The Gruen Transfer: The paradoxical ritual of advertisers exposing advertising

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Abstract
Popular representations of the advertising industry are marked by both celebrations of its creativity and criticisms of its manipulative or ideological role in the consumer society. One longstanding aspect of this ambivalence is the creation and popularity of 'confessional' accounts published by the industry's leading practitioners. The highly successful Australian television program *The Gruen Transfer* is a contemporary articulation of advertising professionals offering an 'insider' view and critique of advertising to the public. This article critically examines the first three seasons (2008-2010) of *The Gruen Transfer* in order to analyse how advertising professionals on the program offer the public the opportunity to understand how advertising 'works on them'. We analyse the practices of 'exposing' advertising *The Gruen Transfer* panellists employ and consider how these practices of exposure are part of the work of managing advertising. We argue that the panellists' narrative of exposure celebrates rather than critiques the role of advertising in society. By claiming the space where such a debate might be facilitated *The Gruen Transfer* stabilises advertising as a mechanism for creating brand value.

Keywords

The Gruen Transfer, advertising, branding, professional ideology, cultural work, exposure

Introduction

The Gruen Transfer has been an unexpected ratings success across its four seasons (2008-2011) on Australia's public broadcaster the ABC. The program features a panel of advertising professionals, hosted by comedian Wil Anderson, discussing advertising, branding and marketing. *The Gruen Transfer* averages 1.4 million viewers and is consistently one of the ABC's most highly rating programs. The ABC have screened two Gruen spin offs; Gruen Nation (2010) about the 2010 Federal Election campaign and Gruen Planet (2011) about public relations and media management. Furthermore, *The Gruen Transfer* concept was sold as The Big Sell to Fox LOOK in 2010 in a deal that includes distribution of the format to several other countries. And, somewhat controversially, the BBC's Channel 4 is piloting the *Mad Bad Ad Show* that very closely references *The Gruen Transfer* concept. Wil Anderson opened the first season of *The Gruen Transfer* with this explanation:

What is *The Gruen Transfer*? It's real and it's named after Victor Gruen the guy who designed the very first shopping mall. It's that split second where the mall's intentionally confusing layout makes our eyes glaze and our jaws slacken. The moment when we forget what we came for and become impulse buyers. Y'know when you set out to buy baby food but find yourself shelling out for a case of beer, two pairs of jeans and a plasma instead. This is a show about persuasion, about advertising, about how it works and how it works on you. Every day we're exposed to an average of 3000 commercial messages. To help make sense of it all please welcome four of the industry's finest minds.

While the show is named after one of marketing's most famous attempts at 'hidden' purposive manipulation of the consumer, it offers insight into branding and advertising's contemporary concern with exposing advertising practice and strategy. By performing an exposure of advertising practice, *The Gruen Transfer* offers a unique avenue for expanding recent attempts to account for how communications professionals give meaning to their work (for instance, Caldwell 2008, Carpentier 2005, Deuze 2006, Hackley and Kover 2007, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, Pieczka 2002, Svensson 2007). On *The Gruen Transfer*, advertising and creative professionals present themselves as empowering consumers as they decode their creative process, production techniques and strategic considerations. In this article we critically examine the practices of exposure on *The Gruen Transfer* in order to consider what role they play in the production and management of advertising.

Advertising's paradoxical ritual of exposure

The Gruen Transfer is an example of what John Caldwell (2008: 346) calls a 'publicly disclosed deep text'. That is, *The Gruen Transfer* is a television program where advertising professionals publicly perform an 'industrial self-theorising' (Caldwell 2008: 348) of advertising. In a publicly disclosed text industrial self-theorising is performed for the benefit of viewers who are positioned as 'lucky enough to have been given access to those 'inside' the production process' (Caldwell 2008: 346). *The Gruen Transfer*'s producer Jon Casimir has said that he did not set out to make a show for people in advertising, 'we make a show for people on the couch; it's about people in advertising.' *The Gruen Transfer* plays on the intrigue of seeing 'inside' the production of advertising and having its instrumental and purposive nature exposed. Casimir told industry news site Mumbrella that 'if we're making a show about advertising we're making a show about how people are understood. And for the person on the couch that's a scenario where they get to recognise themselves, and their own behaviours and thoughts'.[i]

The pleasure that Casimir envisions for the audience is 'looking in' on how advertising understands them and operates to manage and modulate their feelings, desires and actions. The offer is to recognise themselves as advertising would recognise them, and to be able to conceptualise, judge and evaluate social relations as advertisers would judge them. This pleasure is the appeal of an 'insider knowledge of how the system works' (Andrejevic 2008: 40). The paradox of these disclosures is that they operate as part of the forms of cultural production they purport to deconstruct. Advertisers arguably engage in this public disclosure because it serves the interests of branding and advertising in general. Rituals of disclosure are central to the contemporary production of brands and brand value. Contemporary theories of branding emphasise its social and

participatory nature (see Arvidsson 2005, Holt 2002, Zwick et al. 2008). As citizens, consumers and audiences are asked to participate in the production of brands they are arguably made savvy to the constructed nature of their appeals (Andrejevic 2009, Teurling 2010). Brands have responded by incorporating and displaying their own 'constructedness' within their advertisements and other communicative activities (Holt 2002). Marketing and advertising professionals do not only produce advertisements as direct purposive messages, they also 'manage' and 'modulate' the exposure of their own mode of production. This exposure takes place both within the advertising and brand messages they produce and in public disclosures and discussions about their work. This practice of exposure, we argue, works alongside other industry practices like the public display of ethical responsibility (Crawford 2008) and pro-bono work (Waller 2010). Exposure is central to advertising's appeal for legitimacy and credibility because it purports to reveal any hidden manipulation leaving the consumer empowered to make fully informed decisions about consumption and participation in the production of advertising.

Advertising's rituals of exposure are evident in its practices, theories and industry dialogue. Advertising's formal 'quest for legitimacy' (Crawford 2008) by publicly arguing for its ethical responsibility has been paralleled by a long history of advertising professionals publishing 'insider confessions' that suggest advertising's instrumental and strategic nature can only be 'revealed' by 'insiders'. These confessions extend from the birth of advertising as a profession (Hopkins 1927), through to the post-war and counter-culture years (Della Femina 1969, Goldberg 1957, Ogilvy 1963, Singleton 1979) and the present day (Bogusky 2011, Hegarty 2011, Lawrence 2003, Miller 2004). Most recently, Alex Bogusky (2011) offers a version of the former advertising executive's narrative fit for the social media age setting up the FearLess Cottage in 2011 with the purpose of writing a new Consumer Bill of Rights. The interplay between the industry's quest for legitimacy, advertisers' moral ambiguity about their work (Drumwright and Murphy 2004), and 'insider confessions' indicate a longstanding paradox, and associated 'agony', in the professional identity of advertisers.

While there is a long history of advertising executives 'confessing' to advertising's instrumental nature, these confessions are often coupled with simultaneous praise of advertising's creativity and effectiveness. These competing impulses are not uncommon in accounts of creative work (Caldwell 2008). The aim in analysing publicly disclosed deep texts is not to discern a 'real' insider's view, but to examine how cultural work is 'theorised' by professionals in particular contexts for certain audiences. This approach pays attention to how 'insider knowledge is managed', how 'spin and narrative define and couch any industrial disclosure' (Caldwell 2008: 3) and how competing and contradictory impulses are balanced. *The Gruen Transfer* demonstrates cultural producers' increasing preoccupation with developing 'dramatised' accounts of themselves and their work (Caldwell 2008). *The Gruen Transfer* enables analysis of how advertisers frame and present their work and its role in larger social, cultural and political formations.

Practices of exposure on *The Gruen Transfer*

The advertising professionals on *The Gruen Transfer* stress that the 'tone' of advertising and the 'way' it speaks to the public matters. For the panel 'good' advertising treats the consumer like a

savvy insider, 'bad' advertising treats them like a passive dupe. For instance, advertising executive Russell Howcroft says:

> I think that one of the things we must do in the ad business is when we wake up in the morning we have to make a decision, am I going to treat the consumer as a moron or am I going to treat the consumer as someone who is bright, intelligent and wants to consume my work?

Advertising creative director and agency CEO Todd Sampson agrees with Howcroft. In his view advertisements that 'start from the premise that we are all empty cups that need to be filled' are 'condescending'. This movement toward treating the consumer as savvy and informed aims to make branding appear less purposive and instrumental and establishes a rationale for exposing advertising practice and strategy to consumers. This mode of branding pits itself against a modernist understanding and critique of brands as cultural engineers (Holt 2002). In this article, we consider how constructing brands as participatory and transparent obfuscates how brands create value not necessarily by telling consumers what to think but by implicating them in participation in the first place (Clough 2008).

We draw on analysis of the first three seasons of *The Gruen Transfer* to conceptualise how advertisers evaluate and expose advertising. These practices of 'exposure' by advertisers on Gruen are arguably a form of affective labour that protects their mode of cultural production. Advertising professionals draw on their 'linguistic, communicative, or intellectual capacities' (Clough 2007: 71) to manage advertising as a cultural practice. Extending from our analysis of the program we outline five different, yet interrelated, practices of exposure. While the literature details rituals of exposure employed by brands and other forms of cultural production (Arvidsson 2005, Holt 2002, Teurling 2010), little attention has been paid to the strategies of exposure employed by advertising professionals. In this article, we consider how exposure works to protect advertising regardless of whether it reveals strategies and techniques that enable consumers to understand how advertising 'works on them'. We do not make claims about the scope or frequency of these practices in the program. Instead, drawing on particular segments from the show, we aim to demonstrate the breadth of practices and techniques of exposure employed on the program.

Firstly, drawing on the panel's discussion of surveillance techniques from episode eight of season three, we examine how exposure seeks to encourage individual consumers to accept responsibility for managing risks.

Secondly, considering the panel's critique of bottled water from episode three of season two, we examine how exposure aims to place responsibility for the ethical, social, environmental and cultural impacts of advertising and consumption on the consumer.

Thirdly, analysing the panel's discussion of household cleaning products from episode one of season three, we examine how exposure attempts to distance advertising from the instrumental manipulation of fears, desires and behaviours.

Fourthly, analysing the panel's discussion of product placement on *Masterchef* from episode three of season three, we examine how exposure constructs the opportunity for the audience to identify as an insider.

Finally, focussing on the panel's explanation and debate about alcohol branding from episode one of season one and their discussion of anti-drinking advertisements from episode six of season three, we examine how exposure operates as an affective gesture embodied in the professional identity of advertisers.

Exposure as empowering the individual consumer to manage risks

The panel's explanation of how advertising and branding works attempts to construct the audience as empowered individuals who can manage the risks of a consumer society. In a discussion of interactive advertising, the explanation of how surveillance works is presented as empowering the consumer (season three, episode eight). Todd Sampson explains to the audience how 'location based marketing' can push advertising messages to consumers based on 'where you are at and then marketing to you specifically at that time'. He explains that marketers 'love it' because they can target messages much more efficiently to consumers who are 'close to buying something'. Having explained how these forms of marketing work to the audience, the panel goes on to consider their impact on social life. Senior strategic planner Carolyn Miller explains that she has 'absolutely no problem' with that because she'd 'prefer to have marketing that's relevant to me. So I actually have no problem with my data being expended out there to marketers.' One of Russell Howcroft's criticisms is that this data collection 'assumes you have a defined set of interests' and so, as they send you ever more defined messages, marketers might not 'break through and give you a new interest'.

These assessments frame the discussion around the effect surveillance has on consumers' ability to get 'good' advertising messages. This prompts host Wil Anderson to push the discussion toward a larger social question by asking Russell Howcroft how much privacy advertising 'owes' us. Howcroft replies, 'well I think increasingly the start point now has gotta be that there is no such thing as private.' The panel and audience laugh, suggesting that everyone is 'in' on the joke. The frequent laughter on the program at the claims made by advertisers illustrates how the ritual of exposing 'what really goes on' presents the audience with the opportunity to identify with an 'inside joke' and simultaneously express savvy derision and doubt about the claims being made (Caldwell 2008, Dean 2010). Todd Sampson and Creative Director Matt Eastwood follow by discussing how 'we' need to be much more careful about what information we make public about ourselves online and how this might impact on future employment opportunities. The panel shift discussion away from the ubiquitous surveillance of the internet for commercial purposes and towards how we as consumer-citizens manage the risks of living in a media-dense society (Andrejevic 2011, Fuchs 2011).

The panellists hedge around the role marketing, advertising and branding play in creating these interactive media architectures that exist to commodify consumer activity. The reliance of contemporary modes of branding on the participation of consumers is presented here as both empowering to the consumer and where it creates risks, they are risks the consumer ought to

manage. This account does not address how these forms of participation are enclosed within communicative spaces that record and manage social interaction. Mark Andrejevic (2007: 2) has described this assembly of participation, surveillance and commodification as a 'digital enclosure' that adapts to and modulates social life. The deconstruction of branding and advertising that the panel offer, even when talking directly about examples of this communicative enclosure, reflexively avoid how consumers are caught up within these social spaces regardless of how they understand them.

Exposure as placing responsibility for the impacts of advertising and consumption on the consumer

When the panel considers bottled water (season two, episode three) they employ a set of explanations that place responsibility for the ethical and environmental impacts of the product with consumers. Bottled water is subject to a critique about both its ecological impact and the way it exemplifies marketing's ability to 'create differences where there potentially are none' (Matt Eastwood). When Wil Anderson asks the panel about the cost of bottled water relative to tap water, Russell Howcroft defends the product.

> Russell Howcroft: No one is coercing the money out of people's pockets. There's not coercion going on, you can decide I'm going to give you seven for that because I like the design. Some people are aesthetically minded Wil. They'll say, 'yes I will'.

Howcroft and the other panellists celebrate bottled water as a commodity that through effective and creative advertising can create surplus value. Russell Howcroft agrees with Wil Anderson that bottled water is a 'wet dream' for marketers. When asked to account for how advertisers create value from making differentiations between products that are essentially the same the panel insist that advertising does not 'coerce' consumers, or set up false distinctions, instead consumers are able to make their own choices, to 'buy into the dream' (Todd Sampson) if they choose to.

Wil Anderson goes on to ask Matt Eastwood about the way bottled water brands 'press the eco button' when in fact ecosystems 'may be under threat from the green house gasses created from making and distributing bottled water'. Matt Eastwood, a creative, agrees this is a problem. Russell Howcroft, an account executive, puts responsibility on the consumer. The consumer is not manipulated or coerced, they make a rational decision.

> Russell Howcroft: Yeah but PET is 100% recyclable.
>
> Matt Eastwood: But it's not recycled.
>
> Russell Howcroft: 40% of it is recycled, and 60% isn't. Now is that the manufacturer's issue or is it the issue of the consumer who just chucks it?
>
> Matt Eastwood: I think it's the manufacturer's issue for not taking responsibility for the product they are selling. I mean yes it's about educating consumers, but surely if they're putting a product out into the market they have to be responsible, they can't go, 'hey no, sorry…'
>
> Russell Howcroft: But you'd have to adopt that argument for virtually every packaged good.

Anderson presses the point, prompting Howcroft to celebrate advertising creativity and leave ethical questions to the consumer.

> Wil Anderson: It's estimated that generally speaking it takes three bottles of water to make a bottle of water. Now Russell as we mentioned, when our tap water is as good as most places in the world, bottled water just seems like an unjustifiable luxury. Is it still a triumph of advertising to you?

> Russell Howcroft: Well I haven't got a surprising answer for you Wil. They are creating margin, they are creating profitable businesses, those profitable businesses therefore employ people, so there's a whole bigger picture here. Um, however, if you are forcing me to say I think this is a triumph, it is a triumph.

The development of theory in advertising, marketing and branding has historically been grounded in practice (Wilkie and Moore 2003). Howcroft's evaluation reflects managerial criteria evident in advertising practices and frameworks (see among others, Wells et al. 2011, Duncan 2005, Hackley 2010) and industry awards recognising outstanding performance in creative excellence (Cannes, ONE SHOW, Clio), strategy (APG) and effectiveness (EFFIE, MFA). Russell, like other panellists, invokes narratives that reflect these industry criteria as tools for theorising, decoding and evaluating 'good' advertising. These managerial criteria draw attention to the strategic effectiveness and creativity of advertising.

The theorising interplay and disagreement between Russell, an account executive, and Matt, a creative, is also significant. In this exchange and others, the account executive appears more comfortable explicitly celebrating advertising's effectiveness and exempting advertising and the client from responsibility for the broader impacts of advertising. The creative, conversely, appears reluctant to defend the client and advertising. This 'theorising' interplay is grounded in the respective positions of each professional in the production process. Whereas the account executives are by nature of their position more involved in the client's marketing strategy and supposed to be the 'client's voice' in the process of developing an advertising campaign, it is part of the creative's professional identity to exhibit an attitude of independence and artistic expression over commercial objectives (Hackley 2003, Hackley and Kover 2007, Koslow et al. 2003). Curiously, this distinction is never clearly explained to the audience. The 'theorising' of good advertising is a product of the continual interplay between creative ideals and strategic objectives, with some producers more responsible for creative or strategic parts of the process. The 'theory' of advertising is socially constructed, and so needs to be continually stabilised and managed via this professional discussion and friction between creative ideals and strategic objectives.

Bottled water is exemplary of 'good' advertising work using managerial criteria. Creating differences where there are none is good strategy, effective, and relies on creative ideas for execution. Howcroft, as the account executive, commands the creative labour. The creative's position of critique is ultimately an apathetic one. Despite whatever view they might have about the impact of the work, they follow the directions of the executive and the client (reflecting Teurling's (2010) notion of 'critical apathy'). In this exchange Howcroft places responsibility with the consumer, and Eastwood places responsibility with the client. It is evident in this exchange that advertisers are aware of claims that their work has social, cultural and ecological impacts. Their

strategy of exposure does not address these critiques but rather shifts responsibility outside of advertising to the consumer or client. This practice avoids exposing advertising to a critique of how it creates, modulates and manages social relations. While panellists will happily expose how particular advertisements attempt to manipulate consumers, and praise their effectiveness in doing so, larger questions about advertising as a mode of cultural production are reflexively obfuscated. In this account, the advertisers construct and promote the idea of a savvy, empowered, rational and informed consumer who cannot be manipulated and is responsible for their own decisions and actions. This stance insulates their professional narrative from claims of manipulation and exploitation.

Exposure as distancing advertising from instrumental manipulation

In a discussion of how household products are marketed to women (season three, episode one) the panel implicitly acknowledge the existence of a broader social critique of their work, while simultaneously and reflexively distancing themselves from this critique. They are happy to expose how advertisements work, but are ambivalent about addressing in clear terms how advertising creates or facilitates desires and behaviours, and the extent to which consumers can make rational and deliberative decisions about their participation in a social world where advertising is ubiquitous. In a discussion about how household cleaning products are marketed to women the panel discuss the way advertisements mobilise fears and anxieties. Host Wil Anderson asks the panel why these advertisements 'go out of their way to make women feel bad about themselves'. Creative Director Todd Sampson explains, 'I think we play on a woman's insecurities because they work, for me the real question is: which insecurity do you choose?' The audience laughs and the other panellists laugh and agree. Like much of the laughter on the program this is suggestive of a joke that advertisers, the host, and audience are 'in' on. The host presses the panel on the 'ethics' of this kind of appeal.

> Wil Anderson: Here's what's interesting, the US Centre for Disease Control suggests no current data demonstrates any health benefits from having anti-bacterial cleansers in a healthy household. Alright, Carolyn, knowing that, is it a wee bit unethical to sell them on that theory?
>
> Carolyn Miller: I think the reason people worry about it, I think it's a hangover from when diseases were spread in the 1930s and 40s, y'know polio things that really could genuinely harm you. So mothers get this fear of bacteria and in germs and its gets passed down. It's not that advertisers are trying to create this fear, I think it's a fear that exists and so advertisers tap into it. And yes, it is self-perpetuating, and on it goes, but it's not unethical, no.
>
> Dee Madigan: Although research is saying not only do we not need those things they may actually be causing problems. I think that's a bit of an unethical thing.
>
> Todd Sampson: Tapping into a fear that exists in society, amplifying that, advertising it, and putting a product to it that solves that, that's not unethical, that's advertising.

Similar to the previous strategy where exposure was employed to place responsibility with the consumer, in this practice while creative Dee Madigan points to an ethical dilemma or critique of advertising the other panellists move to exempt advertising from responsibility in instrumentally

manipulating consumers. In this case, Sampson as an agency CEO and Miller as a strategic planning director hold more senior management positions than Madigan as a creative director. Where the previous strategy shifted attention by celebrating the creativity and effectiveness of advertising and pointing to an informed consumer, this critique simply claims advertisements amplify and modulate consumer desires and social practices but do not create them. Senior strategy planner Carolyn Miller claims advertisers 'tap into' rather than 'create' fear. Both Miller and Sampson claim, without any explanation, 'that's not unethical'. The discussion does not give serious consideration to the 'ethical' framework being employed to make that claim. With the ethical question left floating, the panel offer a narrative that advertising does not construct fears or purposively manipulate people, it merely amplifies or modulates pre-existing anxieties. This is a repeated sequence on the program. At the outset the panel will expose and deconstruct the instrumental nature of advertising's appeals. They will outline how they are creative and effective. This prompts host Wil Anderson to ask a question about the 'ethics' of these practices. The panel responds with a self-theorising interplay that constructs a distinction between 'bad' forms of manipulation that are direct and deceptive, and tacitly acceptable forms of manipulation that indirectly circulate, modulate or manage pre-existing consumer behaviours, desires or anxieties. The invitation is for the audience to be privy to understanding how advertising modulates social life.

Exposure as constructing the opportunity to identify as an insider

The program repeatedly constructs the opportunity for the audience to identify with advertising professionals, positioning them as informed participants in advertising. This assertion by Gruen producers and panellists that 'good' advertising should treat consumers as savvy and informed is undercut by competing narratives in their analysis. In the panel's evaluation of *Masterchef* (season three, episode three) Todd Sampson explains how the program's product placement works:

> Cooking shows are a very unique property, mainly because they are all about consumption and buying and eating. So you're kind of naturally predisposed to seeing things within it that you are going to buy. But there is a difference, people process ads in an ad break differently than they process ads in a program. In an ad break your alarm goes off that you are being advertised to, and you start to get cynical and you start to understand it. In a program that alarm doesn't actually go off.

Within the framework of a television program organised around exposing how advertising works Sampson praises branded entertainment that conceals how advertising works. *The Gruen Transfer* audience are invited to see what 'other' consumers would not see. Sampson goes on to explain that this makes advertisements in *Masterchef* 'skip proof' and Howcroft celebrates the fact that you can 'smash people over the head' with brands for the entire show. This discussion about whether or not the audience's 'alarm' goes off to alert them to the advertising suggests that audiences can only be manipulated if they do not 'know' they are being 'advertised to'. This is a dubious proposition. *Masterchef* is the most efficient mode of commodifying a television audience ever produced in Australia. And, to a savvy and informed audience the branding and advertising within *Masterchef* is highly visible. It would appear then that brands in *Masterchef* create value regardless of whether or not the audience 'realises' they are being 'advertised to'. The gesture of exposure is an empty one, in this instance, because branding and advertising works on a program like *Masterchef* primarily by

creating, amplifying and modulating a way of life. The panel on *The Gruen Transfer* are able to expose advertising without it ceasing to function as an efficient way of accumulating value. The Gruen panellists do not examine how *Masterchef* functions as creative and effective advertising regardless of whether the audience understands they are being 'advertised to'. Such an analysis would have to confront the idea that an audience can be manipulated regardless of what they know about advertising's intent or strategy, which would cut against the show's claim to empower the audience by exposing how advertising works.

Exposure as an affective gesture embodied in the professional identity of the advertiser

Panellists present themselves as being able to discern and expose the hidden affective dimensions of advertising by virtue of their embodied professional identity. Extending the previous practice of exposure the audience are invited to be privy to insider explanations of advertising but precluded from the possibility of deliberating about or being able to make these affective judgments. The invitation is to identify with the insiders without the possibility of really being one or seeing how advertising production works (Andrejevic 2008). Adding another layer to the paradoxical enterprise of exposure, these explanations of how advertising works outside of, or regardless of, consumer's rational understanding of it cuts against earlier claims implied in other practices of exposure that informed consumers make rational decisions. To illustrate, we examine the panel's explanation of alcohol brand and anti-drinking advertisements.

Alcohol is the subject of critique about its social, cultural and health effects by government, policy makers, lobby groups, and health and academic researchers. Further, advertisers in Australia are not able to explicitly promote alcohol in ways that depict how it is actually consumed. Wil Anderson begins the segment in season one, episode one on beer advertisements by explaining that alcohol is subject to strict regulations that mean advertisers cannot show 'drinking excessively, show beer changing someone's mood, or promise that beer will bring you sexual success.' He asks the panel how they can promote alcohol without showing any of the 'good bits'. To answer Anderson, the panel draw attention to the 'affective' or 'emotive' appeals of alcohol advertisements. For instance, Todd Sampson explains that neuroscience researchers had used an MRI where they 'connected up all these electrodes to the head and they show people things. What they came up with which I thought was quite interesting was that a slow poured icy cold beer shot is of equal emotional potence as a baby, small children and a dog.' The audience laughs. Wil Anderson says, 'you guys are freaks.' Russell Howcroft attempts to explain how the colour of the glass is important in beer marketing.

> Russell Howcroft: There's also lots of other stuff that goes into beer marketing like the colour of the glass, so you're unlikely to see a woman drinking out of a brown glass, you're more likely to see it out of green and even more likely to see it out of clear glass.
>
> Wil Anderson: Why's that?
>
> Russell Howcroft: Well I don't know why that is. It's just a phenomenon.
>
> Wil Anderson: Well why are you on this show then?
>
> (laughter)

Wil Anderson: You're an expert, you're meant to know stuff.

Russell Howcroft: Well I'll make it up for you. Brown is overly male and overly masculine.

For a product like alcohol advertisers rely on affective and emotive appeals. The advertising professionals are able to discern these 'hidden' appeals within the advertisements and present them to the audience. Although not explicitly addressed by the panel, they demonstrate how advertising works at a level 'beneath' our rational judgment of it, or 'outside of' how we 'know' it works. Authority is embodied in the advertising professional who intuitively determines and asserts 'facts' about how advertising works.

The practice of asserting facts about the 'hidden' emotive and affective content of advertisements only works for as long as the advertising professional can be implicitly trusted by his peers and the audience. When they disagree, there is rarely any definitive rational explanation for why one position is correct. For example, in a discussion about the effectiveness of anti-drinking advertisements (season three, episode six) Russell Howcroft and Todd Sampson argue about whether humour or facts would be more effective.

Todd Sampson: Here's an interesting thing to talk about because the government is really really hesitant to use humour because they'll be criticized but we all know, and the research is really clear, humour works with the younger market. So the question we have for the government is, 'would you rather be criticized or would you rather your work be effective?'

Russell Howcroft: Yeah no I think you've just gotta do facts

Todd Sampson: Oh, Russell…

Russell Howcroft: I think…

Todd Sampson: I think as part of a campaign facts work, most people go 'I don't give a shit, I'm not one of those statistics'.

Russell Howcroft: I think absolutely not, when you see a Wipe Off 5 fact for example you can see if I take off five kilometers I'm going to save 15 ks when I brake, makes sense, therefore I'm happy to change my behaviour.

Todd Sampson: Russell, most people just ignore that and keep going.

Russell Howcroft: No they don't. That's absolutely not true. And you know that's not true.

Todd Sampson: I think you can't address an irrational behaviour using rational processing.

Russell Howcroft: No.

Todd Sampson: I just think at that level, binge drinking, lining up and telling them, if you do that, if you do this, they don't care.

The argument ends with Russell Howcroft suggesting they each make an advertisement, Russell Howcroft's with 'facts' and Todd Sampson's with 'humour' and see which is more effective. Sampson says he would never make an advertisement for free and everyone laughs. While it is an

amusing example of advertising bravado, it also illustrates an impasse when advertisers attempt to account for what makes their work effective and what impact it can have on the construction, management and modulation of social relations. The accounts of creatives and account executives are embedded in their lived self-theorising of their work. They reflexively adapt managerial frameworks, and where necessary make claims embodied in their experiential knowledge.

These exchanges between panellists about what makes alcohol and anti-alcohol advertisements effective revolve around a circulation of affective facts. An affective fact 'generates its own truth while effectively displacing the debunked ideals of a rational-critical deliberation ... such facts are visceral – a directly intuited gut reaction that short-circuits the potential deceptions of both rationality and deliberation' (Andrejevic 2010: 21). The advertising experts are affective labourers in the sense that they use their intuitive, intellectual and emotional capacities (Clough 2007) to construct, manage and present a credible narrative about how advertising works. They act as a guide to discerning 'affective facts' out of the hidden meanings in advertisements. Andrejevic (2010: 34) argues that in bypassing the deliberative and rational character of public discussion we lose the ability to imagine and conceptualise how things might be otherwise than how they directly seem. If the credibility of the expert is contained in their 'visceral' and embodied knowledge, then we lose the ability to deliberate with them rationally, the audience is precluded from being anything but savvy observers. Their self-theorising obfuscates, rather than reveals, how advertising works and precludes the possibility of an informed consumer deliberating with or intervening in its practices. What we are left with is a climate of continual and exhausting 'reflexive doubt' where viewers can only participate in, and enjoy, the staging of their own impotence (Dean 2010). The advertising professionals assert that 'good' work is creative, emotive and intuitive. The audience have to trust their account. The gesture of participation is a savvy one where the audience are coerced and enjoined to feel empowered as observers privy to an insider's account.

Conclusion: Exposure as central to advertising practice

The Gruen Transfer demonstrates how exposure is a central technique in stabilizing advertising as a meaningful profession, cultural practice and mechanism for creating brand value. On *The Gruen Transfer*, the practice of advertising professionals decoding and exposing their creative labour is presented as a gesture that creates empowered consumers. Managing the exposure of advertising is a form of affective labour undertaken by advertisers. They mobilise their identities and place in the social body to build and maintain productive social relations around advertising. Practices that expose how advertising works appear closely related to the recent turn in branding, like other modes of cultural production, toward a reliance on the participation of consumers and other cultural participants (Turner 2010). The activity of 'exposure' implicates consumers in the production of advertising as a cultural practice by enabling them to feel like savvy insiders.

While professionals on *The Gruen Transfer* happily critique particular advertisements or campaigns using the managerial criteria of the industry, they deflect any discussion about the broader social, cultural and political role of advertising. This is crucial because, as advertising and branding relies on the participation of ordinary consumers and cultural participants it becomes much more embedded in social life. Advertising can no longer be seen as a distinctive instrumental practice that operates directly on consumers (if it ever could be). Advertising creates value from social relations

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not necessarily because we rationally believe its messages but because it is part of a system that manages and modulates consumption as a way of life. As Zwick et al. (2008) argue the invitation to participate reconfigures marketing as a 'technology of exploitation'. *The Gruen Transfer* demonstrates how rituals of exposure and participation are interdependent. And in this case, legitimise advertising, marketing, branding and market research as frameworks the audience might use to understand how advertising 'works on them'. The narrative of 'exposure' incorporates cultural critique ahead of time, and inhibits examination of the social, cultural and political impact of advertising and branding. Any critique of the role of advertising and branding work, and what makes it 'good' or 'bad', would need to be aimed at how it facilitates, manages and modulates a way of life. *The Gruen Transfer* winks at, but routinely avoids, that critique in favour of evaluating and critiquing advertising as effective and creative or not.

The Gruen Transfer is a text of deceptive depth. 'Knowing' how advertising works does not exempt the public from being implicated in it or subject to it. On *The Gruen Transfer* advertisers construct and control the exposure of advertising without having to depict or reveal the industry's processes of production or respond to industry outsiders. It is a carefully managed and closed disclosure. Publicly disclosed deep texts are increasingly common in a reflexive media culture (Caldwell 2008, Teurling 2010). Media organisations like public broadcasters invest resources in creating them. They prove to be popular with audiences. They offer a forum for media and cultural professionals to manage portrayals and public understanding of their work. Researchers need to consider what role these texts play in protecting professions, creating and managing savvy consumers, and stabilising markets. Where public broadcasters invest in creating these disclosures researchers need to consider how they affect the quality of participation in cultural and political life. The advertising industry's professional ideology and public discourses also remain insufficiently researched. The role that advertisers' rituals of 'exposure' and narratives about 'empowered consumers' play in legitimising and valorising advertising deserve further critical attention. The adaptation of *The Gruen Transfer* for US and UK markets offers the opportunity for further comparative research into advertisers' public disclosures.

While the history of 'insider confessions' demonstrate the 'agony' of advertisers wrestling with the meaning, and the social, cultural and political impact of their work, none of that deliberation, agony, and struggle is evident in the analysis on *The Gruen Transfer*. Public broadcasters should be encouraged to facilitate popular deliberation and debate about advertising. *The Gruen Transfer* however, is a celebration of advertising work that in setting itself up as a critical analysis, coopts the space where a public broadcaster might conceptualise and facilitate a deliberation about advertising in a contemporary popular culture and social life. On *The Gruen Transfer* advertisers use the public broadcaster to construct and promote the idea of the savvy empowered consumer, exempt themselves from any real criticism, and manage advertising as a profitable mode of cultural production.

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Acknowledgements

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