutional arrangements and arbiters of aesthetic judgment is debatable; the continued cultural importance accorded state-sponsored museums, curators, and art schools speaks to the ongoing legacy of a liberal humanist philosophy of art and disinterested aesthetic experience. See Wuggenig (2011) for further discussion.

The *marketization* of avant-garde art in the new dealer-critic system involved a shift in emphasis away from a focus solely on the intrinsic qualities of the individual art object, to a fetishization of the identity of the artist and of the creative process itself. Insofar as a capitalist logic of speculative investment came to govern relationships between artists, dealers, and collectors by the end of the nineteenth century, we can observe how creativity was increasingly defined as the unique ability to imagine and generate *novel* (rather than disinterested) aesthetic experience, through intersecting commercial and artistic practices. The increasing valorization of *exceptional* creativity (or originality) embodied by the avant-garde artist thus pivoted upon what Moulin describes as “a transfer of rarity... from the work to the author” (456). These were (and remain) particularly relevant ideas within an increasingly institutionalized industry of advertising production, where the inherently interested nature and purpose of the commodity image, as well as its potentially subjectifying effects on a consuming public, clearly undermined an Enlightenment ideal of aesthetic disinterestedness. But, advertising could still aspire to be aesthetically *novel*—and therefore *creative*—without necessarily claiming to be “art”; recall Nico’s invitation to consider how something as mundane as a potato chip advertisement can be “good,” despite its promotional (rather than transcendental) function. Recall, too, how he compares his advertising work to Alice’s choreography practice, as equally *creative* endeavours.

Insofar as creativity was increasingly understood by the end of the nineteenth century as the production of aesthetic novelty (rather than un-alienated or transcendental experience), it is clear that the shifts described above created conditions that made the artist (or, eventually, “the Creative”) increasingly valuable within a growing industry of advertising production. For the artist, these ideological shifts also made advertising into a potentially salient field of creative *self-*

actualization—shifts that were accompanied and supported by the emergence of the first “full-service” advertising agencies during this same period. Indeed, unlike in earlier eras when agents specialized almost exclusively in the recommendation and selling of advertising space in the pages of the press, the 1870s and 1880s witnessed an expansion in the range and number of services offered by new and already established agencies.⁴⁰ Specifically, agencies during this period began to offer greater consultation on marketing strategies, informed by an increasingly “research-backed” approach that drew on theoretical and methodological advances in the social sciences.⁴¹ Occurring alongside (and sometimes in tension with) these attempts to professionalize advertising as a field of scientific expertise, were parallel efforts to incorporate the intuitive creativity (or “scopic power”) of the artist into increasingly institutionalized processes of advertising production, and it is during this period that the first in-house

⁴⁰ While the first advertising agencies were established by the late eighteenth century, these specialized almost entirely in the recommendation and selling of advertising space. In these early forms, agents on both sides of the Atlantic worked primarily as intermediaries between publishers and advertisers, selling “white space” in various newspapers across their respective countries to local, national, and foreign businesses, and charging commissions directly to the newspapers at a going rate of twenty-five percent (Gardner 2016: 59; Johnston 2001: 32). The first advertising agency to open in Canada, established in Montreal in 1860, was ultimately unsuccessful and closed within four years (Johnston 2001). The failure of the latter speaks to considerable differences between the Canadian economy, and those of the United States and Britain at the time. More specifically, Canada—or “British North America”—was only just emerging from its mercantilist relationship with Great Britain, and beginning to develop domestic manufacturing industries. This relative delay meant that, by the mid-nineteenth century, “Canada’s manufacturing output was not characterized by trade-marked consumer goods, nor did manufacturers have extensive distribution” (Johnston 2001: 35). Though newspapers frequently published ads for local businesses, shops, and services, there was little need for intermediaries to negotiate between publisher and advertiser in such cases. The commercial advertising that did appear in such publications was almost exclusively for “foreign” (primarily British or American) manufactured goods for most of the century, and it was only after Canadian manufacturers began producing trademarked goods in greater quantities during the 1890s that the need for national advertising campaigns—and agents to negotiate them—increased in response (Johnston 24).

⁴¹ A number of early twentieth-century advertising executives, such as Claude Hopkins and Albert Lasker, explicitly advocated for and promoted a “scientific advertising,” based on the premise that effective advertising could be measured, studied, and—through the identification of universal patterns and laws—predictably used to influence consumer behaviours. Some agencies hired social sciences on consulting and full-time bases; the services of psychologists in particular began to be heavily recruited during this time. As Kreshel writes: “Alliances between psychologists and ‘professional’ advertising associations were the basis of early efforts to establish ‘scientific advertising’ near the turn of the century, and later, psychologists were among the first to write the ‘second generation’ of advertising and advertising and psychology textbooks” (1990: 49).

copywriting schools and fine art departments were also established. These changes occurred earliest in the American context, with British and then Canadian agencies eventually following suit.⁴²

That the first full-service advertising agencies emerged alongside the advent of a distinctly modern art market reveals these to be interrelated developments that responded to shared historical conditions. Like the dealer-critic system of the modern art market, the new full-service agencies involved a substantial re-organization of the creative labour and relations involved in advertising production. Whereas in the early nineteenth century advertising clients had frequently written and designed their own ads, hiring agents to help place these in print publications or public space, by the 1880s it had become commonplace for companies to commission illustrations from artists employed at print shops and to hire freelance “advertising specialists” to write copy (Johnston 2001: 40). As mass production increased so too did the production of commodity images, increasing opportunities for creative work within the industry accordingly. Some professional copywriters and illustrators also began to work directly for large manufacturers and retailers during this period, and the first dedicated internal marketing departments responsible for overseeing the creation of national campaigns appear within corporations. By the turn of the twentieth century, advertising agencies also began to offer these specialized “creative services” to clients, and in-house copywriting and design positions became fixtures within the new organizational structure of ad agencies as of that moment.

⁴² According to *Smithsonian*, N.W. Ayer and Sons, in Philadelphia, was the first agency to establish an in-house fine art department, as well as the first to use a full-time copywriter. <https://www.si.edu/object/archives/sova-nmah-ac-0059?destination=object/archives/components/sova-nmah-ac-0059-ref8405>, accessed April 30th, 2023. See Tungate (2013) for further discussion of changes in industry practice during this period.

That these institutional changes were accompanied by emergent industry discourses of legitimization highlights how advertising continued to be the subject of considerable public criticism and debate. For example, as advertising agencies competed with publishers and printing houses offering similar services, many began to publish treatises on the advantages of their own approaches to copywriting and design, presenting advertising as an increasingly professionalized field of both scientific and *creative expertise*. These quickly blossomed into a cottage industry of specialized trade journals and monographs (often published by ad agents themselves). The term “campaign” first appears in reference to advertising production and distribution within the trade literature of this period (around 1910), reflecting a shift towards “a more planned, professional system of production,” whereby individual ads became but one component of broader, nation-wide marketing strategies devised by teams of advertising specialists (McFall 2004: 141). Such practices and discourses reflect concerted attempts on the part of industry stakeholders to present advertising as both a legitimate aesthetic practice and as an invaluable service within an emergent corporate capitalist economy.⁴³

The delineation of copywriting and art direction as specialized professions in the early decades of the twentieth century were integral to these broader changes, and by the 1920s the full-service agency had become the primary site for the production of advertising messages and commodity images in urban centres across North American, Britain, and Europe. Crucially, it was also within this context that the concept of creativity first began to be used in reference to a

⁴³ These new institutional arrangements in the field of advertising mirrored industrial processes of “horizontal combination” and “vertical integration,” which Arrighi, Barr, and Hisaeda (1999) have identified as definitive features of the new American corporate capitalism that “began unseating British family capitalism from its position of global dominance” during the late nineteenth century (132).

distinct kind of expertise and advertising “service,” promoted by advertising industry executives as an invaluable resource for clients seeking to gain advantage within competitive markets. These transformations were not only discursive; they also involved determined attempts to incorporate artists and writers, as embodiments of an idealized creative originality, into the social spaces and organizational structures of modern advertising production.

For many artists and writers, the new full-time ad agencies promised lucrative work. Advertising conception and production were also increasingly constructed within the industry as sites for nurturing individual creative achievement and innovation.⁴⁴ New industry practices that recognized exceptionally creative advertising work, like industry awards and public exhibitions, also became common industry practice during this period. These were more than purely celebratory events; they were also clear and direct responses to ongoing criticism of advertising’s aesthetic effects within the public sphere. This criticism was echoed in concerns amongst artists themselves, many of whom worried that working in advertising would tarnish their artistic reputations. As Bogart (1995) documents, dominant perceptions of ad work during the early decades of the twentieth century (and arguably still today) highlight the industry to be one of considerable “aesthetic compromise,” whereby artistic integrity was frequently perceived as subjugated to commercial interests, and artists who worked for agencies were often seen (or saw themselves) as “selling out” (49). Such anxieties reflect how dominant understandings of creativity as the expression of an idealized autological subjectivity remained imbued with many

⁴⁴ In Chapter 3, I discuss how this became more prominent during the “creative revolution” of the 1960s.

of the same tensions such an ideal attempted to overcome, despite the institutional integration of artists into the corporate capitalist organization of the full-service agency.

Though ongoing contestation surrounding the aesthetic virtues of advertising highlight variable responses to these processes of creative incorporation, when considered from a contemporary vantage point it is clear such processes were successful: today a global industry of international, national, and local full-service agencies exists in testament to this success. These agencies are supported by a number of orbiting organizations (like sound and film production, or graphic design firms, for example) that also participate in the “creative industry” of advertising production. The various and sometimes contested ways in which the individuals who constitute this industry understand and give meaning to their work *as creative* is undeniably informed by the historical developments I have outlined above.

Creative Being

In this chapter I traced how an idealized state and capacity for *being creative* was made into a site of autological subjectivation over the course of the nineteenth century, in ways that continue to inform how creativity is understood and claimed in fields of capitalist aesthetic production, like Montreal advertising, today. Yet, competing aesthetic attitudes towards the creative purpose and virtues of advertising—like those expressed by Alice and Nico in relation to the life insurance commercial in the vignette that opened this chapter—illuminate how the “internal incoherencies” of the liberal political project remain far from resolved.

The rise of the modern artist as an exceptional person capable of resisting the discipline and alienations of modern capitalism occurred in dialogue with the turn to expressive individualism in nineteenth-century art. These developments directed new forms of attention to bohemian/avant-garde performances of non-conformity in both art and life—aestheticized stances that, as I document in chapters to follow, continue to animate what (and who) is considered to be creative in Montreal advertising today. Practices of creative distinction are in this sense a jockeying for social status and recognition *within* the middle class; whether one drinks at Big in Japan or Bethlehem XXX is not a question of whether a person belongs, but rather one of *how* they belong to such a class. And yet, contemporary desires to be creative cannot be grasped by a theory of class distinction alone; it is clear that ad workers, like other aesthetic producers in late capitalist contexts, are oriented by the desire to be creative as a particular kind of good life *and* as an exceptional category of personhood informed by liberal autological ideals. That such meanings were layered onto emergent notions of creativity alongside the reimagining of the city as a site of consumer spectacle and of the bourgeois public as an audience of consumers is significant; together, these provided fertile historical conditions from which advertising emerged as a salient site of consumer capitalist aesthetic production *and* creative self-actualization. In other words, these were not parallel but in fact intersecting transformations that could only have occurred in dialogue.

Bourdieu (1991) suggests that the institutionalization of creativity participates in processes whereby “the rise of the distinguished class to Being has, as an inevitable counterpart, the slide of the complementary class into Nothingness” (1991: 126). This observation is especially relevant to a consideration of the political implications inherent in ideas of what it

means to be creative (or *not*) in late capitalist contexts. Nineteenth-century distinctions of the exceptionally creative person—embodied in the overlapping figures of the bohemian, the avant-garde flâneur, and the modern artist on the market—illuminate the ideological dependency Bourdieu identifies. When read against anxieties associated with the modern crisis in attention, it is clear that such figures dramatized liberalism’s opposition between individual freedom and social constraint, whereby the distinctly *creative* Being of original aesthetic production was defined primarily in negation to the presumably *uncreative* Nothingness of spectatorship and consumption. Such distinctions were and remain energized by an equation of creativity with innovation and aesthetic novelty—manifest not just in the work of art, but also in the avant-garde artist’s *aestheticized performances of self as a free and exceptionally creative subject*.

Crucially, as the artist was more fully incorporated into advertising by the turn of the twentieth century, he carried the tensions inherent in these autological understandings—and distinctions—of creativity with him. And, though today the aesthetic producers of advertising may not always claim to be artists, they do claim to be Creatives.

Chapter 3

Gagner le Grand Coq: Creativity and Exceptionalism in Quebec

“We become collectively convinced not that corporations are hitching a ride on our cultural and communal activities, but that creativity and congregation would be impossible without their generosity.”

(Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, p.35)

Field notes, February 7th, 2013

6 p.m. on a Thursday night. It's dark and painfully cold. I'm on rue Rachel in the Plateau neighbourhood, following a steady stream of men and women hurrying up the steps of l'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste. The stone façade of the church looms with neo-baroque grandeur, quickly forgotten in pursuit of the warm light emanating from its arched doorways. Person after person is pulled out of the cold, and the entrance of the main hall bustles with activity: hunched shoulders relax, layers of scarves and sweaters are peeled off, Wayfarer-style spectacles defog. Fur-trimmed hoods are pulled back, revealing chapped lips and rosy cheeks. As people thaw out and come together, the clinging smells of cigarette smoke and expensive perfume intermingle with the headiness of incense.

This is not the typical demographic one might expect to find in a Quebecois Catholic church, however. Tonight, the dwindling group of white-haired women and men who normally dot the pews, wielding rosaries and hymnals, has been replaced by a swarm of young and stylish urbanites. I have come alone, but find my friend Jean-Paul halfway up the centre aisle. He waves for me to join him, where he stands with several other friends and colleagues. This is, in emic terms, a crowd of “creatives”—creative directors, copywriters, art directors, and graphic designers who all work in advertising. I notice that at the end of the nave a stage has been built over the main altar, upon which an enormous screen has been erected, hiding the pulpit and obscuring the statue of St. John the Baptist who stands in patronage under the gilded baldachin. People circulate freely, weaving in and out of pews as they greet each other, share news, joke, and flirt. Lively chatter and laughter fill the space normally occupied by hushed reverence.

6:30 p.m.: the chandeliers dim, settling us into pews. An electronic beat begins to pulsate from the speakers that have been installed around the church, and a countdown is projected onto the screen: 20, 19, 18, 17, ... 1, 0. All goes black. The pulse pauses as a single organ note reverberates throughout the church. We are stilled—*lifted*—until the organist sinks back into a rhapsodic, hymnal melody and the pulse picks up again, dropping us into our seats, senses tingling. It is awesome, in the original sense. We turn and crane our necks to gaze up at the choir loft, as though laying eyes upon the organ master might bring some form of

revelation. The alter screen then re-aligns, flashing angular red and blue graphics that bend and morph into a choreography of text: “CONCOURS. REVU. REPENSÉ. 100 PROJETS DE L’ANNÉE.” The organist crescendos into his final chord, and the words “SOIRÉE GRAFIKA. NOUVELLE FORMULE” appear across the screen, bathing our upturned faces in white light. We are mesmerized by the spectacle of it all, despite ourselves.

What follows is, however, rather banal: a young man in a sharply tailored grey suit walks onto the stage and over to a microphoned podium. The host for the evening, he announces the beginning of the evening’s Grafika awards ceremony—an event meant to honour the best in Quebec graphic design, as determined by a jury of respected leaders in the industry.¹ The ceremony lasts about two hours. The biggest prize of the night is awarded for an Air Canada campaign that was commissioned to mark the company’s 75th anniversary. An additional fifteen Grand Prix are also awarded that evening, though there is an overall total of one hundred winning projects. Award recipients range from individual students in graphic design programs at local universities, to small graphic design studios (e.g. Baillat Cardell et Fils, Atelier Chinotto), to graphic design teams working for some of Montreal’s largest advertising agencies (e.g. Lg2, Sid Lee, Cossette). The prizes themselves are unfinished wood blocks, upon which the prize name and category, the title of the winning work, and the names of the recipient and client have all been pyrographed in simple font—a materiality that contrasts with the mostly digital work such awards are meant to recognize and honour.

As the ceremony ends, people begin to once again move freely about the church, congratulating one another and recording their presence at the event in Tweets, Facebook posts, and Instagram photos, archived with hashtags like #grafika2013, #infopresse, and #adlife. These acts of self-celebration and instant commemoration occur spontaneously throughout the ceremony, generating real-time commentary and documentation of the event as it happens. They are also formally encouraged through scenes that the event organizers orchestrated ahead of time: at one of the side-altars, for example, votive prayer candles have been pushed aside to make room for photo-ops in front of a Sacred Heart of Jesus statue. The staging is openly irreverent, in a way that might otherwise be considered taboo in a Catholic church. Tonight, however, attendees claim the space in fun: one person clasps his hands together in mock prayer, another adopts an exaggerated air of sombre humility as he lifts his prize towards the heavens and his team beams proudly around him. Many others simply laugh and smile at the camera while a marbled Jesus gazes down upon them, gesturing towards his flaming heart.

¹ The host was Arnaud Granata, then vice-president of Infopresse—a Montreal-based organization that, at the time of my research, published a weekly industry “Infolettre,” ran professional development workshops and conferences, and sponsored a number of local industry awards events including Grafika.

That Infopresse rented l'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste for its Grafika awards ceremony is not an especially unique occurrence; in recent years, many churches in Montreal and across the province of Quebec have undergone various secular transformations in the aftermath of the Quiet Revolution. These transformations have taken different forms. In some cases, churches have been sold in their entirety and converted into luxury condominiums, elite spas and gyms, office spaces, libraries, and, in one case, even a circus school.² Often, churches are simply abandoned when dwindling parish communities can no longer afford to maintain them. In other cases, a given parish may attempt to cover costs by renting out parts of the church on a semi-permanent basis (basements or refectories, for example, which might be leased to yoga or dance studios, or other small businesses), or for one-time events. L'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste is an example of the latter; over the past decade the church has become a popular venue for an array of cultural events and spectacles. In the same season as the Grafika awards described above, for example, it also hosted several classical music performances, modern dance shows, and a David Byrne concert.

Within this context, the Grafika event I attended in 2013 is one example of a broader process of social change and secularization that has characterized the province of Quebec since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, and which has shifted the cultural values, ideals, and behaviours of local populations accordingly.³ At the same time, the various impulses and

² The École de Cirque de Québec (ECQ) in Québec City is housed in the former Saint-Esprit church.

³ As Kaell (2021) describes, the Quiet Revolution was a period of “vast political restructuring, economic modernization, and rapid unchurched” (258). Kaell argues this to have been a process of *reimagining* the role of the Catholic Church within modern Quebec society, rather than the erasure of Catholicism from public culture. This involved the resignification of things like churches as “secularised sites of national heritage” (258), in ways that paradoxically repositioned key elements of Catholic culture as foundational to a modern, “secular” Quebecois national identity.

processes that are remaking church space in new, often very different forms speak to the inherent and ongoing tensions of the Quiet Revolution, rather than their resolution. On the one hand, for example, dwindling numbers of parishioners at churches like Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste clearly reflect the success of the Quiet Revolution in loosening the grip of clerical-conservative ideologies and institutions across various sectors of public life. On the other hand, however, the ways in which the church is now used in events like Grafika also reflect how the Quiet Revolution paradoxically instigated new efforts to preserve elements of Catholicism as the basis of a ‘secular’ national Quebecois identity. (Hence the repurposing rather than demolition of churches, as valued sites of cultural heritage).⁴

Competing impulses towards the sale and privatization of church buildings, versus their preservation through mixed use (e.g. event rentals) or public appropriation and transformation (e.g. colleges or libraries), also reflect conflicting visions surrounding the role of corporate capitalism within a sovereign Quebec nation.⁵ As Sumner (2010) documents, by the 1970s the initial excitement of the early days of the Quiet Revolution “gave way to disillusionment for critics who suggested that the so-called ‘revolution’ was really nothing more than a ‘reorganization of alliances within the bourgeoisie’ designed to strengthen the ties between financial and industrial capitalism in the province” (174).⁶ According to Sumner, for those on the

⁴ For further discussion of Catholic sites and symbols within processes of “heritage creation” in Quebec, see Kaell (2021).

⁵ See Sumner (2010) for further discussion these tensions and debates.

⁶ Here Sumner cites the sociologist, Dorval Brunelle in Marc Raboy, *Movements and Messages: Media and Radical Politics in Quebec*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984. p.8. The relevance of such criticism is particularly well illustrated in Sumner’s analysis of Seagram advertising in Quebec. As Sumner documents, while the founders of the company (the Bronfman family) “were eager participants in the power elite’s attempts to undermine the Parti Quebecois and its separatist mandate” during this period, they also simultaneously adopted new targeted advertising strategies that invoked nationalist sentiment in order to better resonate with Quebecois consumers.

intellectual left, the perceived failures of the Quiet Revolution in reforming political-economic hierarchies within the province prompted critical questioning of the “liberal understandings of cosmopolitanism” that informed discourses of progress and development within a broader Canadian context, and which “posited Western commerce as a vehicle of democracy, progress and peace” (176).

From the vantage point of an emergent Montreal advertising industry, however, the Quiet Revolution presented a pivotal opportunity to reinforce these very ideas. As I describe below, during these years many local industry stakeholders (like advertising executives) promoted multinational corporate investment in regional markets as integral to Quebec’s economic “development,” and thus as vital to the preservation of a distinct Quebecois culture. Crucially, these developments coincided with widespread changes in advertising aesthetics and agency organization that also occurred during the 1960s at a broader international level, in what came to be referred to as advertising’s “creative revolution.” Celebrated within the industry as a period of exceptional creative flourishing, these changes were led by a new generation of creative directors, copywriters, and art directors who identified as non-conformists and incorporated the aesthetics of counter-cultural youth movements into the ads they produced. Described for these reasons by Frank (1997) as a critical moment in advertising’s “conquest of cool,” the creative revolution was also characterized by new patterns of sociality and valuations of creative labour that crystallized around the capital-C “Creative”—a title that came to refer not just to particular professional roles within advertising but also to a new kind of ideal subject in late capitalism.

In this chapter I examine how these parallel revolutions came to intersect in the field of Montreal advertising, in ways that made creativity into an increasingly salient marker of cultural and class distinction for individuals employed within the industry. Through this historical lens I demonstrate how local stakeholders successfully promoted advertising first as a pillar of Quebecois cultural production, and then as a local “creative industry,” in ways that continue to inform dynamics within the industry today. More specifically, I argue that the increasing importance accorded to creativity within intersecting claims to individual and cultural exceptionalism reveal how creativity provided a pivotal ideological hinge between liberal idealizations of the autological self and the project of Quebec sovereignty. For this reason, examining the “repatriation” of advertising alongside increasing creative professionalization within Quebec from the Quiet Revolution onward is vital for understanding how an ideology of creative exceptionalism gained traction in the city of Montreal specifically—a city that came to be perceived locally as the creative epicentre of cultural production for a minority Quebecois population within predominantly anglophone North America.

With this in mind, I take the Grafika awards event as a point of departure for considering how creativity is defined and given value by Montreal ad workers, in ways that have become central to the formation of new kinds of communities—and new kinds of selves—in the city. What does it mean to be creative within such communities, in terms of shared values, common practices, and patterns of relationship? How are these things embodied and negotiated at the level of the self? Who is included in these communities, and who is excluded? Exploring such questions highlights how there is something *at stake* in the temporary spatial occupation and re-signification that occurred during the Grafika awards at l’Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste. This was

especially apparent in the self-conscious sense of play with which Grafika organizers and attendees engaged with the place itself, superimposing new meanings onto spaces and symbols of cultural and spiritual significance. The spectacular way in which the space was used, the ritualistic quality of the event, and its overall intention—the ceremonial adulation of creative work in service of corporate capitalist interests—all serve to recognize and reaffirm a new symbolic order in which particular forms of “creative” labour and identity are central.

Advertising as “culture industry” in Montreal: A brief history

In this section I provide a brief history of Montreal advertising as the primary centre of an “institutionalized system of commercial information and persuasion” (Williams 1980: 170) in Quebec. Situating this institutional history within broader social, political, and economic transformations, I consider how the 1960s marked a new period in which advertising produced by local agencies was promoted by industry stakeholders as integral to the preservation of a distinct Quebecois culture within the context of the Quiet Revolution. Tracing the evolution of advertising as an influential field of aesthetic production within the province during this period provides necessary historical context for understanding its ongoing salience as a site for the negotiation of creative class politics, aesthetic philosophies, and identities in Montreal today.

The period between 1945 and 1975 was one of relative economic prosperity for Canada, the United States, and much of Europe, prompting historians such as Hobsbawm (1994) to designate these years the “Golden Age” of the twentieth century. As Fahrni and Rutherford (2008) describe, these “thirty glorious years” (*les trente glorieuses*), “are generally hailed in

Canada and elsewhere as an extended moment of unprecedented prosperity, developed welfare states, high modernity, and advanced capitalism” (2). Although in Canada “the conditions for a flourishing consumer culture were delayed relative to the United States” (Sumner 2009: 21), by the mid-1950s the country had clearly (if unevenly) entered an era of mass consumption that was in many ways ideologically influenced by American lifestyles, and economically reliant on American investment and trade (Fahrni and Rutherford 2008: 3).

Within this context, advertising in Canada became an increasingly lucrative industry, growing in revenue from an estimated \$159 million in 1947 to \$1.2 billion by 1972 (Elkin 1973: 19). Throughout this period most industry activity remained centred in Toronto, where the largest Canadian-owned agencies and American branches had their offices, and where the bulk of national advertising campaigns were produced. At the same time, statistics reveal Montreal to have also played an important role within the growing Canadian industry: by the end of the Second World War, 60% of national advertising content was produced in Toronto, 30% in Montreal, and the remaining 10% in other cities or abroad. These levels of production remained largely consistent throughout the ensuing decades (Elkin 18).

The positioning of Montreal as a secondary site of production within a growing advertising industry in Canada highlights how advertising was, until the 1960s, seen as a tool for cultural assimilation and nation-building through the promotion of corporate interests, with little regard for more localized experiences of cultural and linguistic distinction. Indeed, in the decades leading up to and immediately following the Second World War, Montreal agencies and offices typically specialized in handling accounts for small local clients and adapting national campaigns

for francophone markets rather than creating new campaigns themselves (Elkin 18). Moreover, during this period advertising agency owners and executives in Montreal were almost exclusively anglophone, reflecting a broader pattern of anglophone industrial ownership and corporate management that shaped socio-economic relationships in Quebec throughout the first two thirds of the twentieth century (27).

Within this context, the production of campaigns for Quebec markets was typically approached as a process of translation, whereby “ads in English were very carefully worked out and polished by the agency and client; then, unless they were obviously inappropriate and objectionable—and sometimes even then—were turned over to a translator for a quick routine and more or less literal translation” (Elkin 28). Professional opportunities for francophone Quebecers working in large agencies consequently consisted almost exclusively of translation work. Translators were expected to work quickly, to stay as close to the original English copy as possible, and were generally undervalued and underpaid (29). While a number of smaller francophone agencies appeared in Quebec by the late 1920s, offering francophone advertising professionals greater autonomy and opportunity to create original ads, the accounts these agencies held were typically for small local businesses and, when situated within a burgeoning national industry, accounted for a negligible percent of total Canadian billings (31).

The marginalization of Quebecois professionals within a Montreal-based advertising industry continued in the post-war years leading up to the Quiet Revolution. Elkin (1973) has documented the frustration of many francophone ad workers during this period, arising from widespread perceptions that anglophone supervisors and clients failed to appreciate the skill and

talent involved in accurate and culturally-relevant translation. Furthermore, although many francophone ad workers argued that original adverts should be created specifically for Quebec markets, most clients and anglophone executives held the view that effective advertising appealed to universal human desires and tastes and therefore required no adaptation beyond linguistic translation—a view informed by dominant theories of consumer persuasion advanced by business psychologists at the time.⁷ Elkin’s comparative study of advertisements published in both English and French Montreal newspapers until the 1960s consequently reveals that the vast majority of advertisers used the same ads for both anglophone and francophone markets, with few changes beyond direct translation of copy. In fact, many French ads often contained English terms, as well as cultural references that had little relevance to francophone Quebecers, with minor cultural adaptations.⁸

Despite these tendencies, advertising production in Quebec increased significantly in the mid-twentieth century as levels of consumption rose alongside post-war economic growth. And

⁷ The “scientific advertising” promoted by many of the most influential advertising executives of the early twentieth century was heavily influenced by contemporaneous developments within the social sciences, which emphasized the search for universal principles and laws according to which the behaviours of the masses could be better understood. Theories and methods from these fields were readily embraced by corporate stakeholders who were keen to predict and control consumer markets to their advantage—the services of psychologists in particular began to be heavily recruited during this time. As Kreshel (1990) writes: “Alliances between psychologists and ‘professional’ advertising associations were the basis of early efforts to establish “scientific advertising” near the turn of the century, and later, psychologists were among the first to write the “second generation” of advertising and advertising and psychology textbooks” (49). Interest in the applications of psychology within advertising further intensified in the inter-war years, as theories of behaviourism gained particular prominence in market research during the 1920s. By the 1930s a new subfield—motivational research—introduced Freudian psychoanalytic theories to the corporate world, which were increasingly embraced in advertising after WWII (Samuel 2010: 10-11). Moreover, as Navon (2017) observes, at the same time that advertising strategy and design were increasingly subject to the discourses and practices of scientific rationalization, this involved “an enormous increase in the aggregate volume of ads and, crucially, a concomitant expansion of the mass media that carried them” (146). All such developments emphasized the creation of nation-wide campaigns that assumed relatively homogenous consumer publics.

⁸ To illustrate typical adaptations of this period, Elkin (1973) provides the example of a campaign for a typewriter, in which the English version features a young woman referred to as “Betty,” and as “Blanche” in the French version (44).

as agencies expanded their operations, employment opportunities for francophone workers within the industry also increased. Most of these workers continued to be employed in low-level jobs as translators and administrators, despite the fact that many held college and university degrees. Nevertheless, Elkin suggests that such positions acted as informal apprenticeships through which some francophone ad workers were able to become familiar with different aspects of advertising production and to cultivate professional networks that helped them advance to higher positions. Though few in number, those individuals who were able to advance within the industry to higher positions—account executives, directors of ‘French Services’, and even in a few cases vice-presidents—came to constitute what Elkin (1973) describes as a “knowledgeable core” of Quebecois advertising professionals who were instrumental to subsequent industry developments within the province (40).⁹

The establishment in 1959 of the Publicité Club de Montréal (PCM), a professional association of francophone advertising professionals in Montreal, was one such development. Similar to processes of professionalization that occurred elsewhere in Canada and the U.S. at the turn of the century, the formation and subsequent initiatives of the Publicité Club were part of a process of legitimization that served two primary goals for its members: 1) it worked against discriminatory practices that marginalized French-speaking advertising professionals within the industry; and 2) it actively promoted advertising as being central to the preservation of a distinct Quebecois identity. In the years following its founding, the association implemented numerous strategies for supporting francophone ad workers in their attempts to gain greater influence and

⁹ Elkin writes: “In general, the French Canadians advanced only in those sections which required French-speaking or bilingual personnel; they did not replace the English-Canadian personnel in positions unrelated to problems of bilingualism and biculturalism” (1973: 66).

autonomy within a broader national and international industry. These included collaboration with the Hautes études commerciales (HEC) de Montréal on the development of a university program in advertising taught in French; the preparation of a comprehensive statistical file on consumer markets across the province, designed to highlight economic opportunities in Quebec to potential advertisers (and thus to convince them of the need for original advertising targeted to such markets); and an extensive public relations campaign.¹⁰ The latter involved the dissemination of a series of ads promoting the cultural importance of a local advertising industry for Quebecois society, as well as the organization of a *Semaine de la Publicité* (Advertising Week) in October 1959, which culminated in a French-language advertising awards gala, the *Coqs d'Or*.¹¹ The gala was widely publicized in the local press, and the Publicité Club continued to host and expand the event in subsequent years, awarding prizes to notable advertising work in various categories, with the “Grand Coq” awarded to best overall campaign.¹²

¹⁰ Although some formal educational training programs in advertising were established in the 1920s—both McGill and the University of Toronto began offering courses in advertising as part of their ‘Commerce and Finance’ programs by the end of the decade—the language of instruction was, without exception, English (Johnston 2001: 56).

¹¹ In addition to the awards gala, the *Semaine de la Publicité* promoted local advertising services to both potential corporate clients as well as to the general public through a series of public talks and conferences, radio and television interviews, publications, and social events.

¹² In October 2006 the Publicité Club de Montréal fused with the Association marketing de Montréal (AMM-PCM), which was renamed as the Association des professionnels de la communication et du marketing (APCM) in 2008. The last Coqs d’Or were held in 2005, at which time the Créa awards, organized by Infopresse, became the main awards event for creativity in advertising in Québec.



Figure 3.1: Local news coverage of PCM's "Semaine de la publicité" in the October 20, 1959, edition of *La Presse*.

The initiatives of the Publicité Club and other legitimization strategies adopted by francophone ad workers as they promoted advertising as central to Quebec nation-building parallel similar efforts advanced by industry stakeholders elsewhere in North America.¹³ Nevertheless, the particular forms this took in Montreal must be contextualized within the

¹³ Comparable efforts in the U.K., the U.S., and elsewhere in Canada occurred earlier. In these contexts, the establishment of advertising clubs and professional associations in the early decades of the twentieth century was a key means through which industry executives and stakeholders worked to defend the profession against mounting public criticism. Early twentieth century trade journals are also replete with what Laird (1992) describes as "a wide-ranging literature of legitimation," in which admen "wrote not only to encourage their peers to raise their professional standards and to convince their business audiences that these standards were already adequate, but also to influence the press and the general public" (309). In the North American context, Mackay (2014) argues that these efforts, referred to as the "Truth in Advertising" movement, in fact constituted an "aggressive campaign" on the part of industry leaders, "to convince society of their moral integrity" (64). This movement was part of a concerted effort to improve the public reputation of the industry, which during the nineteenth century had suffered from association with the dubious claims of patent medicine advertising and the perceived profiteering of nineteenth century space brokers, while also promoting advertising as economically and socially integral to the modern nation. Various initiatives were undertaken as part of this campaign: industry leaders published manifestos against false advertising, professional associations created ethical codes and business standards, and "vigilance committees" were established to enforce new industry rules of conduct. According to Johnston (2001), Canadian advertising professionals began publishing trade journals modelled upon American ones beginning in the 1890s, and actively participated in the Truth in Advertising campaign (150-152). As part of this campaign, politicians were recruited to endorse the moral legitimacy and nation-building contributions of advertising to the public, while laymen proselytized about the virtues of advertising from the pulpits of religious institutions (Mackay 2014; Johnston 2001).

unique political developments and cultural dynamics that shaped Quebec during the 1960s, in what came to be referred to as the Quiet Revolution (*la Révolution tranquille*). An era of significant political change and cultural upheaval, the Quiet Revolution followed an almost twenty-year period of conservative politics in the province under the leadership of Premier Maurice Duplessis. It was characterized by rapid secularization, the creation of a welfare state, a cultural and linguistic renaissance, and the rise of a sovereigntist political movement rooted in a Quebecois ethnic nationalism.¹⁴ Alongside these transformations, the initiatives of francophone advertising professionals as they sought to gain control over the production of advertising content undeniably contributed to the broader goals of the Quiet Revolution.

Many of the perceived gains made in advertising during the 1960s reflect the zeitgeist of the Quiet Revolution, perhaps best captured by Liberal Premier Jean Lesage's campaign slogan, *Maîtres Chez Nous* ("masters in our own home"). In addition to the initiatives of the Publicité Club described above, the industry saw a significant increase in the number of francophone directors of local agency offices, a rise in the quantity and perceived quality of campaigns targeted to Quebec markets, and the establishment of new independent agencies owned and

¹⁴ Duplessis—whose time in power is often referred to as the “Great Darkness” (*La Grande Noirceur*)—was notorious for his cultural and religious conservatism, his liberal economic policies (which supported private foreign investment and control over provincial resources, while also limiting government investment in social services), and the staunch anti-communist stance he took against labour unions. His political party (the Union Nationale) lost the 1960 provincial election to the Québec Liberal Party under the leadership of Jean Lesage, shortly after Duplessis' death. Under Lesage a number of major reforms were undertaken, leading to the profound social, political, and economic changes described above. While Lesage's government was not explicitly sovereigntist, it did profoundly reconfigure the province's economic relationship to Canada, withdrawing Quebec from many federal cost-sharing programs (pensions, tax-sharing, health care) that other provinces agreed to during the post-war period of federal centralization. In this way, the emphasis that Lesage and subsequent provincial governments placed on elaborating the “special status” of Quebec under the Canadian Constitution established a foundation for later sovereigntist political movements that culminated in the referendums of 1980 and 1995.

operated by French-speaking Quebecois.¹⁵ For many individuals involved, these advancements aligned with the broader ideals of political and economic emancipation driving the Quiet Revolution, and were promoted as integral to social progress and modernization.¹⁶ Through their efforts to restructure local relations and processes of advertising production, Quebecois advertising stakeholders ultimately stitched the ideals of the Quiet Revolution to the corporate capitalist interests of their clients, and to their own. They therefore actively promoted themselves as being of central value to the popular movement in two key ways: first, as cultural experts capable of influencing Quebecois markets, increasing consumption, and contributing to economic growth in the province; and second, as key actors in the production and reproduction of a distinctly Quebecois collective identity.

The intertwining of capitalist interests with Quebecois cultural distinctiveness is especially apparent in *Les 36 cordes sensibles des Quebecois* (1978). In this now-canonical text, advertising executive and Publicité Club founder Jacques Bouchard identifies thirty-six cultural traits that he argues distinguish Quebecois consumers from other Canadians.¹⁷ In the prologue to the book, Bouchard writes that the idea for *Les 36 cordes* was initially born out of a

¹⁵ Jacques Bouchard, Jean-Paul Champagne, and Pierre Pelletier founded the earliest such agency, BCP, in 1963. In an especially symbolic gesture, Bouchard (often referred to as the “father of Quebecois advertising”) acquired the original bell that was rung to rally the French-Canadian patriots in 1837 during the battle against the British at Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu, and had it installed in the entrance to the agency (Ducas 2014).

¹⁶ See Elkin (1973: 99-101) for a discussion of various industry campaigns during the 1960s that promoted the role of advertising as central to Québec progress and modernization.

¹⁷ Through “participant observation” in his own culture and a series of focus group interviews with Quebecois men all named “Joe Tremblay,” Bouchard argues that while such traits may change over time, the “six vital roots” under which the traits are classified (the French, Latin, North-American, Minority, Catholic and “Earth” roots) are “unchangeable and permanent.” While the first five are self-explanatory, Bouchard defines the “Earth” root (*terrienne*) as the connection that Quebecois people have to the land, born of their history as an agricultural society. English translation by Lawrence Creaghan, accessed online https://creaghan.ca/36/index_files/index.htm, October 30th 2022.

presentation he gave in 1962 to English-speaking advertising executives in Toronto, in which he attempted to persuade his audience that campaigns conceived and created in Quebec would be more effective at reaching Quebecois consumers than ones made for English-speaking Canadians and translated into French. By the time it was published as a book in 1978, however, *Les 36 cordes* was clearly intended for a Quebecois public. Addressed to a “nous” that presumes an ethnically and culturally homogenous readership, Bouchard refers to francophone Quebecers as “*Homo Consumens Quebecensis*,” and unambiguously states his reason for publishing such a text: to identify a set of shared cultural traits (thirty-six of them, to be precise) that distinguish the Quebecois people as a specific “target market,” ultimately in order to help advertisers more effectively influence consumer behaviours within this population.

Though *Les 36 cordes* was critiqued by a number of leftist Quebecois academics and politicians upon its publication (Bouchard himself admits that “*the feedback n’a pas toujours été positif*,” describing his critics as writing “*dans le plus pur vocabulaire marxiste*”), the book came to be seen as “the ‘Bible’ of Quebec advertising” (Semansky 2008). That it continues to be considered a seminal text within the industry is evidenced by its frequent inclusion in the syllabi of marketing and communications courses across the province. In 2006 Bouchard published an updated version, *Les Nouvelles cordes sensibles de Quebecois*, which updated some of the traits of the Quebecois consumer but maintained the ethno-nationalistic thrust of the original despite increasing multiculturalism within the province.¹⁸

¹⁸ I was given a copy of the book twice during fieldwork: once by my friend Celeste (a marketing strategist who is now vice-president and partner of a local agency), and a second time by a professor at the HEC (Université de Montréal), who allowed me to audit his course as part of my fieldwork.

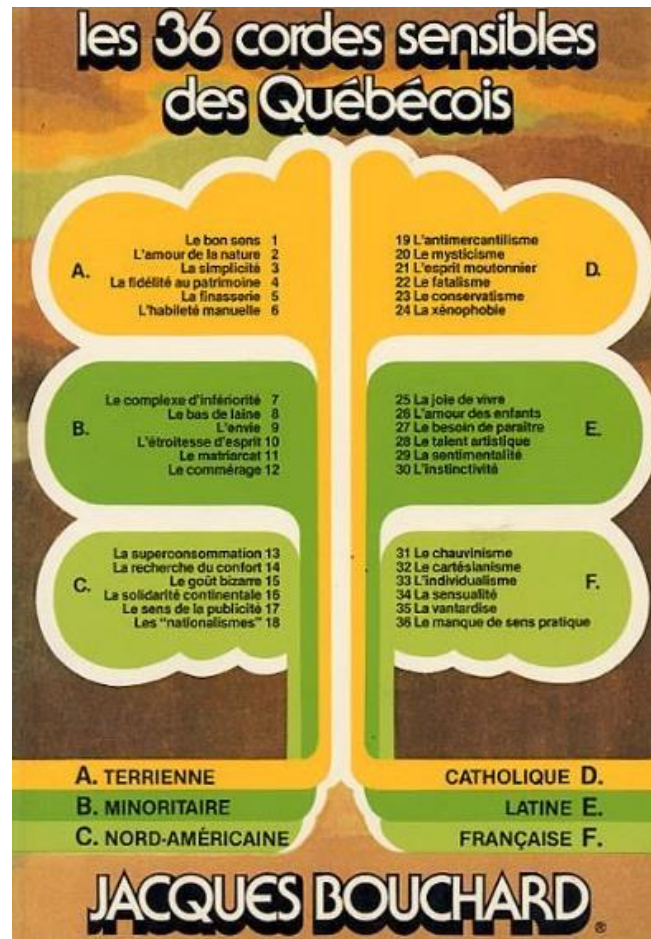


Figure 3.2: Cover page of Bouchard's book, *Les 36 cordes sensibles des Québécois*

That advertising was actively promoted as a vehicle for advancing the political goals of the Quiet Revolution can be read not only in the trade literature, but also in the dominant themes and messages of advertising campaigns produced during this period. These include campaigns commissioned by public institutions and professional associations. For example, as concerns about French language loss and vulgarization intensified during the Quiet Revolution, Quebecois ad workers increasingly promoted their work as a socially salient means to reinforce the use of formal (versus vernacular) French. In 1967, the Publicité Club and Radio-Canada jointly launched the campaign, "*Bien parler, c'est se respecter*," which encouraged Quebecers to speak an "international" French that not only asserted Quebec's ties to a global francophone

community, but which also condemned the perceived degeneration of the French language through working-class *joual* and use of *anglicisms* (Elkin 1973: 95-96). Advertisers also began to feature more Quebecois musicians, actors, and other pop culture celebrities in endorsements for their products, which industry stakeholders pointed to as evidence for how advertising supported not only the growth of local businesses, but also the diffusion and flourishing of distinctly Quebecois art and culture. All such strategies reinforced perceptions that a thriving Quebec advertising industry helped to further the political aims of the Quiet Revolution.¹⁹

Critical examination of the economic and cultural entanglements that characterized advertising practice in Quebec during the Quiet Revolution, however, presents a more complex picture—one that challenges emic narratives of industry progress as furthering the collective emancipation of Quebecois communities. Specifically, while many francophone advertising professionals did directly benefit from increased rates of employment and advancement opportunities within local agencies, much of the content these new agencies produced ultimately worked to harness the cultural symbols and political ideologies of the Quiet Revolution to multinational corporate capitalist goals, profiting affluent classes whose allegiances escaped the boundaries of a Quebecois society imagined in regional and ethno-national terms. Indeed, at the same time as advertising executives publicly celebrated their profession as “repatriating capital and industry” through the promotion of Quebec businesses,

¹⁹ In her biography of Jacques Bouchard, Marie-Claude Ducas describes how Québec advertising in the 1960s and 70s increasingly relied upon celebrity endorsements, and lists a number of celebrities who appeared in ads produced by Bouchard’s agency, BCP, during this period. Moreover, “Il n’y a pas que ces vedettes que l’on côtoie à l’agence,” she writes; “il y a aussi toute une série d’artisans du domaine de la culture: compositeurs, musiciens, réalisateurs, producteurs” (2014). (“The agency worked not only with these celebrities, but also with a whole group of artisans in the field of culture: composers, musicians, directors, producers”).

they also continued to prioritize the pursuit of more profitable accounts for larger Canadian companies and foreign multinationals.²⁰

Through such practice, many of the “*agences d’ici*” that emerged in Quebec during the 1960s and 70s frequently recuperated Quebecois idioms, icons, and celebrities in order to promote the commodities and brands of non-Quebecois corporations, aesthetically reimagining the ideals of self-determination and cultural revitalization as ultimately dependent upon accelerating consumer capitalism. In this way, the commodity images created by local ad workers for a regional market paradoxically promoted the consumption of mass-produced goods made by multinational corporations as an expression of identification with and belonging to a distinct and localized Quebec culture. Such images and modes of consumption were, moreover, often explicitly connected to the broader sovereigntist project of the Quiet Revolution.

²⁰ BCP brochure cited in Elkin (1973: 126). Advertising for Québec businesses was part of a bigger “buy Québec” movement within the province.

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE
AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT
REASONS

Figure 3.3: Print ad for Gilbey's London Dry Gin, published in the *La Presse*, May 18 1967, which illustrates how the central concerns of the Quiet Revolution were invoked in commodity images of the period. The tag line ("Specifically English, yet pleasant") clearly plays upon Quebecois resentment of the English (or "anglos") as the latter were perceived as agents of historic and ongoing socio-economic oppression in the province. The ad is a paradigmatic example of how the major concerns of the Quiet Revolution were harnessed to consumer capitalism by advertising producers in Quebec.

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE
AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT
REASONS

Figure 3.4: Still frame from the "24 juin (faut se parler) commercial for Labatt 50 beer (1975), created by BCP under the direction of Jacques Bouchard. The campaign is considered one of the most iconic Quebecois campaigns of the twentieth century, unambiguously nationalistic in sentiment. First released in time to coincide with Saint-Jean Baptiste Day, the commercial featured an original song written by Quebecois composer, François Dompierre. The song became an anthem of Quebecois nationalism in the lead-up to the 1976 provincial election—the first election won by the separatist party, Parti Québécois. Both the campaign as well as the song were awarded prizes at the *Coqs d'or* that year.

The marketing of Pepsi-Cola in Quebec provides a now-iconic example of the processes described above. Introduced into the Quebec market in 1938, Pepsi advertising consisted primarily of translated versions of English campaigns until the mid-1980s, and the brand remained second to Coca-Cola in the Quebec market (as elsewhere across North America) throughout this period. In 1985, however, the company, working with Blouin Coulombe Dube Thompson (the Quebec office of the American agency, J. Walter Thompson), hired the Quebecois comedian, Claude Meunier, for an original campaign targeted at the francophone population in the province. Television ads featured Meunier playing a range of Quebecois caricatures and were peppered with a liberal use of *joual*. The campaign was enormously successful, and has subsequently been credited with single-handedly elevating Pepsi to the top-selling soft drink in the province by a twenty percent margin—a market position it has roughly continued to maintain. More recent campaigns have centred upon the unique position of Quebec as the sole market in North America where Pepsi consumption trumps Coca-Cola as a marketing strategy itself, adopting the slogan, “*Ici, c’est Pepsi*”.



Figure 3.5: Still frame from a 1989 “Après-Ski” Pepsi-Cola commercial, featuring Claude Meunier.

While many francophone ad workers I interviewed during my fieldwork continue to emphasize the particular challenges involved in persuading clients to create original ads for a regional French-speaking market (such clients often wish to create nation-wide campaigns that transcend regional differences, in order to reduce production costs), the Quiet Revolution nevertheless marked a turning point for advertising in Quebec. Most saliently, the rise of a professionalized body of francophone ad workers, the emergence of Quebecois-owned and operated agencies, and increased corporate investment in targeted campaigns helped to situate Montreal specifically as an important site of advertising production within an increasingly globalized industry. At the same time, such developments were also part of a process of multinational corporate capitalist expansion and accelerating mass consumption, within which advertising professionals positioned themselves as cultural intermediaries whose knowledge of local vernaculars and symbolic codes could be mobilized in order to create commodity images and messages that resonated with regional markets and increased corporate profits.

In this sense, the emergence of a seemingly more autonomous (or “sovereign”) advertising industry in Quebec was not a unique socio-historical occurrence, but is inherently representative of the ways in which advertising everywhere has worked to harness localized lifeworlds to the contingencies of advanced capitalism. As elsewhere, advertising production in Montreal is a vital form of corporate capitalist communication and persuasion; within a contemporary neoliberal context it works to legitimize (or obfuscate) exploitative practices that consolidate profit and privilege in the hands of an increasingly wealthy international elite, while framing these interventions as “investments” in the common good of local communities. As I describe above, such processes are not abstract; rather, they occur through the everyday efforts

of local ad workers and stakeholders, who work to create resonant commodity images and messages that effectively—and *affectively*—harness “target markets” to corporate interests, through incitements to particular forms of consumption. Simultaneously, the ways in which a localized advertising industry in Montreal was established and ideologically legitimized during the Quiet Revolution reveals how individual workers are themselves incited to participate in this work, through the positioning of advertising as a central field of uniquely Quebecois cultural production and, crucially, *creative effervescence*. In this way, as Klein (1999) argues, “[w]e become collectively convinced not that corporations are hitching a ride on our cultural and communal activities, but that creativity and congregation would be impossible without their generosity” (35).

Since the Quiet Revolution, advertising practitioners in Montreal have variously identified with, aspired to, and gained positions of affluence and influence within international networks of corporate power that extract labour and resources from local communities. In so doing they have also helped to establish new structures of class privilege and processes of wealth accumulation that have certainly not benefitted all Quebecers equally. Crucially, however, while the promise of wealth and social status draws many individuals to the work of advertising, the creative ad workers I came to know during my fieldwork also emphasized an idealized state of *being creative* as key to what keeps them invested in their particular (i.e. “creative”) jobs within the industry. Examined ethnographically, it is evident that within the field of advertising part of what makes this creative ideal so fertile is, paradoxically, its ongoing association with a counter-cultural stance born of capitalist critique. How do we make sense of this paradox? In the section to follow I discuss how—at the same time as Montreal advertising executives were working to

expand a local advertising industry within Quebec—understandings and valuations of creativity in advertising production were undergoing significant transformations on a more global scale. These transformations marked the 1960s as a key historical moment not just for the establishment of a distinctly Quebecois ad industry, but also for the claiming of creativity within it, as a distinct form of labour and cultural expertise in late capitalism.



Figure 3.6: “Fausse pub” (fake advertisement) appearing in *Croc* magazine, issue number 12 (1980, p.19).²¹ The “ad” satirizes the processes of aesthetic recuperation I describe in this chapter, by using the historical figure of the French-Canadian Patriot to promote a fake wine, *La Brossée des Patriotes*.²² With absurd humour, the ad highlights how Quebecois culture is commodified in target marketing. It also draws a parallel between late capitalist state corporations (Loto-Quebec and SAQ), and the historic British oppression of a French-Canadian majority in the lead-up and aftermath of the 1837 Lower Canada Rebellion. The parallel invites critical reflection on the role of each government in protecting the interests of local elites over and above the working classes. (The Patriotes whose “names nobody remembers” were mostly French-Canadian farmers, whose settlements were looted and burned by British military and anglophone volunteers upon the former’s defeat). The piece illustrates how local artists creatively contested state-supported processes of capitalist expansion during this period, including the aesthetic recuperation of local art and culture by advertisers.

²¹ Published between 1979 – 1995, *Croc* was a French-language humour magazine that featured a range of cartoons, photographic parodies, satirical texts, etc., made by local Quebecois artists and writers. The often irreverent and absurd humour of *Croc* provided critical commentary on provincial politics and cultural tensions during the years of its publication, roughly coinciding with the first (1980) and second (1995) referendums on Quebec sovereignty.

²² The fake wine name, *La Brossée des Patriotes*, plays on the double meaning that “la brossée” has in Quebecois, referring both to “the beating” of the Patriots, as well as to the common Quebec expression, “prendre une brosse” (to get drunk).

From Quiet to Creative Revolution

While the 1960s was a landmark decade for the development of advertising in Quebec, it was also a period of marked change within the industry at a global level. Indeed, the ways that francophone advertising professionals worked to distinguish Quebec as a unique market during this decade responded to a broader shift within the industry towards what Pope (1991) describes as the widespread process of market segmentation. This process was one whereby “[m]onolithic mass media appeals... yielded to ways of targeting distinct audiences” (50). Involving major shifts in strategy and content creation, advertising began to tailor commodity images and messages to “carefully defined and closely scrutinized segment[s], delineated by demography, social class, or psychosocial traits” (50).²³ Accordingly, as Jhally observes, “[i]nstead of trying to differentiate a brand from its competitors for the entire market, segmentation concentrates on trying to reach a specific market within the mass market” (1990: 123).

In addition to changes in industry practice, Pope argues that the effects of these shifts transformed advertising from “a force for cultural homogeneity and standardization... into one where advertising recognizes social and cultural diversity, and *presents consumption as an arena of expressive individualism*” (50, italics added). Reimagining the consumer public through the lens of market segmentation consequently reoriented advertising practices towards conceptualizing and creating commodity images as targeted incitements designed to appeal to specific consumer subjectivities. Insofar as francophone advertising executives in Quebec

²³ Jacques Bouchard’s *Les 36 cordes sensibles Québécois d’après leurs six racines vitales* (1978), discussed above, is an especially relevant example of how these emergent industry paradigms and practices were translated into the Quebec context by local ad workers.

worked to promote their services as cultural intermediaries capable of creating targeted messages for a regional consumer market, it is clear that the local Montreal advertising industry served as a key site for negotiating the political goals of the Quiet Revolution with broader changes in corporate capitalist structures of communication and persuasion.

It is significant that the shift towards market segmentation in advertising strategy as of the 1960s coincided with changes in the valuation of creative labour within the industry at a broader international level. On this point, Pope (2003) argues that the perceived need to create advertisements that resonated with specific target markets in increasingly novel ways was in fact an intrinsic element of what came to be referred to within advertising as the “creative revolution.” As a period of considerable transformation, this “revolution” is typically credited to the influence of key advertising executives and creative professionals (artists, designers, copywriters and creative directors) who came to prominence during the 1960s, as well as to the rise of a small number of innovative agencies located primarily in New York City whose influence on advertising practice and aesthetics was international in reach.

The creative revolution continues to be spoken of within the industry as a pivotal moment of historical change. It is therefore vital to consider its significance on two levels: first, in terms of the institutional and ideological changes it instigated within the industry; and second, in terms of the ways in which the professional practices and aesthetics associated with the creative revolution in advertising transformed broader cultural understandings of creativity well beyond the field of advertising production. Such understandings became foundational for the subsequent “creative industry,” “creative class,” and “creative city” discourses and initiatives of

the twenty-first century, all of which invoke a conceptualization of creativity as individual expertise, talent, and *capital*.²⁴

As I elaborate below, the increasing use of “Creative” as a title for designating particular individuals and departments within agencies reflects a shifting emphasis placed on creativity as a distinct form of professional expertise in late capitalism. During the creative revolution of the 1960s specifically, the Creative ad worker begins to be constructed as an invaluable cultural intermediary whose *aesthetic sensibility* (rather than scientific rationalism) enables them to create resonant commodity images through the recuperation of emergent cultural movements and aesthetics. Crucially, this was accompanied by considerable shifts in workplace dynamics whereby being “a Creative” in advertising became associated with a particular set of attitudinal stances and behavioural codes. These drew upon longstanding cultural mythologies surrounding the figure of the modern artist, and worked to position advertising Creatives (at least the good ones) as embodiments of an *exceptional* subjectivity. In subsequent chapters I consider how this sense of creative exceptionalism is now central to the valuation of specific forms of labour, processes of identity formation, practices of social distinction, and urban development policies in Montreal today. Here, however, I illuminate how advertising served as a primary site in which these ideological transformations first occurred.

The 1960s constituted a period of considerable change in mainstream advertising aesthetics, modes of production, and professional practice. In *The Conquest of Cool: Business*

²⁴ Reckwitz (2012) argues that while the term “creative industries” did not emerge until the 1990s, “three early forms of the later aesthetic economy were already beginning to develop” in an earlier era of industrial capitalism—fashion, design, and advertising (105). According to Reckwitz, advertising “advanced from a Fordist corporate operation into a genuinely creative industry in the course of the 1960s and 1970s” (111).

Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism, Frank (1997) examines how emic narratives of advertising history—encountered in everyday discourse, but also recorded in autobiographies, interviews, and other forms of trade literature—tend to depict this era as one of significant creative freedom and aesthetic achievement. Nostalgic accounts emphasize how this involved a liberating move away from the constraints of the research-driven approach that characterized the “scientific” advertising of the previous decades to one that emphasized the creative talent and aesthetic autonomy of ad workers. These shifts continue to be understood as foundational to the creative flourishing of the revolution’s most influential “ad men,” and thus as directly responsible for what is often seen as a proliferation of exceptionally “good” (aesthetically novel, original) advertising during this period. While such shifts were clearly not all-encompassing (research-driven advertising strategies continued to be employed throughout this time, and remain central to contemporary practice), the ongoing celebration of specific agencies and individuals associated with the creative revolution is testament to the role they played in reimagining the nature and value of creativity within the field of advertising, as a key site of aesthetic production in capitalism.

Guaranteeing the aesthetic autonomy of creative workers was particularly central to the managerial approach espoused by William (Bill) Bernbach. Bernbach was the creative director and executive who co-founded Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) in 1949 in New York City, and is generally seen to have first introduced many of the organizational changes typically associated with the creative revolution.²⁵ Broadly, these changes involved a turn away from the Fordist

²⁵ Both Bernbach and DDB are widely seen to as leaders of the creative revolution in advertising, with the latter providing an early benchmark for the “ultracreative” advertising that defined the era (Frank 1998).

corporate agency model in advertising towards one of smaller and more flexible “creative” agencies, like DDB. Schwarzkopf (2013) describes what set the latter apart from the former:

[DDB] had for the first time broken with the tradition of the departmental separation of copywriters and artists, who in the past had been told to fill in the text boxes and empty spaces of any product advertisement an account executive happened to put on their desks. DDB’s Bill Bernbach put his art directors and copywriters together into teams and gave both equal status, thus ending the old-fashioned separation between copywriting and visualisation. This organisational restructuring, in turn, liberated the creative process within the agency and put creativity – not account management or sales orientation – at the centre of what clients looked for in an advertising agency. (865)

While Schwarzkopf is not entirely accurate in his description above—the “creative team” approach was already implemented by Earnest Elmo Calkins, decades before Bernbach—what was new, and what set DDB apart from other agencies at the time, was the *creative autonomy* accorded to teams in the conceptualization and design of ads.

For this reason, DDB is generally heralded as setting the benchmark for the “ultracreative” advertising of the 1960s (Frank 1997). This is credited to an increased importance placed not just on aesthetic excellence in advertising production, but also on the cultivation of workplace conditions most conducive to the nurturing and harnessing of “creative talent.” Implementing substantial changes in the organization and culture of the agency, Bernbach’s managerial approach gave creative workers more authority and freedom in determining the concept and aesthetic design of campaigns, through a “less ordered corporate structure” that set DDB apart from the larger, full-service agencies that had come to prominence in the early twentieth century, and which remained the industry’s most prolific advertising producers (55). This established an alternative industry model of the ad agency as “creative workplace”—a

“decentralized, nonhierarchical anti-organization” where people worked together in open spaces rather than closed offices, and wore jeans instead of business suits (95).

These organizational changes were clear and direct responses to what creative workers—many of whom were frustrated writers and artists—perceived as oppressive corporate systems that required them to produce images and copy for mediocre ideas conceived by “non-creative” account executives and clients. This was accompanied (at least at DDB), by a marked shift in agency-client relations, whereby Bernbach insisted that clients respect the expertise of his creative teams as specialists in the art of commercial persuasion. Unlike many of his contemporaries at other agencies, for example, Bernbach limited client control over the concept and creation of commissioned campaigns through agency policies that allowed only for “factual error and a violation of corporate policy” as acceptable reasons for client correction.²⁶

It is clear that such changes had palpable and desired impacts for many creative workers in ways that continue to inform the significance accorded to this era across an international network of advertising agencies and nodes of production.²⁷ Both industry narratives as well as popular depictions of American advertising in television shows like *Mad Men* (2007-2015) or films like *Art & Copy* (2009) celebrate the creative revolution as instigating a period of creative flourishing within the industry. The ways in which the creative revolution continues to be remembered as a utopic time of unfettered creative freedom thus points us to how advertising was made into an increasingly salient site for the experience and enjoyment of a liberal

²⁶ According to DDB account executive Joe Daly, as cited in Frank (58).

²⁷ During my own fieldwork with creative ad workers in Montreal, for example, the contributions of Bernbach and the creative revolution were frequently communicated to me as significant historical developments that radically changed the experience and output of advertising by increasing the *creative value* of both.

autological subjectivity in an era of accelerating consumer capitalism. That this was experienced as such by the creative ad workers involved in the so-called creative revolution is clear; describing her experience at DDB, for example, “star copywriter” Phyllis Robinson reminisces: “we just felt very free, as if we had broken our shackles, had gotten out of jail, and were free to work the way we wanted to work” (cited in Frank 57). Such statements suggest how the creative departments of advertising agencies—as well as the creative processes involved in advertising production more generally—were increasingly imagined as sites of expressive individualism for the creative ad worker, despite the utilitarian purpose of advertising as an aesthetic form.

At the same time, the widespread cultural significance that continues to be paid to the most influential (i.e. *creative*) “Mad Men” of the creative revolution (like Bernbach, for example) also points us to the rise of the capital-C “Creative” in advertising, as a new archetype within the industry characterized by a distinct set of personality traits and behavioural tendencies.²⁸ It is therefore just as significant that industry accounts of this period emphasize changing workplace dynamics and relationships within agencies as equally vital historical changes associated with the creative revolution.²⁹ Such accounts illuminate the increasing importance accorded to

²⁸ This is evident in pop culture depictions of 1960s American advertising, such as the popular television show *Mad Men* (2007-2015), as well as the documentary film, *Art & Copy* (2009). The celebration of this archetype is equally evident in memoirs published by individuals associated with the creative revolution, such as Mary Wells Lawrence’s *A Big life (in advertising)* (2002), George Lois’ *George, Be Careful: A Greek Florist’s Kid in the Roughhouse World of Advertising* (1972), Jerry Della Femina’s *From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor* (1970), and Howie Cohen’s *I Can’t Believe I Lived the Whole Thing* (2019). See also Jerry Goodis’ *Have I Ever Lied to You Before* (1972) and *GOOD!S: Shaking the Canadian Advertising Tree* (1991), for examples from the Canadian context.

²⁹ See Mary Warlick’s *Selling Creative: Advertising Men and Women in the Hall of Fame* (2023) for a collection of such accounts, gathered from agency archives and first-hand interviews with the “creative leaders” of the revolution. Nixon (2015) argues that such accounts are part of an “industry folklore” that has “grown up around the New York ‘creative revolution,’” revealing how “the innovations in advertising strategy and execution” associated with DDB and Bernbach were “imported” into other national contexts within an increasingly globalized industry. Focusing on the influence of the creative revolution in Britain specifically, Nixon examines how executives from London-based agencies “not only borrowed from the organisational structure of DDB,” but also “sought to develop its ethos by making the creative teams the key shapers of the agency’s work” (18). This was achieved through higher

performances of creative distinction as markers of professional talent—performances that drew upon Romantic constructions of the artist as creative genius, and transferred the sense of individual exceptionalism inherent in such constructions to the creative ad worker. Part of the broader historical significance of the creative revolution is thus how it made advertising into a key site for the emergence of what Reckwitz, following Michel Foucault, describes as the “creativity dispositif” of late capitalism—a dispositif that “reorients the aesthetic towards the new while at the same time orienting the regime of the new towards the aesthetic” (2017: 9).³⁰ Crucially, this dispositif has subsequently come to define a host of new forms of affective labour and class affiliations in the twenty-first century well beyond advertising production.

Increasing attention paid to the behavioural codes and performances of “uber-creative” (Frank 1997) ad workers during the creative revolution illuminates how creativity began to be imagined and experienced as a particular *dispositif* in late capitalism. Such re-imaginings transfer the perceived exceptionalism associated with the archetype of the eccentric and provocative avant-garde artist, to distinct professional roles *within* the corporate structure of the ad agency. In so doing, of course, the counter-cultural stance of the former is recuperated by the new professional Creative as a form of individual cultural capital. This recuperation erodes the critical potentiality of such a stance through a reimagining of *creative originality as a form of capital*—in

remuneration for creative professionals, but also through policies that shifted power dynamics within agencies, giving creative teams full authority over the creative content of campaigns while simultaneously limiting the power that account executives previously held to make or propose changes.

³⁰ According to Peltonen, Foucault understood *dispositifs* as “historically specific totalities of discourses and practices” (2004: 206).

this case one that can be harnessed to the production of persuasive commodity images and the advancement of capitalist interests.

The embracing of counter-cultural aesthetics and attitudes by ad workers in performances of creative distinction is extensively documented within historical accounts of workplace dynamics during the creative revolution. Albeit recounted with a certain degree of nostalgic exaggeration, these stories unapologetically celebrate the antics of influential Creatives as challenging hierarchical structures and existing professional norms of the industry. As Frank describes, such individuals continue to be remembered as “heroes” and “brazen rule-breakers” within the field, in “[t]ales of workplace madness” that remain “particularly prominent in industry lore” (53). Importantly—as is evident in the examples I discuss below—these stories also invoke an ideology of creative exceptionalism that is rooted in an understanding of creativity as both a highly individualistic as well as inherently destructive productive force—what Buck-Morss (1992) describes as the “autotelic myth of creation *ex nihilo*, wherein ‘man’ transforms nature by shaping it to his will” (28).

Within the context of the creative revolution, the destructiveness of this autotelic creativity—and by extension of the autological creative subject himself—is particularly apparent in stories of creative ad workers behaving in outlandish and provocative ways *as evidence of their creativity*. Take, for example, the exaggeratedly aggressive antics of the celebrated American art director and advertising executive George Lois, who reportedly “violently confronted superiors, whether other agency men or clients, whenever they edited or altered his work,” going so far as to physically attack those responsible (Frank 81). While extreme, Lois was not unique; indeed, his

influence in shaping the creative revolution as a prolific ad maker and as co-founder of the Papert Koenig Lois (PKL) agency meant that both his aesthetic style as well as his demeanour set a precedent for what became accepted behaviours amongst creatives within the industry. This was reinforced by Lois himself, who actively sought to hire junior creatives with similarly irreverent attitudes, as illustrated in the story of one such employee who reportedly “grew irate at Koenig’s questioning” during his hiring interview, “and said, ‘Fuck you, I don’t need this horseshit’, [which] prompted Lois to hire him” on the spot (Frank 83). Similarly, Frank describes how employees from the “ultracreative Chiat/Day agency continue to recount stories of how Jay Chiat would ‘cut off a client’s tie if he thinks it’s ugly’” (53).

Even when allowing for the exaggerations of nostalgia, the basic contours of these stories are accurate and illuminating. On the one hand, the ideological associations that solidified around the new figure of the non-conforming advertising Creative highlight how advertising was made into an increasingly appealing site of creative agency for aspiring artists and writers. On the other hand, however, such tales can also be read as applauding a pattern of temperamental and hubristic attitudes and behaviours that characterized a generation of mostly white, affluent, male ad workers—ostensibly in evidence and expression of their exceptional and inherent creativity. Within the hyper-capitalist context of the new “creative agency,” these behaviours were (and in significant ways continue to be) indulged at least in part because of hegemonic understandings of creativity as a form of innate individual talent, or genius, which accords the “creative self” an exceptional social status within broader society.

Within the field of advertising, performances of creative identity in such terms thus both draw upon and reinforce what Wilf (2014) describes as “a taken-for-granted script about creative agency” (398) in Western societies. This script emphasizes creative agency as stemming from an innate form of genius rather than structural set of social privileges, and “frame(s) failure to be creative and to transcend present constraints as the result of one’s natural disposition” (407). In this way, the exceptionally creative ad worker can be read as a particular iteration of what Povinelli (2006) terms “the autological self”: a self that is self-made, self-sovereign, and thus firmly positioned at one end of liberalism’s binary construction of freedom and constraint. Within such a construction, those who effectively embody an idealized creative subjectivity are then largely exempt from many of the everyday norms and rules of etiquette that otherwise act as disciplinary forces upon other (presumably less, or even entirely *un*-creative) selves.

Such associations and performances of creative identity were not contained to Madison Avenue; read as expressions of an autological subjectivity, these attitudes and behaviours became commonplace performances of creative identity within a broader international industry of advertising production. That such associations were translated into the Quebec context and came to inform the creative identities of ad workers in Montreal is apparent in the stories that people often recounted to me during my own fieldwork. Take, for example, the following conversation I had with Michel—a fifty-year-old commercial director who has lived and worked in Montreal his entire life. Though I initially met and interviewed Michel during fieldwork in 2013, this particular conversation occurred in 2020. In it, Michel describes what he sees as a profound shift in “the mythology” that surrounds being “a Creative” in advertising, recounting

stories that romanticize a by-gone era of creative freedom while nevertheless continuing to reinforce many of the themes already outlined above:

ME: Many of the advertising creatives I interviewed speak about themselves as non-conformists. Does that resonate with your own experience?

MICHEL: Absolutely. The irreverent “cool” creative is so mythologized in advertising. Though things have changed considerably over the past twenty years.

ME: Can you elaborate?

MICHEL: When I first started directing commercials there were some creatives who could still get away with shit that nobody today would try to pull off. Like, in the early 2000s. There was this whole crew of them—you know these young guys with shaved heads and thick black rimmed glasses? They stole their look from the modern art world. They’d wear painter coveralls to client meetings and shit. Anyway, these guys would go into pitches with this hot-shit, take it or leave it attitude, as though the client would be lucky to have them. I remember they were tough. They’d go head-to-head with the client to defend their concept. If a client wanted to change a concept, they’d be like “No. You can’t change the concept. The concept took months to do and if you don’t like it, we’ll go back to creation, and it’s going to take several weeks, and you’re going to miss your air date. You’ll have to rebook everything.” And so the client would be like, “fuck I’ll miss my air date... I’ll be in trouble with my boss... or yeah, I should just trust him, because he’s got balls.” That was still going on.

ME: This was when?

MICHEL: This was when I was starting out. Early 2000s, until 2010 at least. But those days are long gone. It simply wouldn’t fly with a client today. *Oublie ça*. Clients aren’t impressed with crazy creative antics anymore. You go into a client meeting insisting on your creative authority or whatever, and you’re fucked. You won’t work. Today the client calls the shots. Creatives might resent it, but they know it. (Pauses). I don’t know if it was because of iPhones and social media and how it allowed anyone to become a “content creator,” but now everything’s changed. Nowadays, the client says “jump,” and the creative says “how high?”

ME: Some of the other creatives I’ve interviewed have recounted stories to me about outlandish things they’ve done or witnessed on commercial shoots, or at industry parties. Or even just in everyday agency life. They seem to see those behaviours as expressions of their creative freedom.

MICHEL: For sure it’s related.

ME: Most of these stories are told nostalgically, though. As though the fun has come to an end. Have you observed a change around what people tolerate as “creatives being creatives” within agency culture, too?

MICHEL: Absolutely.

ME: How do you make sense of that change?

MICHEL: It’s unfortunate. It relates to the loss of creative freedom in the work itself. (Pauses). But maybe not all the changes are bad. *Je sais pas*. I think that creative departments were real boys’ clubs. And a lot of their behaviours would be called out as toxic in today’s cancel culture.

ME: It wasn’t toxic then?

MICHEL: (Laughs). Probably, for some people. But for the boys in the club, it wasn’t even that they—maybe we, if I’m honest with myself—didn’t care. It’s that we didn’t even consider it.

ME: Can you give me an example?

MICHEL: Sylvain Archambault is a guy that comes to mind. When I first started out at [production studio] everyone was constantly telling stories about him. Like the time he was pitching to do a commercial for the Canadian Armed Forces, and he decided to shave his head and wear army fatigues to the meeting. People still talked about it years later. I mean, he was pitching to direct the commercial so the pitch was for the creative team at the agency, not the client. And of course, the creatives loved it. It fed into that non-conformist attitude they see as being “original.”

ME: What was he like to work with?

MICHEL: He was abrasive. But he was also outrageous and all gung-ho, and the creatives he worked with loved that shit. Not all the chicks in the office loved his antics. I remember at one point he was sending porn and animal sex photos to the printer, which was right next to the desks of the production coordinators, who were all young women. They’d freak out. Among us guys it was like a *fait d’arme*. (Pauses). But it was still kind of *limite* for us, because we were a younger generation coming in. We didn’t actually do those things ourselves. Sylvain got called out during #MeToo, by the way. Now he’s barred from everything.

ME: Because of the porn pranking?

MICHEL: No. I think because he was abusive on set. Maybe sexually, but also just like insulting everyone and being, like, vehemently irreverent... to him it was irreverent, anyway. I remember this one commercial for Bell that he directed. “Bonjour Toto.” He was so mean

on set he actually made the clown cry... He made the clown cry. It was a big thing. Apparently, he had been like, "Act, goddamnit! Your mother is a slut!" and other shit. He fucking made the clown cry. (Laughs). That one for sure entered into industry lore. So much so in fact that a couple years later they actually made a second Toto commercial, where Toto gets fired by an irate commercial director who was clearly Archambault, and goes home to watch Bell TV.

ME: Did Archambault direct it?

MICHEL: Of course! How's that for meta? Making a Toto commercial about himself being an asshole making a Toto commercial.

ME: It wasn't seen as arrogant?

MICHEL: Maybe. But being arrogant was a desirable quality back then for a director. Or any Creative, really. It was just seen as being ballsy. Not everyone was like that. But the association is still there.

ME: What about you? Did you fit that mould? Or do you still?

MICHEL: I hope not totally. Not in the really bad ways, anyway. But for sure there was a period when there was more room to push boundaries, and I benefitted from that. I don't mean sexual abuse and stuff. I mean being able to go big on shoots in ways that broke rules, or laws even. I'm talking things like shooting near the train tracks, or whatever. There was this one commercial, where we shot a Pepsi machine rolling on the bridge to Quebec from a helicopter, and I was with the creatives and the cinematographer in the helicopter, with this pilot who was former military, and we had already got the "safe" shot, where we only got so close because of federal air traffic laws and rules and shit. Anyway, I had the creatives with me in the helicopter, and we were like, to the pilot, "yeah, rules, we know... but man, common, you're a chopper pilot! Imagine this is, like, Vietnam in Apocalypse Now. We're not gonna get the cool shot from two hundred metres up. If we're gonna get the shot we gotta get in there, like [makes revving sound], it's gotta be baddass!" And the creatives were all like, "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" And the pilot did it. He did the illegal shot. (Laughs). But things don't work that way anymore. Everything is by the books. There's nothing brazen. (Pauses). Before, creatives were cool and clients wanted some of that cool, and you were like, "yeah, well, you're gonna have to suck my balls for it," but now it's like... no, no—they're doing you a favour by hiring you. *Y'a quelque chose qui s'est renversé...* Yeah, *non*. Everybody is replaceable now.

Michel's observations in the interview above speak to how intensifying precarity under neoliberalism has contributed to changing dynamics between "creatives" and clients over the past decade, rendering the former "replaceable" at any moment. These changes have occurred alongside other transformations that have also profoundly altered workplace dynamics and agency cultures, which Michel connects to the increasing vigilance and "cancel culture" spurred by movements like #MeToo. While Michel recognizes, somewhat ambivalently, these changes as positive, he also correlates them to what he sees as a *loss of creative agency as an expression of individual freedom* in the work of advertising production.

At the same time, many of Michel's experiences as a commercial director, as well as his observations about his colleagues within the industry, reflect how an ideology of autotelic creativity continues to inform notions of creative labour and subjectivity in advertising, and within the city of Montreal more broadly, despite the changes he describes. Moreover, the details of the stories he tells speak directly to how "being creative" in advertising has been historically associated with a performative stance of non-conformity since the creative revolution of the 1960s. While I examine the gendering of creativity in such terms more closely in Chapter 5, here I want to highlight how such stories situate the experience of "creative freedom" not just within the process of aesthetic production itself, but also—crucially—within processes of identity formation that take shape *around* the creative act. The celebrated "antics" of figures like Sylvain Archambault, as well as Michel's own story of urging a helicopter pilot to imagine himself part of the American invasion of Vietnam (albeit a highly aestheticized, Francis Ford Coppola version) are especially striking examples of how an idealized creative freedom is pursued at the expense of the freedom or well-being of other kinds of selves. The primacy of

such an ideology—as well as its intersection with other forms of racial, gender, and class privilege—is especially apparent when Michel observes that Creatives (especially those in “the boys’ club”) “didn’t even consider” the impacts of their behaviours beyond their relevance to their own enjoyment, creative flourishing, and career advancement.



Figure 3.7: Still frame of Bell Express Vu “Bonjour Toto” commercial (2001). Featuring Toto the clown.

Within the field of advertising production, the perceived aesthetic qualities of creative output (i.e. the novelty of the commodity image, which Michel describes as “going big” in concept and creation) certainly contribute to whether an individual is seen as legitimately creative. So too does the *everyday performance of a creative subjectivity*, however, in ways that Michel describes as “irreverent,” “ballsy,” “baddass,” and “*limite*”—descriptions that exemplify the individualism and destructive potential that Buck-Morss (1992) connects to the Western “autotelic myth of creation.” With regards to the latter, then, obvious parallels can be made between Michel’s stories of working in advertising in the early 2000s with those that are

frequently recounted of the creative revolution in the 1960s. These parallels speak to how the creative revolution was a pivotal moment both for the evolution of advertising practice, as well as for genealogical constructions of creativity under capitalism. This moment was one whereby the key aesthetics and zeitgeist of post-war counter cultural movements were recuperated by ad workers not only in the aesthetics of the commodity images they produced, but also in their workplace behaviours and performances of creative identity. This ultimately served to advance their own careers within an expanding corporate capitalist system and culture of mass consumption. In this way, the creative revolution marks a decisive turning point in the history of advertising, whereby both mass consumption *as well as the labour of advertising production* itself are presented as arenas of expressive individualism and self-actualization.³¹

Stories of the most celebrated agencies and ad workers of the creative revolution reflect exactly this—how the 1960s witnessed the rise of the capital-C Creative worker as an archetype who in many ways provided an antithesis to the corporate “organization man” (Frank 82), by delineating creativity as a form of individual capital and expertise associated with distinct roles and departments *within* these very organizations.³² Beyond performative antics, the new Creatives acted as vocal critics of the organizational models and research-backed approaches espoused by an older generation of admen who had first established the large, full-service advertising agencies that dominated advertising in North America up until the 1950s.³³ Within

³¹ C.f. Pope 1990, p.50.

³² In the field of advertising, the “organization man” is perhaps most clearly associated with the figure of the account executive (as an embodiment of the conservative WASP, or bourgeois establishment); in the context of the creative revolution open hostility between creatives and account executives was understood as rooted in divisive cultural and political differences, and not just competing professional roles and values.

³³ The advent of a distinctly modern advertising industry is generally understood to have occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, with the emergence of the first full-service advertising agencies in the United States. These agencies both responded to and themselves reflected the contemporaneous rise of a new American corporate

such discourses, being a Creative is directly equated with more “liberated” and flexible forms of labour as *the key element* that distinguishes these exceptional, “ultracreative” ad workers and agencies from their predecessors and competitors. In its transformation from descriptor to proper noun and professional title over the course of the creative revolution (from *being creative* to *being a Creative*), we can also observe how creativity’s association with “rebellion, with difference, with the avant-garde’s search for the new” (Frank 84) meant it was no longer to be found at the margins of a capitalist order (as it had perhaps been in its association with the nineteenth-century figure of the bohemian artist, or the avant-garde). Instead, creativity was now the pulse at the heart of a neoliberal capitalist system—the primary services offered by ad agencies dedicated entirely to the ever-accelerating production of targeted commodity images and the cultivation of consumer desires.

Through a new emphasis on novelty, youth, and non-conformity in both aesthetic production (ads) as well as in the everyday performances of the Creative self, the creative revolution must be recognized as a decisive moment of ideological and institutional transformation, through which the subversive potential of avant-garde aesthetics and other counter-cultural movements was recuperated by ad workers in ways that ultimately reinforced rather than undermined existing corporate interests and regimes of social control. (Hence why Frank sees this period as the “conquering” of “cool”). Indeed, it is clear that while many of the most influential advertising creatives of the creative revolution ostensibly identified with the

capitalism, which “began unseating British family capitalism from its position of global dominance” during the late nineteenth century (Arrighi et al. 1999: 132). For this reason, as Williams (1980) argues, “the formation of modern advertising has to be traced, essentially, to certain characteristics of the new ‘monopoly’ (corporate) capitalism, first clearly evident in this same period” (328).

critical aesthetics and ideals of 1960s youth counterculture, their everyday work involved incorporating these into the creation of commodity images not only in order to increase client sales, but also in order to delineate creativity as a distinct form of professional expertise and individual capital.

In this way, the creative revolution did not really constitute a revolt against corporate North America, but involved instead the emergence of a new class of “cultural producers” (artists, writers, designers) *as corporate stakeholders in their own right*, who ultimately sought to profit from the same capitalist system against which the popular youth movements of the 1960s raged. In the hands of the new advertising Creatives, non-conformity was thus displaced from the populist countercultural challenge to capitalism, and transformed into the primary aesthetics of an emergent “hip consumerism” that continues to promise self-actualization through the consumption of mass-produced goods—an aesthetics that Frank describes as “the key to incessant profitability” in late capitalism (93). The pursuit of creativity in its association with innovation and aesthetic novelty thus became the core value and driving force of the industry, as well as the dominant language through which advertising production would be managed, measured, and given value for decades to come. In the Quebec context specifically, this process of counter-cultural recuperation intersected with a parallel recuperation of the zeitgeist and aesthetics of the Quiet Revolution, whereby advertising creatives began to claim expertise on two levels: first, as experts of aesthetic novelty and counter-cultural “cool”; and second, as cultural producers whose work resonates with and serves to reproduce a distinctly Quebecois identity, against the potentially homogenizing effects of broader Canadian and North American mass consumer culture.

It is therefore especially significant that the creative revolution coincided with a period of broader socio-economic transformation on an international level, whereby emergent neoliberal ideologies and arrangements gradually came to replace the Fordist corporate capitalism of earlier decades. The ongoing significance accorded to the creative revolution during this particular historical moment draws our attention to how the industry of advertising has worked to ideologically untether (at least partially) the concept of creativity from its primary association with the figure of the artist and the pursuit of “art for art’s sake,” harnessing it instead to the figure of the incorporated creative producer and the pursuit of aesthetic novelty in commodity image production. This could only occur, of course, thanks to earlier ideological transformations the concept of creativity underwent in association with the avant-garde (as outlined in Chapter 2), as well as through the targeted efforts of local stakeholders seeking to establish and profit from local agencies of corporate capitalist aesthetic production.

Through these interrelated forms of labour and consumption, an ideology of *creativity as autotelic pursuit* thus helped to crystalize a salient (though paradoxical) philosophical stance that found particularly fertile ground within the advertising industry, as a nexus of avant-garde aesthetics, class distinction, and commercial activity. As I elaborate below, this stance enabled ad workers to simultaneously claim the culturally exceptional position associated with the figure of the avant-garde artist, while also working to reinforce a corporate capitalist system through their everyday labour, acquiring significant levels of wealth and social recognition along the way. In this manner, the creative revolution transformed the field of advertising production into a foundational site for the emergence of new cultural identities and socio-economic allegiances

that have since become constitutive of a broader “creative class politics” in urban centres across the world, including Montreal.

Creativity as capital in Montreal

In the Quebec context, the rise of aesthetic capitalism has profoundly shaped class relations and patterns of urban development in the city of Montreal in particular.³⁴ While public funding for cultural sectors across the province has remained a priority for successive provincial governments since the Quiet Revolution, today Montreal is considered to have an especially high concentration of “cultural industries,” thanks in part to “massive investments in architecture, the arts and special events” that began in the second half of the twentieth century and that continue today (Leslie and Rantisi 2011: 1779). As Leslie and Rantisi argue, while such efforts to ensure the preservation and ongoing dynamism of local cultural forms and practices is informed by an ideology of Quebecois nationalism, these have also remained “oriented towards garnering external validation for the city’s unique cultural identity and world city status” (1779). Events like Expo 67 and the Summer Olympics of 1976 were thus notable early iterations of a modern aesthetics of spectacle that has since characterized attempts to define and promote Montreal as a vital cosmopolitan hub of creative activity, and therefore as distinct from other cities within the

³⁴ Reckwitz (2017) identifies advertising as a key field of cultural production and economic activity through which a new “aesthetic capitalism” came to replace the industrial capitalism of the post-Fordist context. This aesthetic capitalism is distinct from earlier regimes insofar as it pivots upon “work activities that demand the constant production of new things, in particular of signs and symbols—texts, images, communication, procedures, aesthetic objects, body modifications—for a consumer public in search of originality” (2). According to Reckwitz, the changes involved in the rise of aesthetic capitalism have, moreover, led to the rise of a specific “social constellation” in late modernity, which “prioritizes and systematically promotes creativity” as a core cultural value and driver of economic growth (128).

province and across Canada more broadly. In 2006, these efforts resulted in the designation of Montreal as a “City of Design” within UNESCO’s “Creative Cities Network”—a designation I discuss in greater detail below.³⁵

To a greater extent than in most Canadian cities, everyday life in Montreal is uniquely shaped, at least in part, by its numerous cultural festivals, its vibrant arts scene, its six universities, and by the presence of a number of dynamic “creative industries” like advertising, fashion, film and television production, video game design, animation, and architecture.³⁶ This cultural landscape is supported by municipal policies and development initiatives designed to promote specific forms of labour and consumer habits, which since the early 2000s have been increasingly perceived and celebrated as constitutive of the so-called “creative class” (more on this in Chapter 4). For these reasons, Montreal provides a particularly illuminating context in which to observe how intersecting economic and ideological transformations have, since the 1960s, made creativity into an especially fertile “boundary concept” (Hornidge 2011). Thinking of creativity as such allows us to consider how the concept acts as an orienting cultural ideal around which diverse segments of a local population are brought together through shared interests and class allegiances, despite widely divergent and often inherently contradictory

³⁵ According to UNESCO, Montreal “became the first North American city to create the position of a design commissioner, dedicated exclusively to the development and promotion of design and to raise awareness among private and public sector stakeholders of the benefits of good design” (<https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/montreal>)

³⁶ As identified in the study, *The Creative Industries: Catalysts of Wealth and Influence for Metropolitan Montreal*, by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal / Chambre de Commerce du Montréal Métropolitain (CCMM) (2013). Accessed online February 16, 2022: https://www.ccmm.ca/externe/pdf/creative_industries_study.pdf

philosophical stances regarding the nature and purpose of creativity and aesthetic experience in our contemporary context.³⁷

At a global level, the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies in urban centres like Montreal has been accompanied by a discursive shift in defining the relation of aesthetic production and experience to commerce under capitalism. This has involved a turn away from the concept of “culture industry”—first articulated by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944) in their critical theorization of “mass-produced culture” under capitalism—towards a contemporary emphasis within neoliberal economics and urban policy on the value of “creative industries” as key drivers of urban “regeneration” and economic growth. In her content analysis of this discursive shift within the publications and conference proceedings of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Hornidge (2011) illuminates an underlying ideological transformation in dominant understandings of the relationships between “culture,” “the arts,” and “creativity” that occurred over the second half of the twentieth century. While this transformation has been neither total nor complete—Hornidge is careful to consider how the ongoing “fuzziness” surrounding the distinctions between “culture industries” and “creative industries” reveals these concepts to be productive precisely because they are continuously under negotiation—the gradual adoption of “creative industries” into dominant usage by “national governments, their policy-producing bodies, multilateral

³⁷ Hornidge (2011) argues that the concept, “creative industries” can be framed as a “boundary concept” because it “operates as a concept in different settings and is employed by a wide range of highly differing actors and actor groups. All these actors refer roughly to the same meaning when using the term ‘creative industries’, but refrain from giving tight, precise definitions. Instead, enough space is given to attach slightly varying meanings to the term” (260). The “fuzziness” that surrounds the concept is therefore productive insofar as it “allows actors to cross boundaries of viewpoints, knowledge and politics, as well as the institutional boundaries of different actor groups” (279)

organisations and civil representations around the world” (256) is significant. More specifically, insofar as this shift has worked to situate creativity as a core component of thriving “knowledge economies,” it points us to the ways in which state policies pertaining to creativity in Montreal, as elsewhere, are increasingly informed by a neoliberal ideology through which human life is given value primarily as a form of capital.

In 2004 UNESCO created its “Creative Cities Network” as part of an effort “to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.”³⁸ While I discuss the ways in which various stakeholders in Montreal invoke the city’s Creative City designation within this network in greater detail in Chapter 4, it is worth pausing here to examine the interrelated ideological and material changes that led to the adoption of the term “creative industries” by the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, while this term is now regularly used in UNESCO policy and publications as an umbrella term that encompasses both “traditional” arts activities (the visual arts, literature, theatre, etc.) as well as market-oriented aesthetic production (advertising, design, media, etc.), prior to the late 1990s the use of “culture industries” was more commonplace, and explicitly excluded the latter. The collapsing of such a distinction in the concept of creative industry is both indicative of as well as integral to the neoliberal absorption of cultural domains that had previously been accorded a “revolutionary potential of critical, historical, and imaginative activity”—particularly amongst “New Left intellectuals and activists” (Fest 2021: 9). This absorption, I argue, speaks to foundational compatibilities between definitions of creativity in spheres of capitalist activity (like

³⁸ As stated on the UNESCO Creative Cities website, accessed online February 16, 2022: <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home>

advertising), and those encountered in the critical traditions of much anti-capitalist scholarship and “counter-cultural” art movements—compatibilities that highlight how creativity is in both contexts often invoked as a form of individual exceptionalism within processes of social distinction and professionalization.

As Hornidge outlines in her study, UNESCO and its member states first began to use the term “culture industries” in the 1970s in initiatives and policies that “reflected a conceptualisation of knowledge and culture that aimed at preserving and fostering localised cultural diversity, autonomous forms of cultural production and free cultural expression” (254). Usage of the term during this period reflects an understanding of culture informed by the critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno, who first referred to “the culture industry” in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, originally published in German in 1947.³⁹ The term in this original sense made a critical distinction between what the authors of *Dialectic* as well as the Frankfurt school more broadly consider “mass-produced culture” and the “genuine work of art.” Within this distinction, the former is characterized by an aesthetics of “advertising,” which Horkheimer and Adorno associate especially with film, radio, and magazines (2002:94).⁴⁰ The latter, however, is defined rather abstractly as aesthetic works of “dialectical negativity,” and less explicitly in categorical terms: “rather than showing the world as it is, the true work of art shows it as it is by also

³⁹ While *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was published in 1947, this was a revised version of the text, *Philosophical Fragments*, printed in 1944 and circulated amongst the authors’ colleagues (Schmidt 1998).

⁴⁰ In addition to such mediums, Horkheimer and Adorno are also pointedly critical of jazz. On this matter, Brantlinger suggests that Adorno’s “pronouncements on mass culture” were especially negative, even amongst the Frankfurt School, and that this is so “partly because he develops definitions of genuine and mass culture which are completely irreconcilable, and partly because of a European parochialism that resulted” (1983: 242). Adorno’s “inability to see any emancipatory value in jazz” is, according to Brantlinger, evidence of such bias (242).

showing it what it is not, shadowing forth the liberation it has failed to achieve” (Brantlinger 1983: 234).

While this theory of “the culture industry” does not categorically exclude popular culture from being considered “genuine art,” it is nevertheless clear that, for the Frankfurt School, those forms of “genuine art” that inspire critical awareness through an imaginative engagement required by their dialectic negativity (i.e. “authentic experience”), are generally associated with European high culture and specific forms of aesthetic practice and experience that have remained definitive of the so-called “fine arts” since the eighteenth century—delineations that scholars like Eagleton (1990) have shown to be deeply entangled with processes of bourgeois legitimization, as I outlined in Chapter 1.⁴¹ It is therefore entirely from these categories (classical music, literature, studio arts) that Horkheimer and Adorno draw in their *Dialectic*, as contrasting examples to the types of aesthetic experience generated by “the culture industry.” Crucially, while the former may depend upon aristocratic patronage or the commodity market, for Horkheimer and Adorno “genuine art” remains *undetermined* by these, aesthetically retaining a critical emancipatory potential. Works produced by the culture industry, however, in their inherently standardized and commodified forms, are entirely determined by a capitalist logic of

⁴¹ The codification of a modern system of the arts is generally credited to Charles Batteux, whose philosophical treatise *Les beaux-arts réduits à un même principe* (1746) was widely embraced within France and across Europe upon its publication (Iseminger 2004: 2). This philosophical development coincided with the emergence of a new set of cultural practices within which specific modes of aesthetic contemplation became increasingly seen as definitive of class status. M.H. Abrams (1985a) has thus argued that poetry, music, painting and sculpture are, for the first time, brought together under the term “fine arts”, as the paradigmatic objects of gentlemanly aesthetic attention and the exercising of the judgment of taste within such a context. Moreover, Abrams observes, these aesthetic forms were newly categorized together “not on the ground that these arts possess a common nature or shared objective features, but solely on the ground that they are all capable of a common function or social role” (16).

marketization, and thus, according to the Frankfurt School, inevitably produce a “reified false consciousness” amongst the masses (Brantlinger 233).

Given the influence of such ideas upon twentieth-century Western philosophies of art and culture, it is unsurprising that UNESCO first adopted the term “culture industries” in reference to market-driven forms of aesthetic production against which “autonomous arts” activities in need of preservation and fostering were distinguished (Hornidge 254). However, as UNESCO and its member states adopted and elaborated the term during a “primary phase” of policy-making (which Hornidge situates as the period from 1976-1998), they gradually “moved from a critical stand on the integration of culture, creativity and the arts on the one hand, and the market on the other, to an incorporation of market-oriented and market-driven cultural production in UNESCO’s profile” (260). Though UNESCO maintained a mandate “to foster and preserve traditional and experimental arts and culture,” this was ultimately expanded to include recognition of “cultural industries” as valuable sites of aesthetic production with the potential to contribute to the development of local, regional, and national economies (260). In 2000, UNESCO thus defined “cultural industries” as “those industries that combine the creation, production and commercialisation of creative contents which are intangible and cultural in nature” (cited in Hornidge 257)—an expanded definition that subsequently became central to their “Creative Cities” designations in 2004. In this way, the more positive denotation of “cultural industries” in UNESCO discourse by the turn of the twentieth century reflects an embracing of those forms of “mass-produced” culture the Frankfurt School initially condemned, including “printing, publishing and multimedia, audiovisual, phonographic and cinematographic productions as well as crafts and design” (cited in Hornidge 257).

The concept of “culture industries” has continued to shift over the past two decades, largely in response to the rise of a “creative industries” discourse in neoliberal policy and economic theory. Originally defined by the UK “Creative Industries Taskforce” in 1997/98, the term “creative industries” was first used in reference to ““those industries which have their origin in *individual creativity*, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”” (cited in Hornidge 257, italics added). Insofar as such a definition prioritizes the criterion of “wealth and job creation,” the concept of “creative industries” thus works to subsume the value of cultural and aesthetic activity into market profitability. Given UNESCO’s historical mandate to preserve and foster “localised cultural diversity, autonomous forms of cultural production and free cultural expression,” it is unsurprising that the organization was initially hesitant to collapse the concept of “cultural industries” into that of “creative industries” so defined. And yet, while in 2005 the organization continued to favour use of the former in its policies, distinguishing cultural industries as “those activities, goods and services” that “embody or convey cultural expressions, *irrespective of the commercial value they may have*” (cited in Hornidge 257, italics added), in its recent publications UNESCO has now adopted “Cultural and Creative Industries” (CCI) as an umbrella term. This term provides a bridge between neoliberal constructions of creativity-as-capital and competing beliefs in the social importance of “autonomous” culture and art that remain rooted in an Enlightenment ideology of aesthetic disinterestedness.

The contemporary relevance of the “Creative City” designation for Montreal is therefore significant for both economic and ideological reasons. Here, I suggest that the overlap or “fuzziness” surrounding distinctions between “cultural” and “creative industries” speaks to why

the concept of creativity is so ideologically fertile in this particular context. Given how the Quiet Revolution emphasized the importance of cultural activity and aesthetic experience as crucial sites of both individual and collective emancipation, idealizations of creativity as a fundamental characteristic of the “autological self” have clear resonance for the project of Quebecois nationalism. The salience of creativity as an ideological point of intersection between autonomous aesthetic production, individual freedom, and cultural sovereignty is especially evident in the *Refus global* (“Total Refusal”)—a manifesto published and signed by sixteen Quebecois artists and intellectuals in 1948 that criticized the cultural conservatism and insularity of Quebecois society, as well as the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church and Duplessis governments during the *Grande Noirceur*.⁴² Recognized today as a seminal text within the emergence of Quebec’s *automatiste* avant-garde, and as a precursor to the social transformations of the Quiet Revolution that accelerated in the 1960s, the *Refus global* included a primary essay by the artist Paul-Émile Borduas alongside additional essays, poetry, two short plays, illustrations and photographs. Together, these works constituted what Wilkin (1998) describes as a “poetic declaration of aesthetic independence” by an influential group of local artists and intellectuals, as well as “an assertion of passionate belief in modernism and even more in intellectual freedom.”⁴³

⁴² The *Grande Noirceur* (Great Darkness) refers to this period of cultural and political conservatism in the province, and is associated especially with premier Maurice Duplessis (1936 to 1939 and from 1944 to 1959).

⁴³ In addition to Borduas, signatories and contributors to the *Refus global* included Madeleine Arbour, Marcel Barbeau, Bruno Cormier, Claude Gauvreau, Pierre Gauvreau, Muriel Guilbault, Marcelle Ferron, Fernand Leduc, Thérèse Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Maurice Perron, Louise Renaud, Françoise Riopelle, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan. Referred to as “les Automatistes”, these artists and intellectuals were heavily influenced by the surrealist theory of automatism.

Gagnon (2014) describes the *Refus global* as having “launched a frontal attack on the parochialism (*esprit de clocher*, as it was called) in Quebec, the stifling dominance of Catholicism, and the narrow nationalism of the provincial government under Premier Maurice Duplessis” (8). Yet, in accounting for how the *Refus global* articulated an “automatist rebellion,” Bourassa (1984) suggests that it was ultimately a rebellion of “an essentially personal nature” and of “a question of how to live” rather than one of political partisanship per se (95). Consider the following assertions by Borduas (2010[1948]) in his title essay:

D’ici là notre devoir est simple.

Rompre définitivement avec toutes les habitudes de la société, se désolidariser de son esprit utilitaire. Refus d’être sciemment au-dessous de nos possibilités psychiques et physiques. Refus de fermer les yeux sur les vices, les duperies perpétrées sous le couvert du savoir, du service rendu, de la reconnaissance due. Refus d’un cantonnement dans la seule bourgade plastique, place fortifiée mais trop facile d’évitement. Refus de se taire – faites de nous ce qu’il vous plaira mais vous devez nous entendre – refus de la gloire, des honneurs (le premier consenti) : stigmates de la nuisance, de l’inconscience, de la servilité. Refus de servir, d’être utilisables pour de telles fins. Refus de toute INTENTION, arme néfaste de la RAISON. À bas toutes deux, au second rang !

Place à la magie !

Place aux mystères objectifs !

Place à l’amour !

Place aux nécessités ! ⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “Therefore, our duty is simple. To break definitively with all conventions of society and its utilitarian spirit! We refuse to live knowingly at less than our spiritual and physical potential; refuse to close our eyes to the vices and confidence tricks perpetuated in the guise of learning, favour, or gratitude; refuse to be ghettoed in an ivory tower, well-fortified but too easy to ignore; refuse to remain silent -- do with us what you will, but you shall hear us; refuse to make a deal with la gloire and its attendant honours: stigmata of malice, unawareness or servility; refuse to serve and to be used for such ends; refuse all intention, evil weapon of reason -- down with them, to second place! Make way for magic! Make way for objective mysteries! Make way for love! Make way for necessities!” English translation accessed online: http://www.conseildesarts.org/documents/Manifeste/manifeste_refus-english.htm. Last accessed February 28, 2022.

As the passage above exemplifies, in addition to decrying the oppression and censorship of state and church, the manifesto also refused an “*esprit utilitaire*” (“utilitarian spirit”) and “*servilité*” (servility) in art, insisting instead upon the need for aesthetic autonomy. Such assertions situate the *Refus global* firmly within an ideology of creativity informed by an Enlightenment philosophy of aesthetic disinterestedness, as well as by psychoanalytic theories of mind.⁴⁵ Similarly, the playwright Claude Gauvreau (one of the signatories of the manifesto), elsewhere defines works of “pure automatism” as ones where “the materials of the creative act are furnished exclusively by the free play of the unconscious.”⁴⁶

Heavily influenced by a surrealist approach to art as a means of free self-expression and exploration, for the signatories of the *Refus global* automatism imbued artistic practice with the potential to liberate society—in this case from the stranglehold of the “alliance of a clerical and a conservative nationalist power... sustained by virtue of the fear generated by a variety of hostile elements: the threat of the English, the threat of religious dissidents..., the threat of the atheists, and the threat of the Communists” (Bourassa 1984: 80). This was, moreover, explicitly framed as a modernist cultural project that hinged upon a radical break with tradition: “*Fini l’assassinat massif du présent et du futur à coup redoublé du passé*” (30), Borduas wrote.⁴⁷ In these ways, the *Refus global* effectively localized the liberal binary of freedom and constraint within a broader

⁴⁵ The aesthetic philosophy of *Les Automatistes* in Quebec was inspired largely by the work of surrealist poet, André Breton. Breton’s Surrealist Manifesto and “stream of consciousness” approach to writing (*écriture automatique*) meant to free the mind from the constraints of moral and aesthetic education, were directly informed by Sigmund Freud’s theory of the unconscious.

⁴⁶ Claude Gauvreau, “L’Automatisme ne vient pas de chez Hadès” (1947, p.6), cited in Bourassa (1984: 88).

⁴⁷ “End the cascade of blows from the past which annihilates both present and future.” English translation accessed online: http://www.conseildesarts.org/documents/Manifeste/manifeste_refus-english.htm. Last accessed February 28, 2022.

political project of cultural emancipation in Quebec, aligning the modern Quebec artist, as well as the creative act of aesthetic production, with an ideology of the autological subject that lives in opposition to the “genealogical society” (Povinelli 2006).

Considered scandalous upon its publication, the *Refus global* was unsurprisingly met with vehemently reactionary responses from government and church authorities, as well as from Quebec’s press.⁴⁸ Today, however, its influence is widely celebrated as an early step towards the Quiet Revolution, illuminating the key role of the artist in the emancipatory projects of the avant-garde as well as of Quebec nationalism. Reading the *Refus global* alongside subsequent developments in the field of Quebec advertising, however, reveals both such projects to be uneasily defined, often riddled with debate and contradiction.

While both the *Refus global* and the efforts of francophone ad workers in the post-war period coalesced around the liberal values of cultural openness, modernization as cultural progress, and aesthetic production as central to cultural emancipation, they also present fundamentally opposite positions on the relationship between creativity and commerce. Whereas the automatistes located a “collective hope” within autonomous art as a field for *resisting* the utilitarianism and rationalizations of modern capitalism, the discourses and practices of ad workers in Quebec during the Quiet Revolution actively sought to rationalize their creative labour and cultural expertise as invaluable precisely *because of* its utilitarian value to corporate interests. For the former, then, the project of Quebecois liberation depended on

⁴⁸ The consequences for Borduas, as the author of the title essay, were severe: he was dismissed from his teaching post at the École de meuble (an applied arts school in Montreal) and, unable to find work in the province, eventually left Quebec for New York and then Paris.

freeing creativity from having to serve any purpose beyond itself, while for an increasingly influential group of advertising executives and creative workers, creativity was directly tied to corporate capitalist investment and to the establishment of an emergent class of professional cultural intermediaries involved in producing a distinctly Quebecois consumer capitalist aesthetics. The various points of correspondence and divergence between these movements are foundational to understandings of and claims to creativity in Montreal today. They also charge the concept of creativity with a productive tension that animates aestheticized positions on both sides of these debates.

Insofar as the emancipatory project of the Quiet Revolution was simultaneously an economic one, for many people within the province this was (and remains) imagined largely in terms of class ascendancy, technological modernization, and economic growth. Consequently, as I have demonstrated above in tracing the evolution of the Montreal advertising industry during this period, the economic viability of sovereignty paradoxically relied upon the construction of a distinct Quebecois public as a “target market” within a globalizing economic system, and thus of an emergent class of cultural intermediaries who worked to establish networks and structures of distinctly local “creative” production, while also positioning themselves within an international class of corporate capitalist stakeholders. The efforts of early francophone ad workers to promote their services as invaluable forms of cultural and aesthetic expertise for multinational corporate clients must therefore be read as local iterations of nascent neoliberal practices that worked to reimagine creativity as a distinct form of human capital in late modernity.

Within such a context, an ideology of creative exceptionalism has resonated especially well with ad workers and other cultural producers living and working in Montreal. These Creatives often see themselves as part of a dynamic core of exceptional individuals within the city, which is itself in turn perceived as the centre of cultural production for a minority francophone population in predominantly anglophone North America. Through aesthetic practices and discourses of creativity, Montreal is thus constructed by such individuals as an exceptional place within an exceptional province in ways that highlight how creativity acts as an ideological hinge between liberal idealizations of the autological subject and the project of Quebec sovereignty.⁴⁹ As I illustrate in subsequent chapters, in Montreal today the language of “creative industries” is ubiquitous in both corporate discourse and in municipal and provincial policy.

Insofar as it informs how advertising work is given value by the people who produce it—as well as how they “curate” themselves accordingly—many local ad workers have embraced a neoliberal ideology of creativity-as-capital. And yet, in examining the ways that such individuals also often emphasize creativity as the primary pursuit that motivates and determines the value of their work in more *autotelic terms* (i.e. as being creative for the sake of being creative), it is equally apparent that residual, competing understandings of creativity as unalienated human

⁴⁹ The *Refus global* provides an early iteration of this dynamic: its signatories expressed allegiance with a cosmopolitan avant-garde, and championed creativity as a site of autonomous expression and aesthetic experience that was defined against the oppressive constraints of “tradition”, the morality of the church, and the rooting of Quebecois culture in an historical past. In associating aesthetic creation to the ideals of individual and collective freedom, the *Refus global* clearly thus resonated with the broader political project of Quebec sovereignty, but—crucially—cannot be collapsed into it. Rather, the aesthetic philosophy it expresses reflects an ideological stance that situates its authors and signatories within a broader liberal project that values the freedom of the autological self above national allegiances. The artist of the *Refus global* is thus one who embodies an “emancipation from tradition [that] requires an active contrast, a dramatic splitting; modern freedom only appears free when it is set against the background of binding tradition” (Levine 2014: 11).

activity and emancipatory experience continue to exist in tension with those that inform creative city developments. Crucially, such tensions are not ones that exist only at the boundaries of clearly delineated and distinct fields of cultural production, as a theorization of “culture industry” versus “genuine art” might suggest. Rather, they might more accurately be understood as *central to* a complexity of material, social, and aesthetic intersections through which the work, relationships, and identities of different individuals who constitute (and in practice regularly *move between*) such fields are shaped.

Accounting for how people in these intersecting fields attempt to navigate the contradictions inherent to the *creative imperatives* of neoliberal capitalism illuminates the especially tenacious hold that the liberal ideal of the autological self maintains over ideas and practices of creativity in our context. This is the case even when its pursuit engenders experiences of profound ambivalence, alienation, and precarity. As I explore in the chapters to follow, the affective traction of this ideal across diverse fields of aesthetic production reveals how it acts as a foundational point of compatibility between otherwise competing definitions of what—and *who*—can claim to be creative.

Chapter 4

Trickling Up: Promoting the Creative Class in Montreal

“The logic of spectacle prescribes the production of separate, isolated, but not introspective individuals.”

(Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, p.79).

“If one of those American megachurches interbred with a business conference, C2MTL would be its baby. A baby that wears a suit and really, really likes the Cirque du Soleil.”

- Manjyot, anthropologist and “design thinker”¹

Field notes, May 29th, 2014:

On a warmish May evening in 2014, I find myself dancing next to Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Muhammad Yunus and his wife, Afrozi. We’re in a 19th-century Griffintown shipyard (now art gallery) on the banks of the Lachine Canal, south-west of downtown Montreal. Wearing a sari that I imagine was made by micro-financed Bangladeshi women, Afrozi bounces elegantly along, clapping her hands with joy when lanky Austrian graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister shimmies his way onto the dance floor to join her and her husband. Stefan looks as though he’s just exited through the gift shop of his own museum exhibit, “The Happy Show,” as he dances hand-in-hand with Catherine Hoke, founder and CEO of Defy Ventures—a non-profit organization run by venture capitalists, which helps reform men with criminal histories into entrepreneurs through MBA-style training in business management.

All around this cast of characters, the concrete hanger-turned-nightclub pulsates with blue light and throngs of well-kept bodies. We are caught up in an effervescent optimism—I’ve never before attended a conference closing party quite like this, but I don’t want to ruin the fun by thinking too hard about that now.

On the stage at the front of the room, James Murphy (former front man of LCD Soundsystem) begins to coax an enchanting remix of Paul Simon's "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes" from his spinning turntables, like some kind of DJ-shaman. Suddenly, the steel-beamed ceiling bursts open into a cloud of silver confetti, which—for a breath—lingers in the air above us. As it begins to trickle down with glittering lightness, we marvel at one another, giggling and giddy at the bits of silver that lace into our hair and settle on our shoulders.

¹ Pseudonym. In 2014, Manjyot attended C2MTL as “anthropologist-in-residence” for a business consultancy firm that produced a collaborative transcript of and live commentary on the conference. She is now a UX (user experience) researcher with her own consultancy firm.

Thus adorned, enthralled, and intoxicated, we keep dancing.

A graphic designer, a venture capitalist, and a Nobel laureate walk into a repurposed shipyard

Benjamin's observation that "ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars" (2009[1963]: 34) invites us to consider how it is the configuration of things, not just things in and of themselves, that are meaningful. Ethnography in this sense is particularly conducive to the witnessing and documenting of constellations—of particular configurations of persons and objects and places, and of the ideas that become manifest in their coming together. The ethnographic moment I describe above is one such constellation; it illuminates pivotal connections between contemporary forms of class distinction, understandings and experiences of human creativity, and core capitalist beliefs that are dominant within contemporary "creative industries" like advertising. Such a scene, which occurred on the final evening of a carefully curated "creativity conference" hosted annually by a local advertising agency in Montreal since 2012, draws attention to how the city is being reimagined and reconfigured according to the interests of a globalized network of upper and upwardly-mobile entrepreneurs, corporate stakeholders, and professionals often defined as the "creative class."

That the individuals I mention in the scene above should find themselves dancing together in such a context is both exceptional and yet also entirely ordinary. It is exceptional in the sense that the social worlds of Sagmeister, Hoke, and Yunus are quite distant from one another in many ways. Sagmeister, for instance, is a celebrated graphic designer based in New

York City whose agency does branding and advertising work, though he is also well known for his album cover designs and his acclaimed international exhibit, “The Happy Show.” Also based in New York City, Hoke’s non-profit organization, Defy Ventures, has a very different client base; whereas Sagmeister may be sought after by musical artists like the Talking Heads, David Byrne, Lou Reed, and the Rolling Stones, Hoke’s clients are formerly incarcerated men who receive business management training and start-up funding from volunteer corporate executives and private donations through Defy. Further away, the Grameen Bank, founded by Yunus in 1983, offers micro-credit to Bangladesh’s poor through lending programs targeted specifically at women. And though the Bangladeshi government controversially forced him to resign from his position as head of the Grameen Bank in 2011, Yunus nevertheless remains an internationally respected economist and entrepreneur, widely recognized as having pioneered the microcredit movement through his work with Grameen – work for which he not only received a Nobel Peace Prize, but which has also served as a model for similar development initiatives across the world.



Figures 4.1 & 4.2: Stephan Sagmeister’s, “The Happy Show.” Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, 2012.²

² “The Happy Show” premiered at Philadelphia’s Institute of Contemporary Art in 2012, <https://sagmeister.com/work/the-happy-show/>, last accessed March 30, 2022



Figure 4.3: Catherine Hoke and fellow entrepreneurs of Defy Ventures, 2016³

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR
OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 4.4: Muhammad Yunus with loan borrowers in rural Bangladesh⁴

And yet, while the respective business initiatives, interests, and personal lives of these various individuals may seem at first to be widely divergent, that they came to overlap on the dance floor of a repurposed shipyard in Montreal is also not very exceptional at all. In fact, when examined closely, there are significant social and ideological connections between the work and lives of these three individuals—connections that situate them (as well as the other people present on the dance floor that evening, myself included) within a particular configuration of

³ Image source: <https://medium.com/techstars/diversity-in-entrepreneurship-defy-ventures-533f7779b857>. Hoke has not worked with Defy ventures since 2018.

⁴ Image source: <https://futurecitysummit.medium.com/people-note-of-the-ceo-from-bangladesh-to-the-world-e11d6ebac8d1>

post-industrial urban gentrification, class distinction, and aesthetic capitalism, of which the moment described above was but one fleeting manifestation. Moreover, as I discuss below, for people whose identities and livelihoods are deeply invested in such a configuration, these interconnected processes are increasingly understood and justified through an historically-particular discourse of creativity.

Brought to Montreal for C2MTL—a business conference “curated” by local advertising agency Sid Lee in partnership with the multi-billion-dollar entertainment company Cirque du Soleil—Sagmeister, Hoke, and Yunus are all regular speakers on what might best be described as a creativity conference circuit—a series of events which, though not formally coordinated together, share a number of notable social, ideological and aesthetic characteristics. Held in post-industrial cities across the world, such conferences bring together experts from diverse fields (such as graphic design, venture capitalism, and microfinance), and are marketed as events that spark creative exchange, innovation, and, ultimately, economic growth within host communities.⁵ While it is heavily promoted as a unique event that “appeals as much to the left half of your brain as it does to your right,” C2MTL is in fact but one local node within this broader global circuit, which both discursively and experientially works to harness human creativity to the interrelated fields of digital technology, research and development, and corporate capitalism.

⁵ “Curated” is the word that conference organizers themselves use in order to describe the nature of their work. C2MTL founder and organizer, Jean-François Bouchard, for example, holds the job title, “Curator” of C2MTL. For an example of the usage of the term by organizers, see C2MTL’s recap of the 2014 conference on their website: <https://www.c2montreal.com/press-releases/c2mtl-sets-new-global-benchmark-yet/#/>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

Examining C2MTL as part of such a circuit thus highlights salient interrelationships between patterns of class formation and dominant discourses of creativity in late capitalist contexts.⁶

These connections are particularly evident when we consider how the same speakers appear again and again at such events, held in geographically distant cities but organized according to unmistakably similar themes. For example, just days before his talk at the C2MTL conference in May 2014, Sagmeister first appeared at the design and technology conference, FITC (“Future, Innovation, Technology, Creativity”) in Toronto. He then made appearances at similar conferences in Calgary and Halifax. These appearances were part of a brief Canadian leg of an international tour; between April and August 2015 alone, Sagmeister was scheduled for twelve speaking engagements at conferences across the globe, ranging from Saskatoon, Kentucky, and New York City to Barcelona, Amsterdam, Sydney, and Mumbai. Sagmeister has also given several talks at the now ubiquitous TED forum, whose official mandate is to spread “ideas worth sharing” within the (rather broadly interpreted) parameters of “Technology, Entertainment and Design.” Though not as explicitly or exclusively invested in promoting corporate capitalism as C2MTL, TED regularly features speakers on economic issues, including Sagmeister’s C2MTL dance partner, Muhammad Yunus, who spoke in 2012 at TEDxVienna.⁷ Beyond TED, Yunus himself also travels extensively for speaking engagements, particularly at business conferences and schools (he followed his C2MTL appearance, for example, with a talk

⁶ As such, C2MTL exemplifies what Thrift (2005) describes as the “cultural circuit” of capitalism.

⁷ For a critique of TED Talks as “middlebrow megachurch infotainment,” see Bratton’s 2013 TED Talk, “What’s Wrong with TED Talks.” Subsequently published as an article in *The Guardian* under the title “We need to talk about TED,” Bratton argues that TED Talks aestheticize scholarship on critical issues in a manner that “diverts your interest, enthusiasm and outrage until it’s absorbed into this black hole of affectation.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/30/we-need-to-talk-about-ted>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

at HEC Montréal). Additionally, Yunus acts as a counsellor for the One Young World summits—a “global forum for young leaders aged 18-30,” described by CNN as the “junior Davos.”⁸ Yunus has also appeared at the Davos World Economic Forum itself, participating on a panel in January 2014 entitled “The Future of Capitalism,” during which he promoted his particular vision of a capitalist financial model for alleviating poverty, the “social business.”⁹ At least a dozen other C2MTL speakers have also participated at Davos.¹⁰ This overlap is no doubt seen by C2MTL organizers as a great measure of success, as they have branded their own conference “the Davos of Creativity.”¹¹

Mapping this circuit of public appearances not only outlines a particular pattern of elite sociality amongst a globalized class of capitalist stakeholders; it also illuminates ideological similarities across the divergent fields of practice embodied by the “creative experts” who encounter one another at various events. For example, Yunus’ interest in increasing social responsibility within contemporary forms of financial capitalism has clear philosophical parallels to Hoke’s work with her organization, Defy Ventures. More specifically, both initiatives work to better integrate marginalized groups into existing capitalist frameworks of economic productivity

⁸ As cited on the One Young World website: <https://www.oneyoungworld.com/news-item/lead2030-launch>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

⁹ Yunus outlines this model in his book, *Creating A World Without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism* (2007).

¹⁰ Other C2MTL speakers who have also participated in the Davos World Economic Forums include Richard Branson (Founder of Virgin Group), Arianna Huffington (of Huffington Post), Patrick Pichette (CFO of Google), Michael Eisner (former CEO of the Walt Disney Company), Deborah Dugan (CEO of (RED)), Barry Diller (media mogul), Blake Mycoskie (founder and CEO of TOMS shoes), James Cameron (filmmaker), Bjarke Ingels (Architect), Estelle Metayer (Founder and President of Competia, and Adjunct Professor at McGill), Noreena Hertz (economist and author), Chelsea Clinton (Vice Chair, Clinton Foundation), Carolyn Everson (VP at Facebook), and Morten Albaek (CMO Vestas Wind Systems A/S).

¹¹ Sid Lee President and CEO and Head Curator of C2MTL, Jean-François Bouchard, is cited as branding C2MTL the “Davos of creativity” in an article published by *La Presse* in October of 2011: <http://affaires.lapresse.ca/economie/201110/05/01-4454351-c2-mtl-faire-de-montreal-le-davos-de-la-creativite.php>. See also the C2MTL website: <https://www.c2montreal.com/who-attends-and-why/#/>.

and sociality.¹² Hoke herself draws a direct analogy between criminal activity and corporate capitalism, arguing that in their previous lines of work—acting as drug dealers or gang leaders, for example—many of the formerly incarcerated men that her organization works with have in fact already acquired significant entrepreneurial and managerial skills that are assets within the corporate world. Hoke describes the work of Defy as “transforming the hustle” of “Entrepreneurs-In-Training,” insofar as it helps qualifying men gain the social and economic capital they need in order to embark upon legal business ventures. Defy has received many accolades as an innovative program and, like both Sagmeister and Yunus, Hoke has consequently become a sought-after speaker on the creativity conference circuit.¹³ Around the same time as the C2MTL conference, for example, she also gave talks at QIdeas (perhaps best described as the overtly Christian version of TED), as well as at the international speaker series, CreativeMornings: a “breakfast lecture series for the creative community” organized by local chapters in 114 “Creative Cities” across the world, including Montreal.¹⁴

Given the circuit-like nature of the creativity conference phenomenon, it is easy to see how it was only a matter of time before Sagmeister, Yunus, and Hoke might eventually find themselves dancing together in such a quintessentially post-industrial space.¹⁵ In situating

¹² This concern was a prominent theme at the C2MTL conference as a whole, particularly in talks given by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, CFO-turned-philanthropist Zita Cobb, and NGO entrepreneur Simon Berry, each of whom addressed their respective efforts to better the lives of marginalized people in the communities where they variously live and/or work (in this case, Las Vegas, Fogo Island, and Zambia).

¹³ For example, in March 2022 Defy Ventures alumnus and now board member Coss Marte made an appearance on the Ellen Degeneres show, to speak about ConBody—a “prison style” fitness bootcamp that employs formerly incarcerated trainers, of which he is CEO.

¹⁴ See the Creative Mornings website for an archive of past events organized by the Montreal chapter, as well as information of upcoming talks: <https://creativemornings.com/cities/mtl>

¹⁵ C2MTL is held at the Arsenal Gallery in the Griffintown district of Montreal – a neighbourhood located along the Lachine Canal in the southwestern section of downtown. Historically, Griffintown was first home to working-class Irish immigrants, many of whom provided the physical labour that built much of the city’s infrastructure, including

C2MTL as one node within this kind of conference circuit, my goal in this chapter is to examine how such events serve as opportunities for the circulation of people, knowledge, and capital in ways that produce particular subjectivities amongst an international and cosmopolitan class of affluent and upwardly-mobile “cultural experts.” In so doing, I highlight significant philosophical commonalities at the foundation of the wide range of contemporary fields in which such speakers work. Moreover, if we are to believe the organizers of C2, then these commonalities have much to do with what it means to be a creative person, and to consequently be part of a particular social class that claims creativity as its primary criteria for belonging.

As this chapter argues, much of the success of C2MTL can be attributed to its design and promotion as an exclusive—and thus *exclusionary*—social space. And yet, in 2014 many of the primary themes explored by featured speakers were paradoxically ones of social responsibility and concerns for “the common good”—concerns that, it seemed to me, contrasted sharply with the design and experience of the conference itself. In investigating these contradictions, I approach C2MTL as a site for observing the solipsistic nature of advanced capitalism, whereby “the thing itself is [presented as] the remedy against the threat it poses” (Zizek 2008: 21). Specifically, I consider how C2MTL is promoted as a space for participants to “incubate” remedies for contemporary social problems, yet designed in a way that diverts participants *away* from critically questioning how such problems may in fact be direct consequences of the

the construction of the Lachine Canal, the Victoria bridge, and local railways. Though the cultural demographics of the neighbourhood shifted in the early twentieth century as more French Canadians, Italians, and Ukrainians moved in, it nevertheless remained largely working-class, with many locals employed in the various factories along the canal. Griffintown experienced intense depopulation during the 1960s and 1970s due to a number of factors, including the deindustrialization of the area when the St. Lawrence Seaway replaced the Lachine Canal as the primary shipping artery for the city, and when the city demolished much of the district’s residential zone in order to construct the Bonaventure Expressway. It is now the centre of the “Quartier d’Innovation” revitalization initiative, which I discuss in more detail below.

corporate capitalist ideologies and practices the conference celebrates and reinforces. In this way, I argue that the “curation” of C2MTL works to erect ideological constraints that foreclose possibilities for imagining social alternatives outside an existent capitalist order, despite the emphasis that organizers place on designing experiences meant to “break free” of comfort zones, and invite “out-of-box” thinking. Investigating such tensions as they shape participant experiences of C2MTL then begs the question: why is *creativity* so fertile a concept around which to organize these circuits of corporate capitalist sociality and knowledge production?

Ethnographic analysis of C2MTL ultimately illuminates how the neoliberal *problematization of creativity*—that is, its theorization and practice in contemporary capitalist contexts—becomes a palatable way of reframing class privilege and status through notions of individual exceptionalism and creative meritocracy. Such reframing encourages individuals to evade critically questioning the roles they play in maintaining the structures of socio-economic inequality that corporate capitalism creates and depends upon. In their association with notions of individual originality, genius, and freedom, invocations of creativity at events like C2MTL reflect attempts to negotiate the inequities of neoliberal capitalism with competing liberal humanist values of equality, freedom, and social responsibility. In this manner, contemporary constructions of *creative personhood* can be read as culturally and historically particular iterations of the autological (or sovereign, “self-made”) subject that Povinelli (2006) identifies as the ideal self of Western liberalism.

In the sections below, I take C2MTL as a window onto these interrelated processes of creative subjectification and class distinction as they are given particular traction amongst

“creative industry” stakeholders and professionals in Montreal. First, I examine C2MTL as one particularly successful example of local attempts to brand the city as “creative,” and consider how this justifies the channeling of public resources to initiatives that promote capitalist economic “development” that serve private interests (in this case especially those of local advertising agencies and executives). I then highlight how such efforts are buttressed by a particular intellectual school of thought that legitimates and encourages “creative city” initiatives through specific theoretical frameworks and discourses. Finally, I describe how the *spectacular aesthetics* of C2MTL are integral to such processes insofar as they serve to distract from the contradictions and paradoxes that trouble the inherent negotiations of creative self-making. Such aesthetics require us to attend to events like C2MTL not just as sites where the structural inequalities of neoliberal capitalism are obfuscated, but also as spaces where the “pleasurable and gratifying transformations of neoliberal capital” are viscerally experienced and celebrated (Vastri 2011).

Promoting Montreal as a “Creative City”

Advertisers are constellation-makers by trade. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the dance floor scene I describe at the beginning of this chapter occurred during the culminating celebration of an annual business conference organized (or, in the words of the organizers, “curated”) by the Montreal-based advertising agency Sid Lee. In addition to presenting a line-up of high-profile speakers (mostly CEOs from major multinational corporations, philanthropists, or celebrities employed in the arts, like filmmakers, actors, and musicians), the conference offered

a combination of networking opportunities, collaborative workshops, and spectacular festivities such as musical performances and circus acts. Together, these elements correspond to what the conference's organizers term the four "pillars" of the C2MTL experience: Inspiration, Connection, Celebration, and Experimentation.

In promotional materials and mainstream media coverage, C2MTL is portrayed not just as a forum for discussing creativity, but also, through its unconventional activities, installations, and social architecture, as a manifestation of creative practice itself. When I attended the conference in 2014, many participants I met expressed how they had wanted to come to the conference not just to hear speakers or to meet other professionals in their fields, but also to participate in the C2MTL "creative experience" promised to attendees. This experience is characterized by a spectacular aesthetics that reflects the influence of C2MTL's founding "creative partner" Cirque du Soleil, one of Sid Lee's largest corporate clients and one of Montreal's most well-known cultural exports. In this section I discuss how C2MTL is part of a broader initiative to position Montreal as a "creative city," and consider what is at stake politically in the particular understandings and articulations of creativity that inform such efforts.

On one level, the name C2MTL is a straightforward indication of the conference's location and primary purpose: MTL is the host city, and C2 refers to the event's focus on "commerce + creativity." This equation is no doubt of particular interest to individuals invested in the various forms of corporate capitalism and aesthetic practice that intersect at the conference. On another level, however, the name, and indeed the carefully curated experience of the conference as a whole, hints at a broader political project, whereby the harnessing of

human creativity to neoliberal pursuits is naturalized through specific forms of consumer capitalist rhetoric and spectacle. In 2014, the year I attended, C2MTL was in its third year, and had already experienced significant levels of success. In a YouTube video published on May 22, 2013, for example, Jean-François Bouchard, Sid Lee President and C2MTL Curator, stated that over \$182 million worth in contracts had been negotiated on-site during the first edition of the conference in 2012.¹⁶ By 2014 the conference had expanded, changed sites to the Arsenal art gallery in Griffintown, and sold out with over 4,000 guests in attendance. According to a C2MTL press release, over sixty percent of these guests held executive level positions at their companies—a demographic that reflected the prohibitive cost of \$3,850 per ticket.¹⁷

Heralded by its investors and enthusiasts as an important local event which contributes to the cultural and economic vitality of the city as a whole, C2MTL receives substantial public funding from municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government, as well as from a number of corporate partners.¹⁸ At a time when austerity measures (such as cuts in funding for public education, health, pensions, and more) are making life less affordable for middle- and working-class individuals, the channeling of public funding to elite events like C2MTL is a clear example of neoliberal practices that redistribute wealth upwards in what Harvey (2007) describes as a process of “accumulation by dispossession” (34). This is justified, in part, through the designation

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulE8xcFQbYI> , accessed March 30, 2022.

¹⁷ <http://www.c2mtl.com/press-releases/c2mtl-sets-new-global-benchmark-yet/> , last accessed March 30, 2022.

¹⁸ According to the C2MTL website: “Funding from the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec amounts to \$750,000. At the provincial level, the support from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Land Occupancy, through the Fonds d’initiative et de rayonnement de la Métropole managed by the Minister Responsible for the Montréal Region (Department of Transport and Department Responsible for the Montréal Region) is \$500,000, the Department of the Economy, Innovation and Exports is contributing \$300,000, and the Ville de Montréal is providing \$200,000.” (<http://www.c2mtl.com/post/c2-montreal-souligne-lappui-de-ses-partenaires-gouvernementaux/> , accessed March 28, 2015).

of C2MTL as an independent non-profit organization, despite the fact that the conference was “founded and imagined” by Sid Lee, and continues to be organized largely by Sid Lee employees through a continued partnership.¹⁹

C2MTL is also, significantly, a partner organization of Montreal’s recent “Quartier de l’Innovation” (“QI”) initiative—an urban development program spearheaded by l’École de technologie supérieure (l’ÉTS) and McGill University, with the aim of creating an “innovation ecosystem in the heart of Montreal.”²⁰ The QI initiative’s declared mission is thus:

To create, around knowledge institutions, favourable conditions for establishing an urban district of the highest quality, based on international standards, which brings together a creative and engaged community with the purpose of driving the development of an innovative and entrepreneurial culture that balances four pillars: Industrial, Education and Research, Social and Cultural, and Urban.²¹

With these goals in mind, the Griffintown district where the Arsenal Gallery is located (and where C2MTL has been held since 2013) was designated to be the central site for such a project, becoming Montreal’s official Quartier de l’Innovation (QI), or “innovation district,” in May 2013.

On the one hand, the goals of the QI initiative may seem innocuous, invoking as they do a sense of social regeneration through the language of “community,” “creativity,” and “engagement.” On the other hand, however, we might ask: who exactly constitutes the “creative

¹⁹ When I attended in 2014, this non-profit designation challenged my own preconceptions as to what “non-for-profit” could mean—it seemed to me that the way in which the conference was promoted and organized was in fact entirely tailored to for-profit outcomes, perhaps most explicitly in terms of the benefits C2MTL offers its corporate “partner organizations,” in various forms. This included: opportunities to “strategically position your brand” in conference materials and at the event itself; tickets and courtesy packages to “engage your team” by attending the conference; and networking opportunities to “drive business growth” and “grow your pipeline” (<https://www.c2montreal.com/partners/>, last accessed October 7, 2022).

²⁰ In 2022, the Quartier de l’Innovation de Montreal announced that it was ceasing all its activities and ending the initiative as a whole: <https://quartierinnovationmontreal.com/>, last accessed December 5, 2022.

²¹ <http://quartierinnovationmontreal.com/en/who-is-behind-the-qi/>, last accessed February 18, 2015.

and engaged community” that stands to benefit from the forms of development these projects invite and support? How does C2MTL, as a business conference organized by an advertising agency, participate within this broader innovation initiative? What kinds of community building can actually be observed at such events, and how is the concept of creativity variously invoked and defined within such processes? In order to begin to answer such questions, it is worth addressing two points raised by the QI’s mission statement, as quoted above.

First, in its concern for “establishing an urban district of the highest quality, based on international standards,” it becomes clear that the initiative not only seeks to situate the city of Montreal as an important hub within a broader international movement of comparable urban development projects, but also that it seeks to *distinguish* Montreal among them.²² There is, in this sense, a competitive logic that informs the QI initiative, whereby the city is positioned *against* other urban communities similarly marketing themselves as sites for investing in “creative industries.” Participating therefore in what Peck describes as “the interurban war for talent” (2005: 753), the QI and C2MTL initiatives seek to transform the city into a vital space of capitalist activity where, “above all, the city has to appear as an innovative, exciting, creative and safe place to live or visit, to play and consume in” (Harvey 1989: 9). From this perspective, C2MTL must be grouped with other local efforts, such as the Commerce Design Montreal (CDM) competition, which, as Leslie and Rantisi (2012) describe, aims “to make Montreal a chic and fashionable place to live, work, and visit, and to attract talent and tourists to the city” (465). In the same way that the CDM competition ultimately works to support businesses that “serve an

²² Such as from nearby Toronto, for example, which in 2017 also received the “Creative City” designation from UNESCO for media arts, or from Quebec City, proclaimed a “Creative City of Literature” of 2017. In 2022, the UNESCO Creative City Network (UCCN) had a membership of over 200 cities.

upscale market,” transforming design into “a tool to create a heightened image of exclusivity” (465), C2MTL similarly frames creativity as a means for cultural distinction, marketed to “the cream of the international business crop,” with whom C2MTL organizers clearly themselves identify.²³

Second, it is evident in the QI’s mission statement that the aim of bringing together “a creative and engaged community” is not an end in itself. Rather, the ultimate goal of doing so is “for the purpose of driving the development of an *innovative* and *entrepreneurial* culture” (QI Mission Statement, italics added). Intrinsic to the QI mission, in other words, is the valuation of creative capacity and experience in distinctly capitalist terms, whereby creativity is construed as a productive mode and profit-generating resource (i.e. a form of capital). Through this conceptual framing, the “creative and engaged community” the QI seeks to foster is defined according to a neoliberal class politics currently shaping post-industrial urban development in Montreal and elsewhere.

The connection the QI makes between aesthetic activity, economic development, and changing political dynamics in Quebec is not new. As Leslie and Rantisi (2011) describe, “since the 1950s, provincial governments in Quebec have placed a strong emphasis on culture and the arts” (1778). This emphasis, they argue, must be understood as historically situated within “the rise of Quebec nationalism and the widespread belief that the provincial government should support cultural sectors, which play an important role in identity formation” (1778). Highlighting parallels with the government management of “cultural sectors” in France, Leslie and Rantisi

²³ As described on the C2MTL website and in its 2014 press releases.

describe a tendency in Quebec to “view art as a societal project,” and point to the role played by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the SODEC (Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles) in supporting arts-based initiatives as crucial forms of cultural survival (1778-1779). During the latter half of the twentieth century, Montreal became a central site of investment in Quebec’s cultural industries through architectural, artistic, and “special events” initiatives (e.g. Expo 67, the 1976 Summer Olympics). These were, moreover, largely “oriented towards garnering external validation for the city’s unique cultural identity and world city status” (1779). As I discuss in Chapter 3, such initiatives were also crucial ways in which efforts to promote the city as a space for multinational corporate capitalist investment were tied to the project of Quebec sovereignty.

From this historical perspective, that both C2MTL and the QI initiative should receive substantial government support is perhaps not surprising. At the same time, however, these more recent initiatives also reflect critical shifts in late modern conceptualizations and valuations of aesthetic production, culture, and creativity. Such shifts reveal increasingly predominant concerns with creativity and aesthetic production as constituting distinct forms of industry and professional expertise, over and above previous associations with cultural preservation and the flourishing of a distinctive national identity. Leslie and Rantisi (2011) explain:

In the 1970s and 1980s, industrial decline, the rise of a francophone business class and the growth of neo-liberal governance regimes combined to force a reinterpretation of the world city project. New emphasis was placed on a consumerist cosmopolitanism oriented towards the construction of spectacle and an expanded symbolic economy to replace the eroding manufacturing base. ... In terms of cultural policy, this has implied a greater focus by the 1980s on the economic significance of culture and the support of cultural commodities—rather than traditional arts, per se—since those commodities can

be exported and can thereby enhance economic competitiveness, as well as solidify foreign linkages. (1779)

With this in mind, the explicit economic focus of C2MTL and the QI provides a clear example of how particular groups of people living and working in the city attempt to navigate post-industrial economies and neoliberal constrictions: namely, by building spaces and institutions that develop, support, and promote “creativity” and “innovation” as local economic resources, in dialogue with the rise in immaterial labour that defines the city as a site of aesthetic capitalism (Reckwitz 2017).²⁴ As Moos (2013) argues, such initiatives highlight how, while Montreal may be “an urban context that contains elements of... the traditional Keynesian welfare state,” today it is also significantly shaped by “an emerging new economy sector, notably in arts and culture” (2079).

It is within this changing economic context that business elites make claims to creativity in capitalist terms. In this way, C2MTL is an apt example of how stakeholders continuously define both the city of Montreal as well as its local advertising industry as valuable sites of creative expertise, whereby associated institutions (e.g. agencies, conferences, professional associations) are understood not just as structures for enabling commercial profit, but also as frameworks for supporting processes of cultural creativity and innovation that, they claim, benefit the city as a whole. As such, there is also an inherent argument within such claims that these creative industries and initiatives merit public support in the form of government funding, infrastructure,

²⁴ Reckwitz uses the term “aesthetic capitalism” to describe social contexts in which “older forms of labour have been replaced by work activities that demand the constant production of new things, in particular of signs and symbols – texts, images, communication, procedures, aesthetic objects, body modifications – for a consumer public in search of originality and surprise” (2017: 2).

and urban policies designed to attract creative workers and encourage economic growth in their fields.

Intersecting beliefs in the importance of arts and culture as central to the project of Quebec sovereignty and as major contributors to the economic vitality of Montreal are both at the core of local efforts to maintain Montreal's "creative city" status and reputation. In many ways these efforts have met with success. In 2006, for example, Montreal was officially designated a UNESCO City of Design—one of the seven designations that a city can receive in order to become part of UNESCO's Creative Cities Network.²⁵ Indeed, upon the fifth anniversary of this designation, the City of Montreal listed C2MTL as an important "creativity and innovation" event, an example of the city's dynamic design landscape. At the same time, however, events like C2MTL also highlight the disproportionate role played by business elites in spearheading such initiatives in ways that often "co-opt and redeploy the experiences of those they ultimately marginalize... as they attempt to reimagine the contemporary world-class city as fresh, hip, and, above all, 'creative'" (Levin and Solga 2009: 37).

As critics of the new "creative economy" have highlighted, far from benefitting entire urban populations, creative city initiatives often exacerbate processes of intensifying economic inequality and social marginalization in post-industrial urban areas, particularly insofar as they are implicated in "regeneration" programs that push less affluent groups out of downtown cores and into urban peripheries. Because they are informed by what Janssen (2014) describes as "the creativity city 'script'," both C2MTL and the QI perpetuate "limited and exclusive notions of

²⁵ <https://designmontreal.com/en/about-montreal-unesco-city-of-design>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

creativity... [that] fail to take responsibility for the displacement of working class and ethnic communities, the removal of youth and the homeless from public space, and those subjectivities who are mostly affected and further marginalized by these cultural hubs and urban renewal schemes” (Janssen 2014: 28). Despite their claims to “bring together a creative and engaged community,” creative city initiatives are for these reasons quintessential examples of an “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2007: 34) that in fact often fractures and displaces communities through the interrelated processes of aesthetic recuperation and gentrification that characterize neoliberal class politics in urban contexts.

At the level of the “creative city,” then, neoliberal restructuring takes a number of forms. These include not only the channelling of resources upwards (in the form of funding for exclusive events like C2MTL, for example), but also ones that involve the radical reimagining of what it means to be able to live—and thrive—in the city. Indeed, insofar as the problematization of creativity in creative city initiatives like C2MTL is founded upon the argument that the city be designed in ways that ultimately nurture *exceptionally creative persons*, as locally-relevant iterations of an idealized autological subject, we can observe how contemporary claims to creative identity remain embroiled in questions of how to live a free and self-actualized (or unalienated) “good life.” As Harvey argues, however: “the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city” (2007: 23). It is therefore necessary to ask: what kinds of change are enacted in Montreal through its reimagining as a creativity city, and who is granted the right to participate in these transformations?

Creativity as class meritocracy

In order to fully understand how events like C2MTL are shaping Montreal according to these particular class interests, it is crucial to consider the kinds of experiences and subjectivities creative city initiatives imagine, as well as those that they deny. In their integrated approach to urban design, social policy, research, and economic development, both C2MTL and the Quartier de l'Innovation initiatives invoke the particular language and logic of creative city theorists like Richard Florida.²⁶ Florida, most well-known for his theorization of how a rising “creative class” acts as the primary engine for urban regeneration in post-industrial cities, has built a thriving career as an expert on this class through a series of best-selling publications as well as a consultancy business, the Creative Class Group (Florida 2002; 2005; 2012).²⁷

Florida's theory of the creative class has been widely embraced by policy-makers and corporate stakeholders (like advertising executives and professionals) in cities across the world, including in Montreal where his work is frequently cited in urban development proposals and

²⁶ Peck (2020) argues that while the creative city “policymaking contagion... is not entirely reducible to the after-effects of [Florida's] much-discussed book,” his “zeitgeist-catching intervention articulated, and then helped to realise and reproduce, a particular kind of ‘late entrepreneurial or ‘soft neoliberal’ moment across evolving regimes of urban governance” (37). Through both the widespread public attention his publications have received beyond academic circles, as well as through the influence of his consultancy firm, Florida arguably remains the most notable theorist of the creative class. For additional theorizations of creativity and the role of creative industries in post-Fordist urban regeneration, see also Landry's *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (2000), Yencken's “The Creative City” (1988), and Howkins' *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas* (2001).

²⁷ As cited on the Creative Class Group website: “Richard Florida is perhaps the world's leading urbanist, “as close to a household name as it is possible for an urban theorist to be in America,” according to *The Economist*. *Esquire* has included him on its annual list of “The Best and the Brightest,” and *Fast Company* dubbed him an “intellectual rock star.” MIT *Technology Review* recently named him one of the world's most influential thinkers. GDI also named him one of the world's global thought leaders of 2013 and the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) recently named him 100 of the most followed scientists” (http://www.creativeclass.com/richard_florida/about_richard, accessed March 15, 2015).

reports.²⁸ In 2004, Florida was commissioned by Montreal's Chamber of Commerce, *Culture Montréal*, and *Montréal International* to conduct a study on the city's creative economy.²⁹ In January 2005 he presented his analysis to a receptive audience of "very mobile and well educated people," described by Shearmur (2006) as belonging to the local "municipal, economic and cultural glitterati"—a group Florida celebrates as the "creative talent" that cities must attract and retain in order to be competitive within the new "knowledge economies" of the twenty-first century (Shearmur 2006: 31).³⁰ Such ideas have also been elaborated by a number of academics working in and studying Montreal as a creative city, further contributing to their traction at a local level.³¹ In this section I examine how creative class theory constitutes a particular intellectual school of thought that legitimates and encourages capitalist initiatives like C2MTL and QI, and simultaneously helps members of this class rationalize how they benefit from neoliberal processes that exploit and marginalize others.³²

²⁸ See, for example: "The Creative Industries: Catalysts of Wealth and Influence for Metropolitan Montréal" (2013)—a report on the importance of the creative industries in Montreal by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal in partnership with the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal, the Ministère des Finances et de l'Économie du Québec, the Secrétariat à la région métropolitaine, Ville de Montréal, the Québec Film and Television Council and the Association of Quebec Advertising Agencies. The report directly employs Florida's theorization of the creative class, stating: "Among the other concepts that have emerged over the years, we cannot ignore the concept of creative classes, the subgroup of the population working in creative occupations. However, the creative classes are not the subject of this study; we are interested in enterprises that operate in the creative industries rather than in all the individuals whose work or know-how is creative" (8). Similarly, in their joint publication, "Quartier de l'innovation: Un écosystème urbain pour l'innovation" (2012) the Université de Québec's École de technologie supérieure (ETS) and McGill University explicitly draw on Florida's theory in framing the QI initiative.

²⁹ Florida published the results of this study in two articles: "Creativity, Connections, and Innovation: A Study of the Linkages in the Montréal Region" (Stolarick and Florida 2006); and "Montréal's Capacity for Creative Connectivity: Outlook & Opportunities" (Florida and Stolarick 2010).

³⁰ Shearmur (2006) describes *Culture Montréal* as "an organization that gathers Montreal's cultural elite and that lobbies for more funding," and *Montréal International* as "a provincially funded organization the purpose of which is to market the Montreal agglomeration to outside companies and potential—usually wealthy or educated—immigrants" (31).

³¹ See, for example, Cohendet, Grandadam and Simon 2009; Cohendet and Zapata 2009.

³² In addition to the rhetorical similarities I outline in this chapter, C2MTL shares a number of financial and social ties to Florida's Creative Class Group (CCG), which offers consultancy services to both corporate and public institutions. For example, Cirque du Soleil, a founding partner of C2MTL, also hired Florida's firm for advice on target city market

In his seminal work *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2012), Florida advances two primary objectives: 1) to describe a set of socio-economic shifts he identifies with the emergence of the creative class; and 2) to measure the interrelated lifestyle and work practices of this class in order to develop a model of urban development that best harnesses their creative potential to economic growth. While in his final chapter, “The Creative Class Grows Up,” Florida lightly admonishes members of the creative class for their self-interested tendencies, his general position vis-à-vis the qualities and impacts of this class is laudatory.³³ For example, Florida explicitly assesses the moral values he identifies with the creative class as culturally progressive (his theory rests upon an assumed homogeneity in this regard), and establishes a “Creativity Index” that he defines as “an overall measure of regional economic potential,” which he uses to rank cities according to a set of correlated economic and cultural criteria (Florida 2012: 253). “The key to understanding the new economic geography of creativity and its positive effects on economic outcomes,” writes Florida, “is what I call the 3T’s of economic development: technology, talent, and tolerance” (2012: 228). Florida’s index consequently considers a diverse and otherwise seemingly unrelated set of variables as measures of more or less “creative” cities; his list includes the presence of high-tech industries and patents per capita, the prevalence of

selection. Likewise, CCG advised Zappos’ CEO Tony Hsieh as well as a number of Las Vegas public officials on economic development strategies for the Las Vegas core, where Zappos is headquartered. The role that Zappos played in regenerating downtown Las Vegas was also subsequently the topic of the talk that Hsieh gave as a headlining speaker during the 2014 C2MTL conference. Additionally, the new-economy magazine, *Fast Company* (for which Florida’s wife, Rana Florida, is a frequent contributing writer), has praised Florida as an “intellectual rock star.” *Fast Company* is also a partner of C2MTL.

³³ Florida’s critics highlight this as one of the primary limitations of his work. Reckwitz, for example, argues that Florida’s study “endeavours to promote the very phenomenon it is discussing,” and in this way is “far from being a neutral account” (2017: 2).

values like “openness to experience” and acceptance of “foreign-born” people, and the vibrancy of local bohemian and queer communities.

Arguing that the “wide appeal of his message and method reveals a great deal about the soft center of neoliberal urban politics,” Peck (2010) describes Florida’s theory as one that “mixes cosmopolitan elitism and pop universalism, casual and causal inference, and social libertarianism and business realism” (194). Additional critiques call attention to Florida’s lack of methodological rigor, his use of what some perceive as arbitrary statistical indicators of creativity, his romanticising of urban gentrification, his failure to account for how the processes he associates with creative class “regeneration” exacerbate entrenched structures of inequality, and his evasion of political debates surrounding the policies he promotes (Peck 2005; see also Lehmann 2003; Maliszewski 2004; Pratt 2008; Shearmur 2006). On this last point Peck (2005), for instance, argues that in failing to attend to “intraurban inequality and working poverty,” Florida’s academic publications and consultancy work have in fact *exacerbated* such issues for many urban communities (756). Moreover, Peck argues, in eschewing “big government solutions” in favour of a theory of “creative trickle-down,” Florida’s creative class formulas for urban regeneration can be interpreted as attempts to justify the increasing inequalities that accompany neoliberal restructuring through an ideology of creative class meritocracy (759). Similarly, Shearmur (2006) argues that insofar as urban development projects informed by Florida’s creative class theory promote the interests of such a class above those of the supposedly “non-creative class’... [that] comprises 70 per cent of the population,” they espouse a trickle-down logic whereby the enrichment of the creative class is argued to be good for everyone since (the theory goes) it is the primary driver of urban economic growth (37).

Florida's ideas have clearly resonated with interest groups in Montreal whose membership falls into the creative class thus defined; in their joint publication, "Quartier de l'innovation: Un écosystème urban pour l'innovation" (2012), for example, the Université de Québec's École de technologie supérieure (ÉTS) and McGill University explicitly reference Florida's theorization of the "3T's" in promoting the potential of the QI initiative to further Montreal's status as "une ville de savoir et de créativité de niveau international (1).³⁴ Many of Florida's key theoretical tenets have also been elaborated by business scholars and economists based in Montreal, in analyzing the city's post-industrial economic context. In their article, "The Anatomy of the Creative City," for example, Cohendet, Grandadam and Simon (2010) argue that the economic landscape of any creative city consists of three different layers: the *upperground* ("formal firms and institutions" that "bring creative ideas to the market"); the *underground* ("creative individuals such as artists or other knowledge workers," who produce culture "outside the corporate logic of exploitation" as part of the "fertile soil" of the creative city); and the *middleground* (communities of cultural intermediaries who contribute "particular forms of knowledge in the processes of creativity" through which "emerging creative ideas from the street and bars of the city can crystalize and get equipped with validating processes to reach the market"). According to such authors, "it is the *middleground* that is the essence of the creative city" (92); taking Ubisoft and Cirque du Soleil as exemplary case studies, they suggest that the

³⁴ Translates as, "an internationally renowned city of knowledge and creativity." The QI report also relies heavily upon publications by the Martin Prosperity Institute (MPI)—a public policy institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management that aimed to apply design thinking" to public policy "interventions", where Florida was an affiliated professor and "Director of Cities." The institute closed in 2019. (<http://www-2.rotman.utoronto.ca/mpi/about/the-institute/>, last accessed March 25, 2022). Report accessed online: <https://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/P56/7a17a.pdf>, December 7, 2022.

success of such companies lies in “community contributions” that connect employees to the local *underground*, in order to take advantage of the “creative atmosphere and resources” the latter provides (103).

In this way, Cohendet, Grandadam and Simon provide an economic rationalization and ideological framework for justifying processes of capitalist recuperation—i.e. practices through which novel cultural aesthetics are appropriated and commodified by intermediate actors (like creative ad workers), in order to generate profit for corporate stakeholders. Here, however, the process of recuperation (or “middleground” activity) is promoted as an “intermediate structure linking the *underground* to the *upperground*,” which performs key economic functions that contribute to the competitive edge of a creative city (97). In this “brokerage position,” the authors suggest, the groups that constitute the creative middleground “provide the necessary cognitive platform to make creative material economically marketable and viable,” but are often undertheorized and overlooked in their cultural and economic contributions (97). For these reasons, “relevant policies to stimulate and favor the quality of the creative forces in this specific milieu” (i.e. built environments and social architectures that provide “playgrounds for creativity” for the creative class) are argued as key to both the economic and cultural dynamism of the creative city.

With these local interpretations and engagements in mind, here I would add to existing critiques that conceptualizations of creativity within creative class theory are themselves inherently contradictory—contradictions I observed as palpably present at events like C2MTL, and in initiatives like the QI. Briefly, this contradiction is one whereby creativity is defined as a

universal human capacity, but also then claimed within processes of social distinction that associate being creative with a specific cluster of shared cultural values, social orientations, professional roles, and cultivated consumer tastes.³⁵ In this second sense, the capacity to *be creative* is conflated with a specific class *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) in a manner that directly contradicts more universalistic definitions. Accordingly, the flourishing of creativity amongst a specific subset of urban populations is then turned to as *both the justification for* as well as *the ideal outcome of* specific kinds of urban development initiatives, corporate practices, and government policies that reimagine and rebuild city landscapes according to the interests of this class. Because such theories have become influential frameworks for neoliberal development initiatives that reinforce structures of class distinction and wealth consolidation within post-industrial urban contexts, the discursive reframing of socio-economic inequality as the inevitable outcome of *creative class meritocracy* is politically significant.³⁶

The notion of creative class meritocracy is especially apparent in the distinction Florida draws between “working,” “service,” and “creative” forms of labour; the implication of Florida’s categorizations in this regard is that coinciding kinds of labourers themselves embody variable capacities for creativity, and that these then naturally direct different individuals towards specific forms of capitalist productivity and lifestyle choices accordingly. This idea is reinforced by Florida’s delineation of a “Super-Creative core” of knowledge workers and cultural experts, as a

³⁵ Throughout his work, Florida repeatedly asserts that the “creative impulse [is] the attribute that distinguishes us, as humans, from other species” (2012: 4).

³⁶ See David Brooks’ article, “How to Bobos Broke America” (*The Atlantic*, September 2021 issue: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/09/blame-the-bobos-creative-class/619492/>) for a discussion of how the creative class perpetuates the myth of meritocracy while consolidating class standing through practices of wealth and resource concentration. See also O’Brien et al. (2016), “Are the creative industries meritocratic? An analysis of the 2014 British labour force survey.”

distinctive group within the broader creative class, in which Florida includes “people who work in science and engineering, computers and mathematics, education, and the arts, design and entertainment” (2012: 74). Florida’s taxonomy of creative class distinctions does not rest upon clear definitions of what makes such roles intrinsically more creative than others, however. Rather, as Pratt (2008) observes, Florida delineates the creative class through a series of “proxies” (i.e. associated social values, cultural tastes, and lifestyle habits), which he interprets as distinguishing this class from others. In this way, creative personhood is reimagined as a set of “distinct habits of mind and patterns of behaviour that must be cultivated on both an individual basis and in the surrounding society” (Florida 2012: 16). Instead of systematically attending to how such habits and behaviours are shaped by differential levels of access to cultural capital (like education), social networks, or economic resources, Florida simply treats them as natural indicators of a “creative ethos,” through which the creative class rightly maintains its cultural influence as the “norm-setting class of our time” (2012: 10).

The idealization of such a class *as creative* consequently rests primarily upon its potential to act as a driver of economic growth in de-industrialized cities. In other words, by constituting a new kind of labour force to which “mobile, high-tech and high-growth firms are drawn,” the dynamic presence of the creative class within a given city theoretically thus encourages foreign economic investment in local “creative industries” (Pratt 2008: 108). Creative class proponents therefore argue that municipal policy should be geared towards the projects that support the professional, lifestyle, and cultural interests of this highly mobile, cosmopolitan, affluent class—even if such projects might marginalize other city residents and urban communities. What emerges from the contradictions inherent to conceptualizations of creativity within creative class

theory is therefore ultimately an ideological rationalization of contemporary forms of urban class inequality (manifesting in this case as one's ability to hold creative jobs, to live/consume aesthetically, to participate in exclusive cultural events) as meritocratic—i.e. as earned by virtue of one's innate ability to *be creative*.

While the circular logic of such a theory is striking, it is not altogether novel. Indeed, in conflating class habitus with creativity, Florida's theory of the creative class reads as an elaboration of key tensions that have surrounded Western ideologies of creativity since the Enlightenment, as I outlined in Chapter 1. Such tensions speak to the ongoing relevance of the concept within contemporary attempts to negotiate the connections between aesthetics, ethics, and commerce under capitalism. With this in mind, it is particularly significant that the "creative class" so-defined includes people from both middle and upper socio-economic strata. As such, it is more accurately understood as a set of shared ideologies and cultural orientations that bridge socio-economic divides than as a clearly delineated class in classic economic terms. This is particularly crucial in order to understand how the neoliberal imperative to *be creative* becomes tethered to middle-class aspirations of upward social mobility, and how this then harnesses individual "creatives" to particular forms of labour and lifestyles that often paradoxically impede their own sense of creative flourishing. (I examine such experiences more closely in Chapters 5 and 6).

It is clear that recent creative class theory draws upon longstanding philosophical associations that idealize creativity as a marker of individual and group exceptionalism. These associations make the concept into a fertile and relevant ideological framework for rendering

neoliberal class politics more palatable to those people who constitute this newly-defined creative class. The appeal of creative class narratives becomes even more apparent when read alongside what Vradi (2011) describes as the turn towards “caring capitalism”—a phenomenon that encompasses “the social entrepreneur, the creative worker, the frugal consumer, and the volunteer tourist, who use corporate social responsibility, continuing education, ethical consumption or charitable contributions to lend capitalism a ‘human face’.”³⁷ These themes were particularly apparent during the 2014 edition of C2MTL, where analogous notions of “creative capitalism” and “conscious capitalism” were frequently invoked in ways that emphasized individual philanthropic efforts and the cultivation of ethical business sensibilities amongst corporate stakeholders as avenues for contributing to the common good, while avoiding discussion of more systemic reforms.³⁸

In a social climate like Montreal, where longstanding traditions and concern for social welfare exist uneasily alongside entrenched structures of inequality and class privilege, it is easy to see the appeal of these narratives for individuals who identify with the creative class. Within such a context, C2MTL clearly provides a forum for the circulation of such ideas as part of a process of class legitimization, while also acting as a site for the ongoing consolidation of social and economic capital in the hands of an affluent class. This is readily apparent in a number of

³⁷ Florida situates his own work on the creative class as contributing to the broader political project of “democratic capitalism”—a term adopted by Florida and his colleagues at the Martin Prosperity Institute (MPI), housed within the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management. Until its closing in 2019, MPI aimed to apply “design thinking” to public policy “interventions” that, according to the institute’s website, “would benefit workers, the system and, notably, business.” (<http://www-2.rotman.utoronto.ca/mpi/about/the-institute/>, last accessed March 25, 2022).

³⁸ In addition to talks given by conference speakers, such themes were also reflected in the 2014 edition of *C2MAG* (C2MTL’s conference program and magazine). See especially the introductory article to the magazine entitled “Toward the Common Good,” written Jeff Chu (C2MTL collaborator and editor for *Fast Company*).

ways, from the language and themes of conference publications, to the individual speakers who provided testimonies of creative corporate success, to the spectacular and carefully curated aesthetics of the experience as a whole.

For example, the 2014 conference program, *C2MAG*, distributed to all attendees, includes a feature article entitled, “Toward the Common Good.” The article, by Jeff Chu, opens with the following:

As the global economy faltered, a great man stood before his people and issued a stinging indictment of business leaders: “They only know the rules of a generation of self-seekers.” He praised priceless things, saying, “Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.” Then, he issued a call to community: “These dark days, my friends, will be worth all they cost if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves, to our fellow men.” (19)

Quoting F.D. Roosevelt, Chu’s article makes a direct comparison between the “recent Great Recession” and the Great Depression of 1929-1939, with Chu subsequently remarking that, “it’s striking how applicable [Roosevelt’s words] are now as they were then” (19). While one might think that invoking Roosevelt’s indictment of “a generation of self-seekers” would invite critical discussion of the neoliberal economic practices that not only led to the “recent Great Recession” but that also continue to inform patterns of increasing inequality today, Chu leaves this territory unexplored. Instead, he goes on to argue that there has been an “unmistakable climate change” since Roosevelt’s era, whereby transparency, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability are (supposedly) now becoming the norm.

Chu supports his claim that such a shift is occurring by arguing that “you can judge a society by its heroes.” He then lists Muhammad Yunus, Warren Buffet, Bill and Melinda Gates, and Blake Mycoskie (founder of TOMS shoes) as examples of a new, heroic, corporate

stakeholder who embodies the sense of social responsibility and humanistic philanthropy that supposedly characterizes the more caring capitalism of a new era. “None of these heroes have sworn off capitalism,” continues Chu, but have, rather, “encouraged us by example to use it for good, modeling what some might call social responsibility writ very large” (20). Chu’s argument is, of course, selective and anecdotal, particularly in light of robust statistics that suggest how prevailing corporate capitalist practices of wealth consolidation are far from transparent, socially responsible, or sustainable (such as rewarding executives with exorbitant bonuses while worker wages stagnate). And yet, Chu’s argument is also rather commonplace; as McQuaig and Brooks describe in their discussion of Bill Gates, for example, the heralding of the wealthy entrepreneur who “gives back” as heroic is a common trope in dominant capitalist discourse, where such a figure is celebrated as “an almost mythical character, one who makes wealth accumulation look justified” (2011: 74).³⁹

In the structure of Chu’s text, we can also observe a rhetorical sleight of hand that characterizes narratives of “democratic,” “caring,” and “creative” capitalism more broadly: first a nod to morally discomfiting realities (e.g. the Great Recession), and then a distancing of “us” from the “self-seekers.” By focusing on figures like Yunus, Buffet, Gates and Mycoskie, Chu champions the feats of a new kind of entrepreneurial hero—one who embodies the “nobler,

³⁹ In their chapter, “Why Bill Gates Doesn’t Deserve His Fortune,” McQuaig and Brooks engage a critical discussion of Bill Gates’ success, as a case study for reexamining popular assumptions that Gates’ career is entirely the result of his own talent and hard work. Instead, they describe the particular forms of class privilege and access to resources and opportunity that he benefited from, in order to argue that his acquired wealth and influence is to a large extent the result of inherited privileges that go unacknowledged in his mythologizing: “Our culture inculcates us with the notion that important advances are the product of individual genius. We tend to see the development of human civilization over the centuries as the history of spectacular achievements by individual Great Men (and the occasional Great Woman), virtually eliminating the role that society plays. This notion gives credibility and legitimacy to the accumulation of vast fortunes” (2011: 79).

cleaner capitalism” that Beckert (2014a) argues “we” crave. While these examples of heroic capitalism may be invoked, in part, in order to inspire a sense of hope and possibility for change, the claim that such exceptional actors are representative of a widespread or systemic shift away from entrenched structures of capitalist exploitation is, in light of pervasive evidence of increasing inequality, misleading at best. More critically, the circulation of such narratives can be seen as discursive practices that help to sustain structures of intensifying socio-economic inequality by diverting “creative class” consciousness and attention away from the forms of oppression and exploitation that characterize contemporary capitalism. The theoretical task then becomes how to account for the affective pull of such narratives—the sense of hope such figures inspire, and *for whom*.

Situating discourses of democratic capitalism and stories of entrepreneurial heroes as part of a broader creative class mythology allows for significant observations to be made regarding their narrative structure and symbolic meanings. This helps to elucidate how and why such narratives resonate so strongly with certain groups (such as the various executives, advertising professionals, and other “creatives” in attendance at C2MTL). According to Lévi-Strauss, “what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” (1955: 430). We can certainly observe elements of this pattern at play in the creative class mythology that informs texts like Chu’s: 1) first, within a capitalist ontology inequality is naturalized as an inescapable (and ideal) form of human social organization that is meritocratic in nature, and democratic in its foundations (past); 2) second, contemporary forms of inequality are explained as produced through historical *perversions* of capitalism (e.g. hedge funds, stock based compensation), which

have resulted in popular discontent and protest (e.g. a crisis of faith in capitalism) that threatens to undermine the natural order (present); 3) finally, the philanthropic billionaire entrepreneur is heralded as a heroic figure who, as an embodiment of both unbridled entrepreneurial spirit *and* altruism, resolves the contradiction between the individualistic pursuit of wealth accumulation with the liberal humanist concern for “the common good,” consequently restoring faith in the justness of the capitalist world order. As such, exceptional entrepreneur-philanthropists or social business advocates are celebrated as embodiments of an idealized capitalist practice that others can aspire to, without renouncing convictions in the righteousness of individual wealth accumulation and class privilege. In this way, if we consider Lévi-Strauss’ claim that “the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction” (1955: 443), then we can understand how such narratives emerge from and attempt to redress a foundational paradox—in this case, one through which the creative class seeks to maintain privileged lifeworlds that depend upon socio-economic inequality, exploitation, and class distinction, with competing liberal humanist values of equality, democracy, and individual freedom.

Notably, “creative class” initiatives, as well as their accompanying programs of “caring,” “conscious,” and “democratic” capitalism, advance a reform-from-within approach to an inherently exploitative corporate capitalist system. The circulation of these ideas at events like C2MTL encourage creatives to ignore the structural inequalities they directly benefit from, and that inform the ways in which the post-industrial “creative cities” they inhabit are imagined and designed according to their own class interests. The intensification of such inequalities are a direct outcome of the neoliberal values that inform private interventions into public policy and that characterize dominant patterns of governance today—practices that Harvey describes as

involving “the channelling [of] wealth from subordinate classes to dominant ones and from poorer to richer countries” (2007: 22).⁴⁰ Insofar as it receives public funding from different levels of government, despite being an exclusive and inherently thus exclusionary event, C2MTL exemplifies this type of neoliberal practice, while also illuminating key discourses (caring capitalism, creative class meritocracy) through which the channeling of resources “upwards” is ideologically justified.

The consequences of neoliberal capitalism are not only far reaching in geographic terms, but are also profound in the effects they have on individual subjectivities, shaping understandings of self and other in intimate and affective ways. Scholars of neoliberalism have consequently highlighted the pervasive sense of precarity that characterizes the affective atmosphere of neoliberal contexts (Berlant 2011), as well as the “unequal distribution of hope following neoliberal reform” (Miyazaki 2010: 238; see also Hage 2003). Deeply relevant to these affective experiences, or “structures of feeling” (Williams 2011: 69), I argue, are contemporary discourses and practices that circumscribe creativity and creative personhood in class-based terms. Put differently, insofar as ideological constructions and performances of creative personhood are associated to the idealized autological subject of Western liberalism, then the circumscription of creativity to specific individuals according to class belonging is especially significant. Insofar as creativity remains tethered to the liberal autological subject through

⁴⁰ That the shift from industrial to post-industrial “aesthetic capitalism” (Reckwitz 2017) has contributed to intensifying economic stratification and precarity is clear; at the time of the C2MTL conference, for example, statistics indicated that the richest ten percent of Canadians owned almost half of all national wealth (47.9%), while the bottom fifty percent of the population held less than six percent (Broadbent 2014a). Internationally, these disparities were even more extreme, with eighty-five percent of total global wealth controlled by the richest ten percent of the global population, while “the bottom half of the world’s adult population owned 1% of global wealth” (Bauman 2013: 1).

“discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom” (Povinelli 2006: 4), class-based claims to creative personhood must be interpreted as always necessarily thus implicated in a politics of *denying others* the same freedoms and capacities for self-actualization that distinguish creative selves as exceptionally free, un-alienated, self-sovereign subjects.

In attending to how creative class narratives invoke the myth of meritocracy, we can thus begin to better understand their affective appeal amongst “creative industry” professionals, corporate stakeholders, and public policy-makers. This is evidenced in the numerous “creative city” regeneration projects that have been remaking local urban landscapes across North America and Europe since the early 2000’s, as well as in the observable success and popularity of events like C2MTL.⁴¹ Thus, while to an outsider like me there seemed to be a conspicuous contradiction between the curation of C2MTL as an elite and exclusive event on the one hand, with the themes of social responsibility and justice that were the focus of the 2014 edition on the other, the conference was clearly not experienced as contradictory to most attendees or organizers. Rather, as throngs of well-heeled dancers shimmied to a song about diamond-soled shoes, and bits of silver confetti began to trickle down from the rafters in a moment laden with unintended symbolism, it became quite obvious that the majority of conference participants had in fact rapturously embraced the dominant mission and messages of C2, contradictions notwithstanding.

⁴¹ See Peck 2005 for an overview and discussion of such regeneration projects, as influenced by Florida’s writings and consultancy work.

Spectacle in the city: “curating” creativity as capital

In the section to follow I consider how the discursive framing of creativity as class distinction is experientially reinforced at events like C2MTL, through an emphasis on spectacular aesthetics and immersive experience. As my friend Manjot aptly observed in her description of the event as part “American megachurch” and part “business conference” (cited in the epigraph at the start of this chapter), the C2MTL experience is something of a hybrid—a mass-audience, multi-day social event that is at once a forum for utilitarian pragmatism, spectacular entertainment, and ideological proselytization. In promoting the event, conference organizers themselves often emphasize the “immersive” design of C2, exemplified through specific conference features such as “D.I.Y Labs.” Depending on the year, these labs might, for example: offer participants opportunities to convene, blindfolded, in a pit of plastic balls in order to discuss innovative solutions to business problems; to network with each other while sitting in chairs suspended from the ceiling seven metres above the ground; or to make new contacts by climbing up into a giant ball of branches perched on stilts and painted pink, like something Dr. Seuss dreamed up. A similarly spectacular aesthetics is equally encountered outside the Arsenal gallery space, in an area referred to as “The Plaza.” Here, in an open-air zone that stretches along the banks of the Lachine canal, middle-aged executives and young professionals relax on beanbags in the Fatboy lounge (always with a business card at the ready), or take rides on the candy-coloured Ferris wheel set up especially for the conference. And inside the main auditorium, between talks given by well-known cultural experts, CEOs, and celebrities in the arts, a master of ceremonies who would have made an excellent court jester in a bygone era coordinates a game of glow-in-the-

dark ball-throwing amongst audience members, urging attendees to make new friends by kissing one another on each cheek, “Montreal-style.”



Figure 4.5: “The Pool,” 2014 edition (photo by C2MTL)⁴²

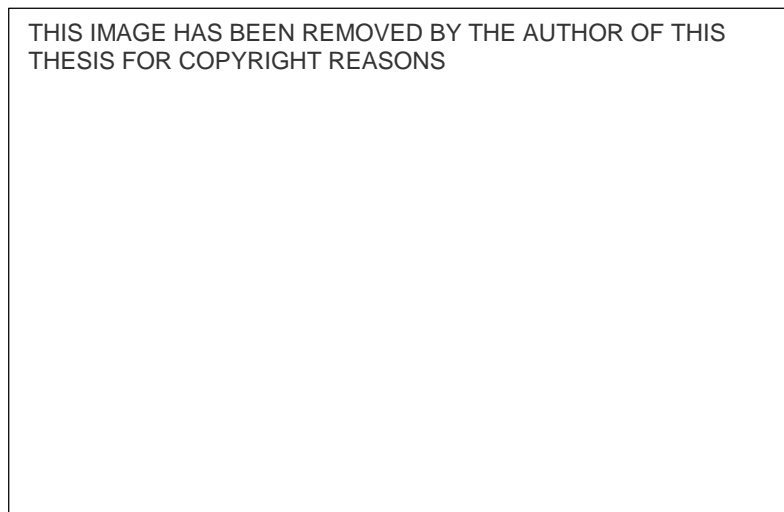


Figure 4.6: “NEST” by C-Lab (Cirque du Soleil) for the C2MTL 2015 edition. (Photo by Melissa Thompson for Studio JULY)⁴³

⁴² <https://www.c2montreal.com/post/labs-101-meaningful-play-to-amplify-your-creative-game/#/>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

⁴³ As described on Studio JULY’s website: “Originally installed during the 2015 C2MTL business conference held at Montreal’s Arsenal, the first phase of this project invited strangers, two at a time, to enter into the NEST and to be initiated into a ritual of intuition and commitment. Relying solely on their intuition, visitors of the NEST were asked to choose one of the 18 graphic symbols laid out before them on a series of wooden stamps, eventually creating a shared tattoo.” Participants then exited the NEST through a photo-booth where their arms were photographed, “creating the connection between two people that are no longer strangers.” After the conference the NEST was installed at the “E-Merge” exhibition (also held at Arsenal Gallery), alongside eighteen selected arm portraits from the conference. (<https://studiojuly.co/work/clab-nest/>, last accessed March 30, 2022).

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF
THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 4.7: “The Plaza.” (Photo by C2MTL)⁴⁴

The playful approach that C2MTL takes to conference design is clearly intended to remove social inhibitions among participants, and to create an effervescent atmosphere conducive to the liberating of one’s creative faculties. The particular aesthetics of the event also clearly reflect and promote both the Sid Lee and Cirque du Soleil brands.⁴⁵ Sid Lee, for example, promotes itself as “a collective of lateral thinkers, thrill-seeking daredevils, happy campers, hopeless dreamers, entrepreneurial spirits, midnight oil burners, curious problem solvers, status quo-phobes”—a branding that invokes the same rule-breaking irreverence celebrated as a hallmark of the creative revolution in advertising (as I describe in Chapter 3).⁴⁶ Such aesthetics are self-consciously “cool” in ways that speak to what Reckwitz (2017) describes as the

⁴⁴ <https://www.c2montreal.com/press-releases/c2-montreals-closing-party-sold-out/#/>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

⁴⁵ Incidentally, in 2012 Cirque du Soleil bought a significant minority stake in Sid Lee.

⁴⁶ Despite its emphasis on originality, Sid Lee’s branding in this regard clearly evokes the iconic Apple TV commercial, released in 1997 as part of its “Think Different” campaign, and narrated by Steve Jobs: “Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently — they’re not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

dissolution of “the antagonism between bourgeoisie and the counter-cultures,” whereby, he argues, the former has come to embrace the “creative” and “aesthetically-oriented way of life” historically associated with the latter (221).

Inasmuch as assertions of creative identity through the adoption of an aestheticized, “counter-cultural” stance reflect the ongoing legacy of the creative revolution within a globalized advertising industry, they also speak to the continuous recuperation of cultural trends by ad workers, as experts of all that is culturally emergent and aesthetically novel. Indeed, it is clear that C2MTL organizers bring a similar aesthetic sensibility and cultural expertise to the design of the conference as they do to their advertising work; in addition to the line-up of speakers and networking opportunities, C2MTL is punctuated by artistic performances (especially music, dance, and circus show) that help to legitimize the event as contributing to the cultural dynamism of the city. All these features add to the conference’s reputation as a place for the celebration of spontaneity, collective play, and individual freedom in ways that eschew the constraints of more conventional business practices. In this way C2MTL also offers, at least ostensibly, a space where participants are *liberated to be creative*.

And yet, as Manjot suggests when she describes C2MTL as part “megachurch,” there are also core aspects of the C2MTL experience that are best described as ones of neoliberal evangelism, through which the attentions and energies of participants are constantly directed towards thinking, relating, and acting “creatively,” but only insofar as these can be contained within a capitalist ideological framework. In this sense, the conference serves as a space for observing how the call to *be creative* is more imperative than invitation—i.e. a particular mode

of neoliberal subjectification and self-discipline. This is apparent, for example, in the ways that “creative collaborations” between strangers at the conference are given value as opportunities to pursue new business partnerships or job opportunities. It can be read in the appreciation that attendees express for unconventional immersive sensory experiences as a way to gain deeper insight into embodied human experience, as integral to effective corporate management strategies. And it is also palpable in the enthusiasm that younger participants have for idea-incubating labs as fertile spaces from which the next big start-up venture might take flight (hopefully with them on board). In both discursive and embodied ways, then, the conference reinforces an understanding of human creativity as most naturally expressed within an ethos of capitalist productivity and “entrepreneurial spirit.” Moreover, as I elaborate below, the particular social architecture of the conference works to experientially connect the ideals of individual freedom, self-actualization, and unalienated aesthetic experience that are associated with liberal constructions of the autological creative self as *intimately dependent upon* corporate capitalist structures of power.

Attention to these dimensions of the C2MTL initiative consequently begs comparison of the conference to other forms of religious ritual, through which dominant ideologies are reinforced in embodied experiences of collective effervescence and cultural belonging. Indeed, there are several key aspects of the C2MTL experience that have significant parallels to the kind of spectacular religiosity characteristic of the “megachurch” Christianity to which Manjot aptly referred. Take, for example, the pace and feel of the main-stage speaker sessions that began, in 2014, with an ethereal performance by local Montreal musician (and Mile End celebrity) Patrick Watson. The performance served to separate the conference in time and space from mundane

everyday realities, lending it a pseudo-sacred quality that was subsequently heightened by the appearance of five chorists, who floated downstage towards the audience in otherworldly fashion. As Watson's performance came to a dramatic finale, Jean-François Bouchard (C2MTL "head curator") then energetically bounced onto the stage, his image projected onto large screens installed all around the venue. Wearing a wireless microphone, he paced from one end of the stage to the other as he spoke about the importance of embracing change with a rhetorical style that resembled that of an animated preacher.

The series of talks that followed Bouchard's introduction were ones of personal testimony, in which "thought-leaders" presented lessons learned from their lived experiences.⁴⁷ Amongst others, common themes included personal redemption, resilience in the face of adversity, and giving back to community. Catherine Hoke, for example, spoke of "being called" to establish Defy Ventures during a prison tour, when she was working for a New York private equity firm. The multimillionaire tech executive, Zita Cobb, spoke of her work with the organization Shorefast, which she founded in order to economically revitalize her home community of Fogo Island, Newfoundland.⁴⁸ Advocating for the growth of the "social enterprise" sector as an "exciting" space of overlap between for-profit and non-profit organizations, Cobb presented her "not-just-for-profit" business model as one of capitalist hope. Like other quintessential features of evangelical religiosity, such testimonies bear witness to experiences of transcendence; in this case, what is transcended are the ethical dilemmas of an inherently

⁴⁷ <https://www.c2montreal.com/press-releases/c2mtl-sets-new-global-benchmark-yet/#/>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

⁴⁸ <https://shorefast.org/>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

exploitative capitalist system, through exemplary and enlightened individual action, and the modelling of a more righteous (or “conscious”) capitalism.

The inspirational tone of the testimonies provided by Hoke, Cobb, and others, enhanced by the spectacular projection of images on massive screens throughout the auditorium alongside a barrage of overwhelming light and sound effects, draws our attention to the ways in which forums like C2MTL contribute to an aestheticization of knowledge under capitalism. Bratton (2013) describes this aesthetic as one of “middlebrow megachurch infotainment,” characterized by “a combination of epiphany and personal testimony (an ‘epiphimony’ if you like) through which the speaker shares a personal journey of insight and realization, its triumphs and tribulations.”⁴⁹ While Bratton is writing specifically about TED Talks, a similar tendency towards *epiphimony* similarly characterizes the kinds of talks that predominate at C2; it is obvious, in fact, that in significant ways C2MTL is modelled upon the highly successful TED, to the point where it is often described as, “a cross between *Burning Man* and *Ted*.”⁵⁰ Such a characterization makes for appealing branding. It also highlights how C2MTL participates in a process that Bratton describes as the reduction of knowledge to “one simple take away, one magic idea.”

In addition to the form and tone of the mainstage speaker series, the evangelical feel of C2MTL is reinforced by the spectacular elements of its immersive experience. Underlying this attention to spectacle is a clear attempt to harness participant attention and energies to

⁴⁹ For a transcript of Bratton’s talk, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/30/we-need-to-talk-about-ted>, last accessed March 30, 2022.

⁵⁰ As described by Kristina Moore for *Forbes* magazine, in her article “What to Wear: C2MTL”: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesstylefile/2014/05/20/what-to-wear-c2mtl/?sh=465e06ca2f6c>, last accessed March 30, 2022

conference activities in ways that, when examined critically, can be seen as disciplinary and distracting rather than liberating or empowering. This was especially apparent to me during a moment when, after a long day of speakers and workshops, a C2MTL employee herded participants to a table overflowing with mountainous blocks of chocolate, and handed everyone chisels. Manjot and I, alongside other attendees, were then instructed to use the chisels to break off palm-sized pieces of chocolate, which we then quietly gnawed at until we grew sick with fatigue and sugar, throwing our obscenely-large chunks into the garbage as we left, defeated. Far from cultivating a sense of creative inspiration and agency, the excessive indulgence of the experience made us feel passive and placated. A similar feeling characterized the moment when Cirque du Soleil acrobats and stilt-walkers were released into the crowd at the end of the day, interrupting conversations with body-bending curlicues and dizzying dives, as well as when attendees swarmed a scoop-it-yourself ice cream wheel as they exited the main auditorium after the final keynote speaker of the day, starving and sweaty. In fact, while many other cultural forms of circus may be ripe with subversive carnivalesque potential (see Bakhtin 1965), the particular aesthetics of Cirque du Soleil entertainment encountered at C2MTL might more accurately be described as a *panem et circenses* varietal of popular appeasement and distracted indulgence.

C2MTL organizers themselves describe their approach to conference design as one of “curation.” This discursive framing is clearly part of an attempt to legitimize the ideas and activities that define C2MTL as being of broad cultural value (and not just private corporate interest). By transferring the prestige of the gallery or museum curator working in the “fine arts” (as an embodiment of “good taste”) to the design of the business conference, this curatorial

claim insists upon the aesthetic value of C2MTL as a “creative” event. The emphasis on the role of curation throughout the event is quite telling; it draws attention to how the C2MTL organizers intentionally design activities and messages in ways that work to contain participant thinking and experiences of creativity to a capitalist logic and worldview that advances corporate interests.

Despite a promotional emphasis on conference experiences as ones of spontaneity, rule-breaking, and play, the concept of curation draws attention to how the design of C2MTL actively disciplines attendees into specific forms of creative productivity and reinforces existing creative class hierarchies. This can be observed in the separation of C2MTL participants into stratified groups with variable levels of access to exclusive spaces within the conference. This stratification is reinforced through the use of technologies that allow organizers to systematically track the movements of individual participants accordingly: the first thing that all participants must do when arriving at the conference is to collect their conference pass (indicating their name and job title), which they are required to wear on a lanyard around their necks whenever they are on site. These passes also indicate the specific package the participant has purchased, which grant differential levels of access to various spaces and activities throughout the conference accordingly. In 2014 these packages ranged from the \$3,850 (+tax) “Total Experience” 3-day pass, to the \$2,350 “Village Experience” passes, which granted access to the conference site and social activities, but not to the main auditorium (though attendees could nevertheless watch the talks on television screens in the Videotron-sponsored “Streaming Lounge”).

While the exorbitant costs of access immediately serve to restrict the event to individuals with the personal wealth or institutional affiliations of an affluent professional class, once inside

the conference individual access to different spaces continues to be monitored and restricted through the use of unique UHF (ultra-high frequency) RFID (radio-frequency identification) microchips embedded in each attendee's pass. These RFID are read by gates or towers located at entrance points to restricted areas, such as the main auditorium and VIP rooms. If an attendee does not have the necessary access privileges for a specific space or event, the readers in the towers send an alert to C2MTL employees who hover around points of entry. Moreover, what C2MTL organizers do not explicitly tell participants is that their RFID passes are also used for much more extensive tracking and monitoring purposes, not only at access points. Specifically, UHF readers are also present in chandeliers hung from the ceilings in the different zones of the conference site, which permit organizers to identify the locations of individual persons at all times, and to monitor how they participate in various parts of the conference program. All this data is collected by a system that monitors which participants are in what zones, at what times, and for how long.⁵¹

This type of tracking and monitoring is, according to C2MTL employees, meant to ensure that safety regulations are followed (so that certain spaces do not exceed capacity, for example), as well as to guarantee adequate seating for those participants who have paid for full access passes. The use of such technology is in fact not unique to C2MTL—it is often used at other large audience events such as music festivals, where it eases flows of movement into restricted-access spaces by allowing attendees to simply walk into the venue (if they have purchased access) without having to stop to show credentials. Its implementation at C2, however, is also clearly a

⁵¹ <https://www.bizbash.com/home/media-gallery/13351116/rfid>, last accessed March 30, 2022

strategy for stratifying conference experiences according to varying degrees of exclusivity in ways that provide elite participants with opportunities to continuously assert higher socio-economic standing and professional status within the context of the conference itself. With this in mind, though the organizers of the conference clearly use the concept of curation to define their work as a form of creative labour informed by refined aesthetic sensibilities and cultural expertise, in this context curation can also be seen as an aestheticized approach to the design of social spaces and experiences that ultimately tether creativity to a politics of class distinction. Indeed, the “curatorial” approach to conference organization directs and determines social experiences and exchanges in ways that reinforce broader corporate cultures of elite privilege and “creative class” hierarchies; presumably, only the *most* creative people at a “creativity + commerce” conference have access to the VIP room.

And yet: one never knows who one might rub elbows with in the ball-pit, or in a chair hanging from the ceiling, or on the dance floor of C2MTL; the spectacular (and perhaps *cruel*) hope is that it might just be the exact audience you need for your next big creative idea.

As the congregation files out of the first block of speakers, Twitter is buzzing with soundbites and status updates:

@jeffchu: “Innovation and creativity come not only from the creation of ideas but also from their destruction.” (@noreenahertz #c2mtl)

@shannonballard: “A great brand is a story than never stops unfolding.” (@tonyhsieh #c2mtl)

@sapwatch: 20 of @FastCompany 100 Most Creative People in Business are in audience of #C2MTL

@corycoley: Creativity in business should be organized, purposeful, chaos #C2MTL

@MsGenDupuis: Today it’s all about #freedom @C2MTL, after @Bjarkelngels @esthersoolee points out the need to free yourself to #create

The atmosphere of the conference is effervescent—attendees are enthusiastic, engaged, animated.

Manjot and I push our way out of the auditorium, heading towards the coffee stands, comparing what we just experienced to the typical academic conference.

“I’m telling you, get out of academia while you can,” she says to me. “It’s so much more fun on the dark side.”

Manjot’s colleague, Jean-François, joins us. He asks if either of us have a piece of gum. We don’t.

We observe that there are no breath fresheners to be had.

Joking, I suggest that we sell gum at next year’s C2MTL.

Manjot adds that it shouldn’t just be average gum: we could print inspirational quotes from C2MTL speakers onto individual sticks of gum, in real-time. C2MTL attendees would not only be able to freshen their breath, they could also then physically consume the creative insights they had paid so dearly to receive, like some kind of entrepreneurial Eucharist!

We would call our startup “Chew on This!”

Jean-François laughs, and suggests we go present our idea at “The Garage”—a part of the C2MTL site where ambitious young entrepreneurs sign up to participate in “Life’s a Pitch,” during which they’re given 333 seconds to sell their business ideas to potential investors.

And then, more seriously, he says: “It’s actually not a bad idea!”

“Chew on This” never materialized. Nevertheless, our fleeting excitement at its incubation speaks to how easily one can be swept up into the collective effervescence of C2MTL. In analyzing the spectacular dimensions of C2MTL as they shape practices of social networking, professionalization, knowledge dissemination, and performances of class distinction amongst an educated, cosmopolitan, and professional class increasingly defined as “creative,” we can observe how dominant capitalist beliefs about the world and one’s place within it are reinforced through the “problematization” (in the Foucauldian sense) of creativity as a salient cultural ideal

under capitalism. This problematization makes creativity into a marker of class status and exceptional personhood that is also simultaneously associated with—and *often experienced as*—individual freedom and agency. This theorization and practice of *creativity as distinction* is exemplified in a particularly illuminating way during the immersive spectacle that is C2MTL, organized primarily for and by “creative industry” stakeholders (especially Sid Lee) in the city of Montreal.

As one node within a broader “creativity circuit,” C2MTL acts a site for both the implementation as well as the moral legitimation of broader neoliberal practices and imperatives. As I have argued above, such initiatives direct critical attention away from questions of how one’s labour and leisure activities become harnessed to intensifying socio-economic inequalities. Examining the different discursive and aesthetic elements of C2MTL as well as the underlying ideologies that legitimate them thus illuminates how this occurs, in part, through discourses and experiences of elite belonging and class meritocracy that attempt to answer the question of what—and who—can claim to “be creative.”

Chapter 5

The Double Binds of the Creative Self

“It’s not like we sell guns to babies, but I still have problems with some of what we do. Actually, with the whole nature of what advertising does, generally.”

(Nikita, Creative Producer)

“Optimism is cruel when it takes shape as an affectively stunning double bind: a binding to fantasies that block the satisfactions they offer, and a binding to the promise of optimism as such that the fantasies have come to represent.”

(Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p.51).

Field notes, February 16th, 2014:

Me: Were you at the Créa awards last night?

Lars: I showed up for an hour towards the end, but couldn’t stomach it and had to leave.

Me: How come?

Lars: Don’t know... I used to go to these industry things all the time. I mean, it’s part of the lifestyle that draws people into advertising in the first place. At first you just want to be part of it, you know? But after a while, you are just so bored by it. All that industry sexiness is obviously an illusion – advertising advertising itself, to itself.

Me: What keeps you in the industry?

Lars: I don’t think I would get the opportunity to be creative – to actualize it in production – in the same way anywhere else. I mean, in what other world would someone give me half a million dollars to sit in a room with some bearded, pot-smoking art director, in order to solve problems with creative thinking?

Me: That seems to be a common image of advertising work—sitting around with some other guy, thinking about stuff, being creative. But I want to know what makes that scenario different from any other two guys sitting around, brainstorming ideas. I mean, obviously there’s something more to it than that. What does it mean to be really creative in advertising? What does it involve?

Lars: That's a huge fucking question. (Pauses). There are lots of people who are successful in advertising because they are producers, not creators. These people are only driven by money. They know how to play the game, but for a creative person the game isn't fulfilling. Advertising is only fulfilling for a creative person in the sense that the work requires you to solve a problem that has been set by something else. Creativity is the ability to think a certain way... People who I respect as creative are people who are able to change their minds constantly.

Me: How can you tell the difference between someone who just produces and someone who creates?

Lars: Good creative will never show you the plumbing.

Me: Can you elaborate?

Lars: Well, there are all these different departments in advertising, right? The job of the strategist is to meet with the client, and figure out what the core message that needs to be communicated is. Then strategy will brief the creative team... do you know all this already?

Me: Yes.

Lars: Okay, so most "creatives" who are in fact just producers will pretty much just take that core message and manifest it in words and pictures, or whatever. So in the end the creative approach or tagline is really just a reiteration of the brief that strategy already gave you, and it's obvious to even the most average consumer. A real creative wouldn't do that. They would come up with something that does what it needs to do, but it would also be something more. It's that something more, that element that escapes the limitations of the client's intended message, that is creative.

Me: Okay. Can you give me an example of a creative ad that does that?

Lars: Let me give you an analogy instead. It's kind of like sleeping with someone for the first time. A bad lover is just going to get in there and get it done, so to speak. I mean, you can call it sex, and you might orgasm, but it's not really fulfilling. There's no fun in it. It doesn't imaginatively engage you. A good lover is going to try and read you, take his time to explore a bit, get to know what turns you on, maybe test your limits slightly or surprise you in an interesting way. It's just much much better, and we all know good sex when we get it.

Me: Does the same analogy work for all kinds of creative work? For other forms of art?

Lars: (Laughs) What's with all your fucking philosophical questions? (Pauses). Yes and no. Advertising is different from other kinds of contemporary art because of the constraints that are the creative challenge. It always has to accomplish something... at the end of the day a

good ad, like a good lover, still needs to make you come. Most contemporary art is just about the artist coming all over himself.

Me: Your comparison between advertising and sex seems to suggest that both are about wielding power over someone else. Is that how you see it?

Lars: (smiling) Ha! Yes, I guess that's what I've just described.

Me: Is that part of what makes the creative challenge of advertising interesting to you? Power?

Lars: Next are you going to ask me if that's why I like sex?

Me: Let's stay with advertising.

Lars: Okay. (Pauses). I actually don't know... I guess there's something to that, yes, but I'd need to think about it some more... I don't think the biggest draw for me is really about wielding power over other people... it's more the creative challenge, like I've described.

Me: Okay. Does creative advertising, by definition, need to effectively influence people to consume?

Lars: Yes.

Me: Do you think creativity can be measured by market impact?

Lars: Yes. And of course, we all know that at the end of the day advertising is evil because of the ways it influences people to think in certain ways, or consume things that are bad for them, or bad for the planet, or other people. Sometimes it's really evil. But we do it anyways.

Me: Have you ever worked on an account that made you ethically uncomfortable?

Lars: Of course. Regularly. We all have. But you do it anyway. Maybe it gets easier, or maybe you just stop pretending that you ever gave a shit about the morality of it all in the first place. (Pauses). I don't know.

Me: Can you give me an example of when you had that kind of experience?

Lars: Yes. (Thinks). But then there's also something interesting about that discomfort. (Pauses). Let me give you a hypothetical instead. Imagine a client wants to reconcile the fact that they use children in Asian sweatshops to make t-shirts, with their image as a socially conscious brand. That's a terrible – and *fantastic* – creative problem.

In previous chapters I demonstrated how (neo)liberal idealizations of being creative, as a particular form of autological subjectivity under capitalism, are key to understanding constructions of personhood and class belonging in the field of Montreal advertising. Within this context, creativity is regularly invoked in ways that encourage individuals to construct and perceive themselves as exceptional persons, while also providing a conceptual framework through which unequal levels of social prestige, privilege, and power are justified as evidence of creative merit. These intertwined notions of individual and class exceptionalism are also integral to the ways in which the ethics of advertising as a field of social relations are continuously negotiated by creative ad workers through an accompanying valuation of the creative process as *autotelic pursuit*. As my interview with Lars (above) highlights, this autotelic emphasis (i.e., being creative for the sake or enjoyment of being creative), is one way that individuals attempt to navigate a range of ethical dilemmas—or “fantastic creative problems”—that often characterize the everyday work of advertising production.

In this chapter I explore how creative ad workers variously reflect upon and negotiate the broader social implications of the commodity images and messages they produce, and consider how these negotiations reveal enduring tensions within dominant idealizations of creativity under capitalism. These tensions are especially apparent in the frustrations that many of my interlocutors shared, which were often (though not always) articulated as arising from a misalignment between the ideological and aesthetic work of advertising on the one hand, and their own personal values and creative aspirations on the other. Put differently, such frustrations stem from conflicting aesthetic sensibilities and desires for creative flourishing; they signal how a philosophy of aesthetic disinterestedness in the sentimentalist tradition (described in Chapter 1)

enters into tension with competing understandings of creativity born of the “autotelic turn” in art and aesthetic philosophy that accompanied the rise of a modern art market, as well as the first “full-service” ad agencies, by the end of the nineteenth century (Chapter 2).

For some of the creative ad workers I mention in this chapter (like Nikita and Michel), it is clear that these tensions engender profoundly ambivalent feelings towards advertising as an industry and, by extension, towards their own careers as “creatives.” As I describe below, for such individuals the hope of achieving an idealized “free and creative subjectivity” is often experienced as irreconcilable with the very nature and purpose of advertising work. In significant ways, frustrations born of these irreconcilabilities reflect continued adherence to an aesthetic philosophy in which ethics and aesthetics are inextricably intertwined, and often centre upon ethical dilemmas that are carried into advertising by the unique demands or practices of “the client” (e.g. the use of child labour to make t-shirts by a “socially conscious brand”).

At the same time, Nikita’s expressed discomfort “with the whole nature of what advertising does, generally” (cited in the epigraph above) reflects a deeper ethical questioning of the *intrinsic* power relations that shape advertising as an institutionalized system of aesthetic production and commercial persuasion. Such statements direct attention to industry discourses and practices that celebrate the creative exceptionalism of ad workers in ways that often *discourage* ethical questioning as moralizing conservatism; for those creative ad workers who align themselves with the non-conformism and social provocations of the avant-garde as evidence of their innate and exceptional (free, autonomous) creativity, the risk of being perceived as morally conservative is a powerful disincentive in this regard. Thus, for many other

ad workers (like Lars), the adoption of an aestheticized stance towards the productive work of advertising elides consideration of advertising's broader social impacts and ethical entanglements in ways that he sees as not just congruent with, but *enhancing of* his creative reputation. This is achieved through a focus on the activity (and status) of being creative (i.e. the self-actualization of the creative subject in aesthetic production), over and above the psychological impacts or social implications of specific consumer incitements (ads).

Alongside these individual experiences and encounters, in this chapter I also turn an ethnographic lens to the remarkably self-referential (and self-reverential) forms of advertising that are produced by advertisers, for the community of advertisers to which they belong, and that promote specific individuals, agencies, and sometimes the industry at large as exceptionally creative. These patterns of self-promotion provide evidence of how the aestheticized stance Lars identifies above is celebrated through particular discourses and industry practices that reward exceptionally creative subjects accordingly. They also reveal widespread industry processes that work to *contain* ways of imagining what—and who—can claim to *be creative* in Montreal advertising. Ethnographic attention to how different ad workers variously perceive, rationalize, and respond to the entangled ethical, aesthetic, and social dilemmas of advertising ultimately illuminates how the (neo)liberal creative ideal is one of considerable *double bind*.

Creatively ambivalent

Throughout my fieldwork and interviews it was frequently made clear to me that being creative in advertising is variably experienced as a rewarding, enjoyable, intellectually challenging, and

often highly collaborative practice. For this reason, creativity must be attended to not just as a marker of individual or class exceptionalism, but also as a particular mode of engagement in and with the world that informs why individuals choose to pursue specific kinds of labour over others. Creativity in this sense is experienced, in other words, as a particular form of human agency and flourishing, for which working in advertising is seen as providing an institutional structure of material and social support. Yet, it is clear that these more positive experiences exist in perpetual tension with the perceived constraints placed upon the creative process by clients and employers. This tension was a recurrent theme in many of the interviews I conducted over the course of my fieldwork in ways that reveal it to be a primary source of the ambivalence that many creative ad workers express towards the industry they constitute.¹

Insofar as ad work is seen by such individuals as one of the few forms of labour under capitalism in which they can *pursue a creative life* while still “making a living”—as Lars indicates in the interview transcribed above—it is clear that a certain pragmatism informs the choice to pursue a career in advertising.² This is especially apparent when we consider how the actual output of much advertising production is often perceived by the ad workers who produce it as being of minimal aesthetic merit; the individual creatives I spent time with often used terms like

¹ In his ethnographic study of advertising and globalization in India, Mazarella (2003) describes how this tension frequently plays out through “a set of conventionalized role expectations” between creative workers and account executives, whereby the former are seen by the latter as “invariably precious failed fine artists” and the latter by the former as “business-headed boors” (27). While these tropes also shape the advertising industry in Montreal to a certain degree (reflecting structures of relationships that characterize advertising production as a globalized industry), here I am more interested in how such tensions play out at the level of the self, in terms of the creative’s relationship to their own aesthetic work and identity.

² According to the Association des Agences de Communication Créative (A2C), working in advertising is the second most common source of revenue for artists in Quebec, with 24% of total artist earnings coming from advertising creation. (Comparatively, 42% of artist earnings in the province come from working in cinema, which is the most common source of revenue for local artists). Source: <https://a2c.quebec/uploads/medias/pres-a2c-portrait-industrie-communication-marketing-quebec-ccmm.pdf>, last accessed May 19th 2022.

“ugly,” “boring,” “tacky,” or “unoriginal” (when speaking English) to describe campaigns they were unhappy to be working on, alongside similar terms like “*quétaine*” or “*poche*” in French. I also often heard phrases like “*on fait de la saucisse*,” or “*c’est de la réclame*,” used by creatives to describe campaigns or commercials they saw as ugly and unsavoury (“making sausage”), or uninspired and cluttered with commercial messaging (like promotional flyers). Most often, responsibility for the perceived *lack* of creative or aesthetic value within such campaigns was credited to “the client”—a multi-headed figure variably made of corporate marketing directors and executives with the power to kill inspired ideas proposed by creative teams, citing aesthetic demands and production budgets. These constraints were frequently described to me by creative ad workers as informed by a widespread aversion on the part of clients to take aesthetic risks, or simply as the result of a relative lack of aesthetic taste and education among decision-making “corporate types” who want to control the creation process and “defend their jobs.” In all these ways, such figures and types embody and enforce decidedly *uncreative* rationalities.

At another level, however, by providing regular opportunity to *be creative* in everyday work, the same individuals also often described advertising to me as a primary site for enjoyment of the creative process—what Lars described in our interview as the experience of *actualizing ideas in production*. These more positive experiences reveal how an autotelic aesthetic attitude is transferred from its original orientation in relation to the object of art towards *the act or state of being creative as purpose in itself*. In practice—as my fieldwork with ad workers in Montreal exemplifies—the pursuit of this particular state of being (i.e. living a creative life) is a clear and primary reason that many people are drawn to work in the industry. Put differently, the desire to live a creative existence is a key motivator that commits “creatives”

to the work of advertising production and, ultimately, to devote themselves—in practice if not always in spirit—to the projects of corporate capitalism.³

Over time, the tension between the desire for creative freedom and a perceived dependency upon the corporate structures that harness individuals to the production of commodity images often leads advertising creatives to feel ambivalent or apathetic about their work (and, by extension, about core aspects of their own identities and lives). Moreover, many people I interviewed candidly and self-reflexively observed that they perceived their work in advertising as exacerbating widespread social problems and structures of inequality. Amongst such individuals, Lars was on one end of a spectrum, conveying a profoundly ambivalent attitude towards the question of corporate ethics, going so far as to express appreciation for the fertile “discomfort” of unethical corporate practices because of the creative challenge they present. Other people I interviewed, like Nikita (a former creative producer quoted in the epigraph to this chapter), communicated overwhelmingly negative sentiments towards the industry. These sentiments were born of an ethical discomfort she feels about the corporate practices and structures of power that advertising sustains. They were especially apparent when, on another occasion, Nikita described advertising to me as “the handmaiden of contemporary capitalist exploitation.” Several months after I met her, she quit her job at Sid Lee and returned to university in order to pursue a graduate degree in art history.

³ Most creatives I interviewed could also readily provide me with examples of work they were proud of (which they variously described as “cool”, “beautiful”, “funny”, “creative”, and “relevant”). Attitudes towards ad work in this sense varied according to individual aesthetic values, creative aspirations (whether a person grudgingly did ad work to support a separate artistic practice, or whether they intentionally sought careers in the field), and experiences of success within the industry (those with more success seemed to have greater freedom to be selective in the accounts they worked on and/or received “better” accounts at their agencies).

Most typically, the creative ad workers I spoke with fell somewhere between these two positions, discussing ethical dilemmas in more situational terms through anecdotes of particular campaigns: the time the agency they worked for conducted market research for a major beer brand by running focus groups with “loyal beer drinkers” (i.e. alcoholics), and then paid those participants in cases of beer; the campaign for yogurt tubes they worked on, in which they marketed the product to kids without using the term “yogurt” because there wasn’t enough dairy content in the product for it to actually qualify as yogurt; the time they created a lottery campaign to aesthetically appeal to “underemployed” Quebecers; the time their agency designed a series of “casino coupons” targeted to “frequent visitors” (i.e. gambling addicts). In recounting these experiences, the ad workers I interviewed described varying levels of ethical discomfort as an unavoidable aspect of the job, which they openly discussed amongst themselves in both informal and formal contexts. When asked about how they understood their own roles within what they themselves articulated as unethical corporate practices, responses ranged from a fervent desire to leave the industry altogether, to evasion of individual accountability (“if I don’t make it, someone else will”), to excitement over the “fantastic” creative problem of mass persuasion.

Within this range of responses were clear attempts to navigate ethical dilemmas in advertising on a more individual, case-by-case basis. This is illustrated in an article entitled, “*De la difficile question de l’intégrité en pub*” (“On the difficult question of integrity in advertising”), written by the creative director Dominique Trudeau and published online in March 2018 by the

local industry trade magazine, *Infopresse*.⁴ In this article, Trudeau writes about the experience of turning down a major, big-budget account when he had just left a stable position at an established local agency to open his own “micro-agency,” Couleur Locale. His reason for not taking on the account? It would have required him to go against his personal environmental values. Specifically, Trudeau describes receiving a call from the potential client in Toronto asking him to “creatively adapt a campaign that would reach Quebecers,” but which would also require him to “spin the virtues of something that is not-too Catholic, environmentally speaking.”⁵

In describing his deliberations over whether or not to take the account, Trudeau depicts a scenario that is not difficult to imagine: an ethically-questionable client presents an opportunity for creatively interesting work and lucrative pay, which creates inner conflict for the ad worker. Trudeau’s decision to decline the account was not what I observed to be an industry norm: over the course of my fieldwork I heard far more stories of ad workers agreeing to work on ethically discomfiting accounts than I did stories of ad workers declining work for ethical reasons. However, the way in which Trudeau frames ethical decision-making as a form of expressive individualism is, I argue, of particular relevance to the definitions of creative personhood under capitalism that I explore throughout this dissertation. Indeed, given how a counter-cultural stance has been directly associated with idealized constructions of the creative self in advertising since the creative revolution (see Chapter 3), it is unsurprising that Trudeau adopts an attitude of

⁴ The opinion piece can still be accessed on Dominique Trudeau’s personal website:

<https://domtru.com/2018/03/10/de-la-difficile-question-de-lintegrite-en-pub/> (last accessed April 23rd, 2022).

⁵ Trudeau writes: “Oui allo? Oui, c’est moi. Oui, oui, Couleur locale, micro-agence québécoise agile, blah, blah, blah. Un mandat? Oui, adapter créativement une campagne pour parler aux Québécois? Formidable. Easy. Been there, done that. I’m in all right. C’est pour qui?... Bon, c’est là que mon histoire se morpionne. On me demande de spinner les vertus d’un truc pas trop catholique environnementalement parlant. Moi qui viens tout juste d’acheter un char hybride pour l’entreprise, ça craint. Et pourtant, j’ai pas donné ma réponse sur le coup.”

irreverence and non-conformism towards the question of advertising ethics altogether, even while aligning himself with a “progressive” ethics of environmental consumerism that creative class theorists consider a defining feature of said class (Florida 2012: 60; see Chapter 4). Yet, in discussing his decision to turn down the account under question, Trudeau insists that this choice was ultimately informed by his own (original, freely-formed) sense of *individual ethics*, rather than by adherence to a collective moral code. In so doing, however, Trudeau nevertheless manages to inform the reader that he not only drives a hybrid car, eats organic food, refuses to water his lawn or use pesticides, and just got rid of his gas heating system, but also that, despite all this, he “mostly does not care about social conventions or the opinions of do-gooders” (“*je me fous des conventions et des bien-pensants, souvent*”).⁶

What is notable about Trudeau’s personal reflection on the ethics of advertising work is not only how it registers a shared experience of ethical discomfort that many ad workers face over the course of their careers. Specifically, his insights also illuminate how this discomfort stems from an ideological double-bind whereby the “creative” is caught between the constraints of ethical social action on the one hand and an idealized life of unconstrained creative flourishing associated with non-conformism, social exceptionalism, professional acclaim, and wealth, on the other. This bind is explicitly acknowledged when, towards the end of his article, Trudeau writes:

Fuck, it’s not always easy. It’s a funny job, advertising. More often than not, I sell things that for the most part go against my own values. Great opportunities for having fun. For

⁶ « Bon, c’est là que mon histoire se morpionne. On me demande de spinner les vertus d’un truc pas trop catholique environnementalement parlant. Moi qui viens tout juste d’acheter un char hybride pour l’entreprise, ça craint. Et pourtant, j’ai pas donné ma réponse sur le coup. Pourquoi? Parce que le défi est magnifique et grandiose pour un publicitaire comme moi. Parce que l’argent donne des ailes naturellement. Parce que je suis dans ma première année en affaires. Parce que je me fous des conventions et des bien-pensants, souvent. Parce que je suis capable de tout pondérer, de mettre tout sur une balance. Mais merde, c’est trop bête quand même, moi qui bouffe bio, qui ne flanque rien sur son gazon, même pas de l’eau, pis qui a sacré aux poubelles sa fournaise à l’huile... »

working with remarkably talented Quebec artisans. With very decent budgets for everyone involved. Sweet gigs, in other words.⁷

In fact, Trudeau goes on to say that, while one might occasionally be lucky enough to win accounts that are “good for the soul,” these are but “the tip of the iceberg. ... What’s beneath the surface is much bigger, and harder to grasp.”⁸ What advice does Trudeau then provide for how to navigate working with ethically questionable corporations? Be clear about “one’s own individual limits, individual beliefs, individual principles.”⁹

In crucial ways, the particular double-bind that Trudeau describes as inherent to the job of the creative ad worker is clearly born of what Povinelli (2006) identifies as the binary opposition “between individual freedom and social determination” that characterizes Western liberalism, “as if the choice between these Manichean positions were the only real choice available to us” (6). Indeed, Trudeau’s insistence on ethics in advertising as a matter of personal choice (rather than, say, collective refusal, regulatory bodies, or state laws), reflects an adherence to an ideology of creative personhood in autological terms, defined by “the *fantasy* of self-referential enclosure” (Povinelli 184). Thus, even when describing his environmental values and habits (which are clearly informed by broader socio-political movements and cultural codes of ethical consumption), Trudeau emphasizes individual choice over collective action and political reform. In stating his own “beliefs, limits, and ways of navigating the grey zones,” he

⁷ « Fuck, c’est pas facile parfois. C’est quand même un drôle de métier, la pub. Plus souvent qu’autrement, je vends des trucs qui vont pas mal beaucoup à l’encontre de mes vrais valeurs. Des canevas formidables pour vraiment s’écarter. Pour travailler avec des artisans québécois remarquablement talentueux. Avec des budgets très décentes pour tout le monde. Le pied, quoi. »

⁸ « Mais c’est la pointe du iceberg, tout ça. C’est joli et ça fait une belle carte postale. Sous l’eau, c’est plus gros, beaucoup plus gros, et plus difficile à saisir. »

⁹ « Chacun a ses limites, ses croyances, ses principes (j’espère). Et c’est bien ainsi. Qui suis-je pour les questionner? Chacun a le droit de dire oui ou de dire non. Y’a pas de parfaitement bien et de totalement mal (merci M. Miyazaki). »

argues that these self-imposed boundaries are expressions of his unique individual identity and position in society.¹⁰ The reader is thus presented with an image of the creative ad worker that emphasizes ethics as a site of autological subjectivation, or self-making—subjectivation that within such a context is understood “not only as a viable but also as a necessary practice of human freedom” (Povinelli 184). In this way, as Povinelli argues, “the telic and ontic truth of this man is not in his *essence* but in his obedience to a specific semiotic practice of self-performativity” (184, emphasis in original). With this in mind, it is not just the specific ethical stance that Trudeau asserts that is illuminating, but also the way in which he asserts this stance as evidence of his creative freedom and originality.

The particular performance of creative personhood that is articulated by Trudeau in his opinion piece also speaks to contemporary neoliberal discourses and practices that perpetuate the view that global problems of accelerating climate change and social inequality are best solved through individual consumer choice rather than collective mobilization or state regulation of corporate practice. Under this neoliberal order, dominant advertising messages—as well as narratives of ethical work practices that circulate within the industry itself, as Trudeau’s text exemplifies—are ultimately ones that exhort the individual “consumer-citizen” to action in ways that have done little to mitigate rampantly destructive corporate practices that devastate environments and erode the social welfare of communities across the world. In this way, Trudeau’s text is reflective of many conversations I had with other ad workers over the course of

¹⁰ « Moi, j’ai mes croyances, mes propres limites et mes façons aussi d’aborder les zones grises. C’est important pour ma santé mentale. C’est mon identité et la place que je prends dans la société. Je dois absolument me respecter et me faire violence au besoin. Les OGM, les pesticides, le pétrole, les pipelines, le tabac, les armes et la guerre, c’est pas touche pour bibi. C’est à l’extérieur de mes limites. Peu importe. Faut jamais que je l’oublie. Jamais. »

my fieldwork on the topic of ethics in advertising; more often than not, such conversations would culminate in a question of personal “lines”—i.e. in what specific instance(s) would a person “draw the line” in terms of working on ethically questionable accounts.

Indeed, while many ad workers spoke to me about a generalized ethical discomfort they felt about working in advertising—which they saw as grounded in consumer manipulation and the aesthetic obfuscation of capitalist exploitation—others I met were quick to share with me their personal list of clients, commodities, or industries they would refuse to work for, often entirely unprompted. Inasmuch as these lists outlined freely determined ethical guidelines for navigating the potential dilemmas of ad work, they were also clear means through which such individuals attempted to reconcile the ethically dubious reputation of the industry itself with perceptions of themselves as virtuous persons. These lists commonly included entire industries like tobacco or oil and gas, with some featuring specific corporations (e.g. Coca-Cola, Walmart). In reading Trudeau’s text, I was therefore unsurprised that he eventually enumerated his own such list: GMOs, pesticides, oil and gas, tobacco, and weapons of war.

Imagining industry ethics as a matter of individual lines illuminates how the double-bind of the creative ad worker is exacerbated by neoliberal discourses and practices that place the burden of solving systemic social problems on individual workers and consumers rather than on powerful political and corporate actors who benefit the most from a globalized system of state-supported neoliberal exploitation. Reflexive opinion pieces like Trudeau’s invite us to recognize how this transfer of responsibility to the individual self is internalized through the adoption of particular social stances (or *dispositifs*), and associated to the fantasy of the autological subject.

This occurs not just through the rhetoric and practice of “consumer choice,” but also through accompanying discourses and practices of professionalization—ones that in this case are continuously related back to the creative self as a free and self-fashioned liberal subject.

Whether or not individual refusals like Trudeau’s actually have the potential to alter neoliberal capitalism’s current course of action towards pending climate catastrophe and social collapse is not my primary interest here, however. Instead, I am more interested in how Trudeau’s invitation to cultivate an *ethical creative subjectivity* is articulated as a matter of *hyper-individualistic self-curation* (discipline/discernment). As such, Trudeau’s text registers how the creative ad worker remains caught between a stance of aesthetic disinterestedness in creative pursuit (as a form of autonomous self-actualization) and the inescapable realities (or “constraints”) of social interdependence and collective life on a planet with finite resources. In describing the experience of this double-bind, the idealized pursuit of autotelic creativity is itself revealed as a particular kind of “cruel optimism”—an ideological attachment whereby that which is desired becomes an obstacle to one’s “flourishing” (Berlant 2011: 2).

The ways in which various individuals employed in the field of advertising navigate the disappointments of “failing to flourish” in creative terms consequently speak, at least in part, to the frustrations of such binds. Indeed, while Trudeau appears to remain optimistic about balancing creative freedom with his individual sense of ethics, many of the ad workers I interviewed were much less so. Take, for example, Michel, a commercial director first introduced in Chapter 3. In a discussion we had in 2014, Michel described his experiences of ethical

discomfort working in advertising in highly ambivalent terms, relating them to a broader sense of creative frustration he saw as shared among many of his colleagues:

ME: Have you ever made a commercial for a product or company you had ethical issues with?

MICHEL: Yes. Loto-Québec. Pepsi. All of them, mostly.

ME: How did you justify the work, to yourself?

MICHEL: I didn't really. It was more a matter of learning to live with the tension. Behind the scenes this comes out in jokes at the client's expense. There's a lot of sarcasm, amongst creatives especially... This is a way we try to separate ourselves, to set ourselves apart from the system I guess. Or at least this is my experience, and I think it's shared by many people I worked with.

ME: When you say "the system," what are you referring to?

MICHEL: Big business. Global corporate capitalism I guess.

ME: Ok. Do you see any aspect of your commercial directing work as separate from the system?

MICHEL: Not at all. What I do is a core part of the machinery. (Pauses). Once I'd been working in the industry for a while I started to think about my career differently... I tried not to get caught up in the industry lifestyle anymore. I became more mercenary about it. I figured if I was going to bust my ass doing this work, I would at least save as much of the money I made from it as possible, so I'd have something to show for it.

ME: Why was that important to you?

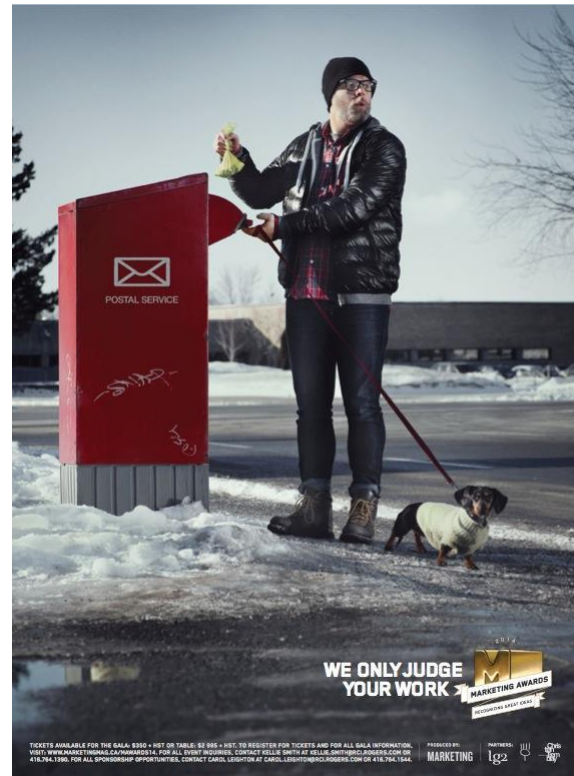
MICHEL: I guess it was my way to say "fuck you" to the system. So that eventually I'd have enough money to be free of it entirely.

Despite working for over fifteen years in the industry, Michel has yet to achieve the financial freedom to be able to say "fuck you" to the system, and continues to accept as many advertising gigs as he can. In fact, Michel's career in advertising has in recent years become increasingly precarious, paradoxically intensifying his sense of dependency on advertising work

and diminishing his sense of individual agency in determining the direction of his creative career. Over the course of our conversation Michel expressed to me how he now feels immense pressure to accept any job that comes his way, regardless of whether or not it aligns with his ethical values and creative interests. Mitigating potential resentment over this perceived lack of agency through humour (“jokes at the client’s expense”) is therefore not only a means to distance oneself from “the system,” but also provides a certain catharsis from the pressures and frustrations that keep one stuck—precariously—in such a system.

Before turning to other ways in which a neoliberal ideology of creativity binds the fantasy of individual freedom to particular forms of subjectification, I would like to consider the question of ethical ambivalence in ad work with a final example: as it is captured within an advertising campaign *for advertising itself*. Specifically, in February 2014, the Quebec advertising agency Lg2 produced a campaign for the national Marketing Awards.¹¹ The campaign consisted of a series of print and video ads featuring advertising professionals engaging in a range of ethically-questionable behaviours: parking one’s car over two handicapped spots; putting dog poo in a Canada Post box; pretending to be deaf in order to avoid an elderly woman asking for help on the street in the middle of winter; and more. Each image or scenario was accompanied by the tagline, “We Only Judge Your Work.”

¹¹ The creative director of the campaign was Luc Du Sault. Copy by Andrée-Anne Hallé and Jean Lafrenière. Art direction by Andrée-Anne Hallé. The small print provides information about event tickets and sponsorship opportunities.



Figures 5.1 and 5.2: “We Only Judge Your Work” print ads for the 2014 Marketing Awards, created by Lg2.

When this Marketing Awards campaign was released it received industry-wide accolades, was featured in *Infopresse* as one of the best campaigns produced that month, and was described enthusiastically to me by a number of ad workers I spent time with that winter as an example of “good” creative work. These emic responses to the campaign speak not only to the effective use of humour in each imagined scene, but also to how the campaign’s underlying theme resonated with the lived experiences of its target audience of creative ad workers. When I asked different individuals about why they considered it “good creative,” responses varied. For example, Lars (who was, incidentally, the first person to bring the campaign to my attention), described the campaign as “good because it unabashedly recognizes how, deep down, we all just want the freedom to be assholes.” From a somewhat different point of view, Grégoire (a

copywriter) described the campaign as one of “cathartic release” for ad workers consistently engaged in ethically questionable work. This observation parallels the one Michel made to me about “backstage” jokes circulating amongst creatives “at the client’s expense.”

Despite nuanced differences between such interpretations, one thing is clear: the campaign depicted ethical ambivalence as a shared attitude amongst creative ad workers and a commonplace trope within the industry. Though this attitude was undoubtedly exaggerated for comic effect, it remains significant that within the campaign unethical behaviour was portrayed as directly related to the individual pursuit of a creative exceptionalism, with consequences that extend beyond the field of advertising production and into other dimensions of public life. Indeed, insofar as the Marketing Awards are meant to celebrate creative excellence in Canadian advertising, the campaign itself effectively promoted the interests of the autological creative subject as being in fundamental tension with the common good, suggesting this to be not only a quintessential characteristic of the advertising industry, but also, for some, a necessary condition for idealized creative freedom.

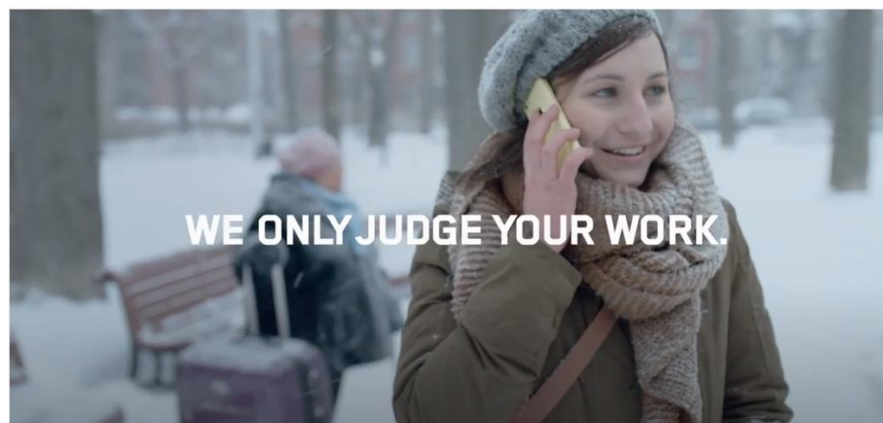


Figure 5.3: “We Only Judge Your Work” still from a video commercial for the 2014 Marketing Awards, created by Lg2. The commercial shows an ad worker answering her cell phone after pretending to be deaf in order to avoid helping a lost elderly woman.

The guys that bind: claiming—and containing—creative opportunity

Nikita: Advertising is all about wanking.

Me: Ranking? Like social hierarchies?

Nikita: No, wanking. (Makes an explanatory gesture). Everybody wanks each other, telling each other how amazing they are all the time.

The ways in which the local advertising industry in Montreal celebrates and promotes itself, to itself, illuminates how understandings of what it means to be creative are ideologically associated with the freedom of the autological subject. As one example of this kind of promotional practice, the Marketing Awards campaign discussed above highlights how the pursuit of such freedom often poses an ethical dilemma, whereby one's desire for creative autonomy is perceived to exist in an antagonistic relationship with the obligations and responsibilities of social life. While the scenarios depicted in the campaign are exaggerated for humorous effect, the ways in which they unapologetically celebrate self-interestedness as a key trait of the creative ad worker remain relevant and illuminating of key tensions that shape dynamics within the field of Montreal advertising.

The national Marketing Awards are but one example from a range of industry events held at local, national, and international levels that illustrate how understandings of creativity as a form of individual and group exceptionalism intersect with other aspects of autological subject formation in late capitalist contexts. At the time of my research, industry awards events in

Montreal specifically were organized by the local marketing media company, Infopresse.¹² In addition to the Grafika awards described in Chapter 3, these annual awards included the Boomerang awards (for interactive communications), the Lux awards (for photography and illustration), the Prix Média (for media strategy), the STRAT (communications and marketing strategy), and the Créa awards (for creation in advertising).¹³ These awards events were co-sponsored by additional organizations that included professional associations (e.g. the *Société des designers graphiques du Québec*; the *Association des agences de publicité du Québec*; the *Association des professionnels de la communication et du marketing*), media conglomerates (e.g. Québecor; Bell Média; La Presse), and other industry partners. Included among the latter were local advertising agencies, design studios, and production companies that collaborated with Infopresse on the branding and marketing of specific awards events, including the creation of print and video campaigns to promote the competitions and awards evenings within the industry. Such campaigns appeared on Infopresse's website and in its publications (including a daily email newsletter), and were circulated within the industry through social media networks (particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Vimeo). These collaborations also carried over into the events themselves through continued promotion in conventional mediums like video and print,

¹² At the time of my research Infopresse was a media group focused on trade publications (industry magazines, newsletters), conference organization, and awards events. In 2019 the company was restructured into "Formations Infopresse." In this iteration, it focuses on professional training and conferences related to the field of communications and marketing, though it continues to publish industry newsletters and maintain an online blog.

¹³ Infopresse organized the fourteenth and final edition of the Créa awards in 2019, at which point the *Association des agences de communication créative* (A2C) announced that it was joining forces with the *Société des designers graphiques du Québec* (SDGQ) and the *Conseil des directeurs médias du Québec* (CDMQ) to launch an entirely new competition—the Idéa awards. Held annually, this event brings together various domains of advertising production previously recognized in distinct competitions, including advertising conceptualization and creation, design, digital communications, and strategy. Though the organization of local awards has thus changed hands and been restructured, many of the same promotional practices surrounding the competition and the awards evening that I discuss below remain fundamentally similar.

as well as through experiential marketing strategies that shaped forms of socialization and modes of participation in awards evenings.

In the weeks leading up to an awards evening, Infopresse would typically publish a series of articles to generate interest in the event, covering topics such as who will lead the year's jury, who the head juror then selects as other jury members, and updates on jury deliberations. This pre-awards coverage also often included interviews with the jury president, who would share their observations about emerging trends within the industry based on that year's submissions. For more high-profile awards events like the Créa, Infopresse would also publish a series of articles "counting down" to the day of the event itself, with titles like "*J-2 avant le meilleur de la creation*" or "*J-3: Créa, fruit de multiples collaborations.*" These articles served to spotlight the individual professionals and agencies involved in the design and production of the specific awards event, providing information to readers on topics such as: which local musicians and sound studios created music for the event; which agencies and production studios created the campaigns and video profiles of the judges; which local personality would be hosting the evening; and which local fashion designer made the host's wardrobe. Beyond recognizing excellence in advertising creation, Infopresse thus promoted the industry awards events it organized as forums for encountering and celebrating the talent and aesthetic expertise of other "creatives" from adjacent cultural industries within the city.

In addition to Infopresse's media coverage of these collaborations, the campaigns produced "out of house" for awards competitions provide an illuminating window onto particular aesthetic practices and networks of social relationships that inform how creativity is

claimed—and contained—by specific kinds of selves within the industry. In the case of the Créa awards specifically, such campaigns were typically produced and paid for by the local agency with which the president of that year’s jury was affiliated. In 2014, for example, Alex Bernier (Partner and Creative Director at Sid Lee) was the head juror for the Créa awards, so Sid Lee was tasked with conceiving and producing a campaign to promote the awards that year. The campaign consisted of a series of print ads that were published on the Infopresse website, promoted in its daily email newsletter, and circulated on various social media sites. The purpose of the campaign was twofold: to promote and solicit participation in the contest (i.e. to get individuals and agencies to submit their work for consideration, at a cost of \$225 – \$295 per submission), and to sell tickets to the awards evening. When examined more critically, however, the latent meanings of the 2014 Créa campaign reflect how an idealized “creative self” was very narrowly conceived by the Sid Lee ad workers who made the campaign, depicting exceptional creative “talent” as embodied exclusively by white Quebecois men.

As illustrated below (Figures 5.4 – 5.6), the campaign features past Créa award winners in various mundane and somewhat embarrassing scenarios (picking one’s nose, staring at a waitress’s breasts, and sitting on the toilet). Each image is accompanied by the tagline: “(Name) *est un être humain comme tout le monde. Vous pouvez le battre,*” under which the featured ad worker’s past Créa victories are listed.¹⁴ The main concept of the campaign is clearly communicated: even the best (i.e. most awarded) creatives in the industry are just normal people whose work can be bested. Aimed at ambitious and competitive Creatives, the campaign

¹⁴ The tagline translates as: “(Name) is a human being like anyone else. You can beat him.”

is, at one level, good advertising: a clear message is communicated in a simple and humorous way that resonates with much of its target audience, particularly those creative ad workers likely to see themselves in the past winners depicted therein. One could even argue that the campaign is inherently representative of a local ad industry insofar as all the individuals featured in the campaign are Quebecois creative directors, art directors, and copywriters who work at agencies in Montreal, and who are well-known amongst their peers. The details in each ad also playfully invoke a sense of place through familiar landscapes (e.g. the gritty urban highway architecture that serves as a backdrop to Beaudry's nose-picking) or shared cultural experience (e.g. the code-switching menu behind Bergeron and Lavoie, featuring "*Les meilleurs pickles à Montréal*").



Figure 5.4: 2014 Créa Awards print ad featuring Simon Beaudry (former creative director for DentsuBos). Created by Sid Lee.

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 5.5: 2014 Créa Awards print ad featuring Jonathan Lavoie and Guillaume Bergeron (former art director and copywriter at Sid Lee). Created by Sid Lee.



Figure 5.6: 2014 Créa Awards print ad featuring Luc Du Sault (partner, vice-president and creative director at Lg2). Created by Sid Lee.

And yet, there is a fundamental contradiction between the seemingly democratic message of the tagline and the structures of social privilege and power that undeniably shape relationships within the industry—structures that are reflected in and reinforced by the campaign itself. This becomes more evident when one considers the individual positions and identities of the featured creatives more carefully. It is significant, for example, that two of the four individuals featured in the campaign are full-time employees of Sid Lee. Despite the fact that this choice could be justified as pragmatic and representative, Sid Lee's decision to feature its own top-performing creatives in the campaign is clearly self-serving, as it garnered more industry attention and recognition for the agency itself.¹⁵ This attention is only positive and desirable, however, if we consider how the campaign idealizes the individuals it seemingly debases through the use of the comic frame. In other words, the campaign is funny because the featured creatives are pictured in relatively disenchanting scenarios. The latent message of the campaign therefore effectively achieves the inverse of what the tagline suggests: the very fact that these creatives are being featured (alongside lists of their various awards) negates their ostensible debasement, instead re-enchanting them with even greater creative authority and cultural prestige. In this way, their reputations as creative individuals are further enhanced from the attention garnered through the campaign (at least within the local advertising community).

¹⁵ I spoke to a number of advertising professionals about the campaign at the time it was released. When I asked for their reactions to the selection of creatives featured in the campaign, people most frequently responded that they were good choices, as well-respected professionals within the industry. When I asked the same individuals more directly about Sid Lee's choice to feature its own employees, responses were largely ambivalent. For example, Celeste – Vice President of Strategy at a local agency – explained that because Sid Lee made the ad, of course they would “pull their own people away out of their offices for the shoot.” From another perspective, Rick, a freelance creative director, argued that regardless of agency affiliation, the men depicted were objectively top performers in the local industry, reflected in the fact that they have won more advertising awards in recent years than other industry creatives.

The social relationships involved in the creation of the campaign require us to situate the campaign's aesthetic significance within a reciprocal promotional project; by exalting these particular past Créa winners—despite their ostensible depiction as regular humans caught in embarrassingly intimate or awkward moments—the awards competition itself is marketed as a site of social distinction, central not just to the dynamism of a local advertising industry but equally to the careers of individual creatives. It is, in other words, made into a forum for the recognition and assertion of creativity as a marker of individual exceptionalism. This symbiotic promotional project was further reinforced by the results of the 2014 Créa awards themselves (sponsored by Infopresse), in which the Créa campaign (commissioned by Infopresse, made by Sid Lee, and published in the Infopresse magazine) was awarded a Créa prize in the category of “*Campagne magazine*” by a jury that was presided over by Sid Lee Creative Director and Partner, Alex Bernier, and included, among its nine other members, artistic director Simon Beaudry—the nose-picking creative featured in one of the print ads of campaign.¹⁶ It was perhaps these kinds of practices that Nikita (quoted above) had in mind when she described her experience of working in Montreal advertising as being “all about wanking.”

* * *

¹⁶ This was equally apparent in an advertisement that Infopresse commissioned as a follow-up to the original 2014 Créa campaign in which vice-president of Infopresse, Arnaud Granata, is featured standing behind his desk with a black-eye and torn clothes. The copy of the ad reads : “*Arnaud Granata est un être humain comme tout le monde. Vous pouvez le battre*”. Then, in small text : “*Mais ça ne donnera rien. Il ne pouvez pas vous donner de billets gratuits pour les Créa, même s’il est V.-P. et directeur des contenus chez Infopresse. Vous devrez les acheter à concourscrea.com.*” On March 13th, 2014, Infopresse published an article, “*Les meilleurs pubs du mois,*” in which it recognized the follow-up campaign it commissioned itself, featuring its own V-P and director of content, as among the five best campaigns of the month, according to the professional judgement of Infopresse staff.

Such forms of cronyism and self-promotion are not unique to the advertising industry. Nevertheless, the symbolic meanings of the 2014 Créa campaign, as well as the conditions of its production, highlight how opportunities for and recognition of individual creativity are claimed—and contained—within a local advertising industry in ways that are far from meritocratic. (Grégoire—a copywriter I introduced at the start of this dissertation—described these aspects of working in advertising to me as “tribal”). The question of *who* is represented (or, perhaps more accurately in this case, who is allowed to *represent themselves*) as the most creative and thus valuable “talent” within such a community therefore warrants closer scrutiny. Specifically, it is significant that in addition to promoting particular agency affiliations, all of the individuals featured in the aforementioned Créa campaign are relatively young, white, francophone men. In other words, they are not “just human beings” like everyone else but are, rather, embodiments of a particular kind of creative personhood imagined in limited ethno-linguistic, racial, and gender terms.

The lack of racial diversity within Montreal advertising has been the subject of increasing critical attention within the industry in recent years. In 2020, the organization People of Colour in Advertising and Marketing (POCAM) drafted an open letter in which it called upon Canadian advertising executives to commit to fifteen recommended actions aimed at combatting systemic racism within the industry.¹⁷ In its call, POCAM highlighted the underrepresentation of racial minorities in advertising agencies, citing employment statistics from the Institute of Canadian Agencies (ICA) that indicated 90.1% of employees at Montreal ad agencies were white, even

¹⁷ See: <https://strategyonline.ca/2020/06/16/open-letter-calls-for-action-against-racism-in-canadian-ad-industry/>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

though visible minorities constitute 32.9% of the city's population.¹⁸ (For comparison, 73.9% of individuals employed at Toronto agencies are white, though that city has a proportionally smaller white population as well).

Research by POCAM also suggests that BIPOC individuals employed within the industry regularly experience discrimination in the form of microaggressions that shape dynamics within the workplace as well as in hiring and job promotion practices. These reflect systemic racial biases amongst employers. Visible minorities working at advertising and marketing agencies are also much more likely to be hired for support roles or as administrative staff than they are for leadership or executive positions.¹⁹ These forms of inequity are mirrored by a significant wage gap; according to research conducted in 2021 by the Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA), BIPOC ad workers “earn 22% less than their white counterparts at junior levels, and while it begins to even out at the middle and senior levels, it spikes back up to a 10% gap within the executive management and c-suite level.”²⁰

In his research on discrimination within ad agencies in the United States, communications researcher Christopher Boulton observes that while corporate clients are increasingly hiring agencies to create campaigns with anti-racism messages in order to make their brands more culturally relevant in a contemporary context (particularly in light of increasing popular awareness and support for the Black Lives Movement), racial discrimination within advertising

¹⁸ See: <https://strategyonline.ca/2020/06/29/why-canada-needs-its-own-approach-to-systemic-racism-in-the-industry/>, last accessed May 18th 2022. See also: <https://www.grenier.qc.ca/nouvelles/21048/y-a-t-il-un-manque-flagrant-de-diversite-en-pub>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.wearepocam.ca/visible-and-vocal>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

²⁰ See: <https://strategyonline.ca/2021/10/19/pay-gaps-based-on-ethnicity-and-gender-prominent-in-canadian-advertising/>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

agencies remains pervasive. Quantitatively, differences in earnings and representation at the executive level according to race are 38% larger than in the United States' overall labour market.²¹ These contradictions between the anti-racist content of corporate advertising and the systemic racism that structures advertising production are equally present in the Quebec context. In a 2020 article for the Quebec industry trade publication *Grenier aux nouvelles*, for example, the Montreal-based account director Yasmine Zeggane writes:

It's nice to want to change and diversify commercial casting.... But if we turn the camera around and the director is white, the producer is white, the creative team is white, and the clients are white... There's clearly some reflection that's not happening. To deny or refuse to recognize this is also a problem, because we need to change these codes.²²

Zeggane's observations invite closer attention to how racial discrimination shapes who is or is not given opportunity to *be creative* within the industry, reinforced through particular patterns of representation and practices of production. The 2014 Créa campaign is thus an illustrative example of how the racialization of creative personhood—that is, the aesthetic coding of creativity as the expression of a *dominantly white autological subjectivity*—is effectively perpetuated and naturalized within industry. These racial biases were born out in my own fieldwork; while I am certain there were BIPOC individuals working as advertising creatives in Montreal during the period of my research, I never met them myself. The absence of their perspectives from this dissertation is itself indicative of the systemic underrepresentation and

²¹ See: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/corporate-ads-said-black-lives-matter-industry-creating-them-nearly-ncna1231540>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

²² « C'est bien beau de vouloir changer et de diversifier le casting à l'écran. ... Mais si on tourne la caméra, et que le réalisateur est Blanc, le producteur est Blanc, l'équipe de création est blanche, les clients sont Blancs... Il y a une réflexion qui ne s'est pas faite. Nier ou ne pas le reconnaître est aussi un problème, car il faut changer les codes. » <https://www.grenier.qc.ca/nouvelles/21048/y-a-t-il-un-manque-flagrant-de-diversite-en-pub> last accessed May 18th 2022.

exclusion of BIPOC groups from the particular social networks that continue to inform access to spaces of creative sociality and subject-making in Montreal advertising, as outlined above.

In addition to racial biases, the 2014 Créa campaign also clearly reflects a pervasive androcentrism that informs understandings of creativity within the industry in ways that I encountered time again throughout my own fieldwork. Though the #MeToo movement has intensified public scrutiny of gender discrimination and sexual violence within advertising agencies since the release of the Créa campaign in 2014, it is clear that sexism continues to be an ongoing problem in ways that highlight entrenched inequalities within the industry. For example, in 2012, the underrepresentation of women in creative roles sparked the founding of the “3% Movement,” a U.S.-based organization whose purpose is to increase awareness and combat gender discrimination in advertising, with a particular focus on the underrepresentation of women in creative leadership roles.²³ Both the founding of the 3% Movement and the particular initiatives it undertakes (conferences, publications, mentorship, consultation, research, and more) address common obstacles that female creatives report as barriers to career advancement. In addition to the relative absence of female mentors within agencies and a persistent wage gap, women in creative roles cited a “lack of celebration of female work due to gender bias of award juries” as one of their sector’s primary forms of gender discrimination.²⁴

²³ The name of the organization was derived from statistics indicating that in 2012 only 3% of creative directors across US ad agencies were women. According to the organization, by 2015 this had risen to 11%. See: <https://www.3percentmovement.com/sites/default/files/resources/WhatWomenWant%20-%20Final.pdf>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

²⁴ See: <https://www.3percentmovement.com/mission>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

The devaluation of women's creative capacities is not unique to the United States. In an article entitled "Where do all the women in advertising go?" (2018), Kathryn Ellis (planning director at McCann Bristol and associate lecturer in advertising at Southampton Solent University) cites data gathered by the UK's Institute of Advertising Practices (IPA) which shows that while 61.7% of students in programs focussed on advertising creation in the UK are women, 89% of creative directors at agencies in the UK are men.²⁵ What Ellis also illuminates in her article is that much of this creative attrition occurs immediately upon graduation:

Whilst only 11% of female graduates went into creative departments—less than half the proportion of their male peers—45% went into other agency roles and 34% gained roles in marketing and other creative companies. This is reflected in IPA figures that show an overwhelming majority of entry-level account managers are women.²⁶

Insofar as such measures provide evidence of a pervasive sexism within the industry that limits creative job opportunities for women at the outset of their careers, they challenge commonplace assumptions that women's creative careers are typically stalled by the responsibilities of motherhood or by individual failures to succeed in a competitive industry. These assumptions were frequently communicated to me by ad workers I spoke with during my own fieldwork, as described below. In fact, as Ellis notes, when faced with sexist bias in hiring and promotion many women end up taking positions as "account managers, planners and project managers, but not creatives, despite training specifically for this role."²⁷ The lack of female representation in creative roles within agencies at all levels is then further reinforced by

²⁵ See: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/women-advertising-go/1466097>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

the widespread tendency of creative directors to “champion more masculine work,” as well as in the systemic “exclusion of women from social events and networking.”²⁸

Similar trends also characterize the Quebec context. According to data collected in 2015 by the Association des Agences de Communication Créative (A2C), 57% of highly-skilled workers in advertising agencies were women. However, this figure drops drastically in creative departments; while no definitive national statistics exist, according to a 2013 Strategy Magazine article, “a count of the names on Strategy’s 2013 Creative Report Card’s creative director list reveals only 14% are women.”²⁹ Additionally, it is clear that the small number of women who are employed in creative roles continue to face gender discrimination in a number of ways. These include a lack of industry recognition of their work relative to their male peers. It is significant, for example, that the first time a Créa jury was headed by a woman was in 2019.

These statistics and examples provide evidence of the ubiquitous gender discrimination that women face when it comes to opportunities for creative work in advertising. Underpinning this sexism is the particular ideology of creativity that informs dominant discourses and representations of creative personhood within the industry, as seen in the 2014 Créa campaign. This requires us to consider how claims to creative exceptionalism within advertising are in fact representative of a more widespread sexism that has, within Western capitalist contexts,

²⁸ See: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/women-advertising-go/1466097>, last accessed May 18th 2022. Such findings are also supported by a 2020 experiment conducted by two junior creatives, Jessica Kielstra and Nina Forbes, who sought to find out whether gender discrimination continues to inform experiences of creative workers seeking entry-level positions within the industry. As they report on their website (<https://www.thegenderagenda.co.uk/the-study>), the pair “sent 40 emails [to senior creatives] with a link to a portfolio from ‘Emma & Hannah’ and another 40 emails with a link to the same portfolio from ‘Liam & Harry’”. Everything the same, but the names and photos attached.” Kielstra and Forbes found that “Liam and Harry” received seven offers for book crits (i.e. feedback from senior creatives on a portfolio of creative work) while “Emma and Hannah” received only two for the exact same portfolio.

²⁹ See: <https://strategyonline.ca/2013/04/04/stuck-in-a-mad-men-era/>, last accessed May 18th 2022.

historically limited the ability of women to pursue and enjoy the same creative freedoms as their male counterparts across a range of aesthetic fields. Indeed, insofar as creative exceptionalism continues to be interpreted as the experience and expression of an ideal autological subjectivity, the freedom and self-actualization of “being creative” continue to be ontologically associated to white masculinity.

Consider, for example, the following discussion I had with Jean-Paul, a long-time friend who was also a primary “informant” throughout my fieldwork. While Jean-Paul subsequently quit his job in order to become freelance, at the time of this discussion in 2012 (as I was beginning fieldwork) he was working as a senior creative director for a successful local agency. In addition to allowing me to interview him on multiple occasions, Jean-Paul regularly invited me to industry events and let me accompany him on two commercial shoots. He also enabled my participation in and observation of creative processes by hiring me as a copywriter on a freelance basis. I note my personal experiences of Jean-Paul’s friendship and support throughout my fieldwork here to paint a more complex picture of him as a person than what might otherwise be conveyed in the conversation I recount below. Nevertheless, Jean-Paul’s comments reflect persistent androcentric beliefs about human creativity within the industry:

ME: Would you feel comfortable introducing me to other creatives you know, so that I could ask them for interviews?

JP: Of course! My friends will think that being the subject of an anthropological study is funny.

ME: Cool, thanks.

JP: What kind of people do you want me to introduce you to?

ME: Maybe we could start with a list of the ten people who you think are the most creative people working in Montreal advertising.

JP: Give me your pen.

(I pass Jean-Paul my notebook and pen, and he proceeds to write down the names of ten creatives he knows, checking his phone for their contact information. He passes the notebook back to me).

JP: Here. I know eight of the ten personally, so I'll call them up to tell them to expect to hear from you. The other two, I don't know well. I'll see if I can find a connection to introduce you.

ME: Thanks. (I take a brief look at the names). Are all these guys senior creatives like you?

JP: No, there's a mix. Grégoire has only been working as a copywriter for a few years but he's already got a reputation as hot shit. He's racking up awards.

(JP then goes through the list with me, telling me a bit about each person – their roles, their agencies, their approximate ages and status in the industry).

ME: There's no women on your list of ten most creative creatives. Was that intentional?

JP: (Pauses). No, not intentional. It's just the way it is.

ME: How so?

JP: There aren't very many women creatives.

ME: Why not, in your opinion?

JP: Women don't make good creatives. I'm not saying women aren't able to be creative, but in advertising you have to be able to be unemotional about your work, because your boss, or the client, is going to constantly shit on most of the ideas you come up with. Women aren't able to handle that as well as men. When you tell a woman copywriter that her ideas are shit and that she has to work all night to come up with something better, she cries.

ME: I see. Have you, or any of the men you've worked with ever reacted emotionally to having your work rejected?

JP: Sure. We get angry. But we get over it. Women take it personally. Men are more rational about it.

ME: Ok. If I asked you for a list of the ten best women creatives in the city, could you produce one?

JP: (Pauses). I'd have to think about it more. (Pauses). Give me your book.

(JP takes back the notebook and pen, and writes an additional two names on the list).

JP: Here. (Giving the book back). Actually, maybe I should have included Ava on the first list. She's excellent. She's a creative director.

ME: Thanks. Why do you consider Ava so exceptionally creative?

JP: She sees things in original ways. She doesn't get phased when a client rejects her ideas. She pushes for them anyway, and often gets her way, and the result is always an excellent ad. (Pauses). Good women creatives are tough. They're able to think and act like men. They can put aside their feelings for the sake of the work. Also, she never had kids. A creative's career is made in their thirties and early forties. If you take time off to have kids, you're fucked.

Jean-Paul's perspective on the role gender plays in determining one's capacity for becoming a "good creative" reflects the biases outlined above—biases I frequently observed throughout my fieldwork. Specifically, the distinction Jean-Paul makes between women "taking things personally" when their ideas are rejected versus the more "rational" response of men (who get "angry," but not "emotional") reflects a pervasive culture of hypermasculinity that continues to permeate the field of advertising, particularly within the creative departments of agencies.³⁰ This culture is reinforced by the continued circulation of stories that celebrate the hubristic and

³⁰ In their article "Hypermasculinity in Men's Magazine Advertisements," Vokey, Tefft and Tysiakzny (2013) identify "toughness and emotional self-control" as one of the four interrelated beliefs that define cultures of hypermasculinity. This core belief is defined as "the belief that anger is the only legitimate male emotion, and that expression of other emotions (particularly inferior 'feminine' emotions such as sensitivity and empathy) is a sign of weakness. To an HM [hypermasculine] man, masculinity necessarily involves mastery of his emotions in the form of inhibiting the expression of fear, distress, and shame" (563).

aggressive “antics” of male creative ad workers insistent upon their right to “creative freedom” (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Following my discussion with Jean-Paul I contacted each of the creatives on the original list he provided. All ten male creatives responded to my phone or email queries, and nine accepted to be interviewed. At the end of each interview, I asked the same question: whether the interviewee could provide me with a list of ten people they considered the “best” creatives in the industry. Seven of the nine creatives I interviewed also included only men on their lists. The other two creatives each included one woman. Perhaps equally as revealing was that of the two women creatives whose names were given to me in this first round of “snowball sampling,” neither one responded to my request for an interview. (Later in my fieldwork I did get to know a small number of women creatives, including Carmen—a junior copywriter whose experiences in the industry I focus on in Chapter 6. None of the names provided to me through this exercise included BIPOC creatives).

The pervasive coding of creativity as masculine within Montreal’s advertising industry affects the careers of female ad workers in complex ways, informing how they claim—or not—the particular freedoms and privileges associated with the exceptional social status of *being (a) creative*. At the same time, the inherent tensions of asserting creative distinction as a woman in advertising also inform relationships *between* women as they work to carve careers in a highly competitive, precarious, and status-driven industry. The difficulties I often encountered when soliciting interviews and attempting to build relationships with women creatives hint at these dynamics. I spoke about these experiences to my friend Celeste—a successful marketing

strategist who later became Vice-President and partner at the agency where she continues to work:

ME: Why do you think no women creatives I reached out to responded to me?

CELESTE: They're probably too busy proving themselves to the boys' club. They probably don't have time.

ME: Why do you think creative departments are such boys' clubs, to begin with?

CELESTE: It's inevitable. Most women I've met can't hack it in creative. The women who do are tough. I really don't think this has to do with discriminating against individual women, if that's what you're getting at.

ME: Why not?

CELESTE: I think creativity is an inherently masculine energy. Women have some of it, but not as much men. Kind of like testosterone. (Pauses). Being creative is fundamentally a rational process. Like math.

ME: Do you think math is a masculine endeavour?

CELEST: Yes, but that doesn't mean no woman can be good at math, or at being creative. Just like testosterone, some women have more of the energy or abilities for those talents... Women are still very valuable in advertising. It's just that their emotional wiring often gets in the way of their ability to come up with ideas that deliver clear creative messages. It's not a bad thing, it just means that they're probably better suited to other kinds of work. (Pauses) Also, women aren't as funny as men, and so much advertising is based on humour. Especially commercials.

ME: What about Ava?

CELESTE: Oh, she's good. Really good. But she has a guy's sense of humour. Plus, she's also really beautiful, which is probably why Jean-Paul and his friends put her on their lists. (Pauses). You know, there are probably many more competent women creatives than people talk about. Especially copywriters, more so than art directors or creative directors. I could give you some more names, actually. But the few who make it to the top get there because they can work like guys.

Celeste's reflections on the reasons for widespread sexism within creative departments were certainly not universally shared by other women I came to know over the course of my fieldwork. Indeed, younger ad workers I met seemed significantly more critical of what they perceived as rampant levels of gender discrimination within the industry. In recent years, the #MeToo movement has also pressured agency management to take complaints from female employees more seriously.

Nevertheless, at the time of my research, Celeste's views were commonplace assumptions I frequently encountered in interviews, industry media content, and everyday exchanges—especially amongst “Gen-X” advertising professionals of all genders. Take Nikita, for example, who explained during one of our interviews that she became a creative producer because she was unable to get work as an art director in advertising, even though she held an undergraduate degree in Fine Arts and Marketing and had several years of experience in animation prior to applying for advertising jobs. Despite her qualifications, Nikita recounted that when she applied for an art director position at the agency where she now worked as a creative producer, the human resource director (also a woman) contacted her to let her know that while she would not be given an interview for the art director job, she was encouraged to apply for a producer position. When Nikita asked the HR director for an explanation as to why, she was told that her “soft skills” were much better suited to the role of producer.

Allow me to return to the 2014 Créa campaign for a moment longer, in order to consider more carefully the significance of the androcentric bias it reflects and reinforces. The campaign's implicit idealization of creativity as masculine—i.e. as embodied exclusively in the image of the

male ad worker—can be situated within a much longer history of Western aesthetic philosophy, within which creative genius and the production of aesthetic novelty has been predominantly associated with the figure of the male artist. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, the intersection of dominant gender ideologies and emergent philosophies of creativity in the late nineteenth century occurred in a context of rapid industrialization and accelerating consumer capitalism. Within this context, creativity was re-imagined as a key site for the experience and expression of an un-alienated, autonomous self (i.e. the autological subject) that came to be associated with the overlapping figures of the male bohemian artist and flâneur. What's more, this free, autonomous, creative artist was perceived as a masculine antithesis to the undifferentiated consumer masses within which the disciplined and passive passer-by, as well as the bourgeois woman consumer, were seen as worrisomely vulnerable to the aesthetic manipulations of consumer capitalism. Situating the Créa campaign within this broader genealogy of creativity alerts us then to how a pervasive androcentric bias continues to inform dominant ideas about who is perceived as exceptionally creative in Montreal advertising. This contextualization also calls us to consider how this then serves to ideologically buttress structures of inclusion and exclusion that effectively limit the optimistic pursuit of free and unalienated creative flourishing to particular kinds of subjects.

As these images, experiences, and discourses help show, the “boys’ club” brand of creative exceptionalism that permeates agency culture within Montreal advertising is informed by a broader androcentrism inherent to the construction of the liberal autological subject. The social relations of production behind the 2014 Créa campaign illustrate how this bias is continuously reinforced in professional practices and networks of social relationships that often

restrict opportunities for *being creative* (and thus for enjoying the particular freedoms and unalienated experiences to which creativity, *as the expression of autological subjectivity*, is associated) primarily to men. Specific institutional practices, like the granting of creativity awards, distinguish particular individuals as *exceptionally creative* in ways that add to their professional reputations and advance their careers. These are accompanied by associated discourses and aesthetic representations of creative excellence within the industry that work to ideologically justify pervasive forms of gender inequality when it comes to the valuation (or devaluation) of women in terms of perceived creative capacity, and the exclusion of women from creative roles within the industry. Crucially, however, in the Créa campaign's claim to represent award-winning male creatives as "humans like everyone else," these structural inequalities and systemic forms of exclusion are obfuscated, perpetuating dominant beliefs that the autological creative self is, *most naturally*, a masculine self.

Attempts to justify and legitimize gender discrimination in advertising creation can be observed in a series of comments posted in response to the same Créa campaign, published online by Infopresse on November 6th, 2014. Between the date of its publication and November 10th, the following seven comments were posted to Infopresse's website:

1. **Par** de Preux, Julien de Preux
mercredi, 06 novembre 2013 à 04:10

Excellent !!! bravo.

2. **Par** JCMK, CART1ER
mercredi, 06 novembre 2013 à 02:36

Efficace. Good job.

3. **Par** Sylvain, Pigiste
mercredi, 06 novembre 2013 à 04:05

Vraiment un bel insight. C'est bien une campagne de concours sans le flafla qui vient souvent avec les concours.

4. **Par** Benoit Pilon, Tank
jeudi, 07 novembre 2013 à 10:03

Bravo! Très bon concept et super exécution. Très réussi.

5. **Par** Diane
vendredi, 08 novembre 2013 à 07:59

Pub de gars, par des gars, pour des gars. Sid Lee a su capter l'air du temps avec de vieux clichés.

6. **Par** Céline
vendredi, 08 novembre 2013 à 11:18

attends! Ils ont pas tous plus de 40 piges?

7. **Par** François
dimanche, 10 novembre 2013 à 11:17

Diane,

Comment cette campagne aurait pu être moins une pub de gars? Et si j'ai bien compris le concept, le but était de prendre des créatifs qui ont remporté beaucoup de Créa (à chaque année). Alors pouvez-vous me dire quelle fille ils auraient du prendre? Moi je dis bravo pour cette campagne qui reflète une réalité de notre industrie: seule une poignée de bons créatifs raflent toujours tout.

While the majority of the comments above are adulatory, comment #5, written by “Diane,” is an explicit criticism of the campaign as “a guy’s ad, made by guys, for guys.” Diane suggests that in producing such a campaign, Sid Lee “knew how to capture the spirit of the times with old clichés.” In her brief comment, Diane homes in on the gender bias that informs the campaign’s depiction of creative talent, and situates both the production and reception of the campaign within an institutionalized sexism that continues to shape experiences of working in advertising.

Given that the vast majority of Infopresse readers are industry professionals, it is reasonable to assume that Diane most likely works in advertising herself, and that her comments are consequently informed by her own first-hand observations and lived experiences. What is equally illuminating, however, is the reaction of “François” in comment #7, in which he

unintentionally substantiates Diane's criticism in his attempt to defend the aesthetic value of the campaign. "How could the campaign have been less of a guy's ad?" he writes. "If I understand the concept well, the goal was to get creatives who have won a lot of Créa... Could you tell me, then, what girl they should have taken? I say good job on a campaign that reflects a reality of our industry: there are only a handful of good creatives who win everything." First, François' comments overlook (or conveniently disregard) the fact that the year prior, it was actually Andrée-Anne Hallé—a woman—who won the Créa for best copywriter of the year.³¹ Second, in arguing that the campaign represents only men because the "good" creatives in the industry are, in fact, only men (and even then, there are only a few), François ignores the self-promotional nature of the campaign, as well as the cronyism that clearly informed who was selected to produce and be featured in the campaign in the first place. Indeed, these relations of reciprocal "wanking," to borrow Nikita's descriptor, were especially apparent when the same networks of creative authority within the industry further legitimized the androcentric image of creativity the campaign depicts by subsequently awarding the Créa campaign *its own Créa award*.

* * *

The creation, dissemination, and reception of the Créa campaign reveals a foundational dialectic between creative identity formation and social distinction under capitalism. On the one hand, the pursuit of creativity as a mode of unalienated experience and freedom often brings individuals together into groups of creative practitioners united by common purpose and shared values. On the other hand, however, the pursuit of *being (a) creative*—as an idealized social

³¹ Andrée-Anne Hallé won copywriter of the year at the 2013 Créa awards: <http://www.marketingmag.ca/advertising/30-under-30-andree-anne-halle-126252>.)

status or identity—simultaneously remains mired in processes that claim and *contain* the freedoms and fulfilments of creative flourishing to specific kinds of selves through an emphasis on creative exceptionalism and practices of social distinction. In a late capitalist context, where the imperative to *be creative* is a defining feature not just of particular professions but also of a corresponding consumer culture driven by novel aesthetic experience, advertising exists as a social field where this dialectic is especially pronounced.

Insofar as claims to creativity remain bound to intersecting forms of racial, gender, and class distinction, advertising also thus provides a window onto what Weiss describes as the dialectic production of “differentiated subjects” and the delineation of “niche communities” (2011: 8). Such a dialectic, she argues, is a particular feature of late capitalism, which she describes as rooted in “a neoliberal valorization of free choice, individual agency and personal responsibility [that] works by obscuring the relationship between seemingly private identities (such as race, gender, and sexuality) and more public political and socioeconomic configurations” (18). Crucially, Weiss observes, such obfuscations “mask the ways that community performatively produces and reproduces social inequality” (18).

The dialectic that Weiss identifies between “private identities” and “public political and socioeconomic configurations” parallels what Povinelli (2006) describes as liberalism’s false dichotomy between the “autological subject” and “genealogical society.” This dichotomy, I argue, is especially relevant to the ways that Montreal ad workers claim creative distinction as a particular expression of autological subjectivity. Consider the following definitions that Povinelli provides:

By the autological subject, I am referring to discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism. By genealogical society, I am referring to discourses, practices, and fantasies about social constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances. (4)

Working with such definitions, Povinelli argues that while the autological subject and genealogical society are marked by contemporary “modes of address and their material anchors... as if they were different in kind,” in practice “these subjects and social worlds are in fact thickly emotionally, socially, and discursively conjoined” (36). Like Weiss, Povinelli then identifies the *systematic denial* of the dialectic between individual processes of identity formation/self-making on the one hand and inherited social constraints/structures of power on the other as intimately *integral to* (neo)liberal systems of power and exploitation—a denial that reinforces the very inequalities it refutes.

Through an analytical lens informed by these theorizations, the Créa campaign can be recognized as a local iteration of a neoliberal cultural politics that links the production of individual subjectivities to structures of power and inequality through the circulation of specific representations and discourses of human creativity. The ways in which advertising professionals use the aesthetic genre of advertising itself in order to (re)present a particular image of creativity that aligns with and reinforces their own identities is therefore an especially autological practice. What also becomes apparent in a consideration of the same Créa awards, however, is that claims to creativity within this context only have value when creativity itself is perceived and asserted as a form of social distinction. In this way, rather than being understood as innate human capacity, *being (a) creative* is instead conceptualized and asserted in the world of advertising as the embodiment of an exceptional talent, genius, and originality. As such, claims

to creative exceptionalism reinforce neoliberal systems that concentrate opportunities for *creative flourishing* (both ideologically and materially) into specific socio-economic groups. What might otherwise be imagined and experienced as a universal mode of human agency and engagement with the world is consequently transformed into the exclusive privilege of a circumscribed few.

Homo faber and the freelancer

The first time I interview Grégoire, he is thirty-seven. We meet at Laika—a popular restaurant/bar in the Plateau, on rue St. Laurent.³² It's a hot day. We sit at a table outside on the sidewalk, drinking mojitos. Every few minutes, someone Grégoire knows passes by: other ad workers, a DJ, a couple of videogame designers he plays soccer with.

Grégoire has just left a copywriting position at a large agency in the city, for a similar one across town. It's a lateral move, prompted more by his need for a "change of scene," he tells me, than by anything like salary or promotion. (Later in the interview, he confides that this change of scene had much to do with having been "a bit sloppy" in his workplace dalliances).

We speak about how he got started in advertising. Unlike many of his friends and peers who are creative directors, copywriters or art directors, Grégoire tells me that he studied business at college and first started working in marketing on "the client side." I ask him when he made the switch.

"One day," he tells me, "I'm in a meeting for a campaign we want to run, and these guys from an agency come in to pitch their concept. They're wearing t-shirts and Converse shoes, and they have this idea that is really out in left field, but it works. And my boss doesn't go for it at all. He didn't get it. He worried it wouldn't resonate, because the idea wasn't a straight line. It communicated the core message, but it also escaped it a bit. And that is something that freaks most clients out. That's when I knew I was on the wrong side of the table."

I ask Grégoire if working on the other side of the table has been more fulfilling.

³² Laika has since permanently closed its doors.

“Yes. It’s definitely better than being a suit. The VP of Creative at the agency I’m at is really good. He gives people enough freedom to have big ideas. And agencies can be fun places to work. You feel like you’re in the middle of something happening, not watching from the sidelines. Even the space itself. There’s a lot of money spent on designing spaces that people want to work in. And not just from 9 to 5. They’re places where you want to stay. And if you stay, you keep working, and that’s good for the agency.”

“Is there a downside?” I ask.

“The pressure. There’s a lot of pressure. People burn out quickly. It’s fun, but you also get the sense that you’re entirely disposable.”

“Does that worry you?”

“Sometimes. I’m enjoying some success at the moment. I like my job. I make decent money. But I transitioned into creative kind of late in the game. Compared to the other guys I work with, I mean. I feel young. But sometimes I look around at work, and apart from the guys with corner offices, I’m the oldest person there.”

Towards the end of our interview, I ask Grégoire for a list of who he sees as the “top ten” creatives in Montreal advertising. He writes down some names, and asks if he can see Jean-Paul’s list to compare (on which his own name is at the top). I oblige. Grégoire scans the list and then says: “Fuck! Apart from me and Ava, these guys are ancient! I mean, a couple of them are still kings in advertising. But the rest of them are dinosaurs.”

I ask Grégoire whether age is relevant to a person’s creativity.

He replies: “I mean, yes. Of course. It’s harsh, but true. Maybe not in another context, I don’t know. But in advertising, if you haven’t made creative director by the time you’re forty then you’re irrelevant. That’s when you have to make a choice: do you want to be the old guy at the agency embarrassing himself, swimming around with water wings in the shallow end of the pool? Or do you want to go freelance, and spend the rest of your days making ads for chicken nuggets while you desperately cling to your dignity?”

One of the most common anxieties expressed to me by the creative ad workers I interviewed and spent time with during my fieldwork was that of “ageing out” of the industry. While this was an especially prevalent theme in the interviews I conducted with “older” creatives (i.e. in their mid- to late-forties, or early fifties), it clearly remains a worrisome spectre on the

horizon for younger ad workers as well, as Grégoire's comments above illustrate. In fact, according to the Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA), the most commonly reported forms of discrimination within the industry relate to age and family status, with 45% of respondents indicating that having dependent children "hinders one's career at their company," and 40% of respondents indicating that ageism was prevalent in their workplace.³³ These percentages are even higher amongst older demographics.

As Grégoire suggests in his observation about choosing between the indignities of "water wings" and "chicken nuggets," many creative ad workers decide to "go freelance" at a certain point in their careers. For some, this is perceived as a path towards greater control over their careers and clients—a choice that allows them the flexibilities of working from home, setting their own hours, taking vacations when they want and (at least in theory) achieving a better balance between "work" and "life." This is, in other words, a choice oriented towards achieving the interrelated ideals of individual freedom and self-sovereignty, as key dimensions of a creative good life.

Take Jean-Paul, for example. When he was in his late forties, Jean-Paul decided to leave his job as an executive creative director for the local agency he had worked at for the better part of a decade. In discussing his decision with me, Jean-Paul stated that he "no longer wanted to report to someone else, no matter how cool their manifesto is." Instead of referring to himself simply as a freelancer, when Jean-Paul left his position he decided to establish his own "one-person agency." Jean-Paul's cognitive framing of his decision in such terms reflects a tenacious

³³ See: <https://acaweb.ca/en/about/for-media/first-global-dei-census-within-marketing-industry-reveals-major-challenges-in-canada/>, last accessed May 30th, 2022.

commitment to his vision of a freer, more creative good life than the one he felt he achieved as a salaried executive. He described to me the organizational structure of the new agency he imagined as one of “variable geometry,” emphasizing its capacity for constant transformation and flexible permutation adapted to different client needs. In order to offer this, Jean-Paul planned to employ only other freelance workers on an “as-needed” basis. If his client wanted a print campaign, then his agency would function as a simple triangle: a three-sided team consisting of himself (as the creative director), a copywriter, and a graphic designer. If the client wants a print campaign produced for both English and French Canada, then Jean-Paul hires a translator and becomes a square. In other words, the social form of the new agency Jean-Paul imagined was essentially one of inherently impermanent and shifting relationships in order to allow for maximum transformability, low overhead and, ultimately, more profit. It was, in other words, a quintessentially neoliberal project that sustained Jean-Paul’s optimistic attachment to a particularly autological creative ideal.

For others, however, the decision to become a freelancer is clearly one made in response to workplace pressures within hyper-competitive agency environments, where failing to climb rank within a corporate hierarchy of creative positions is perceived as testament to one’s lesser creative value and, ultimately, social “relevance.” Since industry awards, higher salaries, executive promotions, as well as a plethora of more informal forms of social recognition and professional standing are perceived as indicators of intrinsic creative worth, many of the creative ad workers I met who did not achieve these markers of success by a certain age (or who lost them over time) struggled to navigate experiences of job insecurity and feeling socially “disposable.” With this in mind, here I would like to consider a final double bind: namely, how

ongoing adherence to the fantasy of autological freedom, in this case as articulated within an ideology of creative exceptionalism, compels individuals to engage in increasingly flexible forms of labour (like freelancing), in ways that are *cruelly optimistic*.

In her book of the same name, Lauren Berlant (2011) uses the concept of *cruel optimism* to illuminate how ideological attachments to culturally- and historically-particular visions of “the good life” affectively harness individuals to social orders that paradoxically impede individual and collective flourishing. As Berlant elaborates, optimism in this sense is cruel “when it takes shape as an affectively stunning double bind: a binding to fantasies that block the satisfactions they offer, and a binding to the promise of optimism as such that the fantasies have come to represent” (2011: 51). For Berlant, the task of critical scholarship is therefore “to specify how the activity of affective attachment can be located formally in a historical, cultural, and political field in ways that clarify the process of knotty tethering to objects, scenes, and modes of life that generate so much overwhelming yet sustaining negation” (2011: 52).

For individuals employed in the creative industries that drive post-industrial economic growth in cities like Montreal, discourses and practices of creativity work to imagine the creative subject as an exceptional person capable of overcoming social constraints that otherwise limit individual freedom and autonomy. As Wilf (2014) describes, these “Romantic mystifications” of creativity align with neoliberal interests insofar as they: “(a) presume the existence of an autonomous inner nature as a compass, (b) make each individual responsible for being in touch with and following this compass, and (c) frame failure to be creative and to transcend present constraints as the result of one’s natural predisposition” (407). The ambivalence and anxieties

that surround experiences of freelancing in Montreal advertising illuminate how the *failure* to achieve an idealized creative existence in such terms is especially cruel; recognizing such failures in other terms—as determined by extrinsic conditions (genealogical constraints)— would require a radical abandoning of the ontological assumptions that inform dominant ideas of what it means to *be creative* in this context.

The “knotty tethering” of an idealized creative flourishing to the *fantasy* of autological subjectivity is particularly evident in a conversation I had with Michel during my fieldwork. As a filmmaker and freelance commercial director, Michel’s experiences illuminate the psychic difficulties born of attempts to navigate the perceived “failure to be creative and to transcend present constraints” that Wilf identifies as characteristic of neoliberal conditions:

I meet Michel at Dépanneur Café in the Mile End—a neighbourhood just north of the Plateau and the downtown core. The café has a warm and worn-in atmosphere (described by Google as “bohemian”), with a mixed clientele of students, artists, musicians, and other neighbourhood regulars. It sits across the street from Drawn and Quarterly (a bookstore and local graphic novel publisher), and is next-door to vintage clothing stores, used vinyl shops, a microbrewery, and numerous restaurants.

Michel tells me that he moved to the Mile End six years earlier, when he and his wife separated. He wears expensive jeans and a t-shirt featuring an image of Simone de Beauvoir. He’s francophone, but fluently bilingual. A regular at the café, he greets the baristas by name and is friends with the jazz guitarist performing a set in the front room when we arrive. Our conversation is frequently interrupted by acquaintances and friends who come over to say hello and share news.

While Michel has directed numerous short films and several features, defining himself first and foremost as a filmmaker, his primary source of income for the past fifteen years has come from commercial directing. Like many other commercial directors in the city, he has a retainer agreement with a local production company that pays him a base salary for a minimum number of days of shooting per year. If he works more than this minimum, Michel then earns approximately \$13,000 per additional day of shooting. Keeping in mind that “a day of shooting” also involves many more days of pre- and post-production labour, this remains lucrative work.

Since Michel seems to be talking a lot about money, I ask Michel if the money is what drew him to the work.

“Of course,” he replies. “Money and ego.”

I ask him to elaborate. He speaks candidly about how the social recognition he earned in advertising at the start of his career “flattered his ego” and accorded him a certain status within the industry that came with many “perks.”

“Part of the fun I had in the industry when I was starting out in my thirties was feeling like I was one of the cool kids,” he tells me. “Parties, travel, the whole scene. But there was also the appeal of *doing cool shit*, with other creative people. When you’re working with creatives who have some imagination, and the concept is cool, and everyone gets along, there’s a little bit of magic in the experience. That’s a big part of what keeps people like me in the game. You can be making a commercial for toilet bowl cleaner, and maybe you don’t really care about toilet bowl cleaner, but if there’s some room in the process to be weird and original while you’re doing it, it’s worth it.”

(In my fieldnotes I write: creative effervescence. And then: *communitas*??)

I ask Michel how often he experiences the magic that makes it worth it.

“Less and less. You know, my commercial career only took off because of my early creative work,” Michel tells me. “I made a bunch of short films that were cool. I was ballsy and trying new things. A friend introduced me to a producer, who offered to represent me at his production studio. I was interesting to advertisers because of the creative risks I was taking in my own films. They saw my reel. I won gigs because I offered something original. It’s ironic, maybe. Clients think they want to work with directors who are cool, who are aesthetically avant-garde. But when you actually shoot a commercial, they place all these constraints on you that usually make it impossible to do anything interesting at all. Most of the commercials I shoot are very boring. I wouldn’t put ninety percent of them in my reel.”

I ask Michel how his commercial work affects his independent film projects.

He tells me that working in advertising increased his confidence in ways that made him feel “creatively virile” at the start of his career—a confidence that then enhanced his filmmaking practice. He describes advertising as a socially dynamic space that provided him regular opportunity to constantly meet new people on commercial shoots, at the production agencies where he worked, and at the industry parties and social gatherings he used to attend more frequently. He credits these “ins” as opportunities to develop a network of friends and colleagues who have enriched his personal life, and often also collaborated with him on creative projects.

Michel says that his commercial work also supported his filmmaking in a very material way: “Unless you’re one of the lucky few who can focus entirely on your own film projects, commercial directing is one of the better side hustles you can have,” he tells me. “The time commitment is less than most other hire-a-director gigs, like doing true-crime shows for TV, or soul-killing corporate videos. And the pay is way better.” When the funding ran out halfway through shooting his last feature, he paid his cast and crew from his own personal savings.

Working as a freelance commercial director also grants Michel a considerable level of freedom and autonomy over his schedule, allowing him to take off months at a time in order to focus on his own creative projects.

At least in theory.

Our conversation turns to the particular stressors and precarities of freelancing, the paradoxes of which are not lost on Michel: “You don’t want to work all the time, because then you have no time to do your own work. But it’s hard to say no to a gig, even one you’re not really interested in, because you never know when the next one will come around.” This sense of precarity has intensified as he’s gotten older; he is now keenly aware that at any point commercial work could “dry up,” and feels immense pressure to work as much as possible before he “ages out” of the industry.

“Ageing is a major liability in advertising,” Michel tells me, describing how it’s become harder to win commercial gigs as he’s gotten older, to the point where last year he fell short of meeting his contractual obligations to his production studio. His contract was renewed for another year despite his decreased productivity, but it’s clear that this is a great source of anxiety for Michel. He confides that he’s not only worried about his financial future, but also about becoming “old and irrelevant.” Whereas five years ago he was winning awards and being featured in trade magazines, now he finds himself regularly rejected by ad agencies who pass him over for directors twenty years his junior, with “slick online profiles, super aestheticized personas, but almost no experience at all.”

Michel sees the previous year as a worrying turning point in his career—for the first time he lost more pitches than he won. “Losing pitches doesn’t just mean less money and a bruised ego,” Michel tells me. Given that the hours of work involved in preparing a commercial pitch go entirely unremunerated if you aren’t hired, for Michel this has also meant “a massive loss of time and energy I could have spent on my own work.”³⁴

³⁴ Advertising agencies go through production companies to hire directors for commercial shoots, who “pitch” themselves and their ideas for how to execute the concept of the commercial to the creative team in charge of the account. While established commercial directors may be hired without pitching based on their previous work or existing relationships with agencies and clients, most also need to regularly pitch for new accounts, supported by the producers and production coordinators of their studios.

“Advertising work is super violent psychologically, when you think about it,” Michel reflects. “Your creative energies are harnessed for pointless product promotion, and constantly micro-managed by middling marketing directors who are afraid to lose their jobs. You do the work because you want the money. For me I wanted the money to carve out some other space to be truly free, creatively. But after a while the pressure to take endless commercial gigs ends up impeding your creativity. You lose your artistic guts.”

Michel waves to someone across the café.

“Soon I’ll just be one of those middle-aged Peter Pans who hangs out in cafés and calls himself an artist,” he laughs. “You can’t throw a stone without hitting one of us around here.”

The anxieties and creative frustrations Michel speaks to in our interview illuminate a particular set of affective intensities that accompanies creative industry labour, class distinction, and intensifying neoliberal precarity in Montreal. As such, Michel’s worries about “ageing out” and becoming creatively “irrelevant” reflect what Kathleen Stewart describes as *atmospheric attunement*: “an attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through things. A living through that shows up in the generative precarity of ordinary sensibilities” (2011: 452).³⁵ Michel’s description of working in advertising as a “psychologically violent” experience registers exactly this; an attunement to the “charged atmospheres of everyday life” (445) for those who inhabit particular fields of sociality (workplaces, neighbourhoods, cities), where the otherwise positive desire for creative flourishing is

³⁵ Stewart’s attention to atmospheric attunement builds upon Berlant’s notion of “affective atmospheres,” as a “refraction” of Williams’ “structures of feeling” (Berlant 2011: 15). In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams describes “structures of feeling” as the “specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships” of a society at a particular moment in history (132).

transformed into an *imperative* under conditions of neoliberal precarity (at least for certain subsets of middle-class professionals).³⁶

With this in mind, I might note that the conversation I had with Michel, recounted above, took place in the middle of the afternoon on a Wednesday. The timing of our interview reflects the relative flexibility of Michel's work schedule as a freelance director. When we meet, Michel tells me that he completed a commercial shoot the week before and was now back to working on his own creative projects from home, writing a new script and filling out grant applications to fund his next feature film. "I don't report to anyone but myself most days," he says at the start of our conversation. "Turns out I'm difficult to work for, but luckily I like to give myself really long lunches." He laughs. He's being glib, but his joke registers a certain tension; as our conversation unfolds, it becomes clear that Michel perceives the freedom and autonomy he associates with an idealized creative life and identity as fleeting and often frustratingly unattainable, paradoxically hindered both by his own anxieties and insecurities, as well as by the time commitments and aesthetic constraints of his commercial directing work.

Anxiously attuned to the fickleness of advertising as an industry and to the precarity of freelance commercial work, Michel paints a picture of being (a) creative in advertising as mired in contradiction, whereby one's pursuit of an idealized state of creative freedom and autonomy is continuously frustrated and constrained by the realities of creative industry employment.

³⁶ Berlant (2011) notes that scholarship on "contemporary capitalist subjectivities" has documented a "shifting-up of economic precarity into what Giorgio Agamben has called the new 'planetary petty bourgeoisie (PPB)'" (191). Insofar as this shift has eroded a sense of socio-economic security "across different concentrations of economic and political privilege," Berlant argues that it has been accompanied by a parallel "affective shift toward valuing lateral freedoms and creative ambitions over strict upward mobility" (193). I interpret the experiences of creative ad workers who in appear in this chapter as emblematic examples of these interrelated shifts.

These frustrations are compounded by concerns about becoming irrelevant within a youth-obsessed industry, where being creative is habitually equated with aesthetic novelty, and ageing seen as “a liability.” Though the ideation of creativity in such terms initially informed Michel’s success as a commercial director, he now sees this emphasis as undermining his creative reputation as a middle-aged professional, despite his many years of experience. Michel’s anxieties about the future of his commercial career are also clearly entangled with his aspirations as a filmmaker, both psychically in terms of diminished confidence and intrinsic drive to create new work, as well as financially given that he’s now uncertain if he will be able to support himself while working on his films. These entanglements are significant; they illustrate how ongoing attachment to an ideal creative good life, defined in terms of individual freedom and autonomy, can paradoxically bind individuals to neoliberal arrangements that *impede* the kinds of creative flourishing they desire.

In neoliberal contexts, intensifying financial precarity and employment insecurity unarguably contribute to the pervasive experiences of failing to flourish that Michel describes. According to Berlant, this precarity is such that:

the profit interests of the owners of neoliberal capital are served by the shrinkage of the social welfare state, the privatization of what had once been publicly held utilities and institutions, the increase in state, banking, and corporate pension insecurity, and the ever more “flexible” practices of contractual reciprocity between owners and workers, which ostensibly keeps business nimble and more capable of responding to market demand” (2011: 192).

Along the same vein, Wacquant (2007) adopts the term “precariat” in reference to what he describes as a fragmented collective that includes a diversity of working-class and marginalized

groups.³⁷ Berlant, however, argues that “the increasing corrosion of security as a condition of life for workers across different concentrations of economic and political privilege” has subsumed many segments of the middle classes into precarious conditions; this has generated a pervasive affective atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty that now characterizes life for many in previously stable professional fields (2011: 193).

Berlant’s arguments in this regard are paralleled by those of Zygmunt Bauman, who offers the following observations:

What “unites” the precariat, integrating that exceedingly variegated aggregate into a cohesive category, is the condition of extreme disintegration, pulverization, atomization. Whatever their provenance or denomination, all precarians suffer—and each suffers alone, each individual suffering being well-deserved individual punishment for individually committed sins of insufficient shrewdness and deficit of industry. Individually born sufferings are all strikingly similar: whether induced by a growing pile of utility bills and college fees invoices, miserliness of wages topped up by the fragility of available jobs and inaccessibility of solid and reliable ones, fogginess of longer-term life prospects, restless spectre of redundancy and/or demotion—they all boil down to existential uncertainty: that awesome blend of ignorance and impotence, and inexhaustible source of humiliation” (2011).

It is worry over this “humiliation” that Grégoire signalled to me during our interview, as he disparaged Jean-Paul’s list of “dinosaurs” while clearly fearing he might become one. The “restless spectre of redundancy” also clearly haunts Michel’s mid-career crisis. This is, perhaps, a

³⁷ Wacquant describes the precariat as constituted by: “Aging industrial labourers and lower-level clerks reduced to workers on a white-collar assembly line or made expendable by technological innovations and the spatial redistribution of productive activities; precarious and temporary workers in the deregulated service sectors; apprentices, trainees, and holders of fixed-time job contracts; the unemployed running out of rights and participants to ‘social minima’ programmes; long-term recipients of public aid and the chronically ‘homeless’; beggars, delinquents and hustlers living off the booty economy of the street; human rejects of the social and medical services and regular customers of the criminal justice system; the disenchanted offspring of the declining fractions of the autochthonous working class facing the unexpected competition of youths from ethnically stigmatized communities and of new immigrant inflows on the markets for jobs and credentials.” (2007: 72). Following Berlant, however, I argue that the precariat can be productively extended to include modes of subjectification and forms of labour that characterize middle-class workers like creative freelancers.

definitive irony of working as a creative in advertising: in a field that defines creativity primarily in terms of incessant innovation and the production of aesthetic novelty, peoples' creative energies are harnessed to the perpetual generation of an aesthetic regime that continuously reminds them that they will be rendered socially obsolete one day, too.

As an adaptive strategy within such conditions, the choice that many ad workers make to "go freelance" speaks directly to the double binds of the (neo)liberal creative ideal, wherein the pursuit of individual freedom and autonomy paradoxically perpetuates conditions that impede the creative flourishing such individuals desire.

At forty-seven, Grégoire has successfully become a freelancer. He has not worked on a campaign for chicken nuggets, but he did just lose a pitch for chicken wings.

Chapter 6

Autological Intimacies

“The first step in thinking about the force of things is the open question of what counts as an event, a movement, an impact, a reason to react. There’s a politics to being/feeling connected (or not), to impacts that are shared (or not), to energies spent worrying or scheming (or not), to affective contagion, and to all the forms of attunement and attachment. There’s a politics to ways of watching and waiting for something to happen and to forms of agency—to how the mirage of a straightforward exercise of will is a flag waved in one situation and a vicious, self-defeating deflation in another.”

(Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p.15-16)

Field notes, November 25th 2013

I’m invited to a dinner party in Westmount—an affluent neighbourhood historically home to the city’s Anglophone establishment, just west of downtown Montreal. Tonight, however, the large Victorian-era house I’m welcomed into is owned by my friend Jean-Paul—an executive creative director in his mid-forties, who moved to the city from France in the late 1990s.

The other guests in attendance are all employed at ad agencies or work in orbiting fields: Benoît (a commercial director), Pilar (an art director), Pilar’s boyfriend Sebastien (a musician and sound producer), Caroline (an executive producer), Caroline’s husband François (another creative director), and Carmen (a copywriter). Seated around Jean-Paul’s large teak table, together we form a party of Québécois (Sebastien, François, Caroline), French (Jean-Paul, Benoît), Spanish (Pilar), and “rest of Canada” guests (myself, Carmen).

Dinner conversation switches easily between French and English, with the occasional Spanish expletive from Pilar. Jean-Paul is a good host: the table brims with food and bottles of wine. The atmosphere is jovial.

Beside me, Caroline is telling Pilar about her new house; the selling point for her was that it has the possibility of building a rooftop terrace. Across the table, Carmen expresses her surprise to François, to hear that they had moved.

“I didn’t move,” he replies. “Only Caroline did.”

Carmen looks confused as she mumbles an apology. Pilar laughs.

"Really, it's fine," replies François. "Caroline and I haven't separated. We've just decided to live separately." Other conversations around the table peter out as our eyes turn towards Carmen and François.

"You're going to live in separate houses, but aren't separating?" Carmen asks.

"Yes," Caroline interjects from across the table.

"Like Frida Kahlo and Rivera," quips Benoît.

"We all know how well that worked out," says Pilar.

People laugh.

Caroline assures us that she and François are both happier since deciding to live apart. "It's been very good for our relationship."

"Do you miss François' legendary snoring?" Jean-Paul asks Caroline.

"He's lying," François says in an aside to Carmen. "I don't snore."

Caroline laughs, a little tightly: "Think about all the things that break couples apart. All the domestic squabbles over bills and chores and who drank the last of the milk."

"All the nagging," François contributes.

"All the washing dirty underwear, and scrubbing the bathroom tiles around the toilet," says Caroline.

"What are you talking about? The cleaning lady always did those things," replies François.

Benoît laughs so hard it rumbles the table.

"What about Henri?" asks Sébastien.

Henri is François and Caroline's ten-year-old son. They also each have other children from previous relationships – Caroline a teenage daughter and François another son, one year older than Henri.

"Henri goes back and forth as he likes," replies François. "He loves it. Double everything. He gets the perks of parental divorce, without the actual divorce."

Jean-Paul raises his glass: "To your divorce without the divorce!"

* * *

Later in the evening talk around the table takes a turn towards debauchery. Jean-Paul tells a story about a beer commercial he made with Benoît a decade earlier, which they shot on a beach in Brazil and which featured a number of bikini-clad women. In vivid detail, Jean-Paul recounts how the copywriter, Phil, became so inebriated at the wrap party that he accidentally defecated in his hotel bed during the night. It just so happened, however, that Phil's bed was also occupied by a local actress and model he had met on set of the shoot earlier that day. Savouring our reactions and sparing no details, Jean-Paul describes how Phil was so embarrassed when he realized what he had done, that as the young woman started to wake up he screamed in disgust and accused her of being the one to soil the bed.

"The poor girl believed that asshole!" Benoît roars.

"He was a gentleman about it, though," Jean-Paul tells us. "Apparently she was so mortified that when she jumped out of the bed in shame, Phil said: 'Don't worry, sweetie. You might feel shitty right now, but last night was fun!'"

Pilar rolls her eyes: "Phil is such a sick fuck." Jean-Paul and Benoît howl with laughter.

"We knew that commercial was never going to win at Cannes," Jean-Paul recounts.¹ "Phil and I initially pitched much more original ideas. But the client had all this market research stating that the best way to sell beer to young men was through images of parties and girls. So, we figured that if we had to work with clichés, we'd try to be funny about it. And that since it was the middle of winter in Montreal, we may as well shoot somewhere tropical! Make sure you put that in your fieldnotes," Jean-Paul states, looking in my direction. "We could have just as easily shot something in Repentigny."²

"And I'm sure the girls in Repentigny would have been just as lovely," Benoît adds, sarcastically.

Jean-Paul laughs. And then, sighing, says: "The industry has changed. Ten years ago, we could still sell an idea that got swimsuit models into beer ads."

"Don't be so nostalgic. It's boring," says Pilar.

"And now we're watching our hairlines recede as we sign divorce papers and make Plan B campaigns, hey Jean-Paul?" Benoît adds, raising an eyebrow. The other guests shoot each other sideways glances. I notice, but I don't ask.

¹ Jean-Paul is referring to the Cannes Lions—a prestigious international advertising awards event held annually in Cannes, France.

² Repentigny is an off-island suburb of Montreal.

Whatever that next story is, it goes left untold.

Jean-Paul shifts in his seat, pours himself another glass of wine, and changes the subject: “Jen, have I told you yet about the chicken wing campaign? What a debacle ...”

As a particular ethnographic modality, intimacy (or the sharing of intimacies) draws sociality into spaces we might call “personal” or even “private” in ways that bring the vulnerabilities of self and other into relief. To be intimate involves a certain collusion, complicity. To be intimate is also typically accompanied by expectations of care. How, then, do we speak or write publicly of what is intimate, in order to capture and consider the politics that trouble it, without breaching its complicity? Is it possible to do so carefully? Can making what is private into something public be itself an act of care?

Such questions form undercurrents beneath the surface of the relationships, stories, and dynamics of the dinner party described above—undercurrents that point to the politics that shape even the most intimate (or perhaps *especially* the most intimate) of relationships, as well as their associated expectations of care. The affective charge of these undercurrents was palpable in the moments of commensality I observed and partook in, sitting around Jean-Paul’s dinner table with people whose friendships were born of inhabiting the same “creative industry,” and whose stories often centered on the intimate entanglements that shaped their respective experiences of working in advertising.

Questions about the politics of intimacy are also what give me some trepidation, in writing of the dinner party above, and of the people whose stories were told to me, in intimate asides and confidences and confessions, in the months afterwards. I worry that my own social

proximity to the subjects of these stories might make it difficult to maintain critical distance. And I worry about how these subjects will react to having their intimate lives made *subject matter*; whether the distance of critical analysis might be its own form of intimate detachment.

The individuals and stories that I focus on in this chapter are here, in part, because Jean-Paul invited me into his social world at the very outset of my fieldwork. I first met Jean-Paul at the neighborhood playground where our kids became fast friends. When Jean-Paul learned about my research as he and I came to know each other during conversations at playdates and pickups, he generously offered to help me “enter the field” of Montreal advertising. As one of my primary points of contact, he inevitably shaped the trajectory of my research by introducing me to other advertising professionals within his network of friends and colleagues (a process I described in Chapter 5). He also regularly included me in social events that provided opportunities for research and moments of commensality, like the dinner party described above. Throughout, Jean-Paul consistently made time to speak to me openly—and intimately—about his own career, thoughts on creativity, and personal life. He remains a friend.

In this chapter I explore intimacy as both a mode of ethnographic inquiry and an object for analysis in its own right. Using the characters, stories, jokes, and unspoken tensions of the dinner party described above as points of entry, I consider how *being intimate* is ultimately a productive practice through which power “snaps into place” (Stewart 2007: 15). I am especially interested in how this occurs through particular patterns of interpersonal relating and modes of subjectification associated with notions of creative exceptionalism, freedom, and self-sovereignty.

From this perspective, experiences and discourses of sex and intimacy that circulate amongst creative ad workers in Montreal are integral dimensions of what Raymond Williams refers to as “structures of feeling”—the “specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships” that characterize a shared culture at a given historical moment (1977: 132). More recently, Lauren Berlant has adopted the term “affective atmospheres” in what she describes as a “refraction” of Williams’ “structures of feeling,” similarly arguing that affect in this sense is “shared, not solitary, and that bodies are continuously busy judging their environments and responding to the atmospheres in which they find themselves” (2011: 15). Furthermore, like Williams, Berlant is especially concerned with demonstrating how “affective responses may be said significantly to exemplify shared *historical* time” (15). Thus, while the specific characters and narrative details I describe in this chapter became my focus partly through happenstance, reflecting networks of personal relationships and the experiences these engendered during fieldwork, I am, like both Williams and Berlant, interested in their broader cultural resonance—in “how the singular becomes delaminated from its location in someone’s story or some locale’s irreducibly local history and circulated as evidence of something shared” (Berlant 2011: 12).

In the sections to follow I consider how stories of sex and the affective atmospheres of their recounting reveal intimacy to be a site of friction between competing cultural values, individual desires, and relations of power in late modern capitalism. As Sehlirkoglu and Zengin (2015) write, “Intimacy is bound up with notions of privacy, sexuality, proximity and secrecy, and with dynamics of sensual and affective attachments and forms of desire. It is therefore integral to the formation of human selves and subjectivities, as well as communities, publics, collectives and socialities” (20). Likewise, Berlant (1998) observes not only that intimacy “builds worlds,”

but also that, for this reason, “its potential *failure* to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress ‘a life’ seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability” (282, italics added). Indeed, as Povinelli (2002) describes, modern forms of intimacy are not just ones of “orientation and attachment” in relation with others, but are also characterized by an ongoing “dialectic of self-elaboration” in which the “intimate interiority” of the modern self is compelled both to continuously question how they feel about and desire the intimate other, as well as to reflexively worry about how the other may (or may not) feel about and desire *them*: “Who am I in relation to you?—this question and its cognates lift up a reflexive ego in the act of asking and stitch it into the world others” (230-231).

Such a dialectic is not always an equally affirming one of “self-elaboration,” however; while attending to how *being intimate* is a process through which the self is *recognized as a subject*, it quickly becomes apparent that intimate encounters also hold the potential for *desubjectification*—for experiences that do not simply trace the contours of the autological subject, but that often illuminate *its limits*. For this reason, as Povinelli (2002) argues and as I elaborate below, sexual relationships are often especially charged sites where individuals seek “intimate recognition” as autological subjects, in ways that illuminate how sexuality can sometimes buttress the “fantasy” of self-sovereignty, but also sometimes be the source of its *undoing*.

With these initial observations and questions in mind, this chapter considers how experiences and expectations of intimacy are discussed and *worried over* among groups of individuals for whom being creative is often equated with what Wilf (2014) describes as a

“‘neoliberal agency’ that requires subjects to imagine and fashion their own future by engaging with risk and making decisions under conditions of increased uncertainty” (407). In previous chapters I examined how industry practices and rationalities in Montreal’s advertising sector claim—and contain—creativity in these neoliberal terms. Here, I consider how neoliberal conditions of increased uncertainty shape experiences of intimate relating in ways that illuminate the social and ideological porousness between professional and personal lives.

Within this context, I approach storytelling between peers and colleagues as registering the affective impacts of intimate encounters, as a “politics to being/feeling connected (or not)” (Stewart 2007: 16). I suggest that stories of intimacy that circulate within the hyper-capitalist spaces of ad industry sociality must therefore be read as more than idiosyncratic anecdotes; they are also forums for describing and reflecting upon *shared affective atmospheres*. What might the affective charge of certain stories tell us about how (neo)liberalism’s “internal incoherencies” (Povinelli 2006: 5) are encountered and navigated by individuals for whom an idealized autological subjectivity is articulated as one of being (a) creative? How are these atmospheres shaped by things that are *not* said—by the sometimes very different experiences and expectations of intimacy that bring individuals with *unequal* levels of neoliberal agency together in sexual encounters? And how do these experiences “operate in intimate relation to a *figure of failed sovereignty*?”³

³ Italics added. I borrow this phrase from the anthropologist Lawrence Cohen, who writes of his interests in “an anthropology of complex objects... [that] all operate in intimate relation to a figure of failed sovereignty” (<https://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/faculty/lawrence-cohen>, accessed May 3, 2023). Here, I consider how creativity exists as one such “complex object,” whereby frustrations, disappointments, and suffering born of the pursuit of an idealized creative good life (in autological terms) reveal the impossibilities of the liberal self-sovereign ideal. The particular intimate modalities I examine in this chapter also therefore illuminate what Berlant (2022) describes as a prevailing sense of “the inconvenience of other people” in (neo)liberal contexts, whereby experiences of

When the autological subject shifts the bed

In the stories exchanged over the course of the evening recounted above, as well as during other informal social gatherings I attended and in interviews I conducted, working in advertising was consistently described to me as an arena of intimate encounter. Moreover, while intimacy is obviously a mode of sociality that shapes various kinds of relationship—platonic friendship, mentorship, the camaraderie of creative partnerships, family—the form of intimacy that the ad workers I knew most often spoke to me about was that of sex. More specifically, I was frequently told stories of sexual encounters that centred upon some form of drama, blunder, or excess in ways that reveal how sexual intimacy is regularly experienced not only as a form of interpersonal connection, but also as a site of subject formation. Over time, I noticed that such stories often described experiences of rupture, break, and detachment from intimate partners in ways that regularly portrayed peoples’ decisions to *disconnect* (or *remain disconnected*) as assertions of individual freedom and self-sovereignty. And yet, recounting of such stories also clearly provided forums for *worrying over* the social and affective consequences of these relational modalities. As sites of social reproduction *and* contestation, these experiences and stories of sexual practice therefore draw attention to “the aporias [that] freedom has generated in the realm of interrelationships” (Illouz 2012: 61). In other words, by speaking to and about desires for and experiences of what Berlant (2022) describes as “nonsovereign relationality,” they illuminate the internal contradictions at the heart of the liberal autological ideal.

“nonsovereign relationality” trouble and fray otherwise tenacious attachments to “sovereignty as idea, ideal, aesthetic, and identity claim” (3).

With this in mind, stories of *crises* in intimate relationships are significant not necessarily because they provide (often salacious) details about individual experiences, but because they register how sexual desire *phenomenologically* intersects with practices of autological subjectivation in late capitalist contexts—often in ways that challenge the ideological bases of the autological fantasy itself. Indeed, such stories frequently document experiences of people trying (and often failing) to connect to each other through particular patterns of thinking and acting that might serve them in certain respects (e.g. competitive attitudes that advance one’s career), but that also clearly fail them in others (e.g. sustaining secure intimate connections). This is true even of the more humorous and outlandish stories of sexual blunder I heard during fieldwork; in many cases stories framed as comedy are ones that most clearly provide a refractive discourse for exploring contradictory experiences arising from ongoing adherence to the “fantasy” of self-sovereignty, through themes of sexual freedom and licentiousness, but also competition, embarrassment, and betrayal.

As such, storytelling about sex provides a discursive frame for variously reinforcing, examining, and questioning dominant ideologies that circumscribe creative agency as a privilege of the autological subject—ideologies that inevitably shape how individuals relate to one another while also attempting to fashion themselves into ideal creative subjects. Moreover, insofar as the ideal creative subject of (neo)liberalism continues to be associated in Montreal advertising with white masculinity, these stories offer an illuminating lens onto how individuals navigate and make sense of unequal levels of sexual power and freedom between men and women in heterosexual relationships within this social field. Building on Illouz (2012), I argue that these stories record how autological subject formation through sexual practice has “generated new

forms of suffering in the shape of inequalities arising from the different ways that men and women feel, experience, and monitor their sexual freedom in competitive social fields” (61).

Notably, many stories of intimate encounter that were shared with me during fieldwork frequently centered upon dilemmas born of a hedonistic individualism discussed as inherently characteristic of creative attitudes and lifestyles.⁴ This association between hedonism and creativity is encouraged and catered to in agency environments and industry parties where high levels of recreational drug use and alcohol consumption are the norm, and over-indulgence seen as a corollary of the fast-paced “hustle” and pressure of everyday ad work. Work trips are also appreciated by creative ad workers as opportunities for hedonistic indulgence, where expensed meals at trendy restaurants, five-star hotel stays, and first-class travel are regularly enjoyed as “perks” of the job. Although these latter forms of luxury consumption are more often enjoyed by executives and senior creatives, they also inform the aspirational imaginaries of junior creatives insofar as they constitute what Michel (a commercial director) described to me as “the cool shit around the work.” Moreover, while not all creative ad workers participate in these aspects of industry culture to the same extent (due to variable levels of personal desire and degrees of agency), it is clear that an industry-wide culture of hedonism turns many opportunities for

⁴ In this chapter I adopt the term “hedonistic individualism” with a certain degree of caution, aware that the notion of hedonism carries a complex history of ideas about what does—or does not—constitute a “good life.” Here, I use the term in reference to a culturally-specific set of values that orient individuals to seek pleasure in ways that are intimately informed by a capitalist consumer culture and a shared understanding of creative freedom. This orientation is one whereby the individual’s pursuit of pleasure is understood—and promoted—in terms of *consumptive* self-gratification. Within this context, I am interested in how pleasure-seeking is anchored in practices of excess and *over-indulgence* that mirror and reinforce neoliberal corporate practices and values of resource extraction, wealth accumulation, and exploitation. See Soper (2020) for discussion of an “alternative hedonism” that resists the capitalist conflation of pleasure with self-interest and consumption.

socialization into ones where uninhibited “shenanigans” are celebrated as further evidence of free-spirited creative being.

While the story of the Brazilian beer shoot recounted by Jean-Paul with help from Benoît might be a particularly exaggerated tale of hedonistic individualism, stories of this type were so frequently exchanged at the social events I attended over the course of my fieldwork that I came to perceive them as constituting a culturally dominant genre of narrative.⁵ This genre is one that celebrates the self-interested pursuit of pleasure as an inherent right of the autological subject, even if this sometimes comes at the expense of other peoples’ dignity or well-being. In this sense, the beer shoot story highlights interrelated structures of power that shape dynamics within the industry and that also often inform the latent meanings of campaigns and commodity images the industry produces. It is significant, in other words, that those individuals who

⁵ Beyond informal storytelling, hedonistic individualism was a celebrated theme in a host of other cultural discourses and practices through which ad workers are socialized into the industry. Take, for example, an advertising industry “expansion pack” made for the popular party card game, “Cards Against Humanity,” by the Toronto-based animation and design studio The Juggernaut. The pack, called “Advertising Against Humanity,” was distributed to 500 ad workers (copywriters, art directors, creative directors, etc.) as a holiday gag gift in December 2014. (The gift was given as part of a tradition of an inter-agency Christmas card/gift exchange that is competitively creative). The cards in the original game, as well as in the “Advertising Against Humanity” pack, are meant to be provocatively funny; while the original embraces political incorrectness and vulgarity, the Advertising cards do so while also reflecting a particular industry “insider” experience. For example, black “question cards” that read, “How do you get ahead in advertising” may receive white “answer cards” like “Watering down good ideas with tears,” or “Changing the track just enough so we don’t have to pay any licensing fees.” While many of the question and answer cards speak to the ethics and experience of advertising work in and of itself, others highlight dominant attitudes that shape patterns of sociality within the industry as a particular social field, particularly in terms of sex. For example, some of the more popular cards (i.e. the ones most shared on social media), included combinations such as: Q: “Why did I get fired from my last agency?” A: “Jerking off to casting tapes”; or Q: “What never fails to liven up the agency Christmas party?” A: “An account coordinator with no gag reflex,” or A: “Getting locked in the agency stairwell while hookers steal the company laptops.” That these cards resonated with people engaged in creative advertising work is reflected in the media attention they received on sites such as Twitter and Instagram (#Advertisingagainsthumanity), as well as in the positive coverage they received within industry publications such as the Montreal-based Infopresse (<http://www.infopresse.com/article/2014/12/8/un-jeu-pour-les-horribles-publicitaires>), and the American publication, Adweek (<http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/if-youre-horrible-ad-person-youll-love-cards-against-humanity-expansion-pack-161762>). Notably, the extension pack was created by a female creative director, in partnership with a male art director.

determine the aesthetics of advertising campaigns are also those with more power to pursue their own self-interests and pleasures in the social fields that surround the creative process. Indeed, as the details of the story illustrate, and as I demonstrated in previous chapters, the inherent inequalities that shape social relations in and around advertising production are regularly obfuscated and justified within the industry through claims to creative exceptionalism.

While the gendered dimensions of the commercial and its production are clear (more on this below), the story of the Brazilian beer shoot also speaks to the unequal distribution of creative agency within a globalizing neoliberal economic order. Though Jean-Paul and Benoît did not discuss financial considerations when recounting the story at the dinner party described above, the commercial production was determined by a neoliberal economic rationality that speaks to these global inequalities. Specifically, the commercial was shot in Brazil not just because the creatives wanted to holiday somewhere warm (the reason Jean-Paul and Benoît wanted to convey), but also because filming and producing advertisements in Brazil is far less regulated than in North America. More precisely, Brazil is an economically advantageous place to shoot a commercial because there are fewer unions, lower wages, and the “freedom” to work cast and crew longer hours without paying overtime. Possibilities for “talent buyout” (lump sum payments to actors for their performances, rather than continued payments on a residual scale every time the commercial airs) are also incentives for clients wanting to save on production costs.

These advantages undoubtedly made Jean-Paul’s and Phil’s pitch to shoot the commercial in Brazil a much easier “sell.” Indeed, though the budgetary concerns of clients are

frequently portrayed by creative ad workers as constraints upon the creative process, the Brazilian beer shoot is illustrative of how neoliberal economic rationalizations are *integral* to the structures of advertising production that define and reward creative ad workers *as creative*. These rationalizations are not anathema to the ideals of creative freedom, self-sovereignty, and exceptionalism that orient and motivate creatives, despite commonplace insistence; they are, rather, what *sustains* the creative practice (and privileges) of individuals employed in the work of advertising, who claim creative distinction in autological terms. Such rationalizations also, I argue, constitute “the force of things” that brought the unnamed Brazilian actress/model to Phil’s bed, and that empowered him to blame her for his own excess.

Neoliberal rationalizations are therefore key in tracing how creative agency is unequally distributed in late capitalist contexts. These are also crucial to consider when examining how an ethos of hedonistic individualism informs more intimate experiences of workplace cultures, industry events, and patterns of relating in Montreal advertising. In fact, Jean-Paul’s storytelling highlights how this ethos is idealistically associated to the creative process of advertising production itself. This was apparent, for example, when Jean-Paul described how he and Phil intentionally planned the commercial shoot with their own gratifications in mind by: 1) conceiving of a campaign in a tropical destination; 2) including scenes of hyper-sexualized women on the beach in their pitch; and 3) selling the idea to the client as an effective way to market their product. The commercial they subsequently produced was therefore in vital ways a projection of their own desires and ideals, with the potential for reinforcing these within a broader consumer public through the dissemination of the ad. In this way, the story highlights significant material and ideological connections between Jean-Paul and Phil’s professional

practices, the latent messages about sexuality communicated in the campaign they conceived and produced, and Phil's behaviour towards the Brazilian actress-model who woke up in his bed full of shit.

Moreover, it is significant that while Jean-Paul and Benoît recounted their story in a manner that framed Phil's behaviour as extraordinarily self-interested, the *point* of the story was certainly not one of moral condemnation. Neither was it received as such: when recounted at the dinner party, reactions from other guests ranged from mild disapproval of Phil's "sick" sense of humour to a permissive ambivalence and even enthusiastic appreciation of the situation's comedic value. Indeed, the potential impact of Phil's behaviour on the unnamed woman was neither the focus of the story as recounted by its narrators, nor subsequently raised as a subject of much concern amongst its audience. Rather, in thinking back to the dinner party, it seems to me that the story instead served as a cautionary tale for the creative subject himself, insofar as Phil's *overly* hedonistic behaviours were framed as threatening *his own interests* by embedding him quite literally in an intimate mess. By emphasizing the quick-wittedness of Phil's response as a resolution, the story ultimately illustrates the triumph of the creative self; Phil's creativity is what allows him to reconcile his pursuit of self-interest with the relationality of his hedonistic desires.

As a scene of individual crisis, Phil's predicament was most obviously one that risked personal embarrassment. As a scene of *social crisis*, however, the story speaks to a complex dynamic of power through which the "fantasy" of the autological subject is troubled by the *inconvenient presence* of the other person—a person whose presence signals the autological

subject's desire for pleasure taken in *nonsovereign relationality*, made inconvenient in its challenge to the autological subject's emphasis on his own sovereignty as "idea, ideal, aesthetic and identity claim" (Berlant 2022: 3). This messy fallout of Phil's behaviour is cautionary, I argue, because it reveals the "internal incoherence" of the liberal binary that informs ways of imagining and managing intimate relations as sites of autological subjectivation (Povinelli 2006). Phil's decision to blame the messy consequences of his over-consumption on the young woman in his bed also reveals the inherent violence of the autological fantasy, in that it is always defined and asserted *against* and *at the expense* of the socially-determined other.

While casual sex is certainly not the only type of intimate relationship creative ad workers desire, seek out, and enjoy, it was one that I observed as especially affectively charged, and frequently the focus of stories ad workers recounted to me during fieldwork. For this reason, here I am less interested in determining how predominant this mode of intimate relating actually is within a local advertising industry, and more interested in how it is discussed and *worried over* within stories like the one recounted above. Indeed, I argue that within such stories the casual intimate encounter becomes an affectively-charged site of social crisis because of its own inherent incoherence. On the one hand, such encounters clearly present eroticized opportunities for the creative ad worker to assert freedom and autonomy *against* the perceived constraints of "committed" sexual/romantic relationships.⁶ On the other hand, casual sex always holds the potential to *reveal the fantasy* of self-sovereignty *as such*. Part of the affective (and erotic) charge of such encounters also undeniably emerges from the power relations that trouble liberal

⁶ See Illouz's chapter "Commitment Phobia" (2012) for further discussion of "the social conditions men express and perform when they resist commitment" (70).

discourses of casual sexual relationships as ones based upon “*mutual* freedom, symmetry and autonomy” between equally sovereign selves (Illouz 60). As the (arguably) comedic tension of Phil’s predicament illuminates, this ideal is regularly made impossible by the unequal distribution of individual agency that shapes how such encounters are *lived*.

Stories like the Brazilian beer shoot celebrate sexual promiscuity as a right and privilege of the free and autonomous (and typically male) creative subject. They also simultaneously register an accompanying atmosphere of anxiety surrounding the potential emotional and social “fallout” of excessively hedonistic behaviours. These anxieties are apparent in an accompanying discourse that assesses and reflects upon intimate relationships in terms of being “managed well” (*bien gérer*), or not, in ways that reflect how a neoliberal rationality is increasingly brought to bear upon understandings of intimacy and sexual relationships, the consequences of which I examine further in the section to follow.⁷ Moreover, insofar as a distinctly neoliberal language of (self)management is used by individuals in this context to make sense of and give meaning to their personal experiences of intimacy, such discourse reveals how intimacy is made into a primary site of autological subjectification. Within this cultural discourse, Phil’s shitty bed serves as a cautionary metaphor for “messy” handlings of casual sexual encounter, which not only risk embedding the autological subject in webs of relational obligation and expectation, but which also reveal the potentially destructive social consequences that result from the autological

⁷ Here, I draw on Gershon’s (2011) argument that neoliberal subjectification encourages individuals to “use market rationality to interpret their social relationships and social strategies.” This form of “neoliberal agency,” she observes “requires a reflexive stance in which people are subjects for themselves—a collection of processes to be managed. There is always already a presumed distance to oneself as an actor... one is always faced with one’s self as a project that must be consciously steered through various possible alliances and obstacles” (539).

subject's insistence upon his own sovereignty and freedom in even the most intimate relations with others.

The state in which Phil “woke up” speaks to the difficulties of maintaining the “fantasy of self-referential enclosure” (Povinelli 2006: 184) that animates liberal ideals; in this way it “operate(s) in intimate relation to a figure of *failed sovereignty*.”⁸ And yet, the recounting of this story also exemplifies how an ideology of creative exceptionalism helps to *sustain* attachments to the fantasy of autological subjectivity even when confronted by its failure, by presenting Phil's ability to *be creative* as what *restores* his self-sovereignty. Moreover, it is significant that at the end of the story recounted by Jean-Paul and Benoît, Phil manages to extricate himself from a scene of intimate crisis by responding to the situation in a manner that is strikingly similar to the making of “good” creative advertising: he presented an inventive (and *fantastical*) solution to a problem, delivered with a clever tagline. Whether or not Phil actually said and did these things is not the point. Rather, the point is that *this is the way the story is told*.

Creative exceptionalism and crises of commensuration

In the context of contemporary advertising production, it is clear that hedonistic attitudes are often associated with notions of creative exceptionalism through intersecting ideologies of masculinity. As I described in earlier chapters, these gendered discourses regularly champion an archetype of the rebellious (typically male) creative ad worker who works in and profits from

⁸ Cohen (n1).

corporate capitalist industry, while irreverently refusing to abide by the normative constraints, mundane responsibilities, and moral codes that otherwise define ideal relationships between equally free and autonomous individuals in civil society.⁹ For this reason, the gender dynamics of the Brazilian beer shoot remain significant, despite the fact that the prevalence of related forms of sexual violence and harassment within the industry have undoubtedly been tempered by the rise of the #MeToo movement since the night of the dinner party described above.¹⁰

With these dynamics in mind, here I would like to consider how such stories reflect a distinctly neoliberal politics of intimacy that are informed by broader gender ideologies and structures of power, but that are not reducible to these alone. This politics is one whereby the logic of market exchange is applied to interpersonal relationships, and intimacy (in this case sexual intimacy) is transformed into an arena of *consumptive* pleasure-seeking through which the personhood of the other is obscured. Drawing on the work of Eva Illouz (2012; 2007), I suggest that discourses and practices surrounding sexual and romantic relationships in Montreal advertising consequently reflect how intimacy itself is profoundly transformed in neoliberal contexts through processes of *commensuration*.

In discussing the rationalization of emotion as a definitive feature of intimate relating in late modern capitalism, Illouz (2007) observes that over the course of the twentieth century,

⁹ In addition to the examples of “creative revolution” shenanigans discussed earlier in this dissertation, such intersections are also prevalent in pop culture representations of advertising culture. See, for example, the documentary film *Art & Copy* (2009), which celebrates the work and lives of creative ad workers associated with the creative revolution of the twentieth century. The French film *99 Francs* (2007), as well as the novel of the same name by Frédéric Beigbeder (2000) upon which the film is based, also provide satirical takes on the hedonism and promiscuity of advertising creatives, as embodied by the story’s protagonist, Octave Parango.

¹⁰ In Quebec, #MeToo was translated into the “*Dis Son Nom*” movement, which led to the creation and online publishing of a list of reported sexual aggressors working in a range of industries within the province (advertising included). See: <https://www.dissonnom.ca/>, last accessed May 29th, 2022.

“the cultural persuasions of therapy, economic productivity, and feminism intertwined and enmeshed with one another” in ways that generated a new “emotional ontology” (36). This ontology involved a “rationalization of emotional bonds... that made intimate relationships commensurate, that is, susceptible to depersonalization, or likely to be emptied of their particularity and to be evaluated according to abstract criteria” (36). This process of “commensuration,” Illouz argues, forms a “cognitive style which empties relationships of their particularity and transforms them into objects which, because they are evaluated through standards of fairness, equality, and need-satisfaction, become more likely to know the fate of commodities traded” (38). Illouz herself is interested in how commensuration has transformed the ways in which people seek to establish and *sustain* emotional connection in sexual partnerships through an “increasing objectivization of the means to express and exchange emotions” (ibid). In this section, I explore how Illouz’s observations in this regard can also be productively applied to other expectations and experiences of sex and intimacy in late capitalist conditions, including those that emphasize emotional *disconnection* and *detachment* as ideal modes of relating between free and autonomous selves.

Crucially, insofar as commensuration “instills a procedural quality to emotional life,” Illouz observes that it paradoxically leads to “the *suspension of one’s emotional entanglements in a social relationship*” (38, italics in original). Indeed, while many of the ad workers I met during fieldwork certainly sought and maintained relationships of sustained emotional connection in their own lives, stories of sexual encounters often emphasized emotional distancing and disconnection as desirable relational outcomes. These stories highlight how the logic of commensuration as well as a related adaptive ability to rationalize and *suspend emotional*

entanglement become characteristic traits of an ideal neoliberal (creative) subject—an autonomous and infinitely flexible individual whose freedom and self-sovereignty are imagined as contingent upon *ongoing avoidance* of socially-determined relationships and obligations (“commitments”), through strategic arrangements and assertions of individual choice.¹¹

Thinking back to the scene of the dinner party that opened this chapter, the manner in which Caroline and François spoke about their decision to live separately without divorcing is illustrative of the rationalization Illouz describes. Indeed, at least as presented to us at the dinner party, the semi-detached terms of their relationship can reflect what we might describe as a distinctly “modern” intimate arrangement—one that affirms the “mutual freedom, symmetry, and autonomy” of each partner (rather than their material and emotional interdependency) by requiring them to regularly *choose* (or not) to come together in intimacy.¹² Illouz suggests that, understood as “expressive individualism,” this “right to choose” is paralleled and informed by similar assertions of individual freedom in capitalist markets and the consumer sphere (2012: 60). And yet, for Caroline and François, it is clear that these autological rationalizations were *affectively charged* in complex and even contradictory ways, and that the specific form of their relational arrangement was in fact born of an attempt to *navigate* and *sustain* their “emotional entanglement” rather than suspend it entirely. Indeed, both the new terms of their marriage as well as the manner in which they discussed these suggest how the desire for individual freedom and autonomy exists in tension with competing desires for emotional closeness, family

¹¹ See Illouz (2012) for a discussion of “commitment phobia” as a phenomenon born of the modern “affirmation of freedom in the sexual sphere” (61).

¹² In this manner, such an arrangement exemplifies Povinelli’s (2002) description of modern intimacy as a “dialectic of self-elaboration” (230).

belonging, and sexual fidelity. Furthermore, it is clear that for Caroline (like many other women in late liberal societies) assertions of freedom and autonomy within romantic partnerships and domestic arrangements are read not just as expressions of an ideal autological subjectivity, but also as expressions of a specifically *feminist* articulation of the autological ideal.¹³

Caroline and François' decision to live apart while remaining married provides an example of how individuals aspiring to a neoliberal autological ideal navigate these aspirations with other social conventions, individual desires, and personal values associated with the "genealogical inheritances" (Povinelli 2006) of socially-determined gender roles, family structures, and ideals of sexual commitment. Conversely, other ad workers I met often talked to me about sex as a site of hedonistic pleasure *freed from* relational obligations of all kinds. This was apparent across a range of practices and relational modes such individuals discussed, including casual relationships (where sex is conceived as a mutual exchange of pleasure within short-term relationships defined by acts of balanced reciprocity), consumptive promiscuity (where sexual partners are acquired and discarded), and sexual optimization (where sexual opportunity is maximized through a "networking" approach to sociality and the strategic organization of social events and spaces), all of which reflect the "commensuration" of intimacy that Illouz describes.

¹³ This is especially so in the context of post-Quiet Revolution Quebec, where changes in family structures and women's roles, often measured in declining fertility and marriage rates, are highlighted not just as evidence of the waning influence of the Catholic Church, but also as evidence of gains made through the feminist revolution of during the same period. See Baillargeon's (2014) chapter, "The Feminist Revolution (1966-1989)" for further discussion of changing family structures and women's roles in post-Quiet Revolution Quebec.

And yet, the *worrying over/about* the “mismanagement” of intimacy within even these more fully “detached” sexual relationships reflects the considerable lived difficulties individuals encounter when navigating the inherent power dynamics that shape intimate encounters, as sites where the inevitability of “nonsovereign relationality” is made apparent. This is true both for the creative subject insistent upon his autological freedom through the “suspension” of feeling and capacity to disconnect, as well as for the “intimate other” whose competing expectations of emotional “investment” are often construed as reflecting a conservative morality that impinges upon the modern “affirmation of freedom in the sexual sphere” (Illouz 2012: 61). Indeed, though the logic of market exchange that informs these relational modes appears inherently compatible with the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism (e.g. social mobility, flexibility, freedom as consumer choice), the affective atmosphere they engender is often one of considerable ambivalence and anxiety on both “sides” of the liberal binary.

Take, for example, Grégoire—a senior copywriter who at the time of our first meeting and interview had recently left his position at a top local agency. When I asked him why he had switched agencies, he replied: “It was time for a change. Plus, I’d slept with all the single women at [former agency]. And maybe a couple of the married ones.” Grégoire’s claim was more than just bravado; in a subsequent interview with Christophe (a creative director at Grégoire’s former agency, and Grégoire’s former boss), I was told that Grégoire had a particularly notorious reputation in this regard, and that Christophe personally knew of at least five women who had “messy” short-lived relationships with Grégoire at the workplace. (Christophe assured me he could confirm this because he himself had had fleeting relationships with the same five women prior to Grégoire—an assurance that mostly conveyed the sexual competitiveness that existed

between the two men). “Grégoire is young, so he didn’t manage those liaisons well,” Christophe told me. When I asked Christophe how he navigated such liaisons and understood them in relation to his own work and identity as a creative, Christophe replied: “It’s the dark side of achieving success as a creative, I guess. There’s some power and status, and money. And with that comes all this temptation—and not just girls on commercial shoots. There’s constant turnover in agencies, too. Fresh batches of new and younger women are hired every year. I can tell you this, without a doubt: working in advertising ruined my marriage.”

Christophe was not the only male creative I interviewed who described working in advertising as a site of sexual “temptation” in ways that connected this aspect of industry culture to the rupture or destabilization of long-term relationships or family units. Michel, for example, also confided to me that a workplace affair was one of the primary reasons his marriage ended. In discussing the “mess” he made of his life, he described the experience of commercial production as one inherently conducive to intense yet fleeting intimate encounters (working late at the production agency, travelling for shoots, long days on set). He explained these as conditions where “the immediate pleasures of sexual novelty just seem too tempting to pass up—until they’re no longer novel, either.” Likewise, in discussing the dissolution of his marriage, Jean-Paul disclosed to me that over the course of his twenty-year career he had slept with over one hundred women in the industry, stating that “more than a few” of these might have “overlapped” with his marriage. He referred to these encounters as “community service,” jokingly describing the pleasure he gave to his sexual partners in altruistic terms. In this regard, Jean-Paul’s boasts reflect a remarkably acquisitive attitude towards sex—not just in terms of the sheer number of sexual partners he claims to have had, but also in terms of how he discusses

moments of intimate encounter as ones whereby even the other person's pleasure becomes appropriated as a form of individual capital (in this case, as testament to Jean-Paul's own sexual expertise).

And yet, while both Jean-Paul and Michel recounted their experiences of "giving in" to sexual temptation in ways that reflect hedonistic attitudes, I also observed both to suffer from genuine regret and a deep sense of loss and sadness over the rupture of their respective marriages. These were not passing emotional states; even after more than a decade of separation, Jean-Paul continued to speak about his ex-wife as "*le plus grand amour de ma vie*" (the biggest love of his life). He described his ongoing attachment to her as a major obstacle in establishing long-term relationships with new partners who regularly reproached him for being emotionally "unavailable." The sense these women had of Jean-Paul's disconnect was not wrong; on more than one occasion I observed Jean-Paul end new relationships in the hope that a reunion with his ex-wife might be possible. Similarly, Michel also spoke to me at length about the difficulties he experienced "letting go" of his own marriage. He described his infidelities as "a spectacular fuck-up" that "blew up his life" in ways that suggest he struggled not just with grief over the loss of his relationship, but also with a sense of having *failed* at managing the intimate attachments of his personal life. According to Michel, this devastating sense of failure became a central theme he explored in many of his subsequent films, as well as in "years of psychoanalysis."

It is clear that these crises in/of intimacy are ones whereby individual desires for secure and long-term relationships exist in tension with competing desires for personal autonomy and

sexual freedom, associated with the creative exceptionalism of the autological subject. Within the late capitalist context of Montreal advertising, stories and anecdotes that celebrate hedonistic individualism (like the Brazilian beer shoot) may hint at this tension. But they also discursively recuperate sexual pleasure into a consumptive capitalist logic. In other words, in speaking of intimate acts and encounters as things to be competitively acquired, accumulated, and consumed, a transformational inversion takes place, in which the capacity to intimately connect with another person is impeded by the “discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom” associated with the autological subject (Povinelli 2006: 4). Intimate connections (or commitments) with/to other people are consequently perceived/experienced as *threatening* the self-enclosure of the ideal (creative) subject, insofar as they trouble and reveal the limits of the liberal “demand for autonomy as evidence of freedom” (Berlant 2022: 3).

Creative expectations in times of “anguished liberation”

There is another set of tensions that trouble experiences and representations of hedonistic individualism in stories like that of the Brazilian beer shoot. If the theme of hedonistic individualism is the red thread in the story Jean-Paul tells at his dinner party—a thread that stitches together the concept for the ad itself, the experience of its production, and the affective work of the commodity image once produced—it is not simply the presence of this red thread that is telling. Namely, it is also the ways in which this thread was pulled and picked at in

discomfort, the places where it appeared frayed and worn, and where it tightened to the point of snapping.

In the context of the dinner party, Pilar's comment that she found Jean-Paul's nostalgic reminiscences "boring" speaks to this fraying. In fact, the particular beer commercial in question was shot almost a decade earlier, as Jean-Paul and Phil were just starting to enjoy success in their careers but had not yet risen to managerial positions. Moreover, Jean-Paul and Benoît's reflections about the shoot, ten years later, address a common trope I heard male creatives of their generation voice: namely, that ad work has changed significantly over the past decade or more, and that, more specifically, the creative freedom needed for the production of "good" (aesthetically novel) ads is increasingly hindered by financial and moral constraints. While on the one hand we might wonder how profound a shift has really occurred (bikini-clad women have certainly not disappeared from beer ads), on the other hand I see this type of nostalgia as alerting us to a set of disillusionments and disappointments born of an ongoing adherence to an ideology of creative exceptionalism, even when the autological "fantasy" that animates this ideal is revealed as such.

The story is nostalgic, in other words, because it was recounted from the position of someone whose everyday creative labour and interpersonal relationships continuously "operate in intimate relation to a figure of failed sovereignty."¹⁴ This failure is relevant beyond the circumstances of Jean-Paul's own personal life. Specifically, the comparison that Jean-Paul and Benoît make between the era when the beer commercial was shot and their experiences of

¹⁴ Cohen (n1).

creative ad work in 2013 reflects a broader cultural shift from what Lipovetsky (2005) describes as “the social optimism” of the mid- to late- twentieth century, which “made untrammelled pleasures a sacred right, without any worries about tomorrow,” to “a second-generation presentism... based on neo-liberal globalization and the revolution in information technologies” (38).

The nostalgia that permeates creative ad workers’ reminiscences of a *lost* era of creative freedom and autonomy points to shifts in the industry’s affective atmosphere that have occurred in dialogue with the intensifying pressures and precarity of neoliberalism. These shifts are emblematic of a fundamental paradox that Lipovetsky invites us to perceive as a key feature of “hypermodern” contexts.¹⁵ As Charles (2005) describes, according to Lipovetsky,

Hypermodern individuals are both better informed and more destructured, more adult and more unstable, less ideological and more in thrall to changing fashions, more open and more easy to influence, more critical and more superficial, more sceptical and less profound. ... The disintegration of the world of tradition is experienced no longer as a form of emancipation but as a source of tension. It is fear which triumphs and bestrides the stage in the face of an uncertain future, a logic of globalization which acts independently of individuals, an exacerbated free-market competitiveness, a headlong development in the technologies of information, an increasingly precarious hold on one’s job, and a worrying stagnation in the unemployment figures... These days Narcissus is gnawed by anxiety; fear has imposed itself on his pleasures, and anguish on his liberation. (12-13)

Within the context of “hyper-capitalist” fields of aesthetic production, like Montreal advertising, such a description is especially apt. This is particularly true not only insofar as it captures the red thread of hedonistic individualism that informs idealizations of creative freedom, but also insofar

¹⁵ In adopting the term “hypermodernity” (contra postmodernity), Lipovetsky (2005) suggests that late modernity is best described as an era of intensification, a “modernity raised to the *n*th power” (30).

as it begins to reveal the forces that fray, pick at, and pull this ideological thread uncomfortably tight.

Here I would like to consider how the early career experiences of Carmen, who I first met at the same dinner party, diverge considerably from the picture of carefree hedonism Jean-Paul and Benoît painted of their own early careers in advertising through their nostalgic reminiscences:

I meet Carmen at Buvette chez Simone after work, a few weeks after the dinner party. I find her standing out front, smoking a cigarette. It's snowing lightly and already dark outside. She takes a final drag of her cigarette when she sees me coming and throws the butt into the dirt of an otherwise empty planter. We go inside and grab seats at the bar. The place is warm and bustling with young professionals. Carmen nods at a table of young men and women by the window. "Advertising people," she says. "That guy's a copywriter at DentsuBos. The women beside him are account directors. I don't know who the bearded dude is. But by the look of his beard, I'd say art director."

I'm interested to hear about Carmen's experience working as a copywriter, as most of the creatives I've interviewed so far have been men. She tells me that she moved to Montreal from Vancouver two years ago. She arrived with a romantic idea of the city—one that involved the hope of becoming a writer while paying cheap rent. "But you get what you pay for," Carmen tells me, describing how her first few months of living in an apartment with three other roommates was a "less than romantic" experience. Eventually, she applied for a job as a junior copywriter for a local agency. She was hired (by Jean-Paul), and has been at the same agency now for several months.

I ask her how she likes her job so far.

"I work with a lot of cool people," she replies. "And the agency is great."

"What about the copywriting itself? Do you enjoy it?"

"Sometimes. I had a hard time adjusting at first. I get these instructions, these briefs, and need to write taglines based on some message that the strategists have come up with. At first, I would work really hard to do something interesting. I would spend hours, and come up with like three lines that would be full of word play, and double-entendres, and metaphor... And I would bring them to Jean-Paul and he would shit on all of them and then scold me for not having ten more to show him."

Carmen pauses.

"Anyway, so I really hustled in the beginning" she continues, "but Jean-Paul kept telling me that I was overthinking. One night I find myself still at work, and it's really late, and I'm stuck there working on an account for a special kind of cat food that helps prevent feline UTIs."

I laugh. "That's a thing?"

"Yep. And I couldn't help but feel that writing lines to sell the stuff was sort of... depressing. I mean, peddling kitty kibble for UTI-prone housecats is just not what I always aspired to do with my life, you know?"

"Did you keep working on the campaign?"

"Of course. I wrote a bunch of outrageous taglines. 'Your cat's a whore, but she'll burn no more!' and 'Keep your pussy purring with that royal feline feeling.' That kind of thing." We laugh.

"How did Jean-Paul react?" I ask.

"Oh, I didn't send them to him. I guess it was just a way to let off steam... some kind of creative catharsis, I guess. Then I was like, fuck it. I looked at the brief again and translated some of the lines in the text from French to English. Wham bam. I strung the same five words together in ten equally boring but slightly different arrangements, emailed them to Jean-Paul, and went home."

"And?"

"Great. He liked them. The client liked them."

"Was it a turning point for you?"

"I guess... I was happy that I finally seemed to be doing a good job, whatever that means. I was happy that Jean-Paul was happy. I like him. I care about his opinion. But I have to admit that sometimes I find the work itself boring."

"Do you think you'll keep working in advertising?" I ask.

"I don't know. I like the money. But I guess I want more. Not more money," she corrects herself, "more... meaning. Something more meaningful. Opportunity to say something more meaningful. And I know I'm not old, but I worry that my window to do that is shrinking

rapidly.” She laughs, and pauses. “But that’s just me. A lot of people I work with love their jobs. Like, really *really* love them.”

Carmen's description of working in advertising as a young creative presents a very different picture than the one depicted in Jean-Paul's nostalgic storytelling. (Carmen was in her early thirties at the time of our interview). Expressing ambivalence about the nature of her job, Carmen's worry that she is running out of time to be creative *because* she is devoting her creative energies to ad work is particularly illustrative of the affective shift Lipovetsky describes. Whereas Jean-Paul is nostalgic for the unbridled hedonism and creative freedom of his youth and early career, Carmen's experience at the outset of her own career is one of apathy, as she begins to doubt whether “something more meaningful” might exist for her. While the beer commercial provided opportunity for Jean-Paul to pursue his own hedonistic desires in ways that reinforced his sense of creative freedom and autonomy, writing about cat food was, for Carmen, experienced as a loss—of time, of dignity, and of individual voice (in the sense that she discards her own “more creative,” if ambivalent, lines in order to submit what she apathetically describes as “words strung together in different arrangements”).

In juxtaposing Jean-Paul and Carmen and the stories they told, my objective is not to suggest that these divergent experiences are only ones of gender or generational difference (recall Michel, discussed in Chapter 5, whose experience of creative frustration more closely aligns with Carmen's in significant ways). Nor do I wish to suggest that the experiences of pleasure and fun that Jean-Paul describes have completely disappeared from industry culture. Rather, I argue that when read alongside Jean-Paul's nostalgia, Carmen's ambivalence and

frustrations of being creative in advertising further illuminate shifts in the industry's affective atmosphere that have occurred in dialogue with the intensifying pressures and precarity of neoliberalism, in ways that are intimately related to the "hypermodern" patterns of relating that Illouz and Lipovetsky describe.

Importantly, while the story that Jean-Paul recounts of Phil's remarkably self-interested sexual antics may reflect a hedonistic individualism "raised to the *n*th power," within the context of the dinner party described above, the story does not end there. The telling of the story ends, in fact, with a joke that references a very different kind of campaign – a joke that I barely noticed in passing, until it resurfaced in a subsequent encounter with Carmen at another event, almost two years later. In the section to follow I explore how Carmen's experiences of creative frustration in her professional career intersected with experiences of affective attachment (and detachment) in her personal life. These intersections raise questions about how desires to *be creative* (as a particular iteration of autological subjectivity) relate to dynamics of sexual practice as a site of "intimate recognition" in late capitalism. How do these intersecting experiences contribute to the atmosphere of increasing precarity, alienation, and *anguished liberation* that Lipovetsky describes as characteristic of "hypermodernity," and that is felt in subtle, discomfiting, and sometimes painfully intimate ways by people in pursuit of the freedom and autonomy associated with a *creative good life*?

Always have a Plan B: hedonistic individualism, the morning after

After telling their story of the Brazilian beer shoot during the dinner party, Benoît made a comment to Jean-Paul that highlights an affective shift from the “social optimism” of their early careers to one of anxiety and social disconnection in the present. Specifically, in response to Jean-Paul’s sighing nostalgia about lost creative freedom, Benoît redirected conversation to the intimate details of their present-day lives, which he characterized as ones of “receding hairlines” and “divorce papers.” He also cracks a joke about a campaign for the morning-after pill, Plan B.

In her analysis of the subversive potential of joking, Mary Douglas observes: “A joke is a play upon form. It brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first” (Douglas 1968: 365). From this perspective, to crack a joke can be seen as a social practice that breaks open, at least momentarily, a space for glimpsing something hidden, for bringing into relief that which may be normally concealed, perhaps even from the self.¹⁶ At the same time, to say that someone has “cracked” a joke implies a degree of spontaneity in wit or humour; while a person may *tell* a joke that is rehearsed and thus potentially funny regardless of social context,

¹⁶ Douglas draws on Freud in order to articulate a theory of joking as temporary social relief through cathartic revelry in that which might otherwise be socially (and psychologically) repressed: “The pleasure of a joke lies in a kind of economy. At all times we are expending energy in monitoring our subconscious so as to ensure that our conscious perceptions come through a filtering control. The joke, because it breaks down the control, gives the monitoring system a holiday. Or, as Freud puts it, since monitoring costs effort, there is a saving in psychic expenditure. For a moment the unconscious is allowed to bubble up without restraint, hence the sense of enjoyment and freedom” (1968: 364). Here, the ‘filtering control’ that normally informs our perception of the world is, for Douglas, social; thus, the humorous potential of a joke is always contingent upon its specific cultural context precisely because it “affords opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective” (Douglas 1968: 365). In this way, joking is a socially legitimate form of temporary cultural transgression: “Whatever the joke, however remote its subject, the telling of it is potentially subversive. Since its form consists of a victorious tilting of uncontrol against control, it is an image of the levelling of hierarchy, the triumph of intimacy over formality, of unofficial values over official ones” (Douglas 1968: 366).

to *crack* a joke is subtly different, in the sense that the expression captures a form of joking that responds to the immediate moment and social circumstance in which it is delivered.

Within the context of the dinner party, Benoît's joke about Plan B created a crack in the surface of Jean-Paul's nostalgic reminiscences in ways that bring the fantasy of autological subjectivity into relief. It did so by drawing attention to the unavoidable webs of social relations within which even the most exceptionally free creatives must exist, as well as to the social consequences not just of individual behaviours but also, crucially, of one's creative work. Indeed, as I elaborate below, the images Benoît used to describe their contemporary lives as middle-aged men—divorce papers, receding hairlines, and emergency contraception pills—provide a sharp contrast to the experiences of creative freedom and carefree hedonism Jean-Paul reminisced about as one of “getting swimsuit models into beer ads.” While Jean-Paul's nostalgia suggests that a certain freedom had been *lost*, I argue that Benoît's joke in fact reveals how such a freedom was always in fact *fantastical*, particularly when considered alongside the experiences of other people on the shoot, in that bed, at that dinner party, and—importantly—consuming the latent messages of that beer ad.

Benoît's joke is funny (or at least was intended to be) because of the way in which it “brings into relation disparate elements,” through the juxtaposition of two products and their campaigns: beer and Plan B. Implicit within this juxtaposition is also that of the contradictory experiences of “hypermodern” intimacy these separate campaigns invoke, which I elaborate on below. The joke only makes sense, however, within a specific cultural field: first, among other male creative ad workers of a similar age who may experientially relate to the affective shift

Benoît describes and, second, as “cracked” amongst an intimate group of friends who were familiar with the details of Jean-Paul’s personal life. In the first case, one can appreciate the observation Benoît makes about how a bygone era of *carpe diem* licentiousness, which informed both the concept for and experience of making the beer commercial, has been followed by an era of inevitable “morning-after” consequences. The association that Benoît makes between divorce papers and emergency contraception is also “cracking,” insofar as they are both means for extracting oneself from undesired relationships and their associated obligations (or constraints).

In the second case, told within the context of the dinner party, the joke was cracking on a deeper level because most people in attendance were also fully aware that Jean-Paul’s workplace infidelities were rumoured to have been the cause of his divorce, which occurred around the same time that he had, in fact, worked on a campaign for Plan B. Jean-Paul’s obvious discomfort at Benoît’s joke is also important to note; as mentioned above, at many other points in our friendship, Jean-Paul confided to me that his failed marriage was a great source of sadness and regret. For this reason, while on the surface Jean-Paul’s story of the beer shoot relates an experience of creative ad work as an arena for hedonistic revelry with minimal social consequence (at least for the creative ad worker), Benoît’s joke hints at more contradictory experiences of social disconnection, existential anxiety, and personal loss (of hair and wives). The joke also therefore invites closer consideration of how creative ad workers negotiate tensions between adherence to idealized images of themselves as free and autonomous subjects with intrinsic needs for secure long-term bonds and sustained emotional connections with others.

The details of the Plan B campaign to which Benoît was referring provide a relevant point of departure for such an exploration. Plan B is a form of emergency contraception more colloquially referred to as a “morning-after pill.” The drug is produced by the Montreal-based pharmaceutical company Paladin Labs, and can be purchased without a prescription across Canada.¹⁷ It is sold as an over-the-counter drug in Quebec, where women must consult with a pharmacist for an additional fee before being issued the drug. In 2007, Paladin Labs hired a Montreal advertising agency, Taxi, to produce a campaign for Plan B. Using various platforms, the campaign targeted women in their twenties and thirties with print ads posted in places like university campuses, bathroom stalls at nightclubs and bars, and music festivals.

Part of the novelty and subsequent success of the campaign was that it depended on user-generated content: the tagline took the format of “The _____ Pill,” with the target audience encouraged to complete with their own sexual “oops,” either through text messages or directly on the microsite, shareyouroops.ca (or partagezvotreoups.ca). These user-generated tags were then displayed on digital advertising screens around the city, which served as public forums for the sharing of intimate blunders: “The oh, oooh, oooh, ooh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah... oh no, oh no, oh no, no, no Pill”; “The trust me I know what I’m doing Pill”; or “*La pilule du oups j’ai bu quatre martinis, trois shooters, puis j’ai rencontré un méchant pétard et la suite est floue.*”

The comic framing of the campaign (“share your oops”) clearly resonated with its target audience, resulting in a 19% increase in Plan B sales, a 59% increase in product awareness, and

¹⁷ Originally founded by the Montreal entrepreneur Jonathan Ross Goodman, Paladin Labs was sold to Pennsylvania-based Endo Health Solutions Inc. in the spring of 2013, under a new Irish-based holding company. See: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/investment-ideas/a-fresh-stock-with-a-veteran-face/article17189152/> last accessed May 30, 2022.

the submission of 7,358 taglines and over 40,000 votes cast for the best line on the microsite (*Strategy*, November 2008).



Figure 6.1: Print ad for the “Share Your Oops” Plan B campaign (by Taxi). The user-generated tag reads: “The condom slipped when we swung off the chandelier pill.”

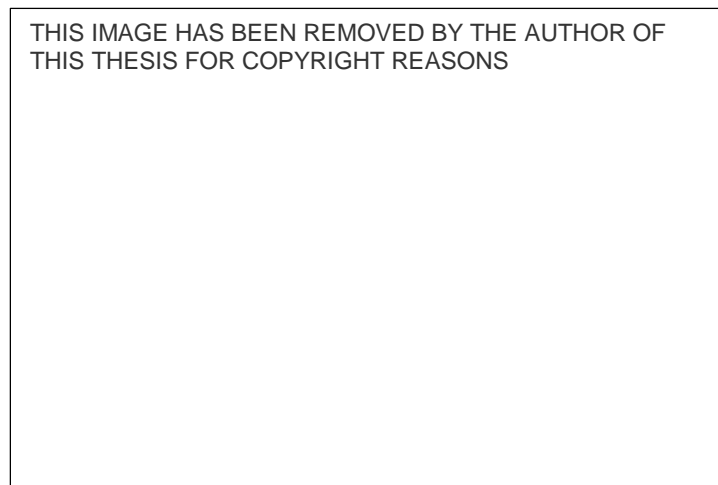


Figure 6.2: Disposable underwear distributed in lieu of promotional flyers to young women at bars, clubs, and music festivals, as part of the “Share Your Oops” Plan B campaign (by Taxi). The packaging reads: “The I should’ve kept my panties on pill.”

The Plan B campaign brought comedic relief to a subject that is often both politically and emotionally fraught. According to the client and ad workers who conceived it, an important goal of the campaign was to de-stigmatize the use of emergency contraception by increasing consumer awareness and creating a more positive product image of Plan B as something that empowers women to maintain agency over their own bodies and fertility. Read this way, the Plan B campaign depicts the need for emergency contraception as a quintessential experience of the sexually liberated, hypermodern young woman, who simply needs a better consumer education—an education that informs her of her choices, but in a way that simultaneously reminds her of her responsibility to avoid unplanned reproduction and the web of social responsibilities and constraints this would involve.

According to an article published in the November 2008 issue of the Canadian communications industry magazine *Strategy*, the Plan B campaign was conceived by Taxi to resonate with a specific target consumer: “A young, sexually active woman in her early 20s, [who] grew up surrounded by an open attitude towards sex, and *has been socialized to believe that there is a way out of just about anything*” (November 2008: 32, italics added). In a 2009 interview for *Marketing* magazine, strategists from Taxi elaborated on their focus group findings:

This is a generation that believes it will always have the answers to the problems and that nothing is serious. They [young women] think they are invincible. This is why a campaign with a pregnant woman or a baby would not have worked at all. They would not have been receptive, so we had to use a language that reflected the way they experience sexuality. (cited in Ritoux 2009)¹⁸

¹⁸ <http://marketingmag.ca/brands/yes-yeeees-oops-8878/>

If we consider the increase in product awareness and consumption of Plan B to be quantifiable measures of the campaign's success, then the insights of the agency's strategists seem to be accurate characterizations of dominant attitudes held by young women at the time the campaign was created.

Through a somewhat different lens, however, the campaign can also be read as aesthetically negotiating what Lipovetsky (2005) sees as a fundamental paradox of hypermodernity itself, whereby: "The consumerist fever for immediate satisfactions, the aspirations toward a playful and hedonistic lifestyle... are being unleashed more than ever: but they are enveloped in a halo of fears and anxieties (46). Within such a context, emphasis on hedonistic gratifications must be understood as existing in constant tension with the autological preoccupation "to foresee, to forestall, to plan, to prevent: what has taken over our individualized lives is an awareness always building bridges to tomorrow and the day after tomorrow" (47). In this way, "hyperindividualism is less a cult of the present moment than a projection into the future, less festive than hygienic, less a matter of the intense enjoyment of life than of the prevention of problems" (47). Illustrative of this paradox, the Plan B campaign speaks not just to the hedonistic individualism of today, but also to the anxious individualism of tomorrow morning.

Lipovetsky highlights neoliberal processes of intensifying social mobility, job insecurity, economic precarity, and the destructuring of institutional regulation as the root causes of these hypermodern anxieties and insecurities about the future. Along a somewhat different vein, Bauman (2003) argues that the paradoxical experiences of the hypermodern subject must also

be understood in relation to the rise of the network as a dominant form of structuring social relationships within a contemporary context that he refers to as one of “liquid modernity.” As evidence of this increasing networked sociality, Bauman highlights the language used to discuss romantic interaction in the relationship advice columns of popular newspapers and magazines:

[R]ather than report their experience and prospects in terms of ‘relating’ and ‘relationships’, people speak ever more often (aided and abetted by the learned advisers) of connections, of ‘connecting’ and ‘being connected’. Instead of talking about partners, they prefer to speak of ‘networks.’ (xi)

This discursive emphasis on networked sociality, Bauman argues, is a salient indicator of the ways in which collective life is being culturally reimagined, valued, and lived in late capitalist contexts. According to Bauman, ideal social relationships are increasingly described within such contexts in “fluid” terms, whereby individuals learn to seek out “‘top pocket relationships’, of the sort they ‘can bring out when they need them’ but push deep down in the pocket when they do not” (2003: x). Moreover, Bauman observes, this culture of relational fluidity (in both personal and professional lives) is ultimately one characterized by a conceptualization of long-term commitment as “the trap that the endeavour ‘to relate’ should avoid more than any other danger” (ibid). Within such a culture, a number of new relational configurations arise, such as “SDCs – ‘semi-detached couples’—[which] are to be praised as ‘relationship revolutionaries who have burst the suffocating couple bubble’” (ibid). Here I am once again reminded of Jean-Paul’s toast to Caroline and François’ separate living arrangements as a means to “divorce without the divorce.”

In a hyper-networked context of “liquid modernity,” the individual is conceptualized as the central point of a circuit of relationships, with endless possibilities for relational

reconfiguration. This emphasis on the networked self—who in significant ways embodies the liberal ideal of the creative autological subject—contrasts with alternate forms of social organization imagined in terms of permanent belonging to a collectivity, whereby the individual is embedded in relatively stable and clearly defined types of relationships:

Unlike ‘relations’, ‘kinships’, ‘partnerships’, and similar notions that make salient the mutual engagement while excluding or passing over in silence its opposite, the disengagement, ‘network’ stands for a matrix *for simultaneously connecting and disconnecting*; networks are unimaginable without both activities being simultaneously enabled. In a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices, enjoy the same status and carry the same importance.” (Bauman 2003: xii, emphasis added)

These observations have clear resonance to the experiences of the creative ad workers I interviewed and came to know. These include Jean-Paul, but also many others, whose attachments to an idealized creative identity understood in autological terms were also sources of tension, ambivalence, and sometimes crisis in their more longstanding intimate relationships.

Such experiences draw attention to how the stories of intimate connection/disconnection discussed at the dinner party, and expressed in the taglines of the Plan B campaign, register the affective dimensions of “networked” experiences of social belonging (or not belonging). These structures and experiences are ones whereby increasingly “flexible” forms of labour, such as freelancing, as well as high levels of job insecurity, “lateral” career moves, and the acquisition of transferable “soft skills” are encouraged and rewarded as adaptive strategies to meet the needs of a neoliberal capitalist order. It is perhaps then of no surprise that these adaptive strategies also inform the ways in which *good creatives* (i.e. individuals who are exceptionally flexible, productive, and capable of recuperating novel cultural aesthetics for corporate profit and their

own career advancement) pursue an idealized autological existence in ways that transfer into other aspects of their lives.

The impacts of networked sociality on experiences of personhood are inherently contradictory in their consequences for the hyper-modern creative subject. On the one hand, building and maintaining a large network acts as a social safety net, in the sense that unfulfilling or unproductive relationships can be more easily discarded/disconnected from if one has options for other more desirable connections. In this sense, a robust social network endows the individual with a potentially liberating social flexibility that is, in theory, compatible with an idealized autological subjectivity. On the other hand, however, in a context where cultivating extensive social networks is an adaptive response to socio-economic instability and risk, relationships between hyper-networked selves are also paradoxically rendered more fragile because, while I might be at the center of my own network, I am simply one node in others' networks. Put differently: at the same time that the networked subject may be reassured by the safety net of her own network (which theoretically guarantees one's freedom to disconnect from/in relationships that become constraining), the networks of *other subjects* simultaneously exist as unsettling reminders of the ease with which one's self may also be just as readily *disconnected from*. Reminders of the latter sort trouble our assertions of autological autonomy; they highlight how life is inescapably—perhaps *inconveniently*—one of “*nonsovereign relationality*” (Berlant 2022: x, italics added).¹⁹

¹⁹ On this point, Berlant writes: “Experiencing nonsovereign relationality—the inconvenience of other people—is inevitably a feature of the sensual ordinary of the world” (2022: x). The autological insistence on self-sovereignty and autonomy as conditions of freedom is therefore often devastatingly violent—not just because we *desire* and

In previous chapters I explored how dominant discourses and practices of creativity in autological terms simultaneously respond to and sustain corporate structures that intensify conditions of socio-economic precarity among certain subsets of a “creative class.” I also discussed how the frustrations and anxieties of freelancing and “ageing out” are often spoken about in terms of becoming creatively “irrelevant”—a worried discourse that reflects an attunement to the affective atmospheres born of the hyper-networked forms of sociality described above. In this chapter I have considered how tensions within intimate relationships and sexual encounters contribute and respond to this atmosphere.

Allow me to return to the hedonistic thread of the dinner party a final time, as it was picked up (and at) in a conversation I had with Carmen in April 2014, at an after-party for the Créa awards:

Soirée Créa. After-party at the SAT. I bump into Carmen, smoking outside on the terrasse.

We speak about the evening’s awards, and about her new position at a different agency. She seems to be enjoying some success in her work—one of the campaigns she worked on won an award tonight. Still, she seems restless. She tells me she’s thinking of moving to Toronto, or even New York City, where the agency she now works for has offices.

When I ask her if she is still in touch with Jean-Paul, she confesses to me that she had been in an “on-again, off-again” relationship with him for over a year, around the time of the dinner party. When Jean-Paul quit the agency where they worked together in order to “go freelance,” he ended their relationship for good.

I must look surprised, because Carmen then asks me whether Jean-Paul had ever spoken to me about his relationship with her. I reply that he had not. (What I don’t say is that Jean-Paul *did* often speak to me about his intimate relationships, but often in the abstract: “I’m seeing a woman right now who used to be in the Cirque de Soleil,” or “This woman I’m seeing is fantastic—she never asks to see me more than once a week”).

depend upon others, but because autological ideals of self are continuously confronted by “the inescapability of being the inconvenient ones” (ibid).

What I say to Carmen instead is: "Jean-Paul is pretty discreet about these things."

Carmen laughs. "Do you know what they used to call him at the agency?" she asks me. "The panty-melter."

Lowering her voice, Carmen then says: "If you're interested in the culture of advertising creatives, this is part of it. So here it is: When I met Jean-Paul, I was smitten. He's hot, right? Like for an older guy, I mean. You know what I mean. Everyone knows he is. At first, when we started sleeping together, I was really flattered. Like I was special or something. What a cliché, right?"

Carmen seems to be waiting for a reply. So I say: "I don't know. Seems like a pretty normal human response, to be flattered when someone likes us back."

"Yeah, that's a nice way to see it. But really, I was naïve. Because when Jean-Paul first hired me, there was this period of a few months, before we started sleeping together, when he was so... attentive. When I would talk he looked at me like I was the most brilliant person in the world. Like nobody else was in the room. And there was all this sexual tension, of course. But then after we started sleeping together more regularly, do you know what happened?"

"No." I'm guessing it wasn't good.

"He wanted to see me less, not more," Carmen continues. She pauses. "It was like he had taken me for a test drive, and found me lacking. Like I was missing heated leather seats, or a sunroof or something."

Carmen finishes her cigarette, and flicks it into the street. "Each time I broke it off, he'd suddenly start paying attention again. But whenever I reciprocated his interest, his would evaporate." Carmen lowers her voice to then tell me: "The most insulting part was when I got knocked up. I scheduled an abortion before I even told Jean-Paul. But he insisted on coming with me. At the time, I thought he was being nice. But now I think it was mostly because he wanted to be sure I went through with it. When I came back into the waiting room, do you know the first thing he said to me? 'You should have taken a Plan B.' Just like that, in front of everyone."

I ask Carmen how she responded.

"I told him he made a hell of a pitch."

"What happened afterwards?" I ask.

"I'm pretty sure he had already moved on to someone else before we even left the clinic. He probably had a dinner date that very night. Jean-Paul always has a plan b."

In writing this chapter years later, I reach out to Carmen. I knew she had moved to New York, but not that she had returned to Montreal. We catch up. She describes "loving" her new job as a creative director, despite her early "growing pains" in the industry. She tells me that she cringes when she thinks about the naïve expectations she had in her relationship with Jean-Paul. "I totally mismanaged that whole thing," she says. "I wouldn't become that attached to a person who can't reciprocate today. Plus, I know my worth now." I note her rationalizations, her market language.

I want to ask Carmen whether she's comfortable with me writing about her story, given how intimate it is. She tells me yes, but that (in good autological fashion) she wants to choose her own pseudonym. In an e-mail later on, Carmen writes to me: "Sure, you can write about this. Honestly I think it's a good story. But don't make it read like a #MeToo story because it absolutely wasn't that. There was full consent. It was messy and painful, but it wasn't abusive."

I write back to Carmen, asking her what she thinks her story *is* about. She replies: "I had a real connection with Jean-Paul. I know because I lived it. It ended terribly, but there were some wonderful moments in there. We had a lot of fun. I see him every now and then. Platonically. We're not close but I'm glad we salvaged a bit of friendship."

A day later, I receive another email from Carmen: "I've been thinking more about your question. Have you read Tiqqun's *Theory of the Young-Girl*? I still stand by my original response. I think that Jean-Paul and I really cared about each other, for a while. The more distance I get

from it, the more I see it in those really simple terms. But the story is also about all the stuff in *Theory of the Young-Girl*. Can it be about both of these things at once?"

I buy the book. The author is not an individual, but a collective of authors and activists.²⁰ The text is not linear. It is noisy. It is a "jumble of fragments," the authors tell the reader: "These are materials accumulated by chance encounter, by frequenting and observing Young-Girls" (20). It matches the spectacular aesthetics of modern advertising. Much of the text is taglines, soundbites. Reading it feels assaulting.²¹

I read around the book: the *MIT Press* webpage describes the work as "A theoretical dissection of capitalism's ultimate form of merchandise: the living spectacle of the Young-Girl." I am looking for clues, for the answers Carmen finds between these pages: "Tracing consumer society's colonization of youth and sexuality through the Young-Girl's 'freedom' (in magazine terms) to do whatever she wants with her body, Tiqqun exposes the rapaciously competitive and psychically ruinous landscape of modern love."²²

I arrange a call with Carmen to discuss it. We read each other quotes aloud. We let them hang in the air between us. We stick to the book's form, to its *trash theory*, resisting the "ruse of theoreticians" (21).²³ Eventually, Carmen selects a quote on page 133, and reads aloud:

²⁰ See McDonough (2011) for a biographical profile and history of Tiqqun membership.

²¹ The English translation of *Theory of a Young-Girl* for MIT's Semiotext(e)/Intervention Series, which I read, was written by the poet Ariana Reines. In *Triple Canopy*, Reines writes about her experience of working on the text: "translating this book made me sick. I mean it gave me migraines, made me puke; I couldn't sleep at night, regressed into totally out-of-character sexual behavior."

https://canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/preliminary_materials_for_a_theory_of_the_young_girl?schema:keywords=tc:tag_power

²² <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9781584351085/preliminary-materials-for-a-theory-of-the-young-girl/>

²³ In "Preliminaries" (the opening, more narrative section of the book), Tiqqun describes resisting the theoreticians' "ruse" because it "resides, generally, in the presentation of the result of their deliberations such that the process of

For the Young-Girl, as for the man in power, who in every way resemble each other when they don't simply coincide, de-subjection cannot avoid a collapse, a collapse *in oneself*. Differences in the height of the fall simply measure the gulf between the fullness of social being and the extreme anemia of singular being; in other words, finally, the poverty of the relation to the self. And yet, there is, in the one's destitution, the *power* that lacks in the completeness of the other. (133, italics in original)

Carmen waits a moment, and then says: "Well. That seems like a good place to end."

Unresolved reflections

Upon reconnecting with Carmen, I was surprised to hear her speak about working in advertising as a source of personal fulfilment (i.e. "loving" her job). This marked a considerable shift, it seemed to me, from the dissatisfaction she described when I first met her a decade ago, at the start of her career. It was paralleled by an equally remarkable shift in the language she used in order to make sense of her past relationship with Jean-Paul—a shift that involved a move away from her earlier emphasis on the violence of Jean-Paul's refusal (or inability) to *intimately recognize* her subjectivity, towards an emphasis on her own *mismanagement of self* in intimate attachment as the source of her suffering. While at one level these shifts may be born of a critical distance gained through the passage of time and greater lived experience, at another level they speak to how neoliberal rationalities are increasingly brought to bear upon the most intimate relationships that people form with another—and with *themselves*—in hyper-capitalist conditions.

deliberation is no longer apparent. We figure that, faced with Bloomesque fragmentation of attention, this ruse no longer works. We have chosen a different one. In these scattered fragments, spirits attracted to moral comfort or vice in need of condemning will find only roads leading nowhere. It is less a question of converting Young-Girls than of mapping out the dark corners of the fractalized frontline of Young-Girlization." (21, italics in original)

With this in mind, I find it equally significant that Carmen wrote back to me after further reflection in order to insist that the matter of her relationship with Jean-Paul (or, more specifically, the matter of its failure), be left a little more *unresolved* than she initially conveyed. In trying to make sense of Carmen's second reflection, I see two different avenues of interpretation, both of which raise questions about the experience of desubjectification and its effects on the self.

First, from one perspective, Carmen's reinterpretation of her (failed) relationship with Jean-Paul could be read as a decidedly autological *refusal to be desubjectified* (i.e. to suffer a loss of a sense of self, or identity) as a result of the power dynamics that shaped their sexual relationship.²⁴ This refusal is apparent in Carmen's insistence on the *reciprocal care* that existed between them, as evidence of a mutually intimate recognition. Here I see Carmen's rise in professional status as *intimately related* to the way in which she now makes sense of her "mismanaged" vulnerability in intimate attachment to Jean-Paul, as one of *personal failure* in asserting her own self-sovereignty. Put differently, in both her personal and professional life, Carmen is now better able to *perform herself* in ideal autological terms. But, I am reticent to suggest that in subjectifying herself in this way, Carmen is deceiving herself or denying that broader social forces play a role in shaping her personal life. Rather, it seems to me that her cognitive reframing of her experience is a highly adaptive response to the precarity of social relationships in neoliberal contexts, where intimacy's "potential failure to stabilize closeness

²⁴ Here, I am aware that Foucault's theory of desubjectivation centres on the more positive sexual *pleasure* to be derived in "the affirmation of non-identity" (Gautam 2016: 29). Without disputing the validity of this theory—nor the possibility that such a pleasure may even have played a role in the sexual dynamics of Carmen's relationship with Jean-Paul—the way in which Carmen spoke of her experience both in the immediate aftermath of their failed intimacy, as well as years later, emphasized it to be one of a suffering born of a lack of mutual recognition.

always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress ‘a life’ seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability” (Berlant 1998: 282).

A somewhat different interpretation can be made, however, if we also consider that a second desubjectivation occurred the moment Carmen *wrote back* to me, rethinking her experience in conversation with Tiqqun. In this second instance, it seems to me that Carmen refuses to contain herself within the contours of the neoliberal autological subject—to remain within, in other words, the limits of market rationality. This is a decidedly more ambiguous move, and not just because *Theory of the Young-Girl* is a decidedly ambiguous text. This is a move that requires us to join Carmen in re-thinking what her desire for and experiences of intimacy with Jean-Paul meant, as ones of *nonsovereign relationality*. There are power dynamics to this, certainly, as well as an unequal distribution of freedom and autonomy that informed who determined the “terms,” so to speak, of their intimacy. But, as Tiqqun observes in the passage Carmen selects, it is not just the figure of the Young-Girl who “cannot avoid a collapse... *in oneself*”—it is also “the man in power” (133).

Why does Carmen find this passage so resonant with her own experience? The way that Jean-Paul intimately (and repeatedly) detached from Carmen was clearly destructive for her sense of self. This was evident in how she initially spoke about the consequences of this desubjectification: namely, as a fall in status from that of an exceptional subject *recognized as such* in intimate relation (“he looked at me like I was the most brilliant person in the world. Like nobody else was in the room”), to that of a commodity to be consumed and discarded (“It was like he had taken me for a test drive, and found me lacking. Like I was missing heated leather

seats, or a sunroof or something”). This experience of commodification is one point of resonance; as McDonough (2011) writes, Tiqqun’s theory of the Young-Girl documents and presents a rallying cry against the “self-fetishisation” of late stage capitalism:

If durable goods (most paradigmatically, automobiles) were the star commodities of Fordist production, today we produce selfhood—the sense of ‘possessing’ autonomous agency, youthful beauty, personality. The ‘Young-Girl’ epitomises this condition of self-fetishisation, of the reification of subjectivity itself, within the West’s current regime of immaterial labour. (50)

For Tiqqun, then, desubjectivation is *positively defined* as a form of resistance to this “self-fetishisation” through which many different kinds of selves (not just girls) are *subjectified* into “Young-Girls.”²⁵

Reading Tiqqun, I think that Carmen sought another language to understand the affective experience of *being desubjectified*, in terms that escape the “market rationality” of neoliberal agency. We cannot disregard Carmen’s initial comments (she tells us not to)—comments that unambiguously describe her relationship with Jean-Paul as being fully consensual, caring, fun (until it was not). It is possible, in fact, that what Carmen sought to make sense of in reading Tiqqun was not how she was desubjectified by Jean-Paul, but how and why *she was complicit* in her own desubjectification.

I do not wish to suggest that in the act of reading Tiqqun, Carmen burnt her autological subjectivity to the ground, and then rose from the ashes. Far from it: she continues to work in advertising and, last I checked, “manage” her intimate attachments the best she can while

²⁵ As McDonough describes, for Tiqqun “the Young-Girl is by no means intended as a gender-specific term—it does not refer only to women, but is rather a cipher for the construction of a fungible post-Fordist subject within a commodified and image-based late capitalist social order” (2011: 50). In her reading of the ways in which the content and style of *Theory of the Young-Girl* seems to contradict Tiqqun’s own claim, as well as in her critique of the book as a whole, I tend to agree with Power (2013).

maintaining her sense (fantasy?) of self-sovereignty. Rather, I offer these tentative interpretations as attempts to capture the contradictions and ambivalence of Carmen's response; a response that recognizes both the care and complicity of her relationship with Jean-Paul *as well as* the suffering she endured. Though Carmen remains intimately attached to her sense of self as (creative) autological subject, the reflections she makes signal a curiosity about—perhaps a *desire for*—desubjectivation.

It is a reflexive response that remains productively unresolved.

Conclusion

Why is creativity such an impelling ideal within hyper-capitalist fields of aesthetic production, like advertising? How does the desire to *be creative* harness individuals to neoliberal social arrangements and processes of capitalist recuperation? What is the particular resonance of the creative ideal in Montreal, a city often seen within Canada as the exceptionally creative epicentre of cultural production for a distinctive Québécois society?

In answering these questions, this dissertation has described how people employed in Montreal advertising imagine creativity as an exceptional form of personhood and regularly invoke the concept in practices of individual and class distinction. Through ethnographic attention to such practices, I demonstrated how ad workers' claims to creativity reflect broader neoliberal rationalities that harness optimistic desires for creative flourishing and recognition to increasingly precarious socio-economic arrangements and structures of inequality. Through interviews with creative ad workers, analysis of industry discourses, and observation of both the everyday interactions as well as the more spectacular forums of sociality that characterize the industry, I have argued that valuations of creativity as a distinct (and distinguishing) form of human capital are key to understanding processes of neoliberal subjectification in late capitalist contexts, like Montreal today.

At the same time, in seeking to understand the affective experiences of ad workers as they aspire to an idealized creative good life, my research also speaks to how the concept of creativity is given meaning as the expression of a freedom and autonomy that *resists* the alienations and utilitarian reductions of capitalism. This was apparent to me as of the first

interview I conducted with Grégoire (see Introduction), who told me that he decided to become a creative ad worker after first working in marketing on “the client side.” Grégoire described his desire to be on the *other side* of the table as one of rejecting a decidedly *uncreative* (unimaginative, inhibited, rule-bound) corporate role in favour of the freer, agency-employed “creative” whose thinking “escapes” the straight line of market rationality. Over the course of my research, it became clear that addressing these associations between creativity and the freedom of the autological subject was necessary in order understand how and why the desire to be *a* creative encourages people to engage in patterns of behaviour, modes of relating, and forms of aesthetic production that impede rather than sustain conditions of collective flourishing.

Understanding the layered and sometimes contradictory meanings associated with being creative in Montreal advertising requires attending to creativity as a genealogical construct. In Chapters 1 and 2, I outlined key historical developments through which emergent theorizations of creativity in early modern Europe imbued the concept with a set of tensions rooted in the foundational dialectics of an Enlightenment ideology of the aesthetic. I demonstrated how Enlightenment interest in the *creative imagination* was then elaborated as a distinctive form of *individual genius* over the course of the nineteenth century. These elaborations were vital ways through which creativity was ideologically associated to an active (and masculine) form of individual agency, in dialogue with the accelerations of industrial capitalism. Through such processes, an idealized state (and status) of *being creative* became intimately associated with what Povinelli (2006) terms the “autological subject” of Western liberalism—that is, a subject that is self-made, self-sovereign, and thus firmly positioned at one end of liberalism’s binary construction of individual freedom versus social constraint. Discussing these developments, I

traced how creativity was consequently embedded into a set of nested liberal binaries; in subsequent chapters I demonstrated these binaries to be of ongoing relevance to the ways that creativity is understood and invoked in Montreal advertising today.

Chapter 3 addressed the Quiet Revolution as a pivotal period in which an ideology of creative exceptionalism was embraced by francophone advertising professionals and stakeholders in Quebec as they sought to establish Québécois-owned agencies and increase advertising production in the province. This occurred alongside broader historical developments that shaped an increasingly globalized advertising industry in the 1960s and 70s—a period considered, in emic terms, as one of “creative revolution” characterized by considerable institutional and ideological changes. Building on existing research into the historical evolution and current socio-economic influence of Montreal’s “creative industries” (Gélinas and Bélanger 2022; Leslie and Rantisi 2006, 2012), I highlighted how Québécois advertising professionals played a key role in expanding corporate capitalist power within the province by promoting their industry as central to the project of Quebec sovereignty.

In Chapter 4 I documented more recent efforts to “brand” Montreal as an exceptional “creative city,” using C2MTL as a window onto the contemporary class politics that inform such initiatives. I described the spectacular aesthetics of “creative class” belonging that can be observed at this and similar events, and argued that these aesthetic experiences work alongside discourses and practices of creative professionalization that reinforce capitalist mythologies of class meritocracy and frame intensifying socio-economic inequalities as the natural outcome of innate individual abilities and distributions of creative “talent.” The observations I make of these

aesthetics, discourses, and practices provide ethnographic insight into how a neoliberal “creativity dispositif” is translated into the Montreal context by local advertising stakeholders with the support of state funding and in partnership with other public and private institutions. In so doing, I contribute to an existing body of scholarship that similarly explores how the call to *be creative* functions as a new form of governmentality in late capitalist contexts (Lazzarato 2017; Lorey 2015; McRobbie 2016; Raunig, Ray and Wuggenig 2011; Reckwitz 2017).

Celebratory events like C2MTL only present part of the picture, however. In Chapter 5 I described how ad workers variously speak about and depict advertising as a site of ethical discomfort, as an industry that limits creative opportunity according to race, gender, and class privilege, and as an increasingly precarious career choice. I documented how different individuals attempt to reconcile these more ambivalent experiences with tenacious attachments to *being creative*, often by drawing on neoliberal rationalities and understandings of creativity as the evidence and expression of autological subjectivity.

In Chapter 6 I explored how an ideology of creative exceptionalism, nurtured by the institutional practices and discourses described in previous chapters, comes to inform the ways that ad workers form relationships with others in the more intimate domains of their personal lives. In particular, I observed how the ad workers I knew spoke about and *worried over* their sexual relationships and practices, as these revealed the limits of autological subjectivity and the “nonsovereign relationality” of social life (Berlant 2022). I argued that in their focus on intimacy as a site of social crisis, stories of sexual encounters recounted amongst peers and colleagues registered pervasive anxieties about the impacts of “hypermodern” patterns of relating on the

fabric of social life. They also record the affectively-charged ways in which people come to understand themselves *as subjects* in intimate relation to—and in definition *against*—others.

Critiquing creativity: limits and possibilities

Taken together, these chapters document how creativity in Montreal advertising is encountered as a *dispositif*—an assemblage of institutional structures, discourses, policies, and aesthetic practices that encourage ad workers to imagine and construct themselves as particular kinds of subjects. In seeking to understand how this *dispositif* compels individuals to embrace neoliberal rationalities and arrangements by fashioning themselves into *good creatives*, I turned a critical lens towards creativity as a particular ethnographic object. This lens was useful in illuminating how an ideology of creative exceptionalism relates to (neo)liberal fantasies of autological subjectivity in ways that were born of and remain embedded in a politics of class distinction. It also allowed for a number of observations to be made about how creative subjectification buttresses neoliberal structures of power and impacts individual and collective life.

Contributing to a scholarly “critique of creativity” (Mould 2018; Raunig, Ray and Wuggenig 2011) was not my primary goal at the outset of my research. Rather, this critical focus emerged as I tried to make sense of how a widespread cultural veneration of creativity in Montreal’s advertising industry was accompanied by more ambivalent experiences shaped by tacit cultural beliefs about who and what is considered exceptionally creative. Over time, I became increasingly more attuned to the tensions that variously animated and frustrated different ad workers’ desires to *be creative*, noting how the affective atmosphere that

surrounded the experience, valuation, and promotion of creativity in advertising (and in Montreal more broadly) was often one of frenetic excitement, but also just as often one of anxiety and disappointment. Critical theorizations of creativity as *dispositif* helped me to identify the sources of these tensions and deepened my understanding of their cultural consequences.

But this critique has its limits. For this reason, I would like to end with an anecdote that speaks to these limits: specifically, to how the desire or impulse to be creative, even in hyper-capitalist fields like advertising, cannot be fully understood through a theory of subjectification. Addressing these limits can help to recognize experiential dimensions of creative practice that are not bound to the fantasy of the autological subject, valued as capital, or imagined as a marker of individual or class distinction.

As I entered into the final stages of writing this dissertation, I had several of my key interlocutors read drafts of chapters. These readers paid particular attention to sections in which they appear, in transcribed interviews and narrative descriptions, and often tried to identify colleagues and peers by deconstructing composite characters or unmasking identities protected by pseudonyms. Some offered additional ethnographic detail to further illustrate key points. Others prompted me to nuance arguments in order to better capture the complexity of lived experiences and attitudes. Mostly, however, these readings led to reflexive conversations informed by differing political views about the relative virtues and vices of capitalism, that spoke to different aesthetic educations and professional formations, and that further illuminated the tenacity with which ad workers remain attached to their identities as creative people, and to hopes for freer creative lives.

One of these conversations I had was with Jean-Paul. In discussing how the privileges and freedoms associated with creative exceptionalism are buttressed by structures of class, race, and gender power, Jean-Paul insisted that the most successful creatives in advertising nevertheless “rise to the top” because of their unique individual creative talents, not because of structural advantage. In this conversation, a decade after my fieldwork, Jean-Paul acknowledged that systemic forms of discrimination do exist within the industry, and that nepotism sometimes plays a role in “opening doors” and according professional opportunities to specific individuals. He also maintained that these factors do not adequately explain why some creative ad workers are more capable than others of making *truly creative* advertising. He spoke to me at length about the *satisfaction* to be had in the process of advertising conception and creation—a process that involves generating ideas for commodity images and messages that meet the constraints of the client, while also (ideally) producing novel aesthetic experience for the viewer/consumer. A good commercial, he said, needs to resonate with *and* surprise the consumer. He then e-mailed me links to a collection of funny, clever, and emotionally resonant commercials that he thought were exemplarily creative. I enjoyed watching them.

The satisfaction Jean-Paul takes in engaging in the conception and production of advertising—as well as how he looks for evidence of creativity in advertising made by others—should not be disregarded. It speaks to a playful dimension of *being creative* that this dissertation examines less closely than it does the politics of how creativity is harnessed to capitalist interests in ways that accord certain individuals more agency and opportunity to actually *enjoy* being creative in their everyday lives. Anthropological inquiry into the experiential

process (rather than the subjectivity) of being creative invites a different way of thinking about creativity—one that engages in dialogue with Jean-Paul’s passion for working in advertising.

In her study of the singing practices of Kangra women in Northern India, for example, Narayan (2016) suggests that everyday creativity can be productively understood as a site of cultural *improvisation*—what she describes as “playing with possibilities within cultural rules” (29). Similarly, Ingold and Hallam (2007) describe the improvisational power of creativity as one of “adjustment and response to the conditions of a world in-formation,” rather one of “liberation from the constraints of a world that is already made” (3). These other ways of thinking about what creativity is, and about what it can or should *do*, pushes back against the modern insistence on creativity as *innovation*—an insistence that creativity be dedicated to “making something radically new” (Narayan 29). Despite the predominance of industry discourses and practices that emphasize the latter, I see Jean-Paul’s description of the satisfaction he derives from ad work as illustrating the kind of *improvisational* engagement that such anthropologists identify and recognize as something that cultivates a sense of individual flourishing—what Narayan describes as “bestow[ing] a feeling of wholeness” (31).

Jean-Paul’s response to this dissertation invites further attention to how advertising production offers possibilities for “creatives” (the good ones, at least) to experience this wholeness. It also invites further questions: What happens when opportunities for such flourishing are *limited* to particular social spaces, institutions, and socio-economic groups? What happens when being creative is imagined primarily as evidence and expression of an exceptional personhood, instead of as a universal human impulse to cultural improvisation that offers

possibilities for enacting agency in the world? What happens to the particular kinds of fulfillment—to the sense of *wholeness*—that derive from the improvisations of everyday creativity, when we are oriented instead towards constant innovation, production, and novelty? This dissertation suggests that the impacts on collective life are considerable, and merit ongoing critical enquiry.

References

- Abelson, Elaine S. *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Abrams, M.H. 2012. *The Fourth Dimension of a Poem, and Other Essays*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- .1985a. "Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics." *Bulletin of the American Academic of Arts and Sciences* 38(6): 8-33.
- .1985b. "From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and the Exemplary Art." In R. Cohen (ed.), *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 16-48.
- 1953. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Adorno, Theodor W. 1997 [1970]. *Aesthetic Theory*. (Adorno, Gretel and Rolf Tiedemann, eds.). Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: The Athlone Press.
- Allison, Anne. 2013. *Precarious Japan*. Durham: Duke UP.
- Amabile, Teresa. 1996. *Creativity in Context*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- .1989. *Growing Up Creative: Nurturing a Lifetime of Creativity*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- .1983. *The Social Psychology of Creativity*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Amabile, Teresa and Steve J. Kramer. 2011. *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Anderson, Ben. 2009. "Affective Atmospheres." *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2009): 77-81.
- Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury. 2001 [1732; 1711]. [C] *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, with a forward by Douglas Den Uyl (in three volumes), Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001. Accessed online at: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/shaftesbury-characteristicks-of-men-manners-opinions-times-3-vols>
- .2017 [1710]. *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*. In the version by Jonathan Bennett presented at www.earlymoderntexts.com
- Arjomand, Noah Amir. 2022. "Figuring Ethnographic Fiction." *American Anthropologist* website, March 19. www.americananthropologist.org/online-content/figuring-ethnographic-fiction.
- Arrighi, Giovanni, Kenneth Barr and Shuji Hisaeda. 1999. "The Transformation of Business Empire". In G. Arrighi and B. Silver (eds.), *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 97-150.

Asselin, Olivier. 2012. "Carré rouge. Le destin politique d'une forme colorée." *Theory and Event* 15(3), 2012 supplement.

Association des Agences de Communication Créative. 2015 (November 10). "Présentation du portrait de l'industrie de la communication marketing au Québec." Accessed online: <https://a2c.quebec/uploads/medias/pres-a2c-portrait-industrie-communication-marketing-quebec-ccmm.pdf>.

Association of Canadian Advertisers. 2021. "Global DEI Census: Canada Market Report." Accessed online: <https://acaweb.ca/en/resource/dei-census-canada-report/>.

Baillargeon, Denyse. 2014. *A Brief History of Women in Quebec*. Translated by W. Donald Wilson. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984 [1965]. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

Barney, Darin. 2012. "The Truth of the *le printemps érables*." *Theory and Event* 15(3), 2012 supplement.

Baudelaire, Charles. 1995[1863]. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated by Jonathan Mayne. London: Phaidon Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2011 (June 14). "On the Unclass of Precarians." *Social Europe*. Accessed online: <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2011/06/on-the-unclass-of-precarians/>.
— .2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Baumgarten, Alexander. 1961 [1750]. *Aesthetica*. Hildesheim : Georg Olms.

Beckert, Sven. 2014a. "Empire of Cotton." *The Atlantic*. December 12, 2014.
— .2014b. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.

Belisle, Donica. 2001. *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 2009 [1963]. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. New York: Verso.
— .2006. *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*. Cambridge: Belknap.
— .1999. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughling. Cambridge: Belknap.
— .1997. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. H. Zohn. London: Verso.
— .1969. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". In H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*. Translated by H. Zohn.

- Berg, Maxine and Helen Clifford. 2007. "Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France". *Cultural and Social History* 4(2): 145-170.
- Berlant, Lauren. 2022. *On the Inconvenience of Other People*. Durham: Duke UP.
- . 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP.
- . 2007. "Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in *La Promsse* and *Rosetta*." *Public Culture* 19(2): 273-301.
- . 1998. "Intimacy: A Special Issue." *Critical Inquiry* 24(2): 281-288.
- Berlin, Isaiah. 2013. *The Roots of Romanticism* (Second Edition). H. Hardy (ed.). Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Berman, Marshall. 1982. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso.
- Bernays, Edward. 1928. *Propaganda*. Brooklyn, NY: IG Publishing.
- Blanning, Tim. 2012. *The Romantic Revolution: A History*. New York: Modern Library.
- . 2002. (Guest). "The Artist." *In Our Time* (BBC). Podcast audio, March 28, 2002.
- Bogart, Michele H. 1995. *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Borduas, Paul-Émile. 2010. *Refus global et autres écrits*. Montreal: Éditions TYPO.
- Bouchard, Jacques. 2014. *The 36 Heartstrings of Quebecers*. Translated by Lawrence Creaghan. Published online with the permission of Guérin Éditeur Ltée and the Fondation Jacques-Bouchard. https://creaghan.ca/36/index_files/index.htm
- . 1978. *Les 36 cordes sensibles Québécois d'après leurs six racines vitales*. Saint-Lambert, Quebec: Les Éditions Héritage Inc.
- Boulton, Christopher. 2020 (July 23). "Corporate ads said Black Lives Matter. But the industry creating them is nearly all white." *NBC News*. Accessed online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/corporate-ads-said-black-lives-matter-industry-creating-them-nearly-ncna1231540>.
- Bourassa, André-G. 1984. *Surrealism and Quebec Literature: History of a Cultural Revolution*. Toronto: Toronto UP.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford UP.
- . 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- .1984[1979]. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- Boutin, Aimée. 2012. "Rethinking the Flâneur: Flâneurie and the Senses". *Dix-Neuf* 16(2): 124-132.
- Bowlby, Rachel. 2001. *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Boyer, Dominic. 2008. "Thinking through the Anthropology of Experts". *Anthropology in Action* 15(2): 38-46.
- . 2013. *The Life Informatic: Newsmaking in the Digital Era*. Ithica: Cornell UP.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. 1983. *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.
- Bratton, Benjamin. 2013 (December 30). "We Need to Talk About TED." *The Guardian*. Accessed online: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/30/we-need-to-talk-about-ted>.
- Broadbent Institute. 2014a (December). *The Wealth Gap: Perceptions and Misconceptions in Canada*. Ottawa: Broadbent Institute. Accessed online: https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/the_wealth_gap.
- .2014b (September). *Have and Have Nots: Deep and Persistent Wealth Inequality in Canada*. Ottawa: Broadbent Institute: Accessed online: https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/haves_and_have_nots.
- Brooks, David. 2021. "How the Bobos Broke America." *The Atlantic* (September 2021 issue). Accessed online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/09/blame-the-bobos-creative-class/619492/>.
- Brousseau-Pouliot, Vincent. 2011 (October 5). "C2-MTL : faire de Montréal le Davos de la créativité. » *La Presse*. Accessed online : <https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/economie/201110/05/01-4454351-c2-mtl-faire-de-montreal-le-davos-de-la-creativite.php>.
- Brown, David. 2014 (October 7). "30 Under 30: Andrée-Anne Hallé." *Marketing Magazine*. Accessed online: <http://marketingmag.ca/advertising/30-under-30-andree-anne-halle-126252/>.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1992. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered". *October* 62: 3-41.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

- Burton, Tara Isabella. 2016. "Bowie, Wilde, and the Fin de Siècle Dandies." JSTOR Daily. Accessed online: <https://daily.jstor.org/bowie-fin-de-siecle-dandies/>.
- C2Montreal. 2014. "C2MTL sets new global benchmark." Accessed online: <https://www.c2montreal.com/press-releases/c2mtl-sets-new-global-benchmark-yet/#/>.
- Campbell, Colin. 2018. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, second edition. New Haven, CT: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Campbell, Stephen. 2018. *Border Capitalism, Disrupted: Precarity and Struggle in a Southeast Asian Industrial Zone*. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Carter, Karen L. 2012. "The Spectatorship of the 'Affiche Illustrée' and the Modern City of Paris, 1880-1900". *Journal of Design History* 25(1): 11-31.
- Cohen, Howie. 2019. *I Can't Believe I Lived the Whole Thing : A Memoir from the Golden Age of Advertising*. Van Nuys CA: Red Rascal Press.
- Cohendet, Patrick, David Grandadam and Laurent Simon. 2010. "The Anatomy of the Creative City." *Industry and Innovation* 17(1): 91-111.
- Cohendet, Patrick and Salomon Zapata. 2009. "Innovation and Creativity: Is there economic significance to the *creative city*?" *Management International* 13: 23-36.
- Coleman, Gabriella. 2009. "Code is Speech: Legal Tinkering, Expertise, and Protest among Free and Open Source Software Developers." *Cultural Anthropology* 24(3): 420-454.
- Crary, Jonathan. 2001. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Chambre de Commerce du Montréal Métropolitain (CCMM). 2013. *The Creative Industries : Catalysts of Wealth and Influence for Metropolitan Montréal*. Retrieved online: https://www.ccmm.ca/externe/pdf/creative_industries_study.pdf
- Chu, Jeff. 2014. "Toward the Common Good". *C2MAG* (2014): 18-24.
- Church, Jeffrey. 2007. "Selfish and Moral Politics: David Hume on Stability and Cohesion in the Modern State." *The Journal of Politics* 69(1): 169-181.
- Costin, Cathy Lynne and Michael C. Ennis-McMillan. 2021. "Creativity and Innovation: Anthropological Perspectives." *Open Anthropology* 9(2).

- Crann, Justin. 2021 (October 19). "Pay gaps based on ethnicity and gender prominent in Canadian advertising." *Strategy*. Accessed online: <https://strategyonline.ca/2021/10/19/pay-gaps-based-on-ethnicity-and-gender-prominent-in-canadian-advertising/>.
- Cukier, Katherine. 2015 (April 3). "Opinion: The 'gated communities' of education in Quebec." *Montreal Gazette*. <http://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/opinion-the-gated-communities-of-education-in-quebec>. Accessed July 11, 2015.
- . 2012, October 13. "Quebec's Subsidized Private Schools: The Elephant Lurking Inside the Student Movement." *Montreal Teachers 4 Change.org*. <http://montrealteachers4change.org/2012/10/13/quebecs-subsidized-private-schools-the-elephant-lurking-inside-the-student-movement/>. Accessed July 8, 2015.
- Debord, Guy. 1998. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. London: Verso.
- . 1983 [1970]. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black and Red.
- Della Famina, Jerry and Charles Sopkin. 1970. *From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor; Front-Line Dispatches from the Advertising War*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Depero, Fortunato. 1999 [1929]. "Outline of the art of Advertising Manifesto". In M. Beirut, J. Helfand, S. Heller and R. Poyner (eds.), *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*. New York: Allworth Press. Pp. 41-42.
- Dickie, George. 1996. *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Donougho, Martin. 2016. "Shaftesbury as Virtuoso: Or, the Birth of Aesthetics Out of a Spirit of Civility". In Garry L. Hagberg (ed.), *Fictional Characters, Real Problems: The Search for Ethical Content in Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP. Pp. 325-339.
- Ducas, Marie-Claude. 2014. *Jacques Bouchard: le père de la publicité québécoise*. Montreal: Québec Amérique.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Elkin, Frederick. 1973. *Rebels and Colleagues: Advertising and Social Change in French Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.
- Ellis, Kathryn. 2018 (May 30). "Where do all the women in advertising go?" *Campaign*. Accessed online: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/women-advertising-go/1466097>.
- Engell, James. 1981. *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

- ÉTS & McGill. (2012). *Quartier de l'innovation: Un écosystème urbain pour l'innovation*. Montréal : ÉTS; MCGILL.
- Evans, Richardson. 1893. *The Age of Disfigurement*. London: Remington & Co.
- Ewen, Stuart. 2001 [1976]. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fahrni, Magda and Robert Rutherford. 2008. *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity and Dissent 1945-1975*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Fest, Racheal. 2021. "Culture and Neoliberalism: Raymond Williams, Friedrich Hayek, and the New Legacy of the Cultural Turn." *Mediations* 34(2): 9-27.
- Florida, Richard. 2012 [2002]. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.
- Florida, Richard and Kevin Stolarick. 2010. "Montréal's Capacity for Creative Connectivity: Outlook & Opportunities," *Environment and Planning A*.
- Forbes, Kristina. 2014 (May 20). "What to Wear: C2MTL." *Forbes*. Accessed online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesstylefile/2014/05/20/what-to-wear-c2mtl/?sh=7098f1b02f6c>.
- Forkert, Kirsten. 2013. *Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity in Two European Cities*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. "The Subject and Power." In *Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 3. New York: New Press.
- Frank, Thomas. 1997. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: Chicago UP.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1922[1921]. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Translated by James Strachey. London and Vienna: The International Psycho-Analytical Press.
- Friday, Jonathan. 1994. "Hume's Sceptical Standard of Taste". *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36(4): 545-566.
- Frye, Northrop. 1968. *A Study of English Romanticism*. Random House.
— .1963. *Romanticism Reconsidered*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gagnon, François. *Paul-Émile Borduas : Life & Work*. Toronto, ON: Art Canada Institute. Accessed online: http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/300/aci-iac/Art-Canada-Institute_Paul-Emile-Borduas.pdf.

- Garvey, Ellen Gruber. 1996. *The Adman in the Parlour: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Gattinger, Monica and Diane Saint-Pierre. 2010. "The "Neoliberal Turn" in Provincial Cultural Policy and Administration in Québec and Ontario: The Emergence of 'Quasi-Neoliberal' Approaches." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 35(2): 279-302.
- Gautam, Sanjay K. *Foucault and the Kamasutra: The Courtesan, the Dandy, and the Birth of Ars Erotica as Theatre in India*. Chicago: Chicago UP.
- Gélinas, Joëlle and Anouk Bélanger. 2022. "Creativity Policies and Districts: The Ambiguous Meaning of Creativity as a Source of Local Tensions in Montréal." In Cheryle Thompson and Miranda Campbell (eds.), *Creative Industries in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars.
- Gerard, Alexander. 1774. *Essay on Genius*. London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell.
- Gershon, Ilana. 2011. "Neoliberal Agency." *Current Anthropology* 52(4): 537-555.
- Gill, Michael B. 2017. "Lord Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury]", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/shaftesbury/>>.
- Gluck, Mary. 2005. *Popular Bohemia: Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP.
- .2003. "The *Flâneur* and the Aesthetic Appropriation of Urban Culture in Mid-19th Century Paris". *Theory, Culture and Society* 20(5): 53-80.
- Goodis Jerry and Gene O'Keefe. 1991. *Good!s : Shaking the Canadian Advertising Tree*. Markham Ont: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
- .1972. *Have I Ever Lied To You Before?* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- Gorodeisky, Keren. 2016. "19th Century Romantic Aesthetics". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/aesthetics-19th-romantic/>>.
- Gregory, Michele Rene. "Inside the Locker Room: Male Homosociability in the Advertising Industry." *Gender, Work and Organization*: 16(3): 323-347.
- Guffey, Elizabeth E. 2015. *Posters: A Global History*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Guyer, Paul. 2016. "18th Century German Aesthetics". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/>>.

- .2005. *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- .2000. *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- .1993. *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- .1990. "Feeling and Freedom: Kant on Aesthetics and Morality". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48(2): 137-146.

- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Hage, Ghassan. 2003. *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*. Annandale, Australia: Pluto Press Australia.

- Hammermeister, Kai. 2002. *The German Aesthetic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

- Hardt, Michael. 1999. "Affective Labor". *boundary 2*, 26(2): 89-100.

- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude*. London: Penguin.

- Harvey, David. 2007. "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 610 (Mar. 2007): 22-44.
- .2003. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York and London: Routledge.
- .1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

- Haynes, Megan. 2013 (April 4). "Stuck in a Mad Men era." *Strategy*. Accessed online: <https://strategyonline.ca/2013/04/04/stuck-in-a-mad-men-era/>.

- Hebdige, Dick. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.

- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1994. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. London: Abacus.
- Hopkins, Claude. 1998 [1923]. *My Life in Advertising and Scientific Advertising* (New Edition). Chicago: NTC Business Books.

- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. 2002 [1947]. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noer. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford UP.

- Hornidge, Anna-Katharina. 2011. "'Creative Industries': Economic Programme and Boundary Concept". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42(2): 253-279.

- Howkins, John. 2001. *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. London: Allen Lane.

- Hume, David. 1993[1742]. "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion." In S. Copley and A. Edgar (eds.) *David Hume: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP. Pp. 10-13
- . 1993[1757]. "Of the Standard of Taste". In S. Copley and A. Edgar (eds.) *David Hume: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP. Pp. 133-153.
- Hutcheson, Francis. 2004 [1725]. *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004). 6/4/2019.
<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2462>
- Illouz, Eva. 2012. *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- . 2007. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ingold, Tim and Elizabeth Hallam. 2007. "Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: An Introduction." In Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (eds.), *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. London: Routledge.
- Iseminger, Gary. 2004. *The Aesthetic Function of Art*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Iskin, Ruth E. 1995. "Selling, Seduction, and Soliciting the Eye: Manet's Bar at the Folies-Bergère". *The Art Bulletin* 77(1): 25-44.
- Janssen, Shauna. 2014. "Urban Occupations Urbaines: Curating the Post-Industrial Landscape." PhD Dissertation, Concordia University.
- Jhally, Sut. 1990. *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnston, Russell. 2001. *Selling Themselves: The Emergence of Canadian Advertising*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kaell, Hillary. 2021. "Religious Heritage and Nation in Post-Vatican II Catholicism: A View from Quebec." *Religions* 12(4): 259.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1914[1892]. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by J.H. Bernard. Second Edition. London: Macmillan and Co.
- Kaufman, Scott Barry and Carolyn Gregoire. 2015. *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*. New York: Perigee.
- King, Alexandra. 2012. "The Aesthetic Attitude". *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://www.iep.utm.edu/aesth-at/>, accessed June 13th 2020.
- Klein, Naomi. 2014. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- .2009 [2000]. *No Logo*. 10th Anniversary Edition. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Kolm, Josh. 2020 (June 16). "Open letter calls for action against racism in Canadian ad industry." *Strategy*. Accessed online: <https://strategyonline.ca/2020/06/16/open-letter-calls-for-action-against-racism-in-canadian-ad-industry/>.
- .2020 (June 29). "Why Canada needs its own approach to systemic racism in the industry." *Strategy*. Accessed online: <https://strategyonline.ca/2020/06/29/why-canada-needs-its-own-approach-to-systemic-racism-in-the-industry/>.
- Krauss, Rosalind. 1986. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Kreshel, Peggy J. 1990. "John B. Watson at J. Walter Thompson: The Legitimation of "Science" in Advertising". *Journal of Advertising* 19(2): 49-59.
- Kubota, Mami. 2015. "Shaftesbury's Aesthetic Theory Revisited. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Accessed online: https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/32075/1/Kubota_Mami_2015_thesis.pdf
- Laird, Pamela Walker. 1998. *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP.
- .1993. "The Business of Progress: The Transformation of American Advertising, 1870-1920." *Business and Economic History* 22(1): 13-18.
- .1992. "From Success to Progress: The Professionalization and Legitimization of Advertising Practitioners, 1820-1920." *Business and Economic History* 21: 307-316.
- Landry, Charles. 2000. *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. London: Earthscan.
- Lawrence, Mary Wells. 2002. *A Big Life in Advertising*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Lazzarato, Maurizio. 2017 [2009]. *Experimental Politics: Work, Welfare, and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age*. Translated by Arianna Bove, Jeremy Gilbert, Andre Goffey, Mark Hayward, Jason Read, and Alberto Toscano. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- .1996. "Immaterial Labor." In *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Le Bon, Gustave. 1896[1895]. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Second Edition. New York: Macmillan.
- Lehmann, Chriss. 2003. "Class Acts." *Raritan* 22: 147-167.
- Leslie, Deborah and Norma M. Rantisi. 2012. "The Rise of a New Knowledge/Creative Economy: Prospects and Challenges for Economic Development, Class Inequality, and Work." In T.J.

- Barnes, J. Peck and E. Sheppard (eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons. Pp. 458-471.
- .2011. "Creativity and Place in the Evolution of a Cultural Industry: The Case of Cirque du Soleil." *Urban Studies* 48(9): 1771-1787.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. "The Structural Study of Myth". *The Journal of American Folklore* 68(270): 428-444.
- Levin, Laura and Kim Solga. 2009. "Building Utopia: Performance and the Fantasy of Urban Renewal in Contemporary Toronto." *The Drama Review* 53(3): 37-53.
- Levine, Gabriel J. 2014. "Radical Vernaculars: Experiments with Tradition Between Politics and Performance." PhD Dissertation, York University.
- Liep, John (ed.). 2011. *Locating Cultural Creativity*. Pluto Press.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles. 2005. *Hypermodern Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Löfgren, Orvar. 2001. *Celebrating Creativity: On the Slanting of a Concept*. In *Locating Cultural Creativity*, John Liep (ed.). Pluto Press. Pp.71-80.
- Lois, George. 1972. *George, Be Careful: A Greek Florist's Kid in the Roughhouse World of Advertising*. New York: Saturday Review Press.
- Lorey, Isabell. 2015. *State of Insecurity*. London: Verso.
- .2011. "Virtuosos of Freedom: On the Implosion of Political Virtuosity and Productive Labour." Translated by Mary O'Neill. In Gerald Raunig Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*. London: MayFlyBooks. Pp. 79-90.
- Lovejoy, Arthur. 1960. *Essays in the History of Ideas*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Mackay, Thomas Ashley. 2014. "Advertising Advertising: The emerging advertising industry's dual promotional campaigns, 1890 – 1920." *History in the Making* 3(2): 63 – 72.
- Macpherson, C.B. 2011 [1962]. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Malefyt, Timothy de Waal and Robert J. Morais. 2012. *Advertising and Anthropology Ethnographic Practice and Cultural Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Maliszewski, Paul. 2004. "Flexibility and its discontents." *The Baffler* 16: 69–79.

- Mauro, Evan. 2013. "The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics". *Mediations* 26.1-2 (Fall 2012-Spring 2013): 119-142.
- May, Todd. 2015. "Subjectification." In Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (eds.), *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. Pp. 490-495.
- Mazzarella, William. 2009. "Affect: What is it Good for?" In *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization*, ed. Saurabh Dube. London: Routledge.
- . 2003. *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*. Duke UP.
- McDonough, Tom. 2011. "Unrepresentable Enemies: On the Legacy of Guy Debord and the Situationist International." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 28(2011/09): 42-55.
- McFall, Liz. 2004. *Advertising: A Cultural Economy*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- . 2002. "What about the old cultural intermediaries? An historical review of advertising producers". *Cultural Studies* 16(4): 532-552.
- McLean, Stuart. 2009. "Stories and Cosmogonies: Imagining Creativity Beyond 'Nature'"
- McQuaig, Linda and Neil Brooks. 2011. *The Trouble With Billionaires*. Toronto: Penguin Group.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2016. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Michael, Lindsay. 2013 (April 18). "Quebec's student tuition protest: Who really won the dispute?" CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/quebec-s-student-tuition-protest-who-really-won-the-dispute-1.1327562>. Accessed July 11, 2015.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2013. *Arbitraging Japan: Dreams of Capitalism at the End of Finance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Moeran, Brian. 1996. *A Japanese Advertising Agency: An Anthropology of Media and Markets*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Moeran, Brian and Timothy de Waal Malefyt (eds.). 2003. *Advertising Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.
- Montag, Warren. 1995. "'The Soul is the Prison of the body': Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975." *Yale French Studies* (88): 53-77.
- Moos, Markus. 2013. "Generational Dimensions of Neoliberal and Post-Fordist Restructuring: The Changing Characteristics of Young Adults and Growing Income Inequality in Montreal and Vancouver." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(6): 2078-2102.

- Moulin, Raymonde. "The Genesis of the Rarity of Art." Translated by Jane Yeoman. *Art in Translation* 3(4): 441-472.
- Muehlebach, Andrea. 2011. "On Affective Labor in Post-Fordist Italy." *Cultural Anthropology* 26(1): 59-82.
- Murail, Estelle. 2013. "The *Flâneur's* Scopic Power or the Victorian Dream of Transparency". *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [En ligne], 77 Printemps, consulté le 03 août: <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/252>
- Murphy, Keith M. 2015. *Swedish Design: An Ethnography*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Narayan, Kirin. 2016. *Everyday Creativity: Singing Goddesses in the Himalayan Foothills*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Navon, Daniel. 2017. "Truth in Advertising: Rationalizing Ads and Knowing Consumers in the Early Twentieth-Century United States". *Theory and Society* 46(2): 143-176.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2017[1901]. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Michael A. Scarpitti and R. Kevin Hill. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited.
- Nixon, Sean. 2015. "Looking westwards and worshipping: The New York 'Creative Revolution' and British advertising, 1956-1980." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17(2): 147-166.
- Ngai, Sianne. 2015 [2012]. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard UP.
- Nguyen, Lea D. 2020 (June 25). « Y a-t-il un manque flagrant de diversité en pub ? » *Grenier aux nouvelles*. Accessed online: <https://www.grenier.qc.ca/actualites/21048/y-a-t-il-un-manque-flagrant-de-diversite-en-pub>.
- Norton, Brian Michael. 2015. "The Spectator, Aesthetic Experience and the Modern Idea of Happiness". *English Literature* 2(1): 87-104.
- Nowotny, Stefan. 2011. "Immanent Effects: Notes on Cre-activity." Translated by Aileen Derieg. In Gerald Raunig Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*. London: MayFlyBooks. Pp. 9-22.
- NW Ayer & Sons, incorporated Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History. Smithsonian Institution. Accessed online: <https://www.si.edu/object/archives/sova-nmah-ac-0059?destination=object/archives/components/sova-nmah-ac-0059-ref8405>.

- O'Barr, William. 2005. "A Brief History of Advertising in America". *Advertising and Society Review* 6(3). Accessed online: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/193868>.
- O'Brien, Dave, Daniel Laurison, Andrew Miles and Sam Friedman. 2016. "Are the creative industries meritocratic? An analysis of the 2014 British labour force survey." *Cultural Trends* 25(2): 1-16.
- Ossowski, Stanislaw. 1978 [1966]. *The Foundations of Aesthetics*. Translated by Janina and Witold Rodzinski. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Pandian, Anand. 2015. *Reel World: An Anthropology of Creation*. Durham: Duke UP.
- Parsons, Deborah L. 2000. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Peck, Jamie. 2020. "Culture Club: Creative Cities, Fast Policy and the New Symbolic Order." In A. de Dios and L. Kong (eds), *Handbook on the Geographies of Creativity*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Pp. 37-53.
- . 2010. *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- . 2005. "Struggling with the Creative Class." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4): 740-770.
- Perreux, Les. 2012, April 27. "The faces of the Quebec education protests". *The Globe and Mail*. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/the-faces-of-the-quebec-education-protests/article4103345/>. Accessed July 11, 2015.
- Peltonen, Matti. 2004. "From Discourse to 'Dispositif': Michel Foucault's Two Histories". *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 30 (2): 205-219.
- Picart, Caroline Joan S. 1999. *Resentment and the "Feminine" in Nietzsche's Politico-Aesthetics*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Pineault, Eric. 2012. "Quebec's Red Spring: An Essay on Ideology and Social Conflict at the End of Neoliberalism." *Studies in Political Economy* 90: 29-56.
- Pope, Daniel. 2003. "Making Sense of Advertising". *History Matters* (website). <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/ads/>
- . 1991. "Advertising as a Consumer Issue: An Historical View." *Journal of Social Issues* 47(1): 41-56.
- . 1983. *The Making of Modern Advertising*. Berghahn Books
- . 1978. "French Advertising Men and the American 'Promised Land'." *Historical Reflections* 5(1): 117-139.

- Postman, Neil. 1985. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Penguin.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 2006. *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Durham and London: Duke UP.
- .2002. "Notes on Gridlock: Genealogy, Intimacy, Sexuality." *Public Culture* 14(1): 215-238.
- Power, Nina. 2013. "She's just not that into you." *Radical Philosophy* (Jan/Feb 2013). Accessed online: <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/reviews/individual-reviews/rp177-shes-just-not-that-into-you>.
- Pratt, Andy C. 2008. "Creative cities: the cultural industries and the creative class." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 90(2): 107-117.
- Pray, Doug (director). 2009. *Art & Copy*. New York: One Club. DVD.
- Rand, Paul and Ann. 1999[1960]. "Advertisement: Ad Vivum or Ad Hominem?" In M. Beirut, J. Helfand, S. Heller and R. Poyner (eds.), *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*. New York: Allworth Press. Pp. 139-145.
- Rantisi, Norma M. and Deborah Leslie. 2021. "In and against the neoliberal state? The precarious siting of work integration social enterprises (WISEs) as counter-movement in Montreal, Quebec." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 53(2), 349–370.
- .2010. "Materiality and creative production: the case of the Mile End neighborhood in Montréal". *Environment and Planning* 42: 2824 – 2841.
- .2006. "Branding the design metropole: the case of Montréal, Canada." *Area* 38(4): 364-376.
- Raunig, Gerald. 2007. "Creative Industries as Mass Deception." In Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*. London: MayFlyBooks. Pp. 191-203.
- Raunig, Gerald, Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). 2011. "Introduction: On the Strange Case of 'Creativity' and its Troubled Resurrection." In Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*. London: MayFlyBooks. Pp.1-5.
- Rebughini, Paola. 2014. "Subject, Subjectivity, and Subjectivation." *Sociopedia.isa*: 1-11.
- Reckwitz, Andreas. 2017. *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Reiter-Palmon, Roni, Victoria L. Kennel and James C. Kaufman. (eds.). 2018. *Individual Creativity in the Workplace*. London: Elsevier.

- Reiter-Palmon, Roni, Colin Fisher and Jennifer S. Mueller. (eds.) 2021. *Creativity at Work: A Festschrift in Honor of Teresa Amabile*. Germany: Springer International Publishing.
- Rolnik, Suely. "The Geopolitics of Pimping." Translated by Brian Holmes. In Gerald Raunig Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*. London: MayFlyBooks. Pp. 23-40.
- Samuel, Lawrence R. 2010. *Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Scarry, Elaine. 1998. "On Beauty and Being Just." Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Schiller, Friedrich. 1983[1793-1794]. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*. Edited and translated by E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby. Clarendon Press.
- Schudson, Michael. 1984. *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schwarzkopf, Stefan. "From Fordist to creative economies: the de-Americanisation of European advertising cultures since the 1960s". *European Review of History* 20(5): 859-879.
- Schwegler, Tara and Michael G. Powell. 2008. "Unruly Experts: Methods and Forms of Collaboration in the Anthropology of Public Policy." *Anthropology in Action* 15(2): 1-9.
- Sehlikoglu, Sertaç and Asli Zengin. 2015. "Introduction: Why Revisit Intimacy?" *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33(2): 20-25.
- Seigel, Jerrold. 1999 [1986]. *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Semansky, Matt. 2008. "Plus ça change." *Marketing Magazine* (October 29, 2008). Accessed online: <http://marketingmag.ca/news/agency-news/plus-a-change-18301>.
- Shearmur, Richard. 2006. "The new knowledge aristocracy: the creative class, mobility and urban growth." *Work organisation, labour & globalisation* 1(1) (Winter 2006-7): 31-47.
- Shusterman, Richard. 1989. "Of the Scandal of Taste: Social Privilege as Nature in the Aesthetic Theories of Hume and Kant." *Philosophical Forum* 20(3): 211-229.
- Siraki, A.T. 2013. *Adam smith and the Problems of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Ottawa, Ottawa.

- Smith, Patricia. 2005. "Children and Ceramic Innovation: A Study in the Archaeology of Children." *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 15(1): 65-79.
- Sommer, Doris. 2009. "Schiller and Company, or How Habermas Incites Us to Play." *New Literary History* 40(1): 85-103.
- Sontag, Susan. 1999[1970]. "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity". In M. Beirut, J. Helfand, S. Heller and R. Poyner (eds.), *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*. New York: Allworth Press. Pp. 196-218.
- Soper, Kate. 2020. *Post-Growth Living: For an Alternative Hedonism*. London: Verso.
- Sterne, Jonathan. 2012. "Quebec's #casseroles: on participation, percussion and protest." *Theory and Event* 15(3, 2012 supplement).
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2011. "Atmospheric Attunements." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29(3): 445-453.
—2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke UP.
- Stobart, J. 2008. "Selling (Through) Politeness: Advertising Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England". *Cultural and Social History* 5(3): 309-328.
- Stolarick, Kevin and Richard Florida. 2006. "Creativity, Connections and Innovation: A Study of Linkages in the Montréal Region," *Environment and Planning A* 38(10): 1799–1817.
- Stolnitz, Jerome. 1961. "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness'". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20(2): 131-143.
- Sumner, Lisa. 2009. *'Known by the company it keeps': Popularizing Seagram in the Canadian Imagination*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). McGill University, Montreal.
- Tarde, Gabriel. 1989[1901]. *L'opinion et la foule*. Paris : Les presses universitaires de France.
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Terranova, T. (2004). *Network culture: Politics for the information age*. London: Pluto Press.
- The 3% Movement. 2016 (March). "What Women Want: Results from Our 3% Community Survey." Accessed online:
<https://www.3percentmovement.com/sites/default/files/resources/WhatWomenWant%20-%20Final.pdf>.

- Thornton, Sara. 2009. *Advertising, Subjectivity and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac and the Language of the Walls*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Thrift, Nigel. 2005. *Knowing Capitalism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Tiersten, Lisa. 2001. *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de Siècle France*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tiqun. 2012. *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*. Translated by Ariana Reines. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), Intervention Series 12.
- Tremblay, Diane-Gabrielle and Angelo Battaglia. 2012. "El Raval and Mile End: A Comparative Study of Two Cultural Quarters between Urban Regeneration and Creative Clusters". *Journal of Geography and Geology* 4(10): 56-74.
- Trudeau, Dominique. 2018. « De la difficile question de l'intégrité en pub. » Originally published online by *Infopresse* (March 2018). Retrieved from : <https://domtru.com/2018/03/10/de-la-difficile-question-de-lintegrite-en-pub/>.
- Tzanelli, Rodanthi. 2020. *Magical Realist Sociologies of Belonging and Becoming*. New York: Routledge.
- Tsing, Anna. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Encounter*. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Tungate, Mark. 2013. *Adland: A Global History of Advertising*. London: Kogan Page.
- Vrasti, Wanda. 2011. "'Caring' Capitalism and the Duplicity of Critique." *Theory and Event* 14(4).
- Verhagen, Marcus. 1995. "The Poster in Fin-de-Siècle Paris". In L. Charney and V. Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 103-129.
- Vokey, Megan, Bruce Tefft and Chris Tysiaczny. 2013. "An Analysis of Hyper-Masculinity in Magazine Advertisements." *Sex Roles* 68: 562-576.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2007. "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality." *Thesis Eleven* 91 (November): 66-77.
- Warlick, Mary E. *Selling Creative: Advertising Men & Women in the Hall of Fame*. Vass N.C: A&C Film Distribution LLC.
- Weiss, Margot. 2011. *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality*. Durham: Duke UP.

- Westkaemper, Emily. 2017. *Selling Women's History: Packaging Feminism in Twentieth-Century American Popular Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP.
- Wilf, Eitan. 2014a. *School for Cool: The Academic Jazz Program and the Paradox of Institutionalized Creativity*. Chicago: Chicago UP.
- . 2014b. "Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43(2014): 397-412.
- . 2012. "Rituals of Creativity: Tradition, Modernity, and the 'Acoustic Unconscious' in a U.S. Collegiate Jazz Music Program. *American Anthropologist* 114(1): 32-44.
- Wilkin, Karen. 1998. "An anniversary in Montreal: 'Refus global' at 50." *The New Criterion* 17(2).
- Williams, Rosalind H. 1982. *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 2011 [1961]. *The Long Revolution*. Llandysul, Wales: Parthian.
- . 1983. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised Edition. New York: Oxford UP.
- . 1980. *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso.
- . 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Willis, Rebecca. 2018. "The use of composite narratives to present interview findings." *Qualitative Research* 19(4): 471-480.
- Wolly, Brian. 2015 (May 18). "American History Museum Scholar on the History of the "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" Advertisement: The commercial that closed out the series finale of "Mad Men," explained." Smithsonian.com. Accessed online: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/american-history-museum-scholar-coke-advertisement-180955318/?no-ist>.
- Wu, Tim. 2016. *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Wuggenig, Ulf. 2011. "'Creativity and Innovation'" in the Nineteenth Century: Harrison C. White and the Impressionist Revolution Reconsidered. In Gerald Raunig Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*. London: MayFlyBooks. Pp. 57-75.
- Yarrow, Thomas. 2019. *Architects: Portraits of a Practice*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Yencken, David. 1988. "The Creative City." *Meanjin* 47(4): 597-608.
- Yunus, Muhammad. 2007. *Creating a World Without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism*. New York: Public Affairs.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.