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ADMEN AND THE SHAPING OF

AMERICAN COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING, 1926-50

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ADMEN AND THE SHAPING OF AMERICAN COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING, 1926-50

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To Lina

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The advertising industry made significant contributions to the development of American commercial broadcasting during the "Golden Age" of radio, roughly the late 1920s through the 1940s. "Admen" not only helped develop broadcasting as an advertising medium, they also produced the majority of prime-time network programs, such as *Show Boat*, *Town Hall Tonight*, and *The Jack Benny Program,* and daytime serials, such as *Stella Dallas, Ma Perkins,* and *Just Plain Bill.* This dissertation, based on an extensive review of surviving network and agency materials, describes the complicated, often conflicted, activities of admen as they sought to develop radio as an entertainment and advertising medium while balancing the competing demands of advertisers, networks, performers, and audiences. The Depression forced broadcasters to seek program financing from advertisers, who turned to advertising agencies to oversee the complexities of integrating their advertising into entertainment. Relationships between networks and agencies evolved to manage the ongoing conflicts over

program control and advertising standards. Meanwhile, admen struggled to develop new techniques for radio, focusing on "showmanship" as a set of strategies to be applied to both entertainment and advertising. Some advertising agencies, such as Blackett-Sample-Hummert, employed the "hard sell," emphasizing product claims and "reasons why" to buy, while other agencies, such as Young & Rubicam, relied on humorous and indirect appeals, or the "soft sell." These advertising strategies carried over into the agencies' programming. At the height of the radio era, advertising agencies expanded into Hollywood to oversee star-studded radio entertainment programs, including *Lux Radio Theatre, Kraft Music Hall,* and *Hollywood Playhouse.* Radio revenues and audiences peaked in 1948, the same year of the first network television broadcasts. By the end of the 1950s, because of increased production costs, the networks had taken over most of the programming functions handled by advertising agencies during the radio era. However, this dissertation argues that the influence of admen and the advertising industry in shaping broadcasting institutions such as networks and cultural forms such as program genres has left a deep and significant legacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
SELLING THE AIR

In 1926, the newly formed radio network, National Broadcasting Company (NBC), hired Frank Arnold as its "Ambassador at Large to the American business world." Arnold traveled the country speaking to businessmen so as to overcome their "sales resistance" to the new medium for advertising: radio.[1] Likewise, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), founded in 1927 and struggling to compete with NBC, relied on the expert promotional efforts of Paul Kesten to demonstrate the reach and power of radio. Arnold and Kesten helped bring advertisers to broadcasting at a time when few were sure it could succeed commercially. Later, during the 1930s, as radio became a national medium entertaining millions, Frank Hummert oversaw the production of forty different daytime serial radio dramas, such as *Ma Perkins* and *Stella Dallas.* To produce many programs quickly, he developed an assembly-line script production process in which hierarchies of writers were responsible for different stages, from concept to plot to dialogue.[2] Also during the 1930s, William Benton and Chester Bowles produced some of the top prime time radio programs of the 1930s, including *The Maxwell House Showboat Hour* and *Town Hall Tonight.* During the 1940s, Carroll Carroll scripted one of the most popular radio programs, *Kraft Music Hall*, writing improvised-sounding patter for Bing Crosby, perhaps radio's biggest star of the time. And in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when television began to overtake radio as the dominant broadcasting medium, the president of NBC Television from 1949 to 1955 was Sylvester "Pat" Weaver. Weaver is best known for having helped develop television "magazine" programs such as the *Today* and *Tonight* shows, which relied on "participation sponsorship," a revenue model that would ultimately replace single sponsorship.

Each of these men helped shape American broadcasting. Each of them also worked in the advertising industry. Each had been, or continued to be, an "advertising man," or "adman."[3] Arnold directed the Frank Seaman Agency from 1917 to 1926. Kesten worked at the Lennen & Mitchell agency. Hummert was a well-known copywriter at the Lord & Thomas advertising agency and later a principal in the agency Blackett-Sample-Hummert. Benton and Bowles founded one of the top radio agencies of the 1930s, Benton & Bowles. Carroll was a longtime employee of J. Walter Thompson, the advertising agency that bought more air time than any other on NBC during the 1930s. Weaver had worked as a radio producer at the Young & Rubicam agency overseeing the top-rated *Town Hall Tonight*. Moreover, Arnold, Kesten, Hummert, Benton, Bowles, Carroll, and Weaver were just a few of many from the advertising industry who populated the ranks of broadcasting, which included also, for example, Robert Colwell, John Reber, Walter Craig, Tom Lewis, Tom McAvity, Walter O'Meara, Danny Danker, and Hubbell Robinson. Advertising men staffed the networks at all levels, including the top. William B. Lewis, was an executive at CBS in the 1930s, having come from the J. Walter Thompson agency, and ultimately moving on to become president of the Kenyon & Eckhardt agency. Lewis, who had overseen prestigious drama programs at CBS, also became the Chief of the Radio Division of the Office of War Information during World War II.[4] Edgar Kobak moved from magazine advertising sales to NBC's Sales Department to the Lord & Thomas advertising agency before becoming president of the Mutual

Broadcasting System, a rival network to NBC, in 1944.[5] These were not anomalies; advertising men were actively involved in the broadcasting industry throughout its history.

The purpose of this dissertation is to trace the specific contributions of advertising men to the shaping of American commercial broadcasting. Admen's influence in broadcasting peaked during the 1930s and 1940s, what is often termed the "Golden Age" of radio. During this period, admen promoted broadcasting as a commercial medium, produced the majority of network primetime programs, and theorized radio as an entertainment and advertising medium. These efforts would also shape television institutions and practices. However, the "radio era" in which these contributions took place, roughly 1926-50, has not been well integrated into broadcast history. As media historian Michele Hilmes has argued, the "Golden Age" of radio effected "changes in the nation's social habits, business economics, and forms of art and entertainment in far-reaching ways that television, despite its far greater revenues and notoriety, did not originate but only continued."[6] This dissertation will build on Hilmes' call for further investigation into the earlier stages of broadcasting, that is, the radio era. Furthermore, rather than focusing on already understood elements of the radio era, such as the development of networks, this dissertation will take as its subject the particular role of the advertising industry in the development of broadcasting.

The importance of the advertising industry in broadcasting has been underanalyzed in part because broadcast histories tend to focus on broadcast institutions exclusively, such as networks, and rarely include more than a mention of advertising industry institutions. The advertising industry, I argue, was fundamental to the development of key broadcast institutional relationships, such as between advertisers and networks, as well as the development of programming and advertising strategies, deeply influencing broadcast entertainment forms. The ways in which the advertising and broadcasting industries interacted and intertwined during the developmental decades of broadcasting can be best understood through an analysis of the role of admen, many of whom worked in both industries. Admen brought advertising strategies and practices with them into broadcasting at its earliest developmental stages; some admen stayed on in broadcasting, contributing to the changes within broadcasting institutions during the transition to television by applying their radio experiences to the new medium. Analyzing admen's multiple roles in early broadcasting, from promoting it as an advertising medium to creating entertainment designed to attract audiences to shaping the relationships among broadcast institutions, offers an opportunity to rethink the significance of the commercial underpinnings of a cultural medium.

Issues in Advertising and Broadcast History

Despite their number and importance, the interconnections and interdependencies among advertising and broadcasting have been little analyzed by critics and historians either of advertising or broadcasting. Advertising historians have provided the most thorough accounts; Stephen Fox and Roland Marchand integrate into their histories of twentieth-century advertising several sections of several chapters on advertising industry involvement in broadcasting.[7] With the exception of Michele Hilmes's *Hollywood and Broadcasting* and her *Radio Voices* and Susan Smulyan's *Selling Radio*, each of which devotes a chapter to the topic, broadcast historians have taken little notice of advertising and broadcasting interrelations.[8] Erik Barnouw's three-volume history recounts some of the events contributing to the commercialization of broadcasting, such as the secret negotiations in the early 1920s in which the major radio patent holders colluded on dividing up manufacturing and broadcasting functions.[9] Yet, though this criticism of early corporate hegemony over broadcasting paved the way for subsequent scholarship, neither this work nor the same writer's *The Sponsor* (which promises to explore commercialism in broadcasting more thoroughly), does more than briefly sketch the role of advertisers in early broadcasting.[10] Further, neither work differentiates between advertisers and the advertising agencies who worked for them, and yet the tensions caused by the conflicting agendas of these groups helped determine the fundamental structure of broadcasting. In his history of radio programming, J. Fred MacDonald mentions the dominance of ad agencies, but makes few references to the nature of their influence. So, although he mentions for example Frank Hummert's affiliation with an advertising agency, he does nothing to explain any of Hummert's practices within that context.[11]

There are a number of reasons for the relative lack of attention to the interrelationships of advertising and broadcasting. First, in the view of many consensus historians, the development of American broadcasting as an advertising-supported medium was an inevitability dictated by its technological limitations and requirements. Advertising appears as simply an economic function that served to subsidize "free" broadcasting; advertising-supported broadcasting is cast as an inescapable solution to an economic problem, with few cultural implications.[12] But we can narrow the advertising industry's role in broadcasting to economics only by artificially separating the economic from the cultural.

Second, the historical interrelationships of the advertising and broadcasting industries are easily obscured if viewed through the lens of current industry practice. Today advertising agencies do not produce programs; they produce commercials received by audiences as separate from programs. This apparent separation obscures the ongoing and deep structural, economic, and discursive relationships among networks, program producers, advertisers, and audiences.[13] A broadcast history that focuses on currently dominant institutions, such as the networks, may view past events primarily in terms of those institutions. Histories of broadcast networks rarely view advertising agencies as anything but interlopers on the networks' terrain, thereby ignoring or overlooking the role of networks in encouraging agency participation in broadcasting.[14] As broadcast historian Hilmes has pointed out, the tendency to favor currently dominant institutions such as networks can lead us to overlook "the true originators of most of the broadcast forms still with us: the major advertising agencies."[15]

A third cause of the relative obscurity of the adman's role in broadcasting history may arise from advertising agencies' practice of avoiding public credit for their radio work. During the radio era, for example, NBC policy prevented advertising agencies from being listed on program credit lines. In 1933, NBC specifically banned such credits as "contrary to advertising industry ethics" and a potential annoyance to listeners.[16] Advertising industry ethics, long in effect in print advertising, required that the makers of advertising subordinate their individual creative contributions to the economic imperatives of their clients, the advertisers. Claims of authorship by advertising men might shift attention away from the advertised product and thereby undermine the effect of the advertising message. Thus, J. Walter Thompson copywriter Carroll Carroll was never credited on the air for writing Bing Crosby's trademark patter on the *Kraft Music Hall* program.[17] Likewise, the J. Walter Thompson agency intentionally presented host Rudy Vallee as the "author" of the *Fleischmann's Yeast Hour* despite the fact that the agency wrote the program and booked the guests.[18] The deeply intertwined relationships between advertising agency producers and performers of radio programs have therefore been almost invisible outside the industry.

A fourth factor has been the difficulty of identifying the role of admen, given their movement back and forth between the industries; admen worked at advertising agencies (such as J. Walter Thompson), at advertisers (such as Procter & Gamble or American Tobacco) who hired agencies but also had in-house advertising staff, as well as at broadcast stations, networks, and trade organizations.[19] Though their wide range of affiliations demonstrates the interpenetration of broadcasting and advertising, it makes difficult the classification of actions and agents as of one industry or the other. A study that focused solely on the role of advertising agencies in broadcasting, for example, might miss some of the significance of the role of advertising men in broadcasting as they moved among employers.

These obstacles are relatively minor ones, however, compared to the problem of overcoming the prevailing assumptions of historians and critics regarding advertising itself. The advertising industry is rarely understood as a media industry rife with conflicting aims and strategies; too often advertising is perceived as a singular institution, unique in its ability to shape consciousness. Rather than a diverse collection of institutions and strategies, advertising is seen as a "black box." Academic treatments of advertising tend to take as their goal the proof that advertising has either positive or negative effects on society and culture. Academic observers who position advertising as having positive effects on society tend to emphasize it as a driving force in an expanding industrializing economy.[20] In this view, advertising provides information to consumers, facilitating the flow of goods, without which underconsumption and overproduction might stymie growth and progress.[21] Although these proponents will acknowledge that advertising adds cost to goods, they argue that advertising contributes to economic efficiency by facilitating distribution.[22] Thus, assuming a basic positive contribution of advertising to economic growth, much academic research confines itself to quantitative research methods measuring the effects of persuasive strategies on consumer behavior. Among American historians, David Potter is known for expanding this view of advertising as a positive economic force into an analysis of American culture. Calling the consumer culture of the 1950s a "culture of abundance," Potter places advertising squarely in the pantheon of important social institutions such as religion and education for shaping American culture.[23]

Most academic treatments of advertising, however, have emphasized its negative social and cultural effects. Journalist Vance Packard famously refers to advertisers as the "hidden persuaders" who manipulate consumers' minds.[24] Daniel Boorstin decries the creation of "pseudo-events" as promulgated by advertisers and image makers in general.[25] Marxists Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy believe that advertising stimulates "false needs."[26] These critics, heirs to Thorstein Veblen's critique of conspicuous consumption, assume that advertising ought to be purely informational.[27] Advertising's reliance on images and associations and its power to ascribe symbolic meanings is suspect. Cultural critic Raymond Williams goes so far as to regard advertising's use of symbols and ideas as a "magic system," a process of reification that channels authentic feelings and needs into the buying of commodities.[28] Williams' criticism of advertising's ability to harness cultural tropes in the service of commerce typifies most marxist-derived treatments of advertising. For example, Judith Williamson applies marxist-structuralist theory to argue that advertising is a vehicle of capitalist ideology.[29] Media critic and historian Stuart Ewen argues that, while a specific advertisement may not influence specific buying behavior, advertising has a more general ideological effect, shaping consumer desires, or "what to dream."[30] Ewen's characterization of advertisers as "captains of consciousness" imputes a suspiciously manipulative power to advertising. In emphasizing its ideological effects, these academic critics take a simplistic approach to advertising as a unitary and unconflicted phenomenon; its negative effects are a given; its influence is to be resisted.

These critiques may reflect understandable anxieties over the changing mores of a modernizing and technocratic society; however, some of them perhaps overestimate advertising's power as a perpetrator of social change.[31] Some recent cultural historians have sought a fuller and subtler understanding of advertising, integrating it into wider cultural discourses. Literary critic Jennifer Wicke, examining the complex intertwining of advertising and literature as "discursive practices" in the nineteenth century, argues that advertising has "roots in myriad discourses."[32] Advertising historian Jackson Lears' cultural history of advertising traces many of the religious, medical, scientific, sociological, and artistic discourses that have contributed to its development. For Lears advertising expresses the economic power of its sponsors "obliquely"[33] by creating "a symbolic universe where certain cultural values [are] sanctioned and others rendered marginal or invisible."[34] Advertising, in Lears' view, is not a singular, purely commercial phenomenon, but multiple phenomena informed by various cultural, political, and economic forces. The work of Lears and other historians investigating the complexities of advertising, cultural change, and modernization, have helped expand analysis of advertising beyond its economic or ideological functions.[35] In seeking to situate the advertising industry more centrally in broadcast history, I wish to avoid simplistic formulations as well.

Although the economic imperative is advertising's structuring practice, its significance in broadcasting cannot be understood in simple economic or ideological terms. I view the advertising industry—and the broadcasting industry—as culture industries. These industries embody, as the term implies, certain dualisms. As media historian Eileen Meehan points out, they are industries, business enterprises driven by the profit motive, and yet they produce cultural meanings. Culture industries produce consumer goods that are also cultural artifacts. While they organize and commodify audiences, audiences actively interpret and revise the meanings of the commodities/cultural artifacts the industries produce.[36] Sociologists William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally argue that the advertising industry's "creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions."[37] People who make advertising must therefore "be sensitive to the latent correspondences in the cultural order," as anthropologist Marshall Sahlins writes, "whose conjunction in a product-symbol may spell mercantile success."[38] The cultural product's profitability and salability depend in part on its perceived salience to existing cultural norms and discourses. In advertising, in particular, creators are thus continually poised between the conventions of the time and the experimental; they must aim to be innovative but at a carefully calibrated pace. To reduce this process of cultural production to a solely economic or manipulative function would be to miss some of the significance of cultural change and innovation in the culture industries. Advertising men, then, should be considered to be deeply involved in the cultural issues of their day. This has been acknowledged by broadcast historian Hilmes, who argues that to understand the complexity of advertising and broadcasting, we should view advertising as "not only a marketing and distribution system but [as] a system of meanings, a system of transmission of cultural values and mediation of cultural tensions."[39] In this dissertation, I will demonstrate how admen sought to do just that in their advertising and programming work on radio—transmit cultural values, tap into popular culture, and mediate cultural tensions.

Just as the history of advertising is being revised by cultural historians such as Lears, much consensus broadcast history is being challenged by critical historians. Rather than accept the view that commercial broadcasting was the inevitable use of radio technology, a number of historians have highlighted struggles and contests over its development. Susan Douglas's *Inventing American Broadcasting*, a social constructionist prehistory of broadcasting, shows how business and media interests contended with alternative conceptions of radio from 1899 until 1922 before decisively establishing it as a commercial entertainment medium.[40] Her work indicates that although ideas for the appropriate use of a new technology may change, the technology's commercialization is key to its successful dissemination. Susan Smulyan's *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934*, picks up on Douglas' interest in alternative users of radio, especially the radio amateurs and their efforts to stay on the air after World War I. Smulyan elucidates the logic behind the creation of networks of radio stations linked by telephone lines: it was a means to distribute programming at a lower cost to more outlets. She examines the programming advantages that early national broadcasting offered both listeners and producers, yet argues that the shift from local programming to centralized, commercial network programming had a homogenizing effect on American culture.[41] Smulyan also delineates the debates over the use of broadcasting for advertising, noting early advertising industry resistance to the idea.[42]

Smulyan and broadcast historian Robert McChesney document a backlash to the commercialization of broadcasting in the early 1930s.[43] Led by educators and religious groups, efforts to strengthen federal regulation of the airwaves and establish funding for educational broadcasting were defeated in part by commercial broadcasters' shrewd defense of "free" broadcasting. The passage of the Communications Act of 1934, according to McChesney, consolidated commercialization and removed federal regulation as a serious threat to commercial broadcasting interests. For McChesney, the 1934 Act was the true watershed, obliterating any further effective resistance to commercial control of the airwaves.[44]

All these writers bemoan the frustration of early utopian aspirations for radio as a vehicle for education, democracy, and cultural "uplift."[45] According to advertising historian Roland Marchand, even the advertising industry shared these utopian aspirations for radio, accounting for some of the early resistance of agencies to the new medium.[46] Each of these critical histories examines some of the roots of commercial broadcasting and each has pinpointed the triumph of commercialism at a different moment. However, implicit in their narratives is the notion of a time when broadcasting carried more diverse and authentic voices, untainted by commercialism. This tendency carries over into television historiography as well, which routinely represents a "Golden Age" followed by a decline into commercialism.[47]

Hilmes provides a useful corrective to this view, which she argues is too simplistic. She claims there was no one single moment of decline into commercialism: "the commercial snake was in the garden from radio's very earliest moments."[48] Advertising was on the air long before sponsored programs were nationally broadcast by networks. As one observer noted in 1922, on radio "Concerts are seasoned here and there with a dash of advertising paprika."[49] Rather than consider commercialism as a force opposed to good broadcasting, Hilmes argues that it provided an "avenue of access to the popular," similar to other popular culture forms such as the penny press, vaudeville, and movies.[50] Given that broadcasting stations were defined in 1922 by the Department of Commerce as commercial entities, as distinct from amateur operations, Hilmes argues that in terms of programming the "most authentic, popular, and local experience [was] that of the commercial entrepreneur, using radio as a means of promotion."[51] Daniel Czitrom makes a similar point when he notes that instead of inventing brand new forms to attract radio audiences, advertisers and their collaborators, the advertising agencies, "welded the advertiser's message to older popular cultural forms made historically specific for the new home environment of radio."[52]

Commercial broadcasting, as it developed in the United States, therefore, was deeply interdependent on and entwined with the advertising industry; this dissertation thus emphasizes the interconnections, parallels, and mutual influences of advertising and broadcasting, specifically as represented in the work of the advertising men who worked in both industries. Thus, rather than characterize the impact of the advertising industry on broadcasting as foreign or corrupting, this dissertation instead seeks to analyze the interrelationships among the industries, acknowledging that the economic imperatives required by a business model dependent on advertising will have different proclivities, different aims, and different strengths and weaknesses than noncommercial broadcasting models. In contrast to existing studies, then, which either underplay the role of advertising in shaping commercial broadcasting, or condemn that role as destroying forever some golden past, I acknowledge the influence of advertising as original and pervasive, and treat it not as a single, unitary force, but as itself complex and contradictory, pulled this way and that by tensions—between salesmanship and showmanship, conservatism and innovation, individual desires and institutional requirements, creative genius and practical purpose—all of which have some effect on the early development of broadcasting and on the shape it still retains.

Theory and Method

I have delineated above some of the reasons that the advertising industry has not been more fully integrated into broadcast history. Another reason for this may be the sparseness of existing primary documentation. I have based my analysis wherever possible on the primary documentation that is accessible. The limited nature of that primary documentation necessarily limits the scope of my study: many elements of admen's roles in broadcasting cannot be reconstructed. Surviving broadcast recordings and scripts rarely provide information about the advertising agency or producer of a program. Furthermore, many advertising announcements have been carefully excised from extant recordings, making those artifacts less useful for this study. Although admen tend to be prolific autobiographers and novelists, those sources rarely document actual agency practice in radio. Novels such as Frederic Wakeman's *The Hucksters*, and autobiographies such as Carroll Carroll's *None of Your Business: Or, My Life with J. Walter Thompson* provide colorful anecdotes but little factual information.[53] Similarly, although I use oral histories gathered by Columbia University's Oral History Research Office, as well as some interviews, these sources are most useful for tracing discourses and debates but are not reliably accurate as to facts or chronology. Post hoc recollections tend to suffer from hindsight and a corresponding shift of emphasis, as well as a tendency to claim or assign credit, whether or not it is due.

However, written records survive at certain key agencies. N. W. Ayer & Son kept some material from its extremely early involvement in radio; however, Ayer's importance declined by the time the radio era was in full swing. The DuPont papers at the Hagley Museum in Wilmington, Delaware, document Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn's production of *Cavalcade of America;* however, that program was not highly rated; it served primarily as a public relations tool for DuPont.[54] The contemporaneous personal papers of prominent admen fill in some gaps. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin archives hold a number of admen's papers, such as the Bruce Barton papers, which include material regarding BBDO's early involvement in television, and E. P. H. James' papers, which document his career at NBC and Mutual Broadcasting. Duke University's John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History holds papers from Benton & Bowles, including William Benton's letters to his mother describing their plunge into radio during the Depression, and extensive papers from the key radio agency, J. Walter Thompson. The J. Walter Thompson files include agency correspondence, memoranda, scripts, promotional materials, staff meeting minutes, and house organs. Since JWT was a major radio producer, these records offer the most complete documentation of agency involvement in broadcasting. The JWT papers include a particularly useful set of documents: word-for-word transcripts of agency staff meetings. These staff meetings were private, so the opinions expressed in them were not for the benefit of clients or other audiences, thus they reflect perhaps more accurately than any other source the actual contemporaneous attitudes and opinions of the advertising men at JWT.

Given the paucity of archived materials from actual agencies, I rely heavily on the NBC Records, also held at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, which contain correspondence between network departments and various agencies, and also document the activities of many admen who worked at NBC. These records offer the most extensive documentation of a variety of advertising agencies in radio, although it is not always possible to piece together all the threads. Since CBS records are currently not available to researchers, many of the most important network/agency relationships are not well documented; I depend on secondary sources for what little documentation there is of CBS/agency relationships.

Sometimes the only reliable source for industry information is the contemporaneous advertising and broadcasting trade press: *Printers' Ink, Advertising Agency, Advertising & Selling, Tide, Radio Showmanship, Broadcast Advertising, Radio Broadcast*, *Sales Management*, *Television*, and others. Advertising historian Marchand argues that the trade press provides the best source for tracing internal industry debates and strategies because it is written *by* and *for* admen, not the public, and is therefore fairly candid.[55] Although the trade journals represented and inflected various advertising industry discourses,[56] and thus are mediated and mediating texts, they published many statements of strategy, policy, and cultural perspective from prominent admen. Articles published in the trade press by practicing advertising men provide insight into specific agency theories and practices, such as an article by Young & Rubicam programmer Hubbell Robinson on detective shows, or BBDO principal Roy Durstine on agency functions in radio, or Benton & Bowles' founder Chester Bowles on the advertising agency's responsibility to entertain.[57] A number of contemporaneous advertising "how to" books, such as *The Advertising Agency Looks at Radio* (1932),[58] provide other statements of strategy and theory. My primary research focus is on sources that document and explicate the views, practices, concerns, and debates of admen, whether they worked at advertising agencies or networks or sponsors. This history, then, is purposely written to foreground the perspective and concerns of admen.

In part because the historical record is fragmentary, my historical method is a cultural historical one, relying heavily on interpretative strategies. Cultural historians acknowledge poststructuralist challenges to claims of objectivity and to positivist methodologies that assume historical facts are self-evident in the record.[59] By recognizing the complexity and multivalency of cultural meanings, the contingency of constructed categories of meaning, and how our access to the past is "decisively shaped by its encoding," cultural historians emphasize "the fundamental task of interpretation" over the task of determining historical causality.[60] Examining not only what happened and why, a cultural historian also seeks to interpret the "codes, clues, hints, signs, gestures, and artifacts through which people communicate their values and truths."[61]

However, the "webs of meaning"[62] cultural historians seek to interpret also have political and social roots, as well as consequences. Thus, in an effort to contextualize the media industries' production of cultural meanings within structures of power, I incorporate aspects of economic, institutional, and aesthetic approaches to history. I address questions of how advertising and broadcasting institutions developed,[63] how new business practices motivated by profit-maximization evolved,[64] and what effects evolving production practices may have had on signifying practices.[65] These material considerations should contribute to a greater understanding of how the production of cultural symbols may reinforce or undermine the legitimacy of dominant discourses—the process of cultural hegemony.[66]

How and why does a cultural historian use the broad concept of cultural hegemony when analyzing media industries? First, in addition to actual events and behaviors, attention to media makers' sentiments, beliefs, ideas, hopes, and fears help clarify the meanings and motivations of their actions and policies.[67] Debates over what could or should happen may illuminate what did happen. Media institutions should not be considered to have a single mentality—they are not "black boxes" that magically produce ideology. They may be permeated with conflicts over the effectiveness of their strategies. Some of those internal conflicts may not be ideological but reflect either internal internecine power struggles or "conflicts between commercial and cultural objectives."[68] Christine Gledhill notes that these conflicts within media institutions, usually between "creative" personnel and the economic objectives of the institution, are, "indeed, part of the ideology of creativity itself."[69] The conflict of the “creatives” with the “suits” is a common issue in the culture industries: the “creatives” usually claiming their work has been unfairly constrained by the profit-seeking priorities of the “suits.”

This tension between the creative and the profitable runs through the reflections of admen on their own work. Repeatedly they show themselves acutely aware that their profession's instrumentalist aims preclude them from engaging in the individualistic form of expression so valued in the bourgeois and romantic ideologies of art to which most of them nonetheless subscribe. However, some admen view their work as analogous to that of artists in the past whose work had been commissioned by a powerful financier. Being paid by an advertiser to produce culture, according to a common claim still made in today's advertising industry, is not much different from the arrangement Michelangelo had with the Pope when he painted the Sistine Chapel.[70] Their hope that their work will have the legitimacy or impact of an icon such as Michelangelo reflects admen's desire to be active shapers of culture. The Michelangelo association also serves as a claim that the essential commercialism of their advertising work does not preclude it from being understood as culture as well.

Another tension always at work in the advertising industry is that between the old and the new, the conventional and the innovative. The continual renegotiation of legitimation requires continual innovation. In fact, cultural innovation is key to the economic success of media industries. This often requires making images and texts that are balanced on the cusp of the familiar and the new: to make what advertising photographers have termed an "original standard picture."[71] Such a picture is fully recognizable within operating aesthetic conventions and yet involves enough innovation to elevate it into originality. Thus, as media historian Eileen Meehan points out, the economic structure of media industries must allow for and encourage "bursts of innovation and creativity just as surely as it mandates duplication and imitation."[72] Culture industries cannot afford simply to reproduce the standards but must continually innovate, yet the innovation cannot be too radical or it will not find a market.

The advertising industry is shaped also by the tensions between the individual and the institution. By situating admen as mediators in culture industries that participate in hegemonic processes, I neither deny their agency nor endow them with authorship that transcends structural constraints. As Anthony Giddens elaborates in his theory of structuration, neither the human subject nor the social structure should have "primacy" in a social theory. Instead, "Each is constituted in and through recurrent practices. The notion of human 'action' presupposes that of `institution,' and vice versa."[73] Social practice, then, is the process of relations between human agents and institutions. Admen's adherence to and support of hegemonic structures and practices in their advertising work reflected efforts to secure and establish their position within structures and institutions. As agents for advertisers, their work must remain creatively anonymous in order to maintain the seamlessness of the advertisers' project. The resulting ambiguity of *how* commercial culture is produced and *by whom* has, as we have seen, obscured the significance of admen's roles in early commercial broadcasting.

My purpose then is to fill in the gaps in our understanding of how American broadcasting developed by analyzing the crucial role of the advertising industry, understood not as a unitary force but as a collection of sometimes contradictory habits and beliefs. I hope to expose the origins of some of the dominant ideas in broadcasting, as well as ideas that were initially marginal and then later enacted, such as network control of programming. By examining how advertising agencies conceptualized and produced radio programming, I illuminate the development of programming strategies and genres. By looking at the nature and effects of the advertising backgrounds and experiences of key broadcast executives, I explicate strategic shifts and interindustry relations. In short, analysis that integrates the advertising industry's role more fully and centrally into broadcasting's institutions and practices should improve our understanding of the historical development of American broadcasting.

Brief Chronology and Chapter Summaries

Radio was invented as a point-to-point communications service, as "wireless" telegraphy. After World War I and during the early 1920s, its capability of reaching multiple points simultaneously was increasingly put to use; this became known as "broadcasting." In the United States, unlike most European countries, broadcasting developed as a for-profit commercial industry rather than as a government-funded communication service. Recent broadcast historiography has illuminated the struggles and contests among stakeholders such as equipment manufacturers, telephone companies, and the federal government in this process.[74] A key issue was how to make money from broadcasting. Unlike film, for which exhibitors could charge entry fees, broadcast signals, once transmitted, were impossible to confine. Anyone with a receiver could get them. How then to earn revenues on programming? Who could pay for it and what kind of benefit could that payer expect? Who should control programming and why? What would listeners want to hear and how should listener interest affect programming? Could advertising help subsidize the cost of radio programming as it did already the cost of magazine articles? Could broadcasting become an effective advertising medium, and if so, how could its effectiveness be measured? And who would oversee it all: the manufacturers of radio equipment? The program suppliers? The advertisers? The government?

At first broadcasting was financed by radio equipment makers hoping to increase sales. This was soon supplemented with "toll broadcasting," in which broadcasters charged for access to air time. Advertisers soon became the primary purchasers of air time, which they began to fill with entertainment so as to attract an audience for their advertisements. When, driven both by client demand and a desire to expand into new fields, the advertising industry largely accepted broadcasting as an advertising medium, it remained internally divided on a number of questions: Should advertisers use radio simply as a public relations tool or as a direct selling medium? Would audiences be offended by direct selling on radio? How much influence could radio have over consumers? Was radio more or less effective than print advertising? If so, how, and in what ways? Were listeners grateful enough to buy the products of their favorite programs' sponsors? Or were advertisers who financed programming simply wasting their money?

The next chapter, Chapter 2, "The Fourth Dimension of Advertising: Admen and Radio in the 1920s," examines the conditions and contexts of the advertising industry's entry into broadcasting. The chapter begins with brief historical overviews of the advertising industry before the advent of broadcasting and the development of commercial broadcasting in the 1920s. I then trace the debates within the advertising industry regarding the utility of radio as an advertising medium at a time when its efficacy had yet to be proven. Admen Frank Arnold, E.P.H. James, and Paul Kesten worked at the fledgling networks to promote broadcasting as an advertising medium to advertisers and to ad agencies. Finally, I will look at how and why agencies started radio departments.

Admen helped shape what would become the single-sponsorship business model of radio. In this model, advertisers bought a block of time from a broadcaster and then filled it with whatever programs they wished, changing them at will. Advertisers were called sponsors, and they had control over the air time they had purchased. As more and more advertisers came to buy air time so as to associate their products with entertainment programming, they would sometimes buy programs broadcasters had already produced. These so-called "sustaining" programs were sustained at a cost to the broadcaster until they could be sold to an advertiser, who then often took control of production. However, since these sponsors were skilled in manufacturing toothpaste or soap rather than in producing programs, they looked to their advertising agencies for this task. These agencies, they felt, would be more likely to keep their advertising goals in mind than other potential program providers such as theater producers or broadcasters. Advertisers trusted advertising agencies with program production precisely because agencies supported the advertisers' rationale for buying air time in the first place.

In order to understand how the radio business model developed, it is important to look at the evolving relationships between the advertising agencies and the broadcast networks.   Broadcast networks, for the most part, welcomed the entry of agencies into broadcast programming. However, throughout the radio era, these relationships were fraught with conflict. At bottom, the conflicts revolved around the problem of who owned the time, the advertiser or the network? Who retained editorial control over programming and advertising? Who controlled the schedule? Who determined standards and practices? Furthermore, the two national networks, NBC and CBS, had quite different attitudes about the advertising industry, as well as commercialism in general. Chapter 3, "Who Owns the Time? Networks and Advertising Agencies in the 1930s," concerns the relationships between these key broadcasting institutions as they evolved during the 1930s.   The networks and agencies had to negotiate issues ranging from agency commissions, circulation (or listenership) measurement, air time prices, program promotion, control over scheduling, live versus recorded programming, and control over programming and advertising standards. Despite conflicts, the networks and agencies were mutually interdependent, the networks depending on the agencies to bring advertisers and programming to attract listeners, and the agencies needing the national distribution networks offered.

Advertising agencies produced most of the popular nationally broadcast network programs during the 1930s and 1940s. For example, Lord & Thomas produced *Amos 'n' Andy*; Young & Rubicam *Town Hall Tonight* and the *Jack Benny Program;* J. Walter Thompson *Kraft Music Theatre* and *Lux Radio Theatre;* Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborne *Cavalcade of America* for DuPont; Benton & Bowles Maxwell House Coffee's *Showboat*; and Blackett-Sample-Hummert *Jack Armstrong, All American Boy.* Once agencies became the key producers of programs, they grappled with ongoing issues: Should the entertainment be closely linked or loosely associated with the advertising goal? Does advertising alienate audiences? Do radio stars add to or detract from the advertiser's message? Who should control the program content: the advertiser that finances it, or the advertising agency that produces it, or the network that transmits it to its affiliated stations, or the stations that broadcast it to local audiences? Should advertising agencies be in the entertainment business at all? What kind of relationship should the advertising industry have with entertainment industries, such as vaudeville, Broadway, and Hollywood? Would agency involvement in entertainment, with its unpredictability and vaguely unsavory associations, undercut advertising's hard won effort to prove itself a sober, scientifically based business practice?

Chapter 4, "Ballet and Ballyhoo: Admen and Showmanship on Radio in the 1930s," analyzes how advertising men conceptualized radio as an advertising and entertainment medium. Beginning with how the advertising industry reacted to the crisis of the Depression, the chapter surveys admen's debates in the 1930s over how to use radio as an advertising and entertainment medium. Radio's challenges included its lack of visuality, its fleeting impression, the use of the human voice, as well as the need to apply "showmanship." The chapter mainly concerns the debates over showmanship: how to define it and how to apply it to radio advertising and programming. Among the constraints facing admen seeking to practice showmanship were tensions within advertising agencies themselves, conflicts with sponsors, issues with identifying and attracting audiences, and the pros and cons of using stars in radio. As admen became more responsible for radio programming, they faced issues of innovation and imitation. Would audiences respond best to the familiar or to the new? Did copycat programming undermine advertising goals? How important is originality to radio?

Chapter 5, "Dramatizing a Bar of Soap: Programming and Advertising Strategies at Blackett-Sample-Hummert, Young & Rubicam, and Benton & Bowles," concerns the specific practices of selected agencies. Blackett-Sample-Hummert practiced a type of hard-sell print advertising strategy known as "reason-why." Their programming and radio advertising strategies originated in this advertising theory, which emphasized repetition, factuality, and exaggeration as selling strategies. B-S-H became one of the largest radio soap opera producers and innovated production practices to increase their output. In contrast, the Young & Rubicam agency applied soft-sell advertising strategies to their radio programming and advertising practices. Using association, suggestion, humor, and integrated advertising, Young & Rubicam tried to prevent audience alienation in programs such as *The Jack Benny Program*. Benton & Bowles drew on both hard and soft sell strategies. However, their founders, William Benton and Chester Bowles, were mavericks in the industry and innovated agency practice in a variety of ways. Each of these agencies was an important innovator in the development of radio programming and advertising.

Chapter 6, "Treadmill to Oblivion: The Peak and Decline of the Radio Era," analyzes advertising industry involvement in radio during the 1940s. In the 1940s commercial network radio reached its peak; advertising agencies were well-established as program production companies. Despite rationing and shortages of consumer goods, the advertising industry in general did well during World War II, by providing institutional and "good will" advertising for corporations seeking a business expense write-off against wartime excess profit taxes.[75] The chapter looks at the relationship of the advertising industry and Hollywood once most program production had shifted to Hollywood. Cheaper landline connections and accessible talent pools led to a shift of program production away from New York and toward Hollywood by 1938.[76] Many agencies opened offices in Hollywood. 1948 marked the peak of radio audiences and revenues; however, the radio industry was already changing in ways that would continue in the television era. Increasing program and talent costs caused an increase in the use of recorded programs, syndication, and spot advertising.

Chapter 6 traces some of the advertising industry debates over the imminent medium of television. Concerned that the expense of television programming would far outstrip that of radio program production, the advertising industry sought ways to develop television as a mass advertising medium. How could television program costs be managed in an economically efficient way? Participating sponsorship, in which more than one sponsor could buy time to advertise on a program, distributed programming costs among several sponsors. This paved the way for eventual network control of programming during the television era: when networks produced and scheduled programming and sold interstitial minutes to advertisers—what I refer to as the "television model." Although this shift is usually represented as a defeat for the advertising industry, I argue that throughout the radio era admen had been concerned about advertiser control of programming. The radio model of single-sponsorship of programming endangered the overall effectiveness of broadcasting as an advertising medium because advertisers, concerned only with their specific program, had no interest in building an effective broadcast *schedule*. The radio model did not allow a central agent to shape the schedule of programming and thereby direct audience attention effectively. The television model, under the networks' oversight, strategized program scheduling with the aim of harnessing audience attention, the better to deliver audiences to advertisers. This dissertation argues that the television model, including network control of programming and scheduling, developed in part because of advertising industry concerns about developing broadcasting as an effective advertising medium.

In conclusion, this dissertation seeks to build on the foundation laid by critical broadcast historians who have illuminated the struggles and contests among stakeholders in commercial broadcasting. Following Michele Hilmes, who argues that the radio era is key to understanding the overall history of broadcasting and that the advertising industry is key to understanding the radio era, I am adding the particular perspective of admen to the narrative of broadcast history. Admen's views were distinct from those of broadcasters and those of their clients, the advertisers; their concerns over the viability of broadcasting as an advertising medium would carry over into the television era. Admen's contributions to the development of American commercial broadcasting have been overlooked and underanalyzed for a variety of reasons. Admen's difficulty in claiming "authorship" of much early broadcast content stems not only from their professional practices but also from the relative marginalization of advertising as a significant source of cultural production in most historical accounts. By documenting and analyzing admen's theories, strategies, and practices during the radio era of broadcasting, this dissertation illuminates the contingency of historical change, the variability of the sources of historical change, and the necessity for rethinking the complex processes of cultural production in the era of mass media.

ENDNOTES

1. Gleason Archer, *Big Business and Radio* (New York: The American Historical Company, 1939), 294-95.

2. Cynthia B. Meyers, "Frank and Anne Hummert's Soap Opera Empire: `Reason-Why' Advertising Strategies in Early Radio Programming," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 16, no. 2 (1997): 113-132.

3. I use the terms "advertising man" or "adman" throughout to describe advertising agents in the first half of the twentieth century for two reasons: the terms reflect the demographic actualities of the industry, and they connote the sense of fraternity within the trade. As advertising historian Roland Marchand documents, most advertising agents of the 1920s and 1930s were white Anglo-Saxon Protestant urban males from upper-middle-class families. The hiring practices of many firms were discriminatory, reflecting the belief that only men of similar backgrounds could have successful and personable relations with clients, the advertisers. Thus, despite constant speculation that women would be well-suited for advertising careers, few women were able to penetrate the barriers. The few exceptions include Helen Resor, who wielded influence as a copywriter at the J. Walter Thompson agency and was married to its president, Stanley Resor. Admen's sense of fraternity was also strengthened by their perceptions of consumers as childish, irrational, and suggestible, and therefore essentially feminine. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), ch. 2, 66.

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14. For example, Robert Metz, *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye* (Chicago: Playboy Press Book, 1975). For an insightful analysis of the rise of the networks, see Laurence Bergreen, *Look Now, Pay Later: The Rise of Network Broadcasting* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980).

15. Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 81.

16. "Agency Air Credit Gets NBC `No' as CBS Tries It Out," *Variety*, 25 July 1933, 37.

17. Carroll Carroll, *None of Your Business: Or My Life with J. Walter Thompson (Confessions of a Renegade Radio Writer)* (New York: Cowles, 1970), 121.

18. JWT Staff Meeting Minutes, 21 December 1932, 9, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (hereafter JWT Staff Meeting Minutes).

19. Other examples of these careers not noted above include that of Victor Ratner, who worked for the agency Lennen & Mitchell before joining CBS, and subsequently worked for Macy's and the advertising agencies McCann-Erickson and Benton & Bowles. Another example would be John H. McGuire, who worked for a sponsor (Clicquot Club), an agency (Ruthrauff & Ryan), and a network (ABC). E.P.H. James worked for an agency, a network, and at Nielsen, the broadcast rating service.

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21. See K. Rotzoll, J. Haefner, and C. Sandage, *Advertising and Society: Perspectives towards Understanding* (Columbus, Ohio: Copywright Grid, 1976).

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24. Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: David McKay Co., 1957).

25. Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

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39. Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 6.

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41. Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, ch. 4.

42. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 89.

43. Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, ch. 5; Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Robert McChesney, "Conflict, Not Consensus: The Debate over Broadcast Communication Policy, 1930-35," in William Solomon and Robert McChesney, eds., *Ruthless Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 222-258.

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48. Michele Hilmes, "Beating the Networks at Their Own Game: The Hollywood/Ad Agency Alliance of the 1930s," unpublished paper, 2.

49. Joseph H. Jackson, "Should Radio Be Used for Advertising?" *Radio Broadcast*, November 1922, 76.

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CHAPTER 2

THE "FOURTH DIMENSION" OF ADVERTISING: ADMEN AND RADIO IN THE 1920s

Frank Arnold, the adman hired by NBC in 1926 to promote the new medium of radio, referred to radio as the "fourth dimension" of advertising—after the first, second, and third "dimensions" of newspapers, magazines, and billboards.[1] This suggests how completely new, how barely imaginable, the medium looked to the advertising industry in the 1920s. The industry's struggles to understand, embrace, and adapt this new medium is the subject of this chapter. Building on existing histories, I preface my own discussion with a brief survey of the development of the advertising industry before the advent of broadcasting, and a brief overview of the development of commercial broadcasting in the 1920s. I then begin with an analysis of how and why admen entered radio. First I explain why admen were well-positioned to enter broadcasting. Then I recount the debates over radio advertising within the advertising industry, which struggled to imagine the use of radio as an advertising medium before there was much evidence for its efficacy. (Chapter 4 will analyze advertising industry debates during the 1930s, once radio's usefulness as an advertising medium was generally accepted.) Then, using the NBC Records, I analyze the roles of admen at the broadcast networks and how they promoted radio to other admen. In a final section, on the creation of the earliest radio departments in advertising agencies, I describe how and why advertising agencies began to incorporate this “fourth dimension” into the services they offered advertisers.

The Advertising Industry before the Advent of Broadcasting

In his 1929 history of advertising, advertising man Frank Presbrey enumerated advertising's many positive contributions to commerce, dating back to its prehistoric beginnings in cave painting.[2] Presbrey’s history represented advertising as timelessly present and universally essential to human history. Historians Susan Strasser and Daniel Pope more soberly situate the development of national advertising in the nineteenth century, when mass production and consumption was made possible by the increased use of flow production (assembly lines), the improvement of transportation technologies (railroads), the branding of standardized goods to facilitate national distribution, and the development of new retail outlets, including department stores.[3] All this required increasingly specialized labor, including that of the new advertising agencies, which brokered newspaper space to advertisers beginning in the 1850s and 1860s. Agents bought advertising space from newspaper publishers at the lowest possible price and sold it to advertisers at the highest, making their profit in the resulting spread. The increase of nationally distributed branded goods and the rise of mass market magazines soon led to changes in the space brokering business. Agents such as George Rowell, J. Walter Thompson, and Francis W. Ayer introduced innovations such as compiling circulation figures in order to compare space rates, "open contracts" to ensure the agent represented the advertiser instead of the publisher, writing copy for advertisements, and basic market research.

By the 1870s, the space-brokering system was superseded by a commission system of compensation, in which newspaper and magazine publishers paid agents 15 percent of the value of the space sold. This led to the creation of agencies operating as independent entities, since agents shared with publishers an incentive to sell ad space for higher rates, and so operated independently of advertisers, who might otherwise have employed them in in-house marketing departments.[4] This commission system has survived, nearly intact, to the present. Advertising agencies charge their clients, the advertisers, not for the production of advertisements but only for the placement of those advertisements in media. Having negotiated a price for advertising space with a media outlet, such as a newspaper, the agency bills the advertiser for the space and retains 15 percent of the "billings" for compensation as a media buyer. All other services the agency may provide in addition to the brokering of media space sales, such as market research, copywriting, or art direction, is usually performed without direct compensation from the advertiser. This business model, developed when agencies handled print media alone, would have a major impact on how and why advertising agencies took up and ultimately gave over broadcast program production.

Despite the steady growth and increasing professionalization of the advertising business, during the nineteenth century advertising men were shadowed by images of earlier salesmen: the itinerant peddler, the drummer, the traveling salesman, the circus man, and the medicine tent show promoter—shady characters whose manipulative strategies succeeded in part because they were strangers passing through town.[5] The peddler, notes advertising historian Jackson Lears, was viewed as "a modern trickster, a confidence man who gained his goal through guile rather than strength—particularly through a skillful theatricality."[6] The patent medicine trade—manned by itinerants who put on "medicine shows" in which musicians and performers would attract a crowd to whom the medicines would then be sold—was just as disreputable. These figures had left a legacy admen found difficult to shake. Even the decline of the patent medicine trade did not remove the indelible association of its tactics with advertising.[7] Patent medicine makers were some of the earliest major advertisers in print media as well; the advertising agencies' association with them slowed the acceptance of such agencies as part of the business mainstream. As Pope describes the more general problem, "These advertising agents were essentially in the business of buying a shadowy, uncertain commodity—advertising space—paying for it, and reselling it to businesses whose own products were often equally obscure."[8]

Consequently, the advertising industry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to overcome the legacy of the confidence man by developing advertising strategies that emphasized sincerity and credibility, forming trade organizations, and establishing training programs. Personal "face-to-face" salesmanship was gradually displaced in importance by manufacturers' reliance on impersonal, mass-mediated selling for their nationally distributed branded goods. Lacking direct interpersonal contact with their prospects, admen sought to extend the personal approach of the salesman into the impersonal medium of print. Positioning themselves rhetorically as "side by side" with the consumer, anonymous copywriters confidentially advised their unknown readers on how to navigate the unknown waters of modern living.[9] Although impersonal, some admen realized that print could be an authoritative medium for selling, perhaps more than personal face-to-face selling. In the 1900s Albert Lasker, leader of the large Chicago agency Lord & Thomas, popularized the concept of "Salesmanship in Print," arguing that print advertising had a greater persuasion potential than personal salesmanship.[10] Lasker's theory of advertising, a form of "hard sell," would be a dominant advertising strategy in the first decades of the twentieth century. This was "reason why" advertising, in which reasons the consumer should buy the product are listed, repeated, and, often, exaggerated.

As methods of persuasion grew more sophisticated, the problem of credibility escalated. Were the claims made in some advertisements believable? Admen were urged to avoid falsehoods because, especially for makers of branded goods who sought repeat customers, in the long run believability—not just truthfulness, but the appearance of sincerity as well—would be more profitable.[11] Urged one advertising man to his peers, "[I]f we want to be credible, we would better be sincere."[12] As Lears points out, "Sincerity had become at once a moral stance and a tactic of persuasion."[13]

In the first decades of the twentieth century, as another means of overcoming its continuing association with patent medicine fraud and to deflect continual threats of regulation, the advertising industry founded trade organizations and through them promulgated industry standards.[14] The Associated Advertising Clubs of America (formed in 1905) and the American Association of Advertising Agencies (formed in 1917) sought to improve the public image of advertising and regularize the field by establishing codes of conduct.[15] The Truth-in-Advertising movement of the turn of the century emphasized the importance of credibility to the continued viability of advertising.[16] Hoping to eliminate distrust and fraud, publishers, advertisers, and their agents collaborated in the creation of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) in 1914, an organization that collected circulation data on publications.

Since advertising space rates were set in part by circulation, or number of readers, this information was crucial for building trust with buyers of advertising space. While the ABC ended the agencies' monopoly on circulation information, it enabled them to become more credible marketing advisors for advertisers.[17] During World War I, admen supported the war effort by contributing bond drive slogans (such as Hummert's slogan, "Bonds not Bondage"), and waging a propaganda campaign under the aegis of the Creel Committee. The effectiveness of these campaigns elevated the advertising industry's status.[18]

As the advertising industry expanded and professionalized in the 1920s, its boosters sought to align it with educational and even religious ideals, and many admen began to adopt the language and goals, the ethics and professionalism, of the Progressivist businessmen of the era.[19] "Business must aim to *serve*, instead of to *sell*," wrote Kenneth Goode, in his 1929 how-to advertising book.[20] Alluding to Progressivist ideals of business practice, in 1926 President Coolidge claimed that advertising was "inspiring and ennobling the commercial world" and was part of the "greater work of the regeneration and redemption of mankind."[21] Coolidge suggested that advertising could help civilize capitalism because it "ministers to the spiritual side of trade." [22] One of the best-known proponents of Progressivism in advertising was Bruce Barton, of the advertising agency Batten Barton Durstine & Osborn. Barton, a minister's son, published the best-selling book *The Man Nobody Knows* in 1924, which presented the teachings of Jesus Christ as the ideals of modern progressive business. Barton claimed that business, and by extension advertising, should emphasize the ideals of service and sincerity, ideals for which Jesus Christ set an example to the modern businessman. Referring to Jesus' parables, Barton urged admen to consider them as models for their own work:

> Take any one of the parables, no matter which—you will find that it exemplifies all the principles on which advertising text books are written. Always a picture in the very first sentence; crisp, graphic language and a message so clear that even the dullest cannot escape it.[23]

Through these analogies between biblical aphorisms and the practices of modern business Barton sought not to reduce religious universals to Babbittry but to elevate and sanctify contemporary business methods.[24] Encouraging advertising men to use Jesus Christ as a model for advertising practice, Barton emphasized, as Presbrey did as well, the universality of advertising and its potential for improving the world.

As they sought to bring advertising into the mainstream of rational business practice and to elevate it into a glorious, redemptive enterprise, advertising men of the Progressive era also sought to improve the popular image of the adman. As William Benton, Yale graduate and future Senator from Connecticut, explained about the industry in the 1920s, "At this time advertising was not looked upon as a good, sound, solid business by the business community of America. On the contrary, it looked a bit like a back alley business, a sort of shady business. . . ."[25] Consequently, in the spirit of professionalization that had transformed "real estate men" into "realtors" and "undertakers" into "morticians," some advertising men sought to be called "attorneys" and the like.[26] Terms such as "consumption engineers" and "psychological engineers" echoed the scientism then fashionable in the business world but also implied suspiciously manipulative powers.[27] Other suggested terms, such as "ambassadors of the consumer" and "liaison officers," also failed to catch on, perhaps because they sounded altogether too high-minded.[28]

By the 1920s, most advertising agencies had expanded their services to include copywriting, market research, and visual layout in addition to media placement, and divided these tasks among an expanding roster of specialized workers. Copywriters and art directors wrote and designed advertisements, account executives attracted and retained advertising clients, others bought and sold advertising space in the media. By the end of the decade, unending economic growth seemed possible, and the advertising industry appeared to be its motor.[29] Advertising industry revenues peaked at $3.4 billion in 1929.[30] Advertising historian Roland Marchand describes how advertising reflected the increasing tempo of twentieth-century life and the changes that affected nearly everyone, from electrification and assembly lines to automobiles and skyscrapers.[31] During the 1920s, Marchand argues that advertising was "both apostle of modernity and buffer against the effects of modern impersonalities of scale."[32] Advertising worked to promote modern ways while simultaneously drawing on traditional and conventional forms. Although fervent "missionaries of modernity," Marchand points out that advertising men were also sensitive to consumers' resistance to the rapid pace of technological and cultural change.[33] Advertisements often presented new technologies within the context of traditional themes, such as print advertisements that depicted radio listeners dressed for the opera.[34] Radio was a new technology that exemplified the changes in modern life that some resisted—radio was "furniture that talks."

While admen in the 1920s focused primarily on developing print strategies that reconciled the new and the traditional, radio broadcasting was developing into a commercial medium. The advertising industry did not take the initiative in developing commercialism on radio; a more significant role was played by none other than the telephone company, ATT. In the following section, I briefly summarize some of the key events in the development of commercial broadcasting in the 1920s. Drawing on historians Douglas, Hilmes, and Bergreen, as well as contemporaneous accounts, I demonstrate that fundamental elements of commercialism in broadcasting were well underway by the time advertising agencies turned to radio.

The Origins of Broadcast Commercialism

According to adman Charles Wolff, advertising has always been available "on the air": "In the haze of prehistory, a savage beat out tom-tom signals along a jungle-lined river and caused the magic of sound to rouse a distant audience of tribesmen."[35] Radio, implied Wolff, was rooted in human history and behavior. Radio carried promotional messages almost from the beginning: for example, a broadcast sold radio equipment over the air in 1915, and Dr. Frank Conrad, Westinghouse engineer, famously broadcast recorded music in 1919.[36] As historian Susan Douglas points out, since radio technology patents were left in private, corporate rather than not-for-profit or governmental control, a business was expected to be developed from those patents from the beginning.[37] Initially, that business was the manufacturing and sale of radio equipment. However, as radio usage disseminated after World War I, commercial and noncommercial interests struggled over who was to have access to the airwaves; amateur "hams" were blamed for increasing congestion of the airwaves.[38] In 1922, despite the broad use of radio by amateurs, schools, and churches, the government defined broadcast stations as commercial entities and assigned them to the purview of the Department of Commerce. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover set priorities by assigning the best and strongest frequencies to stations with commercial interests.

As Michele Hilmes argues, broadcasting was thus constructed from the beginning as a "promotional medium," for the likes of retailers, newspapers, and manufacturers, who invested in stations to promote themselves.[39] Investment in radio technology was nonetheless risky in the early years, and turnover of station ownership was high. Businesses often found radio's public relations function too expensive to maintain, and some began to wonder how else the medium might be used commercially. A key step in commercializing broadcasting was the development of "toll broadcasting" in 1921 by American Telephone and Telegraph (ATT). ATT held radio patents, but since none of them concerned the manufacturing of sets, it was forced to look for other sources of cash revenues for broadcasting. So it decided to try selling radio facilities for public use, like telephone booths of the sky. And like a telephone call, ATT imagined, the cost of the broadcast should be borne by the originator.[40] Since there were only a limited number of broadcast licenses available, according to former ATT employee Mark Woods, "the Telephone Company decided they would have one central station which they would lease to advertisers and others for sales with certain restrictions, rules and regulations." [41] That station was WEAF based in Manhattan. ATT's strategy, then, was to centralize and regulate the commercial messages that had already been going out on the air from various locally-owned stations.

"Toll broadcasting" was conceived initially as a way to send out a message. The sales staff at WEAF sought clients who would pay $50 or so to speak about their business for fifteen minutes. Most famously, the Queensboro Corporation promoted its new cooperative apartments on WEAF in August 1922. William H. Rankin, a prominent New York advertising agency, was one of the first businesses to try a "selling talk" in late 1922; it gained a potential client impressed by Rankin's bold advertising strategy.[42] However, by 1923 it was clear to ATT management that potential customers were shying away from WEAF, put off by the strict rules ATT had instituted limiting what could be said on the air. Because it viewed toll broadcasting as a type of public service, ATT had prohibited "direct advertising," that is, specific product and price information. WEAF policy stated that the advertising message had to be "confined" to the mention of the advertiser's name and product. Sensibly enough, many advertisers believed such "indirect advertising" would do little to increase sales.[43] ATT recruited George McClelland, then an officer of the Association of National Advertisers, to promote broadcasting to advertisers; still it had trouble selling air time except for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings.[44]

According to Edgar Felix, former radio amateur and then-radio advertising promoter, it was WEAF time salesman H. Clinton Smith who convinced ATT executives to expand radio advertising beyond selling talks: he proposed that advertisers be persuaded to sponsor entertainment instead.[45] Smith, a master salesman known as "Father Smith," undoubtedly noticed that musical and dramatic programs had attracted listeners on other stations.[46] It was no violation of WEAF's indirect advertising policy for program sponsors to promote themselves through the program title, followed by perhaps a brief oblique message, such as "Let those Gold Dust Twins into your hearts and homes tonight, and you'll never regret it, for they do brighten the dull spots."[47] Although WEAF did not invent the concept of program sponsorship—entertainment had been provided at other stations owned by commercial interests— its superior wattage allowed WEAF to broadcast some of the best-known early sponsored programs, including the *Eveready Hour* (produced by N. W. Ayer), *A & P Gypsies,* and *The Goodrich Silver-Masked Tenor* (produced by the William Rankin agency) all on the air by 1923.[48] ATT's competitor, Radio Corporation of America (RCA), likewise broadcast sponsored programs, such as *Wanamaker Organ Recital* on its New York stations WJZ and WJY. Thus, although national networks were not established for several more years, by 1923, as network historian Laurence Bergreen notes, the model of commercial broadcasting had already been invented: there were commercially sponsored and regularly scheduled programs such as *The Eveready Hour*, which were transmitted over distance by telephone landlines to multiple stations and produced in broadcast station facilities by an advertising agency hired by an advertiser (who also paid for the air time and for star talent).[49] Although this was not common business practice at the time, programs like *The Eveready Hour* would provide the model for future advertising agency involvement in radio.

Philadelphia-based advertising agency N. W. Ayer & Son helped produce the *Eveready Hour*, one of the first variety programs, for the radio battery manufacturer National Carbon Company, and in 1923 formed what may have been the first advertising agency radio department. One of Ayer's most important clients was the "American Company," as ATT was known, and for ATT Ayer had produced "institutional" print advertising that sought to promote not a particular product but the advertiser as a good corporate citizen. In a 1913 advertisement headlined "The Spirit of Service," ATT's commitment to keep telephone service operational even "when trains are stalled and roads are blocked" is depicted by the image of a telephone lineman in a snowstorm, waging "his lonely fight to keep the wire highways open."[50] The advertisement presented not a product or a price but ATT's role as a good corporate citizen providing a necessary service. Because of ATT's policy of avoiding the use of radio as a direct selling medium, Ayer initially relegated radio to its Public

Relations Department as a "tool for large corporations to make friends" rather than as a selling medium.[51] Many in the advertising field similarly believed that radio's primary commercial role would be to establish a corporation's identity, trademark, and public image–all institutional advertising goals.[52]

By emphasizing the public relations functions of broadcasting, ATT sought to channel the commercialism inevitable in a profit-based broadcast system into acceptable forms. WEAF broadcast primarily institutional or "good will" advertising until 1925, by which time product mentions and selling messages were allowed more and more often, especially for favored clients, such as early radio sponsor Cities Service.[53] This loosening of the rules was in part a response to WEAF's competitors, other local broadcast stations, who imposed fewer restrictions on advertisers.[54] Increased competition for advertisers stimulated more overt commercialism. These changes upset some of the top executives at ATT. Then-president Walter Gifford soon concluded that ATT's involvement in advertising and entertainment threatened to "adversely affect" the public image of ATT.[55] As a result of this, as also of pressure from antitrust investigations of its failure to make good its claim that it alone among radio patent holders was permitted to profit from "toll broadcasting," ATT sold WEAF to RCA in 1925 and withdrew from the programming business, retaining its control over the profitable long lines that connected stations.[56]

Yet indirect advertising persisted in the industry, at least as an ideal for political use. Despite the 1922-25 Radio Conferences' endorsement of advertising as the best source of funding for broadcasting, from 1924 to 1927 government officials and Congress frequently debated how and if advertising on the air should be regulated.[57] Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover reflected the concern of many in broadcasting when he pointed out in 1924 that unlike a reader of magazines and newspapers, a radio listener would have no option of skipping the advertisement; the potential for offending listeners with "direct advertising" could be the "quickest way to kill broadcasting."[58] But Hoover strongly supported indirect advertising as the foundation of a broadcasting system. His disapproval of direct advertising was not a form of "two-facedness," as Daniel Czitrom argues; it was consistent with his endorsement of indirect or good will advertising as the proper format for a medium of cultural uplift.[59] And this emphasis on radio as a means of cultural uplift (that is, as a provider of education, fine arts, and classical music), helped ward off the threat of increased federal oversight of the industry. In order to deflect any threat of government "censorship," it was resolved during the Fourth Radio Conference of 1925 that "public opinion" would supply the necessary curbs on offensive material and that commercial announcements would function primarily to create "good will" since they would be explicitly designed to avoid "ill will."[60]

This endorsement of indirect advertising was coupled with calls for increased self-regulation through industry trade associations such as the National Association of Broadcasters. Like the Truth in Advertising Movement of the 1900s, the promulgation of codes of ethics by the targeted industry itself prevented the formulation of new regulations designed by anyone who did not have a financial stake in the industry. The self-interest of broadcasters and advertisers in the 1920s, then, mandated this ostensibly enlightened form of self-control, represented as "good will" and indirect advertising. Consequently, despite congressional debates over advertising, the Radio Act of 1927 required only that sponsored programs be announced as such. Furthermore, when the new Federal Radio Commission responded to complaints that federal facilities (the airwaves) were being used to the advantage of certain commercial interests over others, the FRC quickly backed off from efforts to change allocations or censor programs, claiming it was "unwise" to "make universal rules about advertising."[61]

These debates over free speech, advertising, regulation, and the public interest were part of a wider discourse regarding “corporate liberalism,” or what historian Martin Sklar describes as a “reconstruction of the political-economic order on the basis of the mutual adaption of corporate capitalism and the American liberal tradition.”[62] Small-producer proprietary capitalism had given way to large-scale, corporately administered capitalism, and progressives struggled to reconcile bureaucratic and oligopolistic corporate practices with liberal notions of individualism, the sanctity of private property, and free markets. Thus, rather than view the social and economic changes of this period as a struggle of pro-business interests against pro-regulatory interests, historian Jeffrey Lustig argues that the actual struggle was to form a viable theory of corporate liberalism, which “was pro-business *and* pro-state, dedicated to private profit *and* to regulatory reform. It was both corporate and liberal, and not only because it arose in defense of the corporation; it also tried to apply individualist modes of reasoning to the problems of an organized society.”[63] As broadcast historian Thomas Streeter has pointed out, most debates over the structure of the US broadcasting system “are regularly framed in terms of reconciling individual freedom with social constraint.”[64] Applying the right of free speech to broadcasting, corporate liberals understood it as freedom from undesired political interference, including the right to broadcast commercials. And under Secretary of State Herbert Hoover, the public interest was interpreted as that which balanced the interests of capital and labor and brought them into a more functional relationship. These precepts lay the groundwork for a regulatory structure that managed competition by reducing open access, replaced political free speech with commercial free speech, and justified itself by technocratic theories of management and technological change.[65] Thus, while multifarious factors and forces affected the formation of what were to become the national networks, a key element was the ability of broadcasting's stakeholders to apply liberal concepts such as free speech to the commercialization of the airwaves. From the outset the key to the new networks' survival was their ability to place commercialization within this generally accepted political framework.

The importance of building viable radio networks by connecting stations with ATT's telephone lines became very clear during ATT's WEAF experiment. ATT made some of the earliest efforts to link stations with telephone lines in the period of 1923-26. Its longtime agency Ayer later claimed to have provided some of the impetus for forming a commercial network by demanding linked stations for its radio clients.[66] This had the additional benefit of increasing business for Ayer's client ATT, which owned the long distance toll lines over which programs were sent.[67] Linked stations could share programming, thus splitting its costs among them. Also, performers at one broadcast station could reach listeners at a different broadcast station, obviating the need to pack up and take the show on the road. As Susan Smulyan points out, networked programming's economies of scale presented a strong incentive to individual stations.[68]

Furthermore, national advertisers, put off by the amateur production values that dominated local broadcasting as well as the limitations of local markets, demanded "a wider circle of listeners" for their sponsored programs.[69]. Local businesses would never have large enough advertising budgets to sustain radio. The highest spending advertisers were national advertisers, such as Procter & Gamble, General Motors, or Kraft, which sought to develop mass markets for their products. Networking addressed the limitations of the broadcast signal, otherwise limited to a number of miles from the transmitter, extending radio's "reach" to a large number of geographically dispersed listeners. It allowed an advertiser to penetrate multiple markets on a scale hitherto unseen in the print media, such as national magazines. And these advertisers, aiming at such large markets, were likely to invest far more than local advertisers in high-cost and high-quality programming.[70]

National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was created in 1926 by a consortium of radio patent holders, including RCA, General Electric, and Westinghouse. WEAF, formerly owned by ATT and soon to be renamed WNBC, was merged with RCA's WJZ. Although others had created loose "chains" of stations, the formation of NBC was significant in that its powerful corporate backing meant it was less likely to fail and thus could attract national advertisers. NBC sought to add other stations to its "web." Local stations that agreed to affiliate paid fees for receiving programming over ATT lines and were identified on air as NBC affiliates. NBC developed two networks: the "Red" network, which included its powerful stations in New York City, and the smaller and weaker "Blue" network. The leaders of NBC, David Sarnoff at RCA and Owen Young at GE, considered its purpose the promotion of such Progressive business ideals as public service and cultural uplift, bringing high culture to those otherwise unexposed.[71] More practically, they conceived programming as a loss leader to stimulate set sales for RCA, the largest radio set manufacturer. Sarnoff, however, preferred to describe the business model in public service terms: programming would be circulated for free like books from a lending library.[72] Before 1930, then, the official policy at NBC was that radio was a "good will medium" and "not a selling medium," and NBC instituted rules forbidding pricing, the use of superlatives, and sample offers.[73] This rigidity toward advertisers, inherited from ATT, would generate internal conflicts at NBC and damage its relationships with major advertisers, until eventually, Sarnoff acknowledged advertising as a "reputable practice" that would preserve "free" broadcasting.[74]

Various networks, organized as regional webs, provided some competition to NBC;[75] its chief rival, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), founded in 1927, would contribute at least as much as NBC to the reshaping of the commercial broadcasting business model. Originally formed by a music recording company concerned that radio would destroy the recording business, CBS was bought in 1927 by William Paley, the son of a cigar advertiser. Paley's family had advertised their La Palina cigars on radio and had seen sales rise exponentially as a result.[76] Realizing thus that radio could serve advertisers well, Paley entered broadcast networking not to provide a high-minded public service but to advertise. As one observer noted, CBS was "free to make money" from advertising.[77] In contrast to NBC, which enjoyed cross-subsidization from its parent company RCA, CBS had no parent company to protect it or provide it with capital in lean times. It had to pursue advertisers and bring in affiliates aggressively.

Working from his perspective as a radio advertiser, Paley altered the basic relationship between network and affiliated stations. He noticed that affiliates would occasionally refuse to transmit network programs, replacing them with local programs, and recognized that such insubordination undercut the very purpose of networking, which was to reach the largest audience possible for advertisers. How could a network guarantee to an advertiser that its message would reach the entire networked audience? Paley's revolutionary solution was to give affiliates an incentive in the form of cash payments. CBS affiliates agreed to "clear" or carry CBS-transmitted programs in return for "compensation." The affiliates thus gained top quality programming plus a new revenue stream; the network programming would attract and build local audiences and allow them to increase prices for air time in other time slots. For CBS, the stations' guaranteed "clearance" of its broadcasts would attract advertisers interested in reaching the largest audiences possible, allowing it to negotiate higher prices for air time. Once it became clear that CBS was attracting many affiliates with this compensation structure, NBC was forced to follow suit and began paying its affiliates compensation as well.

Thus, by the late 1920s, the linkage of stations into networks that could efficiently share programming and connect advertisers with national audiences provided the infrastructure for radio's emergence as a national medium of American popular culture. The establishment of network radio led to the dissemination of a new communications technology during a decade defined by a booming economy, urbanization, modernization, and a growing consumerism that was reshaping daily life. Radio would quickly find a place in American homes that were simultaneously adopting other new technologies, such as refrigerators, washing machines, and the private automobile.[78] The radio "fad" of the mid 1920s traded on the novelty of the talking box; however, networks' ability to distribute high quality programming (especially from the New York cultural industries of vaudeville and Broadway) quickly elevated the value of radio from technological novelty to cultural necessity—to a need to be tuned in. Radio set ownership increased steadily through the 1920s, from 400,000 in 1923, jumping to 1.25 million in 1924 when the "fad" first exploded, to 4.5 million in 1926, when NBC was established, to 13.75 million in 1930.[79]

Although the establishment of national networks was the keystone of the development of commercial broadcasting, broadcasters still faced a challenge in convincing advertisers to use this new medium. The advertising industry was essential in helping convince advertisers, and, in the process, helping shape the new medium for commercial purposes. Agencies were pushed into radio in part by pressure from broadcasters, who needed advertising expertise to build advertiser interest in radio, and from advertisers, who sought entry into this potentially powerful new advertising medium through trusted advisors. Although other historians, such as Smulyan, have noted advertising agency reluctance and then increasing enthusiasm for radio, no one has analyzed why admen were so well-positioned to mediate among broadcasters and advertisers.[80] In the following section, I describe the specific qualifications admen had for radio, as well as describe internal advertising industry debates about advertising on radio.

Salesmanship in the Sky

The advertising industry of the 1920s, which was enjoying peak revenues and a new flush of respectability in the business world, confronted the advent of radio broadcast advertising with both misgivings and high hopes.[81] Dismissed by many in the advertising industry as a passing fad, radio nonetheless appealed to a number of advertising men for its ability to reach vast markets. Seeking to expand the definition of advertising beyond "salesmanship in print," the radio boosters promoted broadcasting as an effective means for communicating business ideals, for generating "good will" toward corporate sponsors of entertainment, and for personalizing selling strategies more effectively than in the voiceless medium of print. Like billboards, another relatively new advertising medium, radio offered new opportunities for advertisers willing to experiment. Still, not everyone was sold on this peculiar business of broadcasting, characterized by *Fortune* magazine as "sell[ing] time, an invisible commodity, to fictitious beings called corporations for the purpose of influencing an audience that no one can see."[82]

From the beginning, the sellers of advertising time—the broadcasters—and the buyers of time—the advertisers—turned to admen, who were especially well-positioned to bring them together. First, as broadcasters had to acknowledge from the outset, advertising agencies had pre-existing relationships with advertisers, the potential radio sponsors.[83] Advertising agencies usually controlled the media buying for their clients, and thus had the power to move an advertiser's accounts from one media outlet to another. Thus, broadcasters usually had to work with a potential sponsor's agency in order to land an account. An agency functioned as "an intimate advisor" to its client, bringing an outsider's view with an "inside angle" to an advertiser's marketing problem.[84] An agency could convince an advertiser either to try radio or to avoid it. To be sure, there were a few cases where an agency was so opposed to radio that its clients simply circumvented it. As the president of the Cliquot Club beverage company declared in 1923, "My advertising agency doesn't believe much in radio, so we'll go ahead without consulting it."[85] But for the most part, the key to convincing an advertiser to allocate some of its advertising budget to radio was in the hands of the advertiser's agency.

Second, admen trained in the persuasive arts could use those same arts to overcome advertiser resistance to the new medium. Salesmen pride themselves on being able to sell anything, and radio presented a particular challenge in the late 1920s.[86] The networks' sales departments promoted radio's advertising efficacy; however, their need to sell time affected their credibility. Advertising agencies, on the other hand, could claim to be marketing experts, analyzing the advertiser's needs and recommending broadcast media with the same objectivity as they had print media. And as marketing advisors to a diverse array of advertisers, admen were far better positioned to evaluate the marketing needs of their clients than the radio industry.

Third, admen offered advertisers expertise with markets and methods of appeal. Their experience in targeting markets in print media, and in such matters as the vehicle, timing, talent, and context of a commercial message, made them better qualified than either networks or independent program producers to evaluate potential entertainment vehicles as appropriate contexts for an advertiser's message. Admen, having a sense of business needs, would mediate more effectively than networks between entertainers and sponsors.[87]

Fourth, although they provided copywriting and art for advertising, advertising agencies' primary revenue source was media placement. Agencies offered advertisers special rates and deals with publishers based on volume and circulation; as time passed, agency media buyers would become expert at time buying strategies as well. Thus, advertising agencies offered a brokering service to advertisers, retaining their accounts by fighting in their behalf for the best deals. Some agencies, such as J. Walter Thompson, developed multiple broadcasting accounts at networks and were then able to wield a great deal of leverage in negotiations with networks over scheduling and rates.

Finally, in general admen were well-positioned to enter broadcasting because they were uniquely well positioned to protect their clients' advertising interests. The networks, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, were likely to enforce their own standards for advertising and programs, occasionally in opposition to advertisers and their agencies. Independent program producers, hailing mainly from the show business worlds of theater and vaudeville, were likely to advance their concern for entertainment values rather than advertising goals. The musical and theatrical performers enlisted for sponsored programs were likely to advance their own interests without much caring for the overarching sales needs of the advertiser. And advertisers, especially if new to the medium and to the concept of entertainment as selling tool, were likely to be hampered by inexperience. But admen, despite their lack of experience in show business, were well qualified, by their marketing experience and their willingness to promote advertisers' interests, to mediate and negotiate for advertisers with broadcasters, talent, and program producers. As one adman claimed in 1929, the adman "is an impresario because he is an expert on popular taste and how to cater to it, to educate it and improve it. It is logical to think that he is destined to be an important factor in radio."[88]

Despite this enviable position at the advent of commercial broadcasting, initially many in the advertising industry resisted entering the new medium. The conservative trade journal *Printers' Ink* editorialized against radio advertising in 1922, complaining that it would prove offensive since "The family circle is not a public place, and advertising has no business intruding there unless it is invited."[89] In 1923, *Printers' Ink* further editorialized that WEAF listeners of "high-class entertainment" who have been "wheedled into listening to a selfish message will naturally be offended." The probable reason for *Printers' Ink* criticism, beyond concern for the privacy of the family circle, beomes clear when the editorial goes on to warn that newspapers will stop publicizing radio programs "if the broadcasters are themselves going to enter into advertising competition with the newspapers."[90] Agencies were, and still are, compensated with a 15 percent commission on the price of space sold to an advertiser, which is officially paid by the publisher *not* the advertiser. Thus, concern over straining relations with their primary business collaborators, the print publishers, motivated some admen to protect their interests in the print media by openly criticizing radio. Furthermore, most of the advertising pages in *Printers' Ink* were sold to newspaper publishers and thus the trade magazine sought to cater to its own largest advertisers.[91]

But advertising agencies had other concerns about radio aside from their desire to maintain good relations with print publishers; they had also to consider the reputation of their profession. Roland Marchand usefully divides the admen who sought increasing professionalization in the period into two general groups, the "real pros" and those who viewed advertising as "uplift." Real pros believed advertising was only as good as the sales figures it generated. Seeking to shake its association with medicine-show style entertainment and bring it into the mainstream of conventional business practice, real pros represented advertising as both a business and a science; they favored quantifiable results and emphasized hard-sell strategies, such as "reasons why" to buy a product, over soft sell strategies, such as the use of associations and emotions. Admen such as Albert Lasker and Claude Hopkins of the Chicago agency Lord & Thomas subscribed to many real pro beliefs. On the other hand, the "uplift" model of advertising, promulgated most famously by Bruce Barton of BBDO, represented advertising as a form of education and a kind of public service, and sought to associate it with high culture forms. N. W. Ayer, for example, went so far as to arrange a gallery of their advertising work for public viewing as art. Many who believed in the uplift model looked to education, especially the formation of advertising curricula in higher education, as a route to respectability and professionalization. The uplift approach favored soft sell, subtle appeals, and indirect and institutional advertising.[92]

Radio presented problems for both factions of professionalizers. To begin with, in the early to mid 1920s radio appeared to be a passing fad, a pastime for amateurs and engineers.[93] In keeping with the increased dignity of their business, both real pros and uplifters feared that associating their clients with a fad of limited appeal could detract from the seriousness of their business. Furthermore, before standards improved with the establishment of the networks, uplifters wished to avoid juxtaposing commercial messages with local programs of variable quality, many of which relied on unpaid and amateur performers. The inconsistency of program quality and the outrageousness of fraudulent advertisers such as Dr. John Brinkley, who promoted goat glands as a cure for impotence until his station license was revoked, tainted radio as vulgar, especially for uplifters. In fact, beginning with NBC's announcement in 1926 that it would provide quality programming,[94] the networks continually stressed their ability to elevate the quality of programming precisely in order to attract advertisers and agencies concerned with potentially damaging associations.

Real pros dismissed radio for its supposed ephemerality: no one knew how many listeners received a broadcast commercial message; it left no mark or solid evidence of its existence.[95] An advertising message on radio could not be reread or reconsidered; it passed through the air to be heard only once. Unlike print media circulation, for which the advertising and publishing industries had established "audited" figures overseen by the Audit Bureau of Circulations, radio's reach or penetration could not be measured.[96] Some argued that this lack of hard data did not mean radio was an ineffective advertising medium; they compared radio to billboards or transit advertising, for which there were likewise no circulation measurements.[97] Some sought to measure listenership through fan mail, and instigated promotions, contests, and giveaways to stimulate such mail. A high volume of mail could be used to persuade a potential sponsor of the size of radio audiences. John Sample, of the agency Blackett-Sample-Hummert, described the results of one premium offer made on the *Ma Perkins* radio program:

> Then we offered a package of zinnia seeds for a dime. We drew about 1,000,000 dimes. The letters covered the floor of an office.... I took Mr. Deupree and some other top [Procter & Gamble] people and I went in there and we walked around on top of all those letters. That's the first time P&G executives had demonstrated to them the power of this relatively new advertising medium....[98]

Detractors, however, dismissed such mail on the ground that that fans usually gushed about the program rather than the product sponsoring it. Most letters requesting offered premiums expressed no gratitude toward the sponsor such as might manifest itself in the purchase of the sponsor’s product.[99] Real pros, then, distrusted this measure of radio circulation. As the radio director of J. Walter Thompson admitted in a private staff meeting, mail volume was no true indication of a program's selling effectiveness.[100] By 1930, the ANA established the first "circulation" figures for radio broadcasts.[101] But though networks' circulation claims thus gradually grew more credible, many admen worried that radio provided "wasted coverage" since networks broadcast to markets in which their clients did not sell, thus incurring increased expense without possibility of increased sales.[102]

Real pros, along with many of their advertiser clients, especially doubted the usefulness of “good will” advertising. Many admen felt such generalized goodwill as radio advertising could generate was simply not worth the expense of program production for most advertisers.[103] Good will advertising would be useful only to advertisers more concerned with national corporate image than product sales, mainly just a few large national corporations. Many real pros therefore viewed advertisers' interest in radio as simply a case of "acute inflammatory radioitis," or the desire of companies' leaders to scratch the "publicity itch"—to seek glory, not sales.[104] Furthermore, the model of radio as a “good will” medium had obvious limits. As one dissenter at J. Walter Thompson pointed out, if competitors each provide sponsored programs, such as Cliquot Club and Canada Dry for their ginger ale products, then which ginger ale company would reap good will from listeners? Would all that "good will" cancel itself out?[105]

Many of the uplifters, on the other hand, extolled radio as a good will medium. Many in the professional middle classes regarded radio as a vehicle of cultural uplift for the masses through educational and high cultural programming.[106] Corporations applying enlightened self-interest would, they felt, sponsor opera, theater, and educational talks aimed at raising the level of cultural discourse. Many admen regarded radio as a kind of home theater, to be quietly appreciated with all the dignity and gravitas that accompanies the attending of opera. Direct advertising of packaged goods and the like could only jar and offend audiences with such expectations.[107]

The fear that direct advertising would undercut the medium's effectiveness, reviewed above as it affected the political environment, lay behind the consistent emphasis on indirect selling within agencies throughout the 1920s. Radio, according to *Advertising & Selling* radio editor Edgar Felix, should be recognized as "a medium for winning good will and as a method of establishing a pleasant association with a trade or firm name."[108] Admen who believed this often reflected the views of their clients. For example, in an exchange with the B.F. Goodrich Company in 1925, the advertising manager of the Kolynos Co., later a significant radio advertiser, was asked the value of radio advertising. He responded, "We feel that direct advertising through the radio would be more likely to antagonize rather than produce sales, and that anything that is done should be put in the form of entertainment."[109] The Goodrich advertising manager concurred, concluding that the "value of this advertising is in the indirect effect it has on its listeners."[110] By 1929, an industry-sponsored survey indicated that just over half of radio listeners were "annoyed" by radio advertising.[111] Thus, as late as 1930, many in broadcasting and advertising remained certain that direct selling on radio would offend listeners.[112]

The debate over the viability of direct advertising on radio to some extent repeated a similar debate over whether or not radio should be "selling its editorial pages."[113] Following the print model, some admen argued that editorial and advertising functions on radio should be kept distinct, that advertisers should not be providing the editorial material, that is, the programs. In 1926 the advertising manager for General Electric, while enthusiastic about radio advertising, assumed that "Broadcasting will probably not be employed in direct selling until some plan is provided by which such advertising can be definitely segregated from all other programs."[114] An anonymous but "prominent" adman argued in the trade press that the conflation of editorial and advertising on radio by way of sponsored programs would eventually undermine the advertising effectiveness of the medium.[115] In 1928, a dissenter at J. Walter Thompson argued that since "All radio `space' is *editorial space*" and since advertising space cannot be "skipped or delayed until time suits its reading," advertisers risk earning "ill will" from listeners if the advertising is not "universally pleasing."[116] In print media, the publisher has the responsibility to attract readers with editorial material; advertisers only buy the attention of those readers by purchasing space adjacent to editorial material. Some admen argued that broadcasters should likewise provide content instead of "scattering the responsibility" for it among advertisers and their agencies.[117] They suggested that, to guarantee the medium's viability, the networks should take control over programming, leaving only brief periods, at intervals of a half hour or so, to the agencies and their advertisements.[118]

Radio advertising's detractors had other concerns about the value of the airwaves. By defining advertising as "salesmanship in print," admen sought to associate selling not with the patent-medicine trade but with the credible, sober, calculated, and literate venue of print. Radio brought this association in question. As one adman claimed, "The longstanding definition of advertising, `Salesmanship in print,' passed into the discard when radio made its debut."[119] Radio "is oral salesmanship instead of salesmanship in print."[120] The reliance on oral selling strategies raised uncomfortable memories of the type of hucksterism associated with face-to-face selling, such as the carnival barker or medicine show.[121] Some admen cheerfully admitted that radio selling was not unlike the traveling medicine shows, in which the vendor would put on a show out of his wagon to attract crowds for sales of patent medicine. Robert Colwell, of J. Walter Thompson, confessed, "Get the crowd around, and then sell your wares. Good radio is just as simple as that."[122] More often, however, radio critics of the 1930s would use the medicine show analogy to criticize commercial broadcasting.[123]

Another objection, one that would affect debates over the role of the advertising industry in broadcasting well through the 1950s, was whether advertising men should be involved in entertainment. If advertising were to become a respected business enterprise, then involvement in show business would seriously undermine admen's insistence that they were professionals, "consumption engineers," in Calkins' phrase. The entire discourse of Progressive business practice was predicated on the promotion of scientific principles, whereas nothing could be less scientific than show business, a slippery, unpredictable, ephemeral enterprise. Nobody could ever predict what show would be successful; the business operated in a marginal and disreputable social sphere populated with hustlers and subject to the disruptive sexuality of fallen women. As George Faulkner of J. Walter Thompson explained, "the word showman carries an undignified, cheap connotation. It has a vaguely Semitic, Barnumish, Broadway air to it."[124] How could men of business enter show business and guarantee results for their advertising clients? Too many factors were difficult to control: the tempers of talent, the whims of popular taste, the risks of offending audiences with inappropriate material, and other imponderables. As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, the tension between the strategies of rational appeals and the strategies of the carnivalesque would shape the intraindustry debates throughout the entire history of advertising agency involvement in programming.

Radio as the Fourth Dimension

At first, then, the advertising industry had deep reservations about participating in commercial network broadcasting. In addition to all those listed in the previous section, there was also the practical obstacle of cost. To enter radio, advertising agencies would need to establish radio departments, or at the very least, hire new personnel. Their reluctance to develop such resources was sometimes overcome only by the prodding of their clients on the one side and of broadcasters on the other. To be sure, some promotion of radio came from within the industry itself. Edgar Felix, for example, as radio editor at the trade publication *Advertising & Selling*, promoted radio as an advertising medium, publishing some of the first "how to" articles for the trade. Much more came from the broadcast networks.

The networks pursued two strategies to entice the agencies into supporting advertiser use of radio. First, during the WEAF experiment and then more formally at NBC during the presidency of Merlin Aylesworth, broadcasters offered a 15 percent commission to agencies on the air time sold to their clients whether or not the agencies had any involvement in the broadcast.[125] Second, the networks hired advertising men to promote radio to advertisers and other advertising men, recognizing that only through personnel familiar with advertisers and agencies could they address the industry's concerns and counter the arguments of the established print media and conservative corporate leaders. In 1926 the NBC board of directors hired Frank A. Arnold, the well-known advertising account executive and director of the Frank Seaman advertising agency, as NBC's "Ambassador at Large to the American Business World."[126] A year later they hired British adman E. P. H. James to provide promotional support. At CBS, initially William Paley himself solicited accounts. By 1930, the network hired former Lennen & Mitchell executive Paul Kesten to furnish promotional campaigns, thereby drastically improving CBS's relations with advertisers.

Rather than sell advertisers specific programs to sponsor, Arnold was directed to tell the "wonderful story" of the "modern miracle" of radio to constituencies involved in advertising, including advertisers, advertising agencies, and advertising media.[127] He had had a long career in retail merchandising, publishing (*Dry Goods Chronicle, Suburban Life*), and advertising before he joined NBC, and was able to capitalize on his personal relationships with agency leaders. Touring the country, he addressed trade groups and visited the "head man" of local advertising organizations in order to encourage them to convince their clients to try radio.[128] According to his colleague E.P.H. "Jimmy" James, the fact that Arnold was "an oldish man" who "embraced the brand new medium of radio made it a little more respectable than if he hadn't."[129] His age and experience lent an imprimatur of respectability to the new medium, considered by many to be "a young man's fancy."[130] Likewise, Mark Woods, a WEAF veteran and later president of NBC Blue and founder of his own advertising agency Woods and Warwick, claimed that Arnold's embrace of radio "lent a certain amount of stability to the broadcast business among agency men, which it didn't previously have."[131]

In order to position radio as an effective advertising tool, Arnold considered and discarded several terms referring to what NBC offered advertisers. He rejected the term "broadcasting," because that could include noncommercial radio. He rejected "radio advertising" because it suggested that NBC was advertising radio sets. Instead of these he invented the phrase "broadcast advertising" and that became NBC's official name for the medium.[132] Because NBC had no promotion department initially, Arnold himself wrote and commissioned a number of pamphlets he titled "Little Books on Broadcasting," which he distributed to advertisers and their agencies.[133] Titles included "What Broadcasting Means to Business," by NBC president Aylesworth; "Broadcasting and the National Advertiser"; "The Technique of Broadcast Advertising"; "The

Advertising Agency and the Broadcasting Medium"; and "Popular Reactions to Radio Broadcasting."

With the aim of suggesting broadcast advertising would supplement rather than supplant print advertising, Arnold designated radio the "fourth dimension of advertising." Newspapers, the first dimension of advertising, are "the bulwark of our civilization." Magazines, the second dimension, contribute to "the literary culture of the people." Outdoor advertising, the third dimension, includes billboards and display advertising. And broadcasting, the fourth dimension, adds "height" to advertising because it extends "100 miles up to the roof of the sky."[134] With this construct, Arnold simultaneously positioned radio alongside conventional advertising media and boosted its futuristic potential.[135]

E.P.H. "Jimmy" James, NBC's other promoter of radio to advertisers and their agencies, was a British advertising man recruited by the Lord & Thomas agency for their client RCA, NBC's parent. His career would take him from NBC to the Mutual Broadcasting System, and by the 1960s, to the A. C. Nielsen Company.[136] James worked to help potential advertisers create a "copy slant" for their broadcast advertising. He grouped broadcast advertising into five categories, each associated with a particular type of radio entertainment: institutional (*The Ipana Troubadours*), fantastic (*The Schikerling Crystal Gazers*), personification (*The Gold Dust Twins*), feature (*Atwater Kent Radio Artists*), and dramatic (*First National Pictures*).[137] For James, the advertisers should associate themselves with compatible entertainment vehicles. Thus, the Cliquot Club ginger ale company should provide entertainment that was "effervescent," like ginger ale.[138] As these program names indicate, Arnold and James were primarily concerned with promoting radio as a "good will" medium. Prices, product claims, and even the naming of specific products were to be avoided. As James recalls, NBC policy was that the "announcer is an invited guest in the home of the listener," and so radio could not be "a selling medium."[139] Good will, argued Arnold, is "the greatest single element in business today," and broadcast advertising should thus avoid creating offense and instead "bring about a feeling of gratitude and pleasant obligation" on the part of the listener.[140]

Unlike NBC, which initially emphasized its public service duties over its commercial aims, CBS lacked the cross-subsidization of a corporate parent or the financial muscle of a manufacturing division and thus from the outset staked its success on its ability please advertisers. Before Paley took over the network, he solicited the opinions of top advertising men on the future of radio, and then moved CBS headquarters to Madison Avenue, for better proximity to the advertising industry.[141] According to its promotional literature, CBS employees charged with handling advertisers were proudly regarded as "first of all advertising men."[142] The sales staff at CBS by 1932 had "an intimate knowledge of agency practice" and usually "had long experience selling 'space.'"[143] In a CBS promotional brochure published in 1929 and aimed at advertising executives, broadcasting is presented as a "subtle" form of advertising that "creates a subconscious obligation in the mind of the listener" to buy sponsors' products out of gratitude for the sponsored programs. Listing the ways in which radio works for the advertiser, the pamphlet claims that broadcasting is "emotional," since musical programs affect "mind, heart and soul." By "owning a certain hour on the air each week," the advertiser gains a "right-of-way through the ether." In case readers remain unconvinced of these powers, the pamphlet explains that only radio can solve the publicity problems created by mergers, consolidations, and interlocking directorates, because it is the only medium "that will reach everyone—everywhere!"[144]

Before Paul Kesten joined CBS in 1930, he had had a career in retail and advertising, working for Gimbel's department store and the Lennen & Mitchell advertising agency, where his CBS colleagues William Klauber and Hugh Boice had also worked. At CBS Kesten directed promotion, helped shape television standards as "vice president in charge of the future," and ultimately ran the network during Paley's absence in World War II.[145] His task as director of sales promotion was, in his words, "advertising advertising—to *advertisers*."[146] Initially he used general arguments in his pamphlets to persuade advertisers to try radio, but he soon switched tactics. Radio, according to Kesten, had been seen as "ephemeral, fantastic. It was drama, mystery, music. It lacked a background of facts. It had never been placed in a frame of statistics and hung upon a wall of evidence, along with other advertising media."[147] So Kesten went about collecting and publishing radio facts in his pamphlets, such as the number of radio sets in use (*The Flood Hits the Valley*), and radios in households defined by income (*Has Radio Sold the Goods*?).

Kesten also worked to provide statistical data about listenership at a time when there was little available. In 1930 the Association of National Advertisers sponsored the "Crossley" ratings, which ascertained listenership through telephone surveys. Since the Crossleys indicated that NBC stations had larger audiences than CBS stations, Kesten sought to undermine them. His own surveys, conducted by postcards asking what radio stations the respondent listened to, favored CBS stations over NBC, and so provided CBS with a counter to the Crossleys and a means of attracting and retaining advertisers.[148] Throughout his tenure at CBS, Kesten emphasized the use of scientific-sounding data, statistics, and information, and his proteges, such as Frank Stanton, further developed the strategy. Although the information he and his cohorts cultivated tended to promote CBS specifically, Kesten sought to emulate NBC's rhetoric of service by claiming that his research supported the value of broadcast advertising in general.[149] This professed lack of self-interest was not only a canny sales pitch to dubious advertisers, but also an acknowledgment that the medium itself had to be sold before CBS' success could be assured.

In breaking down sales resistance to broadcast advertising, radio promoters routinely emphasized certain virtues: radio "appeals to the ear,"[150] radio is a personal medium, and radio penetrates the domestic space of the home. Seeking a route into the consumer's purchasing rationales, promoters argued that the "ear," as opposed to the eye, could be considered "a most receptive channel for appeals to reason or emotion."[151] Advertisers who debated the comparative efficacy of rational versus emotional appeals could be assured that radio was a good medium for both approaches because, unlike print, the human voice could provide nuances of meaning, degrees of feeling, and hints of intimacy. As radio promoter and academic Herman Hettinger claimed, "the human voice still remains the most potent instrument of emotional expression."[152] Having struggled to communicate sincerity in print copy, some admen embraced radio's dependence on the voice as a better means to this end and therefore useful in the establishment of advertiser credibility. The voice on the radio, whether authoritative or coaxing, knowledgeable sounding or questioning, brought a human presence to the advertising message that print could not. Vocal impersonations of the friendly local grocer, or the neighbor lady down the street, were likely to engage the trust of listeners. Radio columnist Edgar Felix announced in 1928 in *Advertising & Selling* that "Radio oracles are winning confidence not only by real radio personality, but by conscientious service."[153] At CBS, Kesten claimed even greater powers for the radio voice: listeners, he wrote in one of his pamphlets, do as they are told. Alone among advertising media, radio "presents the *living* voice of authority," which gives it the "supple power to move people and mold them, to enlist them and command them."[154] Radio voices were not domineering, according to Kesten, but simply authoritative, like those of a parent or teacher.

Radio's dependence on the human voice thus offered opportunities to personalize advertising messages, to build the confidence of listeners and develop more humanized images of advertisers.[155] By cultivating personalities that spoke directly to "you" the listener, radio was able, in the view of some admen, to moderate the potentially alienating effects of fast, novel, mass-oriented technologies. The irony was that radio was the most effective “mass” medium then invented, in the sense that it could reach millions simultaneously, unlike mass print media, and yet radio was experienced by listeners in the privacy of their individual homes. Radio also promised to strengthen the seller-purchaser relationships undermined by national distribution systems. Edgar Felix claimed that radio "humanizes an impersonal business," in part because "personality is still a necessary qualification of salesmanship" in an era of national brands rather than local goods.[156] As an NBC salesman wrote to an ad agency in 1928, broadcasting "promotes a pseudo-friendship ... between the listeners and certain performers whom they have come to associate with a product or company. The listener feels an increased interest and attachment instilled by a phantasmagoric contact between them and him."[157] Far from alienating the listener, the new technology might instead provide a nurturing, if ghostly, presence. Hearing the voice as directed to herself alone, a listener might, admen claimed, feel a message sent to thousands as the personal message of a confidante. This attribution of magical powers to radio was perhaps a reflection of admen's disdain for the intellectual capacities of their invisible audience. Broadcast historian Smulyan argues that the magical hyperbole shows that skeptics still had to be convinced of radio's advertising efficacy. [158]

Radio also provided advertisers an entree into private domestic space. Fearing that potential customers brace themselves to resist the advertising they are exposed to at work, on the street, and during their travels, some advertisers hoped that at home in front of the radio, potential customers would be "at leisure and their minds receptive."[159] Unlike the door-to-door salesman, whose efforts to get in the door might be resented, the radio program was "invited" to speak directly to people as they relaxed in privacy. A relaxed audience was potentially a more receptive one. As Arnold argued, "Here you have the advertiser's ideal—the family group in its moments of relaxation awaiting your message. Nothing equal to this has ever been dreamed of by the advertising man."[160] Likewise James pointed out to potential advertisers that "A broadcast advertisement is intimate, confidential. It is permitted to take part in the family life. It enjoys the confidence of the family circle."[161] Noting that people behave differently when alone or in a group or with family, NBC president Aylesworth argued that "It is the `member-of-the-family' self to which broadcast advertising most often appeals."[162] Some advertisers thus viewed this access to the family circle as an opportunity; a manager at Kraft Cheese believed that "It is indeed a rare privilege for the advertiser to enter the American home ... without even a knock on the door. ... In radio we have an invisible power...."[163]

If references to radio's potential “invisible power” did not convince, promoters were quick to point out more practical applications. Radio could be a "supplementary" advertising medium, part of an overall marketing plan, creating "tie-ins" with other promotional efforts.[164] James recalls that as an advertising man with print experience he worked to encourage advertisers to *add* radio advertising to marketing plans rather than drop print advertising in favor of radio. James would point out "that a chorus is more effective than a solo."[165] Broadcast advertising promoters were anxious not to alienate the print media, and so consistently urged advertisers to consider broadcasting as one more instrument to use in concert with already proven media.[166]

Perhaps most important, however, was promoters' awareness of the unique quality of radio not shared with other media: radio could address "vast audiences simultaneously" because broadcasting "permeates everything, everywhere."[167] No print media enjoyed the advantages of network radio, which would eventually reach nearly every home. Most print media were either local, like newspapers, or limited by interest group, like magazines. To be sure, some national magazines, such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, were vastly popular; nonetheless even they could never gather as large an audience (including the illiterate) as radio. Radio promised to revolutionize communication by compressing time and space and so becoming the first truly national mass medium. To advertisers concerned about the fragmenting of their messages among various print media, radio could be sold as having the potential to create a unified message with a national impact.

Advertising Agencies Found Radio Departments

Former WEAF staffer Mark Woods credits the William H. Rankin agency with being one of the first major agencies "to back this new medium."[168] Rankin's broadcast of actress Marion Davies promoting cosmetic company Mineralava on WEAF in 1922 was probably the first agency produced sponsored program.[169] But most advertising agencies in the mid 1920s were, as NBC promoter E.P.H.

James recalls, "quite indifferent to radio."[170] Their clients' interest in the new medium required some attention, although James claims that clients often went ahead into radio without their agencies.[171] Agency disinterest in radio was reflected in the fact that, even when radio departments appeared in agencies, they were often kept separate from other departments; and despite their increasing importance over the next two decades many radio departments remained marginalized. Many admen, especially heads of agencies, continued to view radio as "a necessary evil."[172]

Agency involvement in radio developed anyway, in part because the advertising industry as a whole was growing. The advertising industry grew from about $3 billion in revenues in 1920 to $3.4 billion in 1929; such growth capitalized agency expansion into new areas.[173] Pointing out that agencies had evolved from space brokers into marketing specialists, Edgar Felix in *Advertising & Selling* urged agencies to consider radio as just one more function to add to an ever-increasing roster of services to provide clients.[174] Agencies, he claimed, should learn the broadcasting and entertainment businesses, not necessarily to become full time "showmen," but to have a "most wholesome and constructive influence" on the broadcasting industry, as well as to intervene to save clients from the "self-appointed unauthorized middlemen" who sought to profit from clients' inexperience in show business.[175]

"Radio service bureaus" and independent program producers proposed and produced programs for advertisers in the absence of well-established agency radio departments. However, as one adman complained, these bureaus were run by "concert managers or broken-down actors or anybody who thought he could sell an idea."[176] These producers would probably not have an advertiser's marketing interests in mind. According to Roy Durstine, one of the founders of

BBDO, "The showman isn't an advertising man," and thus agencies were needed mediate between these dubious figures and the advertisers who paid for their shows.[177] And yet agencies did not enjoy more expertise in show business than showmen in advertising, and according to one observer, they "resented the new form."[178] Ralph Hower, who wrote an in-house history of the N. W. Ayer agency in 1939, noted that radio was "no special boon" to agencies since it "forced them into the entertainment business, a field in which they had no experience."[179] The impetus was as likely to come from business leaders. In the privacy of a staff meeting, a J. Walter Thompson staffer asserted that advertisers wanted to be involved with radio because it was the "more or less suppressed desire of every capitalist to become involved in show business" without "the suggestion of something naughty that goes with the backing of a show on Broadway."[180] Chester Bowles, founder of Benton & Bowles, claimed that once agencies realized that "radio was no passing phenomenon" and that "they would have to take a more and more active part in the building of radio programs," agencies began to recruit personnel who might bring them show business expertise.[181] Thus, many agencies that had been go-betweens for sponsors and broadcasters eventually began producing programs for sponsors directly. By 1929, according to broadcast historian MacDonald, 33 percent of one network's programs were produced by advertising agencies, 28 percent by the network itself, 20 percent by sponsors, and 19 percent by independent program packagers, or radio bureaus.[182] Consequently, network radio advertising revenues jumped from $3.9 million in 1927 to $19.2 million in 1929.[183]

As advertising agencies began to respond to clients' interest in radio, many newly created agency radio departments included a man with network or broadcast experience, one who could explain the ins and outs of the broadcasting "game." According to Woods, NBC began loaning out some of its personnel to help agencies set up radio departments; agencies also began to recruit network personnel, offering them higher salaries, so NBC "lost a number of men to the advertising agencies."[184] Advertising agencies also recruited from CBS; for example, Ralph Wentworth and Norman Brokenshire left CBS in 1929 to join radio departments in agencies.[185] Many of the network men recruited by the agencies were time salesmen who knew how to sell broadcasting generally. These men were often joined at the agencies by someone who could specialize in program building, and by a "statistician" who could present data to clients on radio's effectiveness. The salesman would sell the idea of radio to clients, the program man would present program ideas, and the statistician would supply circulation (or listenership) data.[186]

Ayer, a well-established agency based in Philadelphia, became involved in radio as early as 1922 while serving its client ATT, and was helping produce *The Eveready Hour* in 1923. In addition to claiming to have founded the first agency copy department, the first agency art department, and the first agency publicity department, Ayer also claimed to have founded the first agency radio department.[187] In fact, Ayer leader H. A. Batten claimed for Ayer nearly every innovation that occurred in early radio programming, including the first "drama-type program designed for broadcasting" in 1924, the first adaptation of a full-length novel (*Showboat*) in 1926, the first variety show in 1926, and the first "informal commercials" with Jack Benny in 1932.[188] Whatever the truth of these claims, they served to promote Ayer to potential clients, positioning the agency at the cutting edge of advertising practice. Ayer also viewed its place in the industry as historically important; like J. Walter Thompson, Ayer archived its papers for future historians; Batten’s claims to be “first” sought to establish the agency’s role in history.

Ayer's long association with ATT (which lasted until the 1990s) provided the initial impetus for its involvement in radio. However, the agency culture at Ayer was not well-suited for radio. At least one agency leader, Wilfred Fry, disliked radio advertising.[189] The radio department was never well-integrated into the rest of the agency, and was dismissively called the "wireless department" by some.[190] Ayer's longtime relations with print media such as the *Saturday Evening Post* predisposed its leaders to consider radio as an adjunct. Even at the peak of radio revenues, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ayer leaders believed radio should be used only moderately and in tandem with other media.[191] Ayer therefore did not pursue radio accounts, and other agencies quickly took the lead, especially after the Philadelphia-based agency moved its broadcasting department from New York back to Philadelphia. New York had developed as the center for most radio production, and when given the choice of going "ninety miles to Philadelphia as opposed to going across the street to a New York agency," most broadcasting business found other agencies.[192]

The main competitor to the claim for first agency radio department was Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO). The Batten agency, before it merged with Barton, Durstine & Osborn in 1928, had hired George Podeyn (formerly of WEAF) to run its radio department, and BDO had hired Arthur Pryor, Jr., the son of a bandmaster, for his putative skills in the music industry.[193] BBDO hedged its claim by saying it had established the "first complete radio department" in about 1926.[194] Among BBDO's hires after the merger in 1928 was an NBC executive, Herbert Foster, and a former WEAF programmer, Annette Bushman.[195] Radio's chief supporter at BBDO was Roy Durstine, a vocal proponent of agency involvement in radio. One of BBDO's first programs, the Atwater Kent program, was not produced by the agency; however, client interest soon convinced Durstine of the value of agency control.[196] BBDO's radio department soon became a general selling point for the agency; having a radio department indicated a facility for forward thinking, modern technical know-how, and serious commitment to the cultural uplift of the masses. We can get a sense of how seriously the agency took its radio responspibilities from the mockery of them at a J. Walter Thompson staff meeting, by JWT staffer Robert Simon: "Production men dash about, whispering mysterious instructions to conductors ... others sit in the control room and frown wisely ... and always a tense atmosphere, a brooding, a sense of heavy thinking." BBDO-produced pageants, written by star copywriter Bruce Barton, were merely, according to Simon, "panting panegyrics."[197]

Lord & Thomas, the large Chicago-based agency led by Albert Lasker, became involved in radio in behalf one of its clients, RCA, parent company of NBC. However, because of its relationship with the network, Lord & Thomas left program production to NBC.[198] Lord & Thomas' most significant action in early radio was to pick up what would become the *Amos 'n' Andy* show, then locally syndicated out of Chicago, and put it on the NBC network in August 1929. *Amos 'n Andy,* featuring southern black characters performed by two white men in the tradition of blackface minstrelsy, became one of most popular radio programs of the early Depression.[199] Reputedly, movie theaters piped in the weekly broadcast in order to retain their audiences. The spectacular rise in sales for *Amos 'n' Andy's* first sponsor Pepsodent helped establish national network programs as significant advertising vehicles.

By 1928, a number of other New York agencies had begun radio departments, including Lennen & Mitchell, Young & Rubicam, Frank Seaman, Erwin-Wasey, and Calkins & Holden.[200] Erwin-Wasey's department operated almost independently of the rest of the agency initially; however it was better integrated when the agency landed the Camel cigarette radio account.[201] H. K. McCann, soon to become McCann-Erickson, would found a radio department, as would Campbell Ewald. Young & Rubicam, founded by defectors from Ayer, started its department in 1928 in order to sell a daytime radio program for women called *Radio Household Institute*.[202] By the mid-1930s, Young & Rubicam's had become a major radio department, led by Hubbell Robinson, who would later run programming at CBS Television. Despite founder Raymond Rubicam's distaste for radio advertising, his department was an important innovator, developing a staff that wrote all of its programs and in which there was "a constant striving for novelty."[203]

J. Walter Thompson recruited former WEAF staffer William Ensign to help start its radio department in 1927. Gerard Chatfield and Roosevelt Clark also joined JWT from NBC in 1928.[204] Ensign had to build interest in radio not only among JWT's clients but among agency personnel as well. He wrote articles for the in-house news organ to promote radio use and in a staff meeting confessed that JWT's relative slowness to expand into radio might be his fault: "I probably have not been as aggressive as I should have been in trying to sell you gentlemen on the medium."[205] Ensign felt his closeness to radio, after his experience producing *Roxy and His Gang* at WEAF, might have blinded him to how others perceived the medium. In a gesture to conciliate other departments that might view radio as a competition for billing dollars, Ensign remarked, "It's not billings alone but the fact that I feel that some J.W.T. clients are missing a good thing in not being on the air."[206] JWT leader Stanley Resor then exhorted his staff to cooperate with Ensign and help him with client contacts. At this time, JWT had only one client on the air, Maxwell House Coffee, but within a few years, JWT would become one of the largest radio agencies under the leadership of John Reber.

As advertising agencies became more involved with radio, their radio departments evolved. At first these departments were loosely structured and staffed, but gradually they grew and professionalized. As radio revenues increased, so did radio departments. In a few years, more potential employees had had radio experience, and so the labor pool widened and deepened. An adman named M. Lewis Goodkind described this process as occurring in three phases.[207] First was the "delegated authority" stage, when agencies gradually took over more and more radio production tasks and, to run their radio departments, hurriedly hired anyone who claimed to know something about the medium, such as the "sponsor's nephew." Second was "performer's vogue," when agencies looked to musicians and theatrical directors for guidance in running radio departments. Third was when an agency at last developed a fully professional radio staff. In the case of JWT, a musician named Henry Joslyn took over the radio department in 1929, but when radio billings began to expand rapidly, Joslyn was replaced by former "new business" manager John Reber, an account executive charged with finding new clients for JWT. His ability to "sell" (or sign) new clients won him the position of radio department head over competitors Joslyn and Aminta Cassares, who managed the women's division.[208] His appointment signaled the new importance in the agency of the radio department. Joslyn, the musician, and Cassares, the woman's specialist, despite experience apparently relevant to radio programming, lost the contest to an executive who could prove he could deal with advertisers effectively.

The advertising agencies that first entered radio, then, were usually of two kinds. One was the well-established agency, such as BBDO, J. Walter Thompson, or N. W. Ayer, which developed radio departments as an extra service in order to retain already-existing clients. The other was the upstart agency, such as Benton & Bowles or Blackett-Sample-Hummert, which focused on radio services as a way of getting started in business and as a way to attract clients away from agencies unwilling to manage their clients' radio needs. According to the manager of the Erwin Wasey radio department, ad agencies were helping advertisers "to sell [their] wares by contributing to the daily contentment and culture of millions."[209] Unlike the networks, which built programs and then looked for an advertiser to buy them, the advertising agencies began with the advertiser's needs, the "selling of wares" and then identified or developed programs to fit those needs. Agencies' priorities, then, served advertisers far more directly than the networks.

Agency involvement in programming may have helped improve sponsored programs' quality and diversity. According to former NBC Blue president Mark Woods, the agencies helped promote programming innovation in the late 1920s because they convinced advertisers to spend more on programming, budgeting for star talent and the like, in order to attract larger audiences. Furthermore, Woods claims that agencies spurred more program "diversification" because of their efforts to distinguish their clients' programs from other programs so as to establish their unique radio presence.[210] Chapter 5 will examine the issue of agency innovation in programming through case studies of three advertising agencies which produced some of the most important radio programs of the 1930s. First, however, Chapter 3 will describe the evolving relationships among agencies and the key broadcast institutions, the networks. These relations formed the bedrock of the industrial structure of the radio era. Following that, Chapter 4 will analyze how advertising men in the 1930s conceptualized radio, once its commercialization was complete.

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CHAPTER 3

WHO OWNS THE TIME?
NETWORKS AND ADVERTISING AGENCIES IN THE 1930s

Commercial radio developed in the 1920s amid a booming economy, Progressive ideals, and corporate liberal regulatory regimes. However, only a few years after the establishment of national networks, the Crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic crisis of the Great Depression provided a severe challenge to the young broadcasting industry. At the moment when radio was poised to complete its transition from a local to a truly national medium, capital markets dried up, consumption dropped, unemployment soared. And yet, radio grew anyway. Despite the overall drop in consumer spending, the number of radio sets "in use" climbed from 9 million in 1929 to over 16 million in 1932.[1] Meanwhile, advertising expenditures overall plummeted from about $3.4 billion in 1929 to $2.3 billion in 1931.[2] Newspaper advertising expenditures dropped from $260 million in 1929 to $160 million in 1932.[3] However, national advertisers on network radio increased their spending from $18 million in 1929 to $39 million in 1932. Despite a dip in radio advertising expenditures between 1933 and 1935,[4] by 1937 total annual advertising expenditures on radio (local and national) had climbed to $165 million, matching annual advertising expenditures on magazines.[5] By the end of the 1930s, broadcasting was well established as an advertising medium.

The economic exigencies of the Depression put pressure on the advertising industry to become more involved in radio. The necessity to generate more revenues was acute; radio offered a new area for growth. Pressure to move more forcefully into radio in particular came from three directions: from within the advertising industry, from advertisers, and from broadcasters. To manage competition from within the advertising industry, agencies offered radio services in order to either build a client list or retain one. New agencies, such as Benton & Bowles, moved aggressively into radio in order to build a client base where none had existed. At the same time, the pressure to survive competition from such agencies led some established agencies, such as J. Walter Thompson (JWT), to develop radio as a new service for clients and as a new revenue stream. In 1930 JWT billed advertisers a total of $3 million for radio.[6] By 1931, as many as 105 agencies handled radio network advertising.[7] The second pressure point came from advertisers. Rapidly dropping consumption levels spurred some advertisers to take risks on new strategies. As advertising historian Frank Allen Burt wrote in 1940, "Business demanded new techniques to help it out of the red. Agencies had to devise new ways of serving their clients."[8] Hoping to lure such clients, agencies developed market research techniques, such as surveys, to identify and confirm effective strategies.[9] And the third form of pressure was from the broadcasters, which were strapped for cash and seeking partners for the financing of programming, given that listeners could not be made to pay for it directly.

Between the broadcasters' need to be relieved of programming burdens and the advertisers' need for help with the new advertising medium, advertising agencies were well-positioned to take over programming. As discussed in Chapter 2, there were a number of reasons that advertisers began to delegate more and more of their radio work to their advertising agencies. Unlike theatrical producers or station owners, advertising agencies kept the advertiser's advertising goals consistently in mind. Agencies could offer disinterested and objective media buying advice in regard to radio. And agencies could help advertisers deal with broadcasters. This chapter focuses on this last issue, the role of the agencies in advocating the interests of advertisers with the national networks.

Relying primarily on correspondence between agencies and NBC, I examine how the institutional frameworks for agency involvement in radio evolved during the 1930s. Networks were media sellers to the agencies, who were media buyers. In their relationships they dealt with matters including agency commissions, circulation (or listenership) measurement, air time prices, program promotion, control over scheduling, live versus recorded programming, and control over programming and advertising standards. At bottom, as NBC executive Donald Shaw explained it, the key issue was, "who owns the time and who has a better right to say what is to be done with it?"[10] NBC's Sales Department played a key role in mediating disputes between agencies, advertisers, and the network, usually with the aim of pushing NBC to serve advertisers' needs more thoroughly. NBC's Sales Department thus was often in conflict with NBC's Continuity Acceptance Department, headed by Janet MacRorie, which attempted to enforce network standards of acceptable programming and advertising practices by reviewing and censoring scripts submitted by advertising agencies. ("Continuity" was the industry term for scripts.) The Continuity Acceptance Department set itself in opposition to advertisers and their agencies, seeking to maintain NBC's reputation as a provider of a public service in the face of criticism from audiences and regulators. Broadcast historian Michele Hilmes, in her history of radio programming, briefly discusses the relationship between JWT and NBC, including some of the conflicts between Continuity Acceptance and JWT. Hilmes also notes that despite these conflicts, the networks and the agencies were interdependent: the networks provided access to mass audiences and the agencies provided the programming to attract those audiences.[11] This interdependence shaped many of the other conflicts between agencies and networks, such as those over money, scheduling, and advertising standards. Examining those issues more fully and carefully than other histories have done, I begin with a discussion of how the two major networks, NBC and CBS, differed in their attitudes toward commercial broadcasting and advertising and how that affected their relations with agencies. I then look at specific areas of dispute between agencies and networks in turn: who controls the sponsor? are networks analogous to magazine publishers or not? how does circulation (or listenership) affect the price of time? who controls the broadcast schedule? Finally, I look at some of the debates regarding advertising and programming control, focusing on the Continuity Acceptance Department at NBC.

NBC and CBS: Different Attitudes Toward Commercialism and Advertising

By 1933, eighty agencies bought air time from NBC. Of these, according to NBC staffer Art Hungerford, "More than half build their programs with practically no deference to the NBC."[12] Hungerford's comment reflected his awareness that as the media seller, NBC had to defer to its time buyers. More than half of its buyers programmed their time independently of the network. NBC simply did not control the majority of broadcast time; what went on the air was controlled by advertisers and their agencies. Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO) executive Howard Angus explained in 1931 that NBC and its parent RCA were in "the business of manufacturing electrical gadgets—not entertainment." As mentioned in Chapter 2, RCA at first regarded NBC as a "loss leader," offering programming for free in the hope of increasing RCA radio set sales. Since they could not directly recoup programming fees from listeners, according to Angus, "they naturally looked for somebody else to furnish the entertainment necessary if they were to sell radio stations and sets."[13] By 1934 NBC had found so many others to "furnish the entertainment necessary" that one NBC staffer would complain that it was not always clear that NBC knew "what goes on in its own building."[14]

As a result of its legacy from ATT as well as its duty to its parent RCA, NBC vacillated on the subject of programming control. On the one hand, it did not want to involve itself in broadcast content; it was merely a transmission service designed to help its parent RCA sell electronics. This attitude, as we shall see, would hamstring NBC in dealing with conflict between advertisers. On the other hand, it wanted to exercise tight control over broadcasts, in order to maintain its integrity as the provider of a public service, like a public utility. This attitude would put it into conflict with the advertisers, who would resent its Continuity Acceptance Department's enforcement of rules over broadcast content. Departments within NBC regarded its business quite differently. The Sales Department argued that advertisers were NBC's main customers; their interests had to be central to its policies. Still exasperated as late as 1945 by internal resistance to this view, Sales Department executive Roy Witmer pointed out that many departments at NBC still held the attitude that "a customer," that is, an advertiser, "was supposed to be a necessary evil" rather than the reason for NBC's existence.[15] However, for NBC's parent, RCA, the customer was not the advertiser but the radio set buyer, who must be protected by strict rules on advertising.[16]

NBC's main competitor, CBS, gained on NBC during the 1930s. In 1932, CBS had sold $12.6 million in air time to advertisers, while NBC had sold $26.5 million worth, more than twice as much. By 1937, CBS had more than doubled its sales to $28.7 million, while NBC's sales had grown at a slower rate to only $38.6 million.[17] CBS held several advantages over NBC for attracting advertisers. Its leader, William Paley, was an advertiser himself who located CBS in the heart of the advertising business on Madison Avenue. As mentioned in Chapter 2, CBS was formulated to build an advertising medium; all of its policies and strategies stemmed from that basic goal. CBS's relationships with its affiliate stations reflected this: CBS had pioneered clearance policies to guarantee circulation to advertisers by offering affiliate compensation, a move NBC was forced to follow. Furthermore, CBS did not inherit the legacy of ATT's "toll broadcasting" business model, in which the network was a common carrier providing the means (transmitters, wires) rather than the content for broadcasts, and thus resembled a public utility rather than an advertising medium. In contrast, Paley's attempt to raise capital for CBS through an alliance with the Hollywood studio Paramount reflected his view that CBS was in the entertainment business.

JWT staffer, and future CBS executive, Howard Meighan succinctly summarized the differences between NBC and CBS:

> In general their policies reflect the policies of their owners. NBC is a General Electric products [sic]:––conservative, oozes prestige––fixed in its ways and exercises the strictest censorship in the field. . . . Columbia is owned by Paramount-Publix––more liberal––flexible in its set-up––caters a bit more to the advertiser––more progressive in everything but technical development––where NBC and General Electric have them licked.[18]

Thus, despite NBC's technical advantages and its ownership of a greater number of high powered stations, its underlying assumption that programming was a loss leader for radio hardware sales undercut its competitiveness with advertisers. CBS, on the other hand, focused on advertisers and their programming and advertising needs as the main part of its business.[19]

CBS pursued a number of strategies to attract these advertisers. In addition to reconfiguring affiliate station relations to guarantee clearance for prime time programs, CBS pioneered many audience measurement techniques under the supervision of former adman Paul Kesten and his protege, Frank Stanton. Their research department generated data suggesting the growth and impact of radio in general, not just CBS; this helped agencies convince advertisers to use radio. As Stanton recalled, "We got business that way, not because of our facilities but because we helped the agencies get the business."[20] Unlike NBC, which tried to treat all customers alike, as if it were a public utility, and so as a policy did not provide special deals to advertisers, CBS offered discounts and prime time slots to attract advertisers to its network. Unlike NBC, whose policy of equal treatment prevented it from effectively adjudicating disputes over time slots and issues of station carriage, CBS gave prompt attention to any clearance and scheduling problems, aiming to satisfy any unsatisfied customers.[21] The head of the Frank Presbrey agency informed the NBC Sales Department that, in his view, "advertisers failed to receive the cooperation from NBC that they did from CBS, and that something should be done about it if NBC expected to hold its clients."[22] In 1936 radio department director Roy Durstine of BBDO wrote David Sarnoff at NBC directly about why his agency preferred to use CBS: CBS offered better time slots, provided faster clearance of programs because of its better affiliate relations, and supported agency control of programs. Durstine concluded, “somehow we always found Columbia a little easier to deal with than NBC.” He attributed this to rapid growth at NBC and its confusion over its mission and structure, problems which he felt could be eliminated if authority over advertisers were more clearly allocated between the sales and programming departments.[23]

A key issue that differentiated NBC and CBS was how time slots were sold. On NBC, many advertisers who wanted to buy prime time evening time slots found they could not. NBC’s policy was to sell a time slot to the first advertiser who wanted it, and then allow that advertiser to keep the time slot as long as it liked. The advertiser controlled the time, in what would become known as a “time franchise,” and could program as it saw fit within that time. NBC kept a waiting list (“abeyance”) in case a time slot opened up and then methodically offered the time slot to advertisers according to their order on the list. This policy catered to incumbent advertisers and prevented other advertisers newer to radio from gaining access to prime time. CBS kept no elaborate waiting lists; instead it sought to make money by selling time to the highest bidder.

Some NBC executives commented on these issues. One, Edgar Kobak, tried to soothe advertiser dissatisfaction with the lack of “availabilities.” Kobak handled a number of advertiser issues while he worked at NBC, and when he left NBC to join the advertising agency Lord & Thomas, he communicated with his former colleagues about how they could improve the network’s relations with advertisers. Kobak advised NBC sales director Roy Witmer to build up the smaller Blue network for sponsorship. This network, in contrast to the more commercial Red network with its popular advertiser-sponsored programs, was supposed to provide more public service-oriented and culturally uplifting programs. Its purpose was to demonstrate to regulators and radio critics that NBC did provide cultural and educational programming despite the increasing commercialism of the Red network. Given that many prime time slots on the Blue network were not already owned by advertisers, Kobak urged his former colleagues at NBC to release some of those slots to advertisers in order to win them back from CBS.[24] There is no evidence that Kobak's advice was heeded.

Another issue that frustrated advertisers and their agencies was the difference between NBC and CBS regarding the promotion of programs. In the 1930s NBC would not broadcast announcements of an upcoming program. This rule evolved out of the common carrier model NBC inherited from ATT: NBC avoided interfering with the content of the time it sold to advertisers. To interject promotional interstitial material would have been to interfere and would have opened NBC up to accusations of preferring some advertisers over others. Thus advertisers could not use NBC facilities to promote their programs or rely on NBC to advertise their programs in print; they had to promote their programs on their own. According to NBC promotion director E. P. H. James, the Sales Department was not allowed to use broadcast time to promote programs: "We could not use our own medium to get people to tune in."[25] NBC executives worried that if they helped promote one program for one advertiser, other advertisers would complain of special treatment. NBC executives also sought to reduce costs and assumed that spending money on print advertising for NBC-aired programs was not NBC's responsibility, that such expenditures would cut into NBC's margins too deeply.[26] But agencies disliked this policy. In a 1933 letter, Benton & Bowles (B&B) accused NBC of having "fallen down on publicity and propaganda" compared to CBS and even to the competing entertainment industry of film.[27] B&B cited CBS's publicity expenditures of $25,000 a year for a

B&B program broadcast on CBS in order to pressure NBC into providing similar publicity for an NBC-carried B&B program. The NBC Sales Department disapproved of this extra service; they feared that if print editors became "swamped" by radio promotion requests, they would refuse to carry program promotion at all.[28] Fears of offending constituencies, whether regulators, audiences, other media, or advertisers, kept NBC from fully exploiting its own resources to expand audiences. While CBS saw its goal as increasing the audiences it could deliver to advertisers, NBC held on to the public utility model, thus undermining its ability to draw more audiences to its network.

Network and Agency Turf Wars

Who Controls the Sponsor?

While a 1933 NBC pamphlet instructed its employees that "Cooperation with agencies [is] essential to the welfare of broadcast advertising," the network nonetheless refused such cooperation in a number of ways. For example, as a matter of policy, it refused to allow off-site broadcasts from agency facilities.[29] More informally, NBC staffers resented and sometimes tried to circumvent the agencies' control over their access to advertisers. NBC sales executive Roy Witmer complained about BBDO's "insistence upon standing between us and our clients."[30] Another staffer complained that agency executives leveraged their control over contact with sponsors by withholding information from NBC: "by continually remaining incommunicado, they are enhancing their own importance."[31] Sometimes such NBC staffers threatened to sidestep the agencies and go directly to sponsors if "we cannot get reasonable cooperation" from the agencies.[32] The agencies, on the other hand, understood that a great part of their leverage in negotiating with the networks over such issues as scheduling, time rates, and program content depended on their exclusive control over access to sponsors. Young & Rubicam vice-president Chet La Roche wrote to NBC sales department executive Roy Witmer reminding him of the importance of maintaining the proper lines of communication. Pointing out that "We understand your salesmen have been contacting our clients without working through and with our Radio Department," La Roche warned NBC to desist. If NBC salesmen continued to go around the agency and contact advertisers directly, La Roche warned Witmer that "You can expect on our part the same cooperation that we know we are going to get from you."[33] It is not clear just what La Roche would have done, his threat gained force from the fact that the network depended on his agency for access to advertisers. Despite the NBC salesmen's chafing at this dependency, they knew that the agencies could easily switch networks and so NBC could not afford to alienate them.[34]

One case, involving the advertiser Chevrolet, illustrates the uncomfortable position into which network salesmen were forced by this system. The president of Chevrolet, a Mr. Coyle, lost a time slot on NBC when negotiations over time purchase stalled. He therefore moved his account to CBS, complaining in a letter to NBC that the network's salesmen had been lax in pursuing his account when they failed to contact him directly during these negotiations. When Coyle's letter arrived at NBC, a salesman involved in the case thus defended himself to NBC executive Edgar Kobak, "I believe you realize what would have happened had I gone direct to Mr. Coyle over the heads of the Agency, the Advertising Manager and the Sales Manager."[35] Circumventing the agency would have endangered future relations not only with that advertiser but all advertisers controlled by that agency.

The Networks: Like Magazine Publishers, or Not?

As mentioned above, the majority of programs on networks by the mid-1930s were produced by advertising agencies. Both NBC and CBS had programming departments. But, according to Roy Durstine, CBS actively supported agency control of programming; and though NBC's Program Department, headed by renowned theater producer John Royal, produced "sustaining" programs for potential sale to advertisers,[36] Royal's efforts were often undermined by competition from agencies, who had a much better sense of what would appeal to advertisers. Despite some conflicts between networks and agencies, on the whole agency production of programming appeared to suit everyone concerned: the networks were relieved of programming expense, the advertisers had trusted delegates to handle their radio needs, and agencies had a new source of revenue and a new way to retain clients. However, the shift of editorial responsibility to the agencies was a marked departure from the traditional media advertising business model. As BBDO executive Howard Angus pointed out, by handing over responsibility for programming to the advertisers and their agencies, "the radio companies actually said to the advertisers: 'Here is a nice chair marked 'Editor' and another nice chair marked 'Circulation Manager.' Would you kindly sit in both and do their jobs as well as your own?'"[37] Angus had in mind the magazine business model, in which publishers provided editorial copy and depended on ad agencies to broker the sale of interstitial blank pages, and fill them with advertising. Though they wrote advertising copy, agencies depended on sales commissions from publishers as their primary revenue stream. In radio, there were no publishers: advertisers and their agencies bought media time *and* provided media editorial, that is, programming.

This departure from tradition led to two crucial issues: whether or not the agencies would have control over content–act as their own editors, in other words—and, even more important, how they would be compensated for it. The two issues were related: by establishing editorial control agencies could more clearly justify their commissions. Various agencies approached these in various ways. To cover the costs of programming (and make a profit on it), some agencies charged, in addition to the traditional commissions on time sales, a commission on fees paid to show "talent"; others charged flat fees for producing programs. The major radio agencies, including JWT, Benton & Bowles, and Young & Rubicam, insisted on tight control, refusing to subcontract out programming to the networks or independent producers. Other agencies used network programming departments or collaborated with other program producers. Lord & Thomas (L&T) the leading agency to disavow program control, preferred to function as an overseer of network-produced programs, and therefore charged no commission on talent fees. Not coincidentally L&T had close ties to NBC management through its client RCA. A JWT staffer noted that, although L&T's arrangement that NBC handle programming might have been useful from an "administrative point-of-view," its disengagement from program control "eliminates automatically a large revenue, at the same time making the agency responsible for work over which it has no final control."[38]

The issue of commissions was a source of conflict and negotiation among the networks and agencies. Some agencies with no radio departments and no means of producing programming were reluctant to enter the radio business at all since they feared that, if they used network-produced programming, advertisers would balk at their commissions because the agencies' only function would be to mediate for them with broadcasters. An NBC pamphlet written for time salesmen explained that "an agency may fear that if a major part of the appropriation is diverted into radio programs which the agency does not prepare, the agency commission may become the subject of argument and the agency's hold on the account may be weakened."[39] During the mid-1930s debates over the commission system in general were exacerbated by the Depression and the attendant doubts about the effectiveness of advertising in view of widespread underconsumption.[40] Many advertisers preferred a flat fee system, assuming the commission system had no safeguards to prevent inflated costs or actually provided an incentive for agencies to inflate costs.[41] However, despite advertiser resistance, the 15 percent commission survived and flourished as a standard applied across media.

Circulation and the Price of Time

Since agency commissions were based on time sales, the price of time became a key issue as well. In publishing, the price of page space was valued by circulation, that is, number of issues published and sold. Circulation figures were collated by a bureau ostensibly independent of both publishers and agencies. Measurements of the value of radio time were, in contrast, relatively primitive in the 1930s, drawn from listener mail, telephone surveys, and signal reach. Radio set sales, indicating the possible number of radio households, was initially an important figure. Networks set time prices based on educated guesses of listenership: they priced evening hours at double the rate of daytime hours on the assumption that evening audiences were larger. Unlike print media, where print runs could provide some kind of evidence of circulation, radio's evanescence allowed no such post-broadcast verification strategy; radio "circulation," wrote advertising analyst Warren Dygert, "is a very elastic affair."[42] The agency Kenyon & Eckhardt once refused to pay NBC for time without "proof of performance" that the program reached the intended audience, arguing that such proof is normal for other media and "There seems no justification for making an exception in the case of radio."[43] Moreover, even if circulation could be ascertained, there was no proof that a large audience guaranteed sales increases. Even C. E. Hooper, whose Hooperatings were an early audience measurement tool, acknowledged that "there is no clear-cut relationship between listening audience size and sales."[44]

There was another important difference between print and radio "circulation." In print media the publishers provided the editorial content; on radio advertisers had to provide it themselves. Thus, as CBS executive Howard Meighan explained, regardless of quality, "While a Chase and Sanborn Tea ad in the Bulletin would have little, if any, effect on the paper's circulation, a Chase and Sanborn Tea program on a radio station would have a substantial effect on the station's circulation," or listenership.[45] The onus, then, was on the advertiser to produce its own circulation or listenership, as the General Foods executive Ralph Starr Butler explained: "There is no circulation guarantee on the air; the advertiser must guarantee it for himself."[46] However, paradoxically, by drawing audiences to the networks and stations, advertisers were subject to increased air time prices when listenership increased. In a sharp letter to the president of NBC, the head of the Compton Advertising agency, Leonard T. Bush, complained about NBC's rate hikes:

> [Programs] are the product of the advertiser and his agent, and not the product of the networks. To attempt to justify a unilateral increase in rates on the score that more people are listening longer hours to radio

> programs as a whole, in effect, is to say, "The more capable you, my customer, are, the more I will charge you for my facilities."[47]

Bush's outrage over rate increases pointed to a key weakness in the radio business model. As long as advertisers fully financed the programming, the network would always be vulnerable to the charge that its rate hikes were based on advertiser efforts, not network efforts. Not until the television era, when networks gained ownership stakes in programming and sold the interstitial minutes between programs as magazine publishers sold pages for advertisements, could networks justify increased prices for time by pointing to increased circulation, or viewership.

Advertisers and their agencies often disputed the price of time with the networks. In an effort to attract advertisers, the networks occasionally offered rate discounts to favored or large time buyers. This incensed Arthur Sinsheimer, radio director at the Peck agency, who complained to NBC president Merlin Aylesworth about competing agencies enjoying "preferential rates."[48] Despite NBC's assertion that it followed its rate card and favored no agency over another, NBC did in fact extend preferences. In one case, NBC had been charging preferential prices to Procter & Gamble (P&G) for years because it was one of the first advertisers to buy a large amount of day time hours. In 1938 NBC executive C. E. Rynd tried to calculate the costs and benefits of discontinuing the P&G discounts because, he argued, once network overhead was accounted for, NBC may have been broadcasting the P&G serials at a net loss. Addressing the problem of alienating an advertiser, the primary deterrent NBC faced when trying to renegotiate these arrangements, Rynd made the following argument:

> There is no doubt that P&G helped us build daytime business; however four years at cut rate prices certainly should be sufficient repayment. I see no need to fear that P&G will withdraw all of its business from NBC because it will be impossible for them to find suitable time on any other network, and certainly the additional profit to us of over half a million dollars a year should be reason enough for us to overlook the possible strained relationship that might result temporarily.[49]

Rynd's proposal reflects the fact that by the late 1930s the demand for time exceeded the supply.

Controlling the Schedule

Because NBC booked time based on which advertiser had seniority, it had little or no control over the broadcast schedule. An advertiser with a time "franchise" could program any genre and change program or genre at any time. Programs were scheduled according to what time slot the advertiser controlled, without regard to any other factor, such as what kind of program came before or after, or what kind of audiences may be already tuned in. Consequently, a large portion of the audience tuned into a comedy program sponsored by one advertiser at 8 pm might abruptly tune out the network when a historical drama came on at 9 pm. The networks had not yet developed the concept of creating schedules to build "audience flow," which is the movement of audience attention from one program to another. Block programming a group of comedies, for example, would attract and retain audiences interested in comedies. However, network time sales policies prevented networks (or advertisers) from building audience flow. Networks sold time to the next and highest bidder, regardless of the program provided by the time buyer, resulting in juxtapositions of incompatible programming. This was different from print media buying. Print media space pricing depended in part on adjacencies and contexts. Advertisers sought editorial content that would provide an appropriate context for their advertising and attract the consumers appropriate for their products. In broadcasting, as advertising analyst Herman Hettinger pointed out, the advertiser "has little or no control" of what preceded or followed its program.[50] Daytime advertisers pioneered the block booking of time for clusters of serials (Blackett-Sample-Hummert bought network time for this purpose). CBS executive Frank Stanton has claimed to have noticed the efficacy of grouping program types and so encouraged a greater emphasis on audience flow at CBS than at NBC. However, as long as advertisers controlled the time slot, network management of the schedule was limited. The need to build audience flow and to shape a program schedule eventually would provide a key motivation for the networks to assert programming control in the television era.

Until then, however, the networks adjudicated scheduling conflicts not according to program and audience flow but according to the market power of the advertiser. For example, NBC salesman R. C. Patterson reported to David Sarnoff on scheduling problems with Palmolive in 1935. Palmolive wanted to move to an earlier time slot and threatened to take its $4 million worth of business per year to CBS if NBC did not offer it one. So the NBC sales staff approached other advertisers, such as Firestone, Philip Morris, and The Texas Co. (later Texaco), asking if they would move to another time slot to free up time for Palmolive. The Texas Co. agreed to move, then reneged after its time was offered to Palmolive. Palmolive, in turn, "threatened legal action." Finally it accepted a slot on NBC's less powerful Blue Network in exchange for a merchandising subsidy from NBC.[51] In other cases, when NBC pre-empted some advertisers for holiday programming or sports events, those advertisers would threaten to move to CBS, and NBC would offer "make-goods," or free time to make up for the time pre-empted. NBC insisted to the advertisers that its commitment to public interest required that it pre-empt some advertiser time, yet without full control over the schedule NBC had to placate its advertisers however it could.[52]

Program and Advertising Control: NBC's Continuity Acceptance Department

Networks exerted what control they had over programming mainly by requiring live broadcasts. This requirement, however, had paradoxical effects: it helped networks enforce their control over national broadcasts, while simultaneously, because of the risks inherent in live broadcasts, undermining their control over what actually went out on the air. Broadcast historian Laurence Bergreen has noted that the network emphasis on "live" broadcasts was primarily a means of maintaining discipline over affiliates and guarding monopoly control over New York-based entertainment.[53] If the national networks had allowed recorded programs, or "transcriptions," they feared that affiliates would no longer need to depend on them for high quality programs. Stations would be relatively free to buy and sell programs outside the networks' centralized control structure. By allowing broadcasts of live material only, the networks could more effectively organize and regulate local stations through their clearance policies. A 1937 memo to NBC president Niles Trammell regarding Blackett-Sample-Hummert's request to record programs revealed another reason NBC resisted recordings:

> If an advertising agency enters the business of recording they become, insofar as the recording business is concerned, a competitor of NBC and

> should not, in my opinion, be encouraged in this competition any more than any other competitor.[54]

The networks masked their agenda by justifying this policy with the rhetoric of personalization. A handbook for NBC time salesmen spells out various reasons that live programming serves the advertiser's interest:

> Show that live programs alone offer the great advantage of establishing personal contact between the advertiser and the public. Stress the advantage of a uniform hour, which builds up its regular audience of loyal listeners. Point out that the network advertiser can keep his programs up-to-the-minute, every week, instead of having to rely on something recorded weeks before.[55]

However, live broadcasts did not necessarily serve advertisers' actual interests. Live broadcasts did not allow for the correction of errors, did not prevent inappropriate ad-libbing, made it difficult to achieve particular sound effects, and it prevented the re-use of the performance at a different date or place. Arthur Pryor, radio director at BBDO, complained to NBC that its policy of prohibiting recorded sound of any kind was a "handicap" in their competition with CBS. Most local stations, Pryor pointed out, broadcast transcribed programs regularly.[56] Yet, though NBC occasionally bent the no-recording rule, institutional requirements for maintaining distribution and content control kept it in place.

The federal government, through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), could not regulate broadcast content per se without intrusion on First Amendment rights; however, the Communications Act of 1934 required broadcasters to operate in the public interest, convenience, or necessity (PICON). Stations that broadcast programming in violation of the PICON standards risked license revocation by the FCC (though this rarely occurred). Only stations, not networks, were licensed by the FCC. Networks were indirectly regulated through their local station affiliates. Affiliates were supposed to be sensitive to local audiences; audience complaints could trigger an FCC license review. Affiliates could threaten to leave a network if network programming offended audiences and put their licenses at risk. Thus, networks had to manage program standards in order to maintain good relations with affiliates, through which they gained access to local audiences. However, the networks' revenues came from the advertisers, not the affiliates (who were paid by the network). When networks attempted to limit or control advertiser-produced material, they risked offending and possibly losing the source of their revenues, the advertisers.

Broadcast historian Matthew Murray examined a 1937 case involving a Mae West performance in a skit about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden on the *The Chase & Sanborn Hour*. The script had been approved by NBC before the live broadcast, yet the reportedly lascivious manner in which West performed generated complaints from listeners. Here NBC's self-regulation failed, and it was exposed with its affiliates to criticism and political pressure. According to Murray, the incident helped justify the imposition of "tighter and more vigilant limits to access and exposure."[57] The primary vehicle for imposing these controls at NBC was the Continuity Acceptance Department, established in 1934 and led by Janet MacRorie, who was charged with reviewing scripts in advance of broadcast and vetting them for appropriateness. Murray argues that Continuity Acceptance functioned both to maintain NBC's control over program distribution and to enforce "normative standards" and "ideological limits" for content. The Continuity Acceptance Department allowed NBC to prove to regulators that it was indeed working to maintain standards—or at least provided it with plausible deniability when and if a live performance gave offense—and thereby helped the network avoid federal regulation of content.[58] Sometimes the advance vetting of a script was not possible, as when entertainers and agencies failed to provide one in time. In a memo to Continuity Acceptance head MacRorie, NBC executive I. E. Showerman discussed the problem of Fred Allen, who wrote his scripts on Sunday night, submitted them to NBC on Monday morning, and wanted them approved by 1:00 pm for rehearsal. When Continuity Acceptance requested more time to review the scripts, "this always brings profanity from Allen, protests from the client and a tirade from the agency." Showerman explained to MacRorie that since Allen's sponsor Bristol-Myers was an "old client of ours" that was spending "over a million dollars annually with us," MacRorie should put up with the situation and drop the request for more script review time.[59] Showerman's memo illustrates NBC's awareness, despite its concern for standards, of who was paying to keep it in business.

Murray contends that the agencies for the most part resisted the networks' efforts at content control, that they complained that NBC tried to rely on "moral principles" as a standard when "business regulations" were more appropriate.[60] And indeed they did sometimes complain. A Young & Rubicam executive claimed that, whereas CBS worked in tandem with agencies, NBC attempted to impose schoolmarmish and punitive standards:

> CBS . . . assumes that the agency, as much as the network, has no desire to give offense to anyone and thereby injure its client. Their suggestions are always very reasonable and they show an understanding of the problems of the program. . . . NBC, however, as represented by Miss MacRorie's

> office, functions in the capacity of teachers of wayward children—their attitude being that if they were to relax their vigilance for a second, the agency would exercise no judgment whatsoever.[61]

Nonetheless, most agencies, no matter how vociferously they fought to have their programs and advertisements aired as they wished, expected the networks to take on the role of adjudicator of standards. BBDO radio director Arthur Pryor, Jr., gave a speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1937 asserting:

> The advertiser is not responsible for improving, or even maintaining the quality of your medium. It's up to the broadcasters entirely. And when an advertiser wants to broadcast something that's stupid or in bad taste, you have got to be the one that says: "No."[62]

Thus, despite their resistance to network directives, admen were generally aware that overcommercialization of radio could endanger the effectiveness of broadcast advertising and so looked to the networks to preserve acceptable standards. Robert Colwell at JWT noted in 1930 that network censorship maintained standards of good taste that could only benefit the agency: "All in all we feel that it is a good thing that everybody can't say everything they want to over the air." Considering the audience included women and children, Colwell continued, "the fact that you are in excellent company on the radio," that is, the fact that the networks refused to air programs not in "good taste," and "the fact that the censorship *is* rather strict–[we feel] that these are real assets"[63] [emphasis in original]. Network censorship policies created a environment for the agency's programming and advertising that reduced the risk one advertiser would be adversely affected by another's lack of "good taste."

These debates over censorship illustrate the basic conflict between networks and agencies over programming control. Donald Shaw, who worked for both NBC and the McCann-Erickson agency, described this conflict as about "who owns the time and who has a better right to say what is to be done with it?" Sponsors, having paid for the time, believed they ought to control the content. The networks, although they had shifted a great deal of the programming responsibility to advertisers, had to answer to audiences and regulators for any programs that offended and so insisted they had to impose standards. Having worked on both sides, Shaw pointed out that the networks were especially vulnerable if "there be one slip of the tongue or dip of the dipthong," and so they had to apply policies that they "hate . . . as much or more than agencies and sponsors do."[64] Shaw suggested relieving the networks of responsibility for policing broadcast content, and instead appointing a radio "czar," the equivalent of a Joe Breen of Hollywood's "Hays Office" (otherwise known as the Production Code Administration), who was hired by the film studios to set standards voluntarily followed by all members of the film industry trade organization.[65] A radio czar could regularize policies and standards among networks, agencies, and advertisers. Although never realized, Shaw's proposal reflected the fact that admen as well as networks were frustrated with the lack of clear guidelines. Like the networks, the agencies depended on advertisers for their business and had to deal with their advertisers' demands. Understandably, admen such as Pryor and Cowell preferred that the networks police standards.

In 1932, at the height of the economic crisis, broadcasters were faced with a resolution by the Senate that radio advertising be limited to program sponsorship. The advertising industry led a vociferous defense of direct advertising on radio, particularly by the advertising trade association AAAA in congressional hearings. Ad agencies wrote the FRC warning that "at least 75 percent of the radio programs will disappear from the air" if program sponsors were prevented from advertising.[66] H. K. McCann, founder of the ad agency McCann-Erickson, argued, "We know of no radio program which contains as great a proportion of advertising to entertainment as any one of the leading newspapers or magazines in this country. Yet we hear no agitation to eliminate the advertising in these publications."[67] The Senate resolution failed. In September 1932, both CBS and NBC announced a new policy allowing "price mentions" for the first time: advertisers would be allowed to mention a product's price up to two times in a 15-minute program or three times in a 30-minute program. As the trade journal *Printers' Ink* reported, this new policy was in part a response to the Senate resolution. The networks decided to expand advertising because to restrict it further "would drive advertisers from program sponsorship," destroying the advertising-revenue business model.[68]

Meanwhile, the networks, especially NBC, promulgated a number of rules and limits on broadcast advertising designed to maintain a sense of decorum and prevent conflicts among sponsors. NBC advertisers were initially discouraged from using superlatives or the word "free" under the assumption that these common advertising strategies would "cheapen" the network.[69] Competitive copy was also disallowed: advertisers were not supposed to name competing products and disparage them; but the rule was hard to enforce stringently. JWT, representing Chase & Sanborn coffee, invoked this rule to NBC against its competitor, Maxwell House, complaining that Maxwell House copy disparaged coffee products packaged in paper bags, as was Chase & Sanborn coffee, in order to promote its coffee packaged in cans. NBC salesman George Frey, however, pointed out that JWT was guilty of infringing the same rule, having aired advertisements claiming that Chase & Sanborn was "a blend of choice costly coffees, not cheap coffee in a costly can."[70] In another case, the head of Bristol-Myers, Lee Bristol, complained about competitor Odorono criticizing other deodorants. In an exchange of letters, NBC staff assured Bristol that this was not the case.[71] In another instance, Chester Bowles visited NBC, purportedly hoping to improve B&B's rocky relationship with the network and "anxious to eliminate the arrogant and arbitrary attitude of his employees" toward NBC, but actually to challenge NBC to justify its application of its policies. According to Donald Shaw's report to program department head John Royal, Bowles claimed that B&B had never refused to accept in full a policy of NBC once they were sure that the policy was being applied to all comers, but added that in fairness to his clients, as long as competitive products were allowed to use certain phrases, he could not help but fight for the inclusion of such phrases in his clients' copy.[72]

The networks' advertising rules, then, were simultaneously resisted and exploited by advertisers and agencies, hoping to advance themselves and to maneuver against their competitors through the mediation of the network continuity approval process. The rules allowed advertisers and their agents to exploit every advantage against their competitors, with the network's participation. While agencies were quick to argue that NBC had applied different standards to different advertisers, NBC was placed in relatively defensive position, justifying its standards as they underwent constant revision.

Many of the struggles over advertising standards revolved around products of a personal or medicinal nature: laxatives, tonics, yeast, deodorants. By 1934, CBS and NBC had twenty-eight "medicinal accounts" between them, exposing them to criticism that such advertising was offensive, so the networks attempted to reduce the number of tonic and laxative advertisers.[73] Laxative advertisers cancelled some accounts in protest, and one adman argued that laxative advertising was not objectionable in itself: "To cure vulgarity, ban vulgarity, not laxative advertising."[74] However, prominent admen such as Roy Durstine of BBDO supported the reduction of laxative advertising and furthermore recommended that networks exercise even more editorial control by giving "preference in desirable time to those who keep their commercials brief, interesting, nonrepetitive. (A little more spine in the nets and agencies would accomplish this.)"[75] Durstine's point reflected the ongoing concern that radio's effectiveness as a credible advertising medium could be endangered by excessive commercialism and offensive advertising, and, like many in the industry, attributed the responsibility for maintaining radio's effectiveness to the networks and agencies using "a little more spine" in their dealings with advertisers. Janet MacRorie, of the Continuity Acceptance Department, concurred that the network had allowed too many "medical and nostrum accounts" on the air, and that the "constant bickering" over Continuity Acceptance's efforts to "keep such advertising within the bounds of truth and common sense" was endless as long as there was "no policy on which to challenge the statement made."[76]

In 1935, MacRorie engaged in an analysis of seven years' worth of Fleischmann's Yeast commercial copy promoting yeast for its medicinal properties. Beginning in 1929, when the copy "contained very few exaggerated, unfounded or unpleasant statements," MacRorie charted the rise, fall, and rise of acceptable copy from the Fleischmann's account, handled by JWT during that period. In 1930, MacRorie judged that "Claims [were] stronger and less pleasant in character"; in 1931, "alarmist material was often present. Testimony of doctors is frequently used, and often is unfairly treated to make it appear that they are advising Fleischmann's Yeast more strongly than they actually are."

MacRorie cited copy delivered by a "Dr. Lee" who describes a train wreck as an analogy for "When your body ceases to function properly and poisons accumulate," a time when Fleischmann's Yeast can bring "order out of chaos by ridding your body of those poisons that bring such widespread disturbance." By 1932, at the worst of the economic crisis, the commercials were longer, and their "case histories . . . were tiresome and often unpleasant," filled with more testimony from such characters as "Dr. Georges Faroy of Paris" of the "French Army Bacteriological Laboratories." In 1933, MacRorie found that yeast advertised as a cure for "faulty elimination" on the testimony of more foreign doctors, who claimed, "When the intestines are sluggish, poisons develop and filter into the blood stream. The whole system is affected . . . the body feels tired; the head is heavy and often aches; . . . digestion becomes slow; and the nervous system is upset." In 1934 the commercials "grew steadily worse until November when a definite improvement could be noted." Before November, "boils, pimples, and similar terms were frequently used," as in: "The skin is an organ of elimination. It naturally breaks out when the system is overloaded with impurities. By ridding you of these poisons quicker, 'XR' Yeast clears your blood sooner. Pimples, boils, and other eruptions disappear in a shorter time." However, by 1935, when pressure had increased to clean up radio continuity copy, MacRorie found a "great decrease in the mentions of constipation, pimples, and similar unpleasant terms," and cited a lengthy commercial that included a doctor, and a dialogue between a "Mrs. Butcher" and her acquaintance commenting on her improved health.[77]

MacRorie's memo charted an increasing reliance on "hard-sell" advertising strategies, such as "expert" testimonials and fear mongering; these strategies were especially common during the Depression, as we shall see in

Chapters 4 and 5. In fact, these strategies had provoked the Senate resolution against direct advertising in 1932. NBC hoped the worst elements of the hard sell could be ameliorated through its Continuity Acceptance Department. By February 1936, the network released a report claiming that the Continuity Acceptance department had "succeeded in avoiding 560 violations of NBC's policies," including 164 superlative claims, 88 cases of impropriety, 87 derogatory references to competitors, and 42 unfairly competitive advertisements.[78] MacRorie's quantitative analysis of these prevented violations of advertising standards provided evidence NBC could use to prove that it was exercising editorial control and that the future viability of broadcast advertising was not endangered by an excessive amount of hard sell on radio.

Although the Continuity Acceptance Department was charged with the task of reining in agency excesses, much of the NBC correspondence shows that the agencies routinely bypassed Continuity Acceptance by appealing to the Sales Department or higher placed NBC executives. Those executives, like I. E. Showerman in the Bristol-Myers case, would often overrule MacRorie or negotiate a solution with the agencies. Her department's authority was limited by the immediate financial necessity of accommodating an important advertiser. Despite these conflicts, however, the Continuity Acceptance Department was useful to both the agencies and the network. For the network, it provided proof that NBC took its public service seriously and that it was responsible to its audiences. For the agencies, on the other hand, Continuity Acceptance provided someone other than themselves that advertisers might blame when their scripts were not broadcast as written. The rules and standards applied by Continuity Acceptance also provided an opportunity for agencies to attack their clients' competition, and thereby again prove their worth to their clients.

Conclusion

The network/agency institutional relations that evolved over the 1930s were characterized by both struggle and mutual interdependence. NBC, having inherited a common carrier business model from ATT, did not harness its resources as completely as CBS for building broadcasting as an advertising medium. In seeking to shift programming costs onto advertisers, however, the networks had to collaborate very closely with advertising agencies, which used their access to advertisers as leverage. Agencies and networks argued over commissions, time prices, scheduling, script control, and standards. Agencies looked to networks to adjudicate disputes with other agencies and maintain standards applicable to all broadcast advertisers. However, having been handed responsibility for programming, agencies resented network interference with their advertising and programming strategies. In this chapter I have shown that despite agency resistance to network standards, there was also an awareness in the advertising industry that broadcasting would benefit from more centralized editorial oversight. Concerned that the viability of broadcast advertising would be endangered by advertising excesses, such as hard-sell tactics and commercials for laxatives, admen frequently turned to the networks to maintain and enforce standards. The networks, however, did not want to be seen as favoring one advertiser over another, and as long as the radio industry followed the model of single sponsorship, the networks resisted taking on a more complete role as the "publishers" of broadcasting. Network resistance can be attributed at least in part to their continuing need to offset programming costs on to advertisers during the Depression. This reluctance to take on program financing (and attendant program control) would fade by the late 1940s (once radio revenues had expanded) and then vanish during the television era—when a very different economic climate favored the development of a new business model. During the 1930s, however, the basic question of who owned the time and who had final say as to what could be done with it remained a contested one between networks and advertisers. The next chapter examines the ways in which admen, having been given the responsibility by advertisers and networks to build radio as an entertainment and advertising medium, debated and theorized radio advertising and programming strategies.

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22. Memo from R. C. Patterson to Edgar Kobak, 20 August 1935, Box 40, Folder 42, NBC Records.

23. Letter from Roy Durstine to David Sarnoff, 28 April 1936, Box 44, Folder 29, NBC Records.

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CHAPTER 4

BALLET AND BALLYHOO:
ADMEN AND SHOWMANSHIP ON RADIO IN THE 1930s

As advertising agencies shaped broadcasting as a commercial medium in response to the needs of advertisers and broadcasters, they faced a rash of issues that required them to reconceptualize advertising strategy for the new medium. Print advertising strategies could not be simply transferred to radio; admen had to analyze the unique advantages and disadvantages of radio as an advertising medium. They had to learn to appeal to the ear rather than the eye, to manage the fleeting quality of an impression, to use voices instead of typefaces, and so on. But the most important difference between radio and other advertising media was its reliance on entertainment as the advertising vehicle. Given the broadcasters' increasing dependence on advertisers and their agencies to oversee programming, admen had to figure out how to bring "the show world to the world of commerce."[1] "Showmanship" and its relationship to effective selling was a subject of perpetual debate. If showmanship were necessary to radio selling, were admen qualified to practice showmanship? How would strategies of showmanship apply to radio advertising and programming? Would too much advertising alienate audiences seeking entertainment? Would popular entertainment attract listeners but not succeed in selling products? Would too much showmanship undermine salesmanship? Did radio entertainment have to be closely linked to the product to sell effectively? Was sponsor identification or association with the entertainment necessary? Could advertising be integrated into entertainment? How would admen manage conflicts with advertisers, the sponsors? Identify and target audiences? Manage and utilize star talent? Finally, how would admen deal with the problems of originality, imitation, and plagiarism?

In the previous chapter I examined the relations between networks and agencies during the 1930s, when the economic pressures of the Depression helped shape the broadcasting industry into what I call the radio model. In the radio model, the networks were in the business of selling air time primarily; advertisers bought 15- , 30-, and 60-minute blocks of time to fill with their sponsored programs, usually produced by their advertising agencies. In this single-sponsorship model, programs were designed to support the advertiser's goals, entertainment strategies were integrated into advertising strategies. In this chapter, I examine the advertising industry's responses to the integration of entertainment into advertising, otherwise knows as the problem of "showmanship." The chapter begins with a look at the impact of the Depression on perceptions of the advertising industry and on the resurgence of the "hard-sell" advertising strategy. Then I consider some of the challenges radio presented as an advertising medium, the most significant of which was the issue of showmanship. The rest of the chapter is an in-depth discussion of showmanship theories and practices in both advertising and entertainment strategies, including subsections on particular constraints on admen's showmanship strategies, such as intra-agency tensions over radio, problems with sponsors, issues with identifying audience desires, the quandaries of managing and utilizing star talent, and the debate over imitation and innovation.

The Resurgence of the Hard Sell

The impact of the October 1929 stock market crash was not immediately felt or understood by many in the advertising industry. "Business itself is healthy," argued advertising columnist Kenneth Goode in November 1929.[2] The president of the advertising trade association, AAAA, asserted, "The main damage by the stock market situation may be psychological and that condition is one which advertising is best able to correct."[3] If the problem were perceptual, the advertising industry ought to be able to help solve the crisis. Goode suggested that "While the bankers are busy on finances, let advertising men volunteer to take charge of public sentiment."[4] However, the advertising industry soon suffered from the deepening crisis. The massive contraction in production and consumption in the 1930s not only led to a contraction in the industry's business, but humiliatingly undermined its claim that it had been partly responsible for the boom. As advertisers cut back on advertising expenditures to preserve falling margins, agencies were forced into bankruptcy, consolidations, pay cuts, and layoffs. They fought back on two fronts: defending the advertising industry from external critics and increased federal regulation, and convincing their clients, the advertisers, of advertising's efficacy during the crisis. In order to prove advertising's efficacy, many admen turned back to the hard-sell strategies—strategies that had begun to fall out of favor in the 1920s with the rise of more subtle soft-sell strategies.

On the first front, admen were faced with a nearly unprecedented level of public criticism. Advertising historian Ralph Hower noted in 1939 that the "public attitude toward advertising and private enterprise as a whole" had gone through a "profound change" at the advent of the Depression, when advertising "was an obvious field for attack."[5] Having appeared blind to the severity of the downturn, admen were, according to Hower, "subjected to public ridicule and to sharp attacks by reformers," forcing change and adjustment in "every phase of advertising."[6] Strategies had to be revamped, reconsidered, reconfigured. Perhaps admen had overreached as "missionaries of modernity"; they seemed unable to explain the crisis and ill equipped to repair it. In a tell-all book, *Our Master's Voice* (1934), former adman James Rorty exposed the corruptions of the advertising industry as he had experienced them at BBDO. He mockingly described Madison Avenue as a place where appearances were maintained even as the foundation was cut from underneath it: the "priests of the temple of advertising go about the streets in snappy suits and tattered underwear."[7] Was the advertising industry all show and no substance? Was it fundamentally corrupt? The consumer movement, as well as critics such as F. J. Schlink, whose 1933 expose *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs* accused the industry of deceptive practices, gained political strength during the 1930s.[8] The Roosevelt administration pushed to widen the purview of the Food and Drug Adminstration to regulate advertising as well. By the end of the 1930s, the Consumers Union had a membership of 80,000, and Congress passed amendments to the 1938 Wheeler-Lea Act, which gave the Federal Trade Commission the power to halt unfair or deceptive advertising.[9]

On the second front, justifying their work to their clients rather than to the public, admen were forced back from some of their earlier claims. Bruce Barton, the famous adman and author of *The Jesus Nobody Knows,* who had confidently made grandiose claims as to advertising's powers back in the 1920s, backed away from them in the 1930s. In 1936, Barton explained that admen were not going to "tell the public what to think," their job was to communicate to *advertisers* "what the public thinks, what it wants, how it feels, what are its hopes and aspirations and ideals."[10] Gone was the confidence they could shape consumers' wants in service of advertisers' needs. Instead, admen needed to understand consumers' wants and translate them into effective advertising strategies. Admen needed to follow the consumer, perhaps a more difficult job than dictating from above.

However, many admen sought to prove that their advertising was working hard to sell their clients' products. According to advertising historians Roland Marchand and Stephen Fox, concerns about advertising's efficacy led to a swing toward the "hard sell."[11] Hard-sell advertisements list the "reasons why" a consumer should buy a product and repeat them over and over. As an advertisement placed in the trade magazine *Printers' Ink* explained, "True 'Reason-Why' Copy is Logic, plus persuasion, plus conviction, all woven into a certain simplicity of thought–pre-digested for the average mind, so that it is easier to *understand* than to *misunderstand it."*[12] "Reason-why" advertising was championed in the first decades of the twentieth century by Albert Lasker and Claude Hopkins at the Lord & Thomas agency. Lasker and Hopkins, inspired by a salesman named John E. Kennedy, promulgated the concept that advertising is "salesmanship in print."[13] Assuming the "average" person could not grasp complex ideas, an assumption apparently supported by U. S. military testing of inductees' "intelligence quotient" during World War I,[14] reason-why copywriters presented their products in simple language as simple solutions to simple problems—poor hygiene, sleepless nights, or dingy laundry. A 1933 advertisement for Procter & Gamble's Lava soap headlined, "Disease Germs Lurk on Half-Clean Hands," explained to readers that "With ordinary toilet soap you can't avoid this danger. You only get the surface dirt. Lava gets *all* the dirt in less than a minute—leaves hands free of deadly germs. Lava is safe for children's skin because it contains soothing glycerine and other oils. Works equally well in any water—hot or cold, hard or soft. Outlasts ordinary soaps 3 to 1."[15] The advertisement presented a problem, the presence of disease germs, and the solution, Lava soap. In case the reader was unconvinced by the first reason-why to use Lava, the advertisement lists other reasons, including its "soothing glycerine" and its longlasting quality.

Before the Depression, the industry had been more willing to attempt soft-sell strategies, employing the subtle rather than the obvious, visuals rather than texts, style and cleverness rather than simple "reasons why." Copywriter Theodore MacManus, the best known soft-sell proponent, built an image for General Motors through suggestion and atmosphere.[16] In a 1915 advertisement for Cadillac titled "The Penalty of Leadership," MacManus eschewed any description of the product or reasons-why at all. Instead MacManus suggested that Cadillac's excellent quality was "a target for the shafts of the envious few." But despite such attacks, high quality work would outlast its critics: "That which is great makes itself known, no matter how loud the clamor of denial. That which deserves to live, Lives."[17] For soft-sell followers of MacManus, advertising was a suggestive art rather than a scientific technique. Arguing that consumers were rarely influenced by direct admonition, soft-sell proponents believed the suggestive approach would have a greater impact. However, the rapidly falling consumption rates of the Depression led many advertisers and admen to question the indirect and suggestive strategies of the soft sell. Aesthetically pleasing designs or humorous language might draw consumers' attention, but would they sell? Would the attention they drew to the advertisement be transferred to the product? Lasker favored the direct approach, dismissing the humorous or aesthetically pleasing as the "Circus ideas" of an "unenlightened age": "Vanities and furbelows have no place in salesmanship to the millions."[18] For Lasker and other hard-sell proponents, the success of an advertisement was measured by increased sales, not by increased readers' attention.

Hard-sell proponents, of course, were also vulnerable to criticism. "Reason-why" advertisements were often exaggerated, factitious, and hyperbolic. Critics from within and without the advertising industry accused hard-sell admen of deceptiveness, of "ballyhoo" and "puffery." For example, in a campaign for Schlitz beer, Claude Hopkins' copy trumpeted the fact that the Schlitz brewery washed its bottles with "live steam," implying that this was a form of advanced hygiene unique to Schlitz, while omitting the fact that every other brewer also washed its bottles with live steam.[19] Soft-sell proponents worried that such deceptive techniques undermined the credibility of advertising overall. Critics of the advertising industry, such as the consumer movement, pointed to hard-sell advertising as the reason for increased federal regulation of advertising. Nonetheless, in the desperate climate of the Depression, hard-headed, direct attention to sales was generally accepted as necessary. As Marchand thoroughly documents in *Advertising the American Dream*, advertising in the 1930s increasingly relied on the hard sell. In fact, in print media, new hard-sell methods were developed, such as the comic strip advertisement and the photographically based documentary, all designed to speak to consumers in a louder voice.[20] The resurgence of the hard sell suggests that, despite admen's claims to be able to create demand through "consumer engineering," the industry was concerned that advertising alone might not solve the problem of the Depression.[21] The increasingly strident tone of much advertising betrayed a degree of fear that the message was not getting through.

The Problems and Challenges of Advertising on Radio in the Depression

Radio advertising strategies, like those of advertising in general, had to evolve to address the challenges of the Depression. During the 1920s, ATT's and then NBC's model of radio as a "good will" or institutional advertising medium appealed to advertisers wanting to build their corporate image through the sponsorship of programs of symphonic music, or opera, or other forms of cultural uplift. For institutional advertisers during those boom times, radio was a public relations medium used in addition to other advertising media. They did not expect it to have a direct impact on sales. However, in the face of the Depression's severe contraction of consumption, advertisers and their agencies struggled to find new ways to increase sales. Using radio as a public relations medium alone was a luxury fewer advertisers could afford. And as advertisers, facing low sales, were more eager to sell directly, broadcasters, facing increased competition for advertisers, were more willing to let them do it. The conditions for radio to become a "direct selling" medium were ripe; by 1931, the use of radio as a medium for "good will" had eroded. The 1932 Senate resolution and the efforts of the anti-commercial radio movement could do nothing to reverse the trend. According to BBDO executive Angus Howard in 1931, "Whether we like it or not broadcasting is now being used by practically every advertiser on the air for hard, direct selling. The depression did that."[22]

The declining "good will" strategy was based on the assumption that listeners would feel "good will" toward the sponsor of a preferred program, and would therefore buy its product as a form of thanks. Listeners' sense of "gratitude" toward a sponsor depended on "sponsor identification," that is, on their remembering the sponsor. The measures for determining whether this sequence of events (listener gratitude, listener recall and identification of sponsor) actually took place were crude and unreliable. Admen sometimes appealed to the amount of mail received by broadcasters—Blackett-Sample-Hummert executive John Sample, as we have seen, had Procter & Gamble executives walk on the piles of listener mail. However, volume of mail proved listener interest in the program, and not necessarily the product. Listeners might well enjoy a program yet not buy its sponsor's product in "gratitude." These doubts about the efficacy of listener gratitude, present from the beginning, were confirmed in many minds by the early 1930s. In 1932, Robert Colwell at J. Walter Thompson declared, "Most people are *not* grateful for radio programs."[23] Sponsors depending on listener gratitude alone, according to one adman, "have all been disillusioned."[24] Relying on listener gratitude alone, then, would not, it was felt, stimulate sales. Advertisers and their agencies would have to develop strategies to build on the existing sponsorship model, strategies that would increase sales, not just listener gratitude. Meanwhile, as established radio advertisers turned to direct selling, new advertisers came to the medium, attracted by the larger national program audiences the networks had made possible, and driven by continually dropping sales to find alternatives to standard print advertising strategies. All these conditions forced admen on radio to rethink their assumptions and develop new methods.

Direct radio advertising presented a challenge to admen accustomed to print advertising. Many print strategies, such as visual illustration or typeface style, were obviously inapplicable. In a 1930 staff meeting, JWT staffer George Faulkner listed the challenges of radio: "1. Lack of visual aids. 2. Fleeting impression. 3. The human voice in place of type as medium. 4. Censorship barriers. 5. Need for showmanship."[25] These challenges were discussed by admen throughout the industry; the rest of this section examines these discussions as documented in the trade press, in speeches, and in memos to clients. The first issue, the lack of visual aids, stymied admen who had depended on illustration and typeface. Some distrusted a nonvisual approach to selling: one BBDO staffer worried that "the ear as a sense organ has never been educated as the eye has been."[26] JWT radio department head John Reber argued, in contrast, that communication was in the first instance an oral experience and thus radio, by "speak[ing] to a lot of people at once," was "getting back to the first principle" of communication.[27] Unable to rely on well-known visual strategies, admen had to invent new aural strategies, such as sound effects; there was no evidence that such strategies could not also be effective. Educating "the ear" as receptor for advertising messages was then the first task of radio advertising.

The second problem, radio's "fleeting impression," was a result of its evanescence. Once the message was out on the air, it could not be recaptured, measured, repeated, or reviewed by listeners. Magazine readers were able to reread an advertisement, but a radio listener had no means of rehearing a radio advertisement. What if audiences did not listen closely enough, or grasp the meaning well enough? Print strategies, especially the hard sell, relied on repetition and boldface emphasis. How could that be transferred to an oral medium? Perhaps looking to print strategies for inspiration was a mistake. Radio, according to JWT staffer Robert Colwell, should be considered analogous to billboards, which might be effective even though passing viewers may only catch a glimpse, an impression, and may not see the entire message. Thus, Colwell advised copywriters working in radio to keep the advertising copy simple and "avoid quick transitions, complex ideas, or concepts which the listener cannot grasp as the words fly by."[28] Keeping copy short and simple was also necessary because of the limitations of audience attention. Young & Rubicam radio department head Hubbell Robinson underlined this principle when he explained that "the public's memory is conspicuous chiefly for its brevity, its loyalty chiefly conspicuous for its ability to waver."[29] Admen could not rely on audiences to focus or remember; they would have to to catch an audience's attention, and make the message memorable.

As to the third issue, the use of the human voice as a medium rather than typeface or type size, some admen extolled the advantages of the voice over print. Referring to the admen who wrote radio scripts that incorporated both program and advertising copy, George W. Smith claimed, "Continuity writers have transformed the *divinity* of the printed word into the still more divine eloquence of the spoken word. They tug at heart strings; they inspire appetites; they change deep-rooted habits . . . . In so doing, they sway millions as if by some magic wand."[30] Smith's confidence in the power of speech to sway millions was not shared by all admen; many remained strongly attached to the power of print. BBDO staffer J.T.W. Martin argued that print was intrinsically more credible: "The very fact that advertising copy is printed lends it a sincere appearance. Any size or style of type seems to stamp a statement as truth."[31] Advertising copy that seemed "sincere" in print, Martin claimed, had a different effect when spoken on the air: "It is astonishing how exaggerated and ridiculous an extravagant claim for a product sounds over the air."[32] How could admen avoid the pitfalls of applying print strategies to radio? Hill Blackett, of Blackett-Sample-Hummert, argued, "There are two entirely different techniques" for copywriting. "One is the technique of the spoken word, and the other the technique of the printed word. ...[I]n the early days of radio, the commercials sounded like somebody getting up and reading a piece of advertising."[33]

Continuity writers, those writing scripts that incorporated both advertising and program text, must, according to one adman, avoid "unnatural or 'advertisy' dialog" that would undercut the seamless integration of program and advertisement.[34]

Key to translating the printed word into the spoken was the program's announcer. Announcers in radio were important mediators between the program and the advertising: they usually announced the program, the players, the sponsor, and often read the text of the advertisement as well. Victor Ratner, from the Lennen & Mitchell agency, characterized announcers as "the 'type-faces' of radio," and as in print, their proper use was essential: "the right announcer adds a dynamic quality to any copy he is given to deliver. He can step-up advertising 'voltage' as much as a poor announcer can step it down."[35] Selecting the appropriate announcer was critical to achieving the desired effect. In a 1930 staff meeting, JWT executive Robert Colwell described the different styles of well-known announcers: "Graham MacNamee races along, Alwyn Bach is very slow and dignified, Alois Havrilla is about half way between."[36] The continuity writers need to take their announcer's style into account. As Colwell explained, "A good continuity man will 'write to his announcer.' Like an actor in a play, an announcer suffers when he is given a part that is out of character. Listeners realize . . . when an announcer is saying something that does not sound sincere and spontaneous."[37] Fears that listeners would be alienated by the apparent insincerity or wooden delivery of an announcer prompted another adman to urge agencies to use announcers whose "words must be felt as well as spoken."[38] The most professional announcers could successfully communicate a sincerity that was not just spoken but "felt." Conversely, the professionalism of announcers, their glibness and smoothness, could undercut an advertisement's effectiveness. For this reason, the JWT Radio Department would also, on occasion, have a radio performer who was not a professional announcer present the advertising message: he or she would provide a "fresh voice, a voice which may not be quite so much on its guard and more sincere, frank and open than the ordinary `announcer'...."[39] These variations in strategy indicate the risks involved in relying on announcers to mediate between the advertising text and the audience. JWT's Colwell warned his co-workers that one could never be sure if an announcer would "say it in the right way." Consequently, JWT exercised close control over announcers. According to Colwell, "To insure this we have generally a production man at all of our programs to be certain that the announcer gives the words the exact shade of meaning that they should have."[40]

JWT's George Faulkner named two more challenges to creating effective radio advertising. The fourth challenge, "censorship barriers," concerned relations with networks, which attempted to impose norms and standards in order to prevent political and regulatory backlash. This was a topic of the previous chapter. The fifth issue Faulkner identified, "the need for showmanship," was at the heart of a debate that raged within the advertising industry during the entire radio era. This is the topic of the rest of the chapter.

Showmanship: Theory and Practice

Hard-sell theorist Claude Hopkins had derided admen who "forget they are salesmen and try to be performers. Instead of sales, they seek applause."[41] Yet, as the Depression deepened and existing advertising strategies failed to revive consumption, admen in radio contemplated doing just that, seeking applause. Radio could not be "salesmanship in print"—there was no print involved—admen needed to develop other methods. During the 1930s and

1940s, admen sought to develop "showmanship" as the key strategy for radio. A writer in the trade magazine *Broadcast Advertising* defined showmanship as "the ability to make people pay attention by giving them what they like,"[42] a definition which, of course, begs the question of what people like. Admen defined "showmanship" in accordance with their basic outlook on advertising strategy. Thus, a hard-sell proponent defined showmanship as a tactic that produces tangible results: "Showmanship is presenting any proposition *successfully* to the public."[43] On the other hand, soft-sell proponents defined showmanship as a production ethos. Bob Colwell at JWT argued that "Showmanship is intelligence, imagination, taste. . . . Showmanship is doing everything just a little better than seems necessary. . . . Doing things supremely well."[44] In this view, showmanship was defined by quality, attention to detail, and investment of time and money. Thus, admen used the term "showmanship" to describe how their radio practices reflected their underlying advertising strategies, whether hard sell or soft sell.

The problem of showmanship became so acute during the radio era that entire "how to" books were devoted to its explication. In their 1936 book, *Showmanship in Business,* Kenneth M. Goode and M. Zenn Kaufman argued that there was no real difference between showmanship and salesmanship: all selling is a form of showmanship and all showmanship a form of selling.[45] They sought to prove, among other things, that admen's skills were appropriate for producing entertainment, since the basic principles for appealing to audiences applied to both advertising and entertainment. They urged businessmen to ignore showmanship's "doubtful repute businesswise" and to embrace it as a technique for producing results. Goode and Kaufman delineated the functions of showmanship: showmanship "1. attracts attention . . . 2. emphasizes, 3.

emotionalizes, 4. creates action."[46] To achieve showmanship, one must apply the tools of "suspense, pathos, humor," the basic Aristotelian elements of drama. In order to sell, however, these elements must be handled with "tact": "Showmanship, in short, is another name for 'tact.' Active, aggressive tact. Tact on a gorgeous scale. Tact blown up into a balloon. Painted like a barber pole!"[47] Goode and Kaufman did not clarify how admen were to translate this ballooning, painted tact into effective advertising. However, the fluidity and vagueness of these attempts to define and apply principles of showmanship illustrate that, although promising in theory, the term alone did not provide a set of consistent, workable rules and practices. Instead, "showmanship" provided a rubric for admen to discuss the problem of integrating entertainment and advertising.

Critics of advertising agency-controlled programming claimed that admen had no business passing themselves off as showmen. According to one critic, "Showmanship, the most important element in broadcasting, is likewise the rarest quality to be found in an advertising man." Admen are simply "not very adept at it."[48] In this view, entertainment required a set of strategies distinct from advertising. Some entertainers resented admen's horning in on their territory; the well-known Hollywood star Mary Pickford, for example, complained, "It occurs to me that possibly many radio shows of today have been constructed by salesmen rather than showmen, and now that the novelty of 'tuning in' has worn off, I wonder if any production on the air can really succeed without the highest type of showmanship."[49] Others complained that admen were not treating radio as entertainment but as advertising, that they were ruining radio by treating it as "a thing entirely apart from show business."[50]

Admen defended their qualifications as radio showmen by insisting that their skills in advertising were transferable to entertainment. As one writer put it, admen "are the chaps who have spent years dramatizing a bar of soap."[51] Advertising strategy has always included dramatics, though in print; radio simply offered admen a platform for extending those skills. A BBDO copywriter pointed out that showmanship came naturally to admen: "After all, showmanship is only brains plus imagination, plus the bravery to try something new. Brains–-imagination–-bravery–-dramatic instinct and ability. Where will you find these qualities more necessary than in the advertising business?"[52] In fact, perhaps admen were better qualified to entertain than were established entertainers themselves: one BBDO executive sneered that "Ever since broadcasting began, broken-down vaudeville actors and ex-directors of ex-little theaters have been ranting that radio needed showmen."[53] The tensions between the people from show business and the people from Madison Avenue were exacerbated as each group sought to position themselves as the best managers of radio. Radio writer Robert Landry explained the differences both in social background and in aims:

> The gap between the conservatively tailored fraternity brothers from Dartmouth and Princeton and the sharp customers from the other side of Sixth Avenue was in part a social gap but it was also a matter of business conditioning. The admen said in horror, "They don't *think* advertising." The showmen said, also in horror, "They don't *think* show business."[54]

Even if admen's skills were transferable to entertainment, the social gap as well as the differences of aims maintained the divisions between admen and showmen.

Radio, of course, was not the first instance of entertainment as an advertising vehicle. Nineteenth-century patent medicine sellers traveled from town to town, putting on a "medicine show" to attract an audience. After the entertainment had attracted audiences, the patent medicines were brought out and their benefits extolled. Observers within and without the advertising industry viewed the sponsorship model as an updated version of the medicine show. Adman Howard Angus declared in 1932 that "It is back to first principles–-the old medicine show all over again."[55] Radio critic John T. Flynn drew a parallel between the historical medicine show and the contemporary radio program:

> The itinerant medicine man of former days carried about with him his banjo player and minstrel and clog dancer and magician to attract the crowd to his tent and to put them in a benevolent mood as a prologue to his own 'high pitch' upon the wonders of his pills and lotions.[56]

The entertainment of the medicine show had the same instrumental purpose as the sponsored radio program: to sell. For critics, and some admen, this compromised both the entertainment and the advertising. Others, however, rather than disown the legacy of the patent medicine trade, embraced it. As adman Carl Dreppert wrote:

> The problems of the medicine showmen of yesterday are exactly the problems of the radio advertiser today. Call radio the macrocosm of mass showmanship to sell: the medicine showman is the microcosm. . . . Were these medicine showmen masters of all the entertaining arts they practiced? Not by a long shot. They were masters of but one art–the art of knowing the mental habits of the people who made up their market. . . . They weren't selling a show—they were *using a show to sell goods*.[57]

For Dreppert, the adman's purpose was not to produce a good show, but to produce a good *enough* show to sell goods. If radio were a modern-day medicine show, that was not a compromise, but a solution.

In contrast, Robert Simon argued in a 1932 JWT staff meeting that while the structure and goals of medicine shows and radio programs may be similar, the style of radio programming must evolve beyond the medicine show. Referring to an article comparing medicine shows and radio programs, Simon noted that while the similarities may have been obvious in 1930—"You had entertainment, you had an announcer who was virtually a barker"—audiences had changed, and so should radio program producers:

> [T]he same thing has happened to radio that has happened to the medicine show. The patrons are getting wise to that racket. The doctor brings on his bottle and they go somewhere else. In short, we cannot continue indefinitely to sell our wares by the venerable combination of ballet and ballyhoo.[58]

Pursuing the medicine show strategy was increasingly risky for those advertisers seeking to establish long-term relationships with consumers.

If using entertainment as bait for hard-sell advertisement was problematic for some admen, improving the program at the expense of the advertisement was problematic for others. In an article titled "Are We Selling Entertainment or Merchandise?" one adman cast doubt on the compatibility of entertainment and advertising, arguing that "a fact-smothering bombardment of cleverness does not help anyone to buy more sanely."[59] Selling and buying should be rational processes; entertainment was inherently irrational. Audience response was unpredictable, the failure rate high, the risk of offense omnipresent.

Entertainment as a selling strategy had pitfalls whether or not the program was successful with audiences. As one adman described the potential for failure:

> A radio program can "sell" so hard and so consistently that the listening audience will fade out in boredom or disgust. Or it may be an "impression" job with entertainment so fine that few people get, and none remember, the name and product of the sponsor.[60]

It was too easy to make either mistake: if the program sold too hard, the advertiser could lose the audience, but if the program entertained too completely, he could lose the sale. Some admen argued that advertising goals were being lost entirely in the rush to provide entertainment. Howard Angus worried that "advertisers have gone crazy and are selling stars instead of their products."[61] Arguing that expensive programming might please audiences, but was a poor investment unless it helped sell products, adman L. Ames Brown wrote in 1932,

> A $20,000 all-star program on a coast-to-coast network may get fine press notices and win the sympathetic applause of those self-appointed advertising critics who are working for high cultural standards—but it's a dead loss to the advertiser if it's all showmanship and no salesmanship.[62]

Was there a middle way between straight selling talks and high-priced star-filled entertainment programs?[63] Did the program have to be entirely dedicated to and identified with the sponsor's product, at the risk of alienating audiences? Or did the program have to be star-studded and expensive, at the risk of undermining sales?

Admen began to question the need for a close association between the program and the product. In 1932, JWT radio department head John Reber abandoned the assumption that the product and the program had to be closely associated. This assumption had operated since early radio, when advertisers such as ginger ale makers had sponsored bubbly, cheery music programs like the *Cliquot Club Eskimos*. Audiences, it was assumed, would associate the bubbly music with bubbly ginger ale. Reber argued that such an association was not necessary, that an effective radio advertising strategy began with identifying the product's target market, then building a program to attract that target market, whether or not it resembled the product. As Reber explained in a staff meeting: "[T}he entertainment should be something which will attract an audience composed of the most likely people to whom the product can be sold. It need not have anything whatever to do with the product or advertising message."[64] In this view, an advertiser no longer had to find or develop a program that was "keyed to his product."[65] Advertisers could buy or develop programs that simply attracted the audiences that would be interested in their products. The program would not have to fit with the product. If true, advertisers and agencies would be able to consider a wider variety of programming options.

Finding a middle way between selling too hard and not selling hard enough was a process of mediating between advertisers and audiences. As a writer in the trade magazine *Radio Showmanship* put it: "Radio listeners want programs to be *interesting*, and sponsors want them to be *profitable*."[66] Admen and agencies had to balance these goals. A Ruthrauff & Ryan executive described it as a process akin to international diplomacy: "The problem is to mediate between the objective of social subjects and the practical task of selling soap. It is editorial statesmanship combined with the utmost concentration of showmanship. . . ."[67] While "statesmanship" may have been a slight exaggeration, admen certainly needed diplomatic skills. The radio department head of Young & Rubicam, Hubbell Robinson, thus described mediating between the selling needs of a sponsor and the entertainment aims of the program talent:

> The question of entertainment versus advertising is fast reaching the state of a perennial bugaboo in connection with commercial radio broadcasts . . . . [M]ost clients . . . insist on as much direct selling talk as they can crowd in. Showmen, actors, script and continuity writers insist on cutting the selling talk to the minimum. On the horns of this dilemma the radio advertising men balance themselves as best they can. . . .[68]

This dilemma was insoluble: faced with the extremes of alienating audiences with too much advertising, or not stimulating sales by overemphasizing entertainment, admen balanced themselves as best they could

Some agencies turned to integrated commercials as a solution. As early as 1929, JWT used this approach in the Fleischmann's program starring Rudy Vallee. John Reber explained to other JWT staffers how this approach allowed for the insertion of advertising while keeping the narrative frame of Vallee's nightclub act intact:

> We have a little trick in Fleischmann which we feel is quite certain to work out well. . . . It provides for a conversation between Rudy and a friend of his. . . . He comes in and says, "Hello, aren't you going to show me around?" and Rudy takes him around, and as they walk around, and go into the kitchen, and meet the chef, it's "Hello," and "How do you do," and then they are out again, and as they walk along the tables, . . . the friend says "You seem to have friends here, " and [Rudy] replies, "There is a couple over there who don't even know I am here. I wonder what they are talking about. . . . Let's listen." And then, with enough of a change on the fader to indicate a change of microphone, you hear this conversation

going on at the table. . . . The conversation is to the effect that this boy is doing better with his work, is getting more money, and the girl says, "How did you manage that, how did you do it?" and finally it ends by divulging the secret of his success, that he had been taking Fleischmann's Yeast, etc.[69]

This strategy was especially popular at the agencies that specialized in soft sell tactics. Young & Rubicam invented Jack Benny's famous invocation of his sponsor, "Jello again. This is Jack Benny speaking," a clever way to weave the sponsor's name into the program.[70] Benton & Bowles also used scripted backstage patter, having the performers shift out of the first fictional frame into another fictional frame of "real-life situations and settings" in order to identify more fully the product with the entertainers.[71] By eliding differences between the entertainment and selling texts, these strategies, as historian Susan Douglas has noted about Jack Benny's word play, may have helped legitimize and to make commercialism more "palatable" to entertainers and their audiences alike.[72]

To create advertising for radio without considering entertainment was no longer possible. As one adman put it, radio advertising required "seductive selling coated with, or presented through the medium of, entertainment."[73] But how to decide what kind of entertainment would work as the best selling medium? JWT radio staffer Robert Colwell sighed with exasperation in a staff meeting in 1930, "The question of what we are going to do for entertainment and how we are going to do it and who is going to do it is just endless."[74] In a 1931 JWT staff meeting, radio department head John Reber acknowledged the increasing complexity of entertainment production, admitting he had given up his opinion that radio was "easy" to master. On the contrary it was, he pointed out, increasingly labor intensive as the agency tried "to make more of a performance, more of a show of the thing."[75] How to build showmanship into the shows themselves? What made a program a good program? Advertising theorist Kenneth Goode defined good programs as having those having "radiobility": the ability to have "an almost instantaneous attention catching-and-holding quality."[76] This was a difficult task. What does it take to create "radiobility"? What tools, methods, strategies were useful?

Constraints on Showmanship

As agencies struggled to conceptualize showmanship and radiobility, they were already on the job, testing ideas as they went along. In doing so, they faced a number of constraints. First, they faced resistance from within the advertising industry itself and institutional limitations within agencies. Second, they faced the demands of their clients, the radio sponsors. Third, they were constrained by the difficulty of solving the mystery of audience desires: what did audiences want? Fourth, they faced the needs and demands of star talent, perhaps the most difficult of all these constraints.

As should be clear from earlier discussions of internal industry debates, throughout the radio era some admen resisted the medium; often detractors and proponents of radio co-existed within a single agency. For example, the head of N.W. Ayer thought very little of radio as an advertising medium and undermined his agency's otherwise pre-eminent head start by moving its headquarters to Philadelphia, away from the burgeoning radio industry.[77] At Young & Rubicam, one of the top radio agencies, founder Raymond Rubicam never disguised his distaste for radio. In the 1950s, he would fulminate against commercial television as well.[78] However, Rubicam was a businessman, and radio was a good business for his agency throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Agencies varied in the way their radio departments fit into their overall organizational structure. In some agencies, like Young & Rubicam, these departments were entirely separate. In other agencies, advertising on radio was coordinated with advertising in print media: the radio department was expected to pick up and use print advertising concepts. For some radio admen, this was problematic; print advertising strategies were not always appropriate on radio. At JWT, radio department head Reber criticized the print copywriters for providing poor advertising concepts the radio department was then forced to execute. In a 1932 staff meeting, Reber complained: "The Radio Department leans very heavily upon the creative group because we expect you to work out the advertising message. . . . It is pretty difficult sometimes to accept some of the ramshackle platforms handed us by the creative group." Reber went on to disavow responsibility: "So don't blame us for what we say. You can blame us for the way it is said, but it is not our fault as to the basic advertising idea."[79] This separation of concept from execution was Reber's way of defending his department from some of the internal agency critics of radio.

The second area of constraint for admen concerned their clients, the advertisers. Admen often complained that radio sponsors would not take their professional advice, would meddle in issues of which they knew little, and would stubbornly insist on having their way. These complaints were never aired directly, of course, but admen expressed their exasperation with sponsors in staff meetings, reminiscences, later interviews, and autobiographies. By the late 1940s, the problematic sponsor had almost become a cliche, memorialized in Hollywood films such as *The Hucksters* and *A Letter to Three Wives*. Admen complained especially about the conservatism of many sponsors and their distrust of show business, which, according to then-NBC staffer and future ad agency president Mark Woods, "cramped and confined ingenuity."[80] Another adman claimed that sponsors "tramp with hobnailed shoes over the gossamer fabric of the entertainment. . . ."[81] JWT staffers complained repeatedly in their meetings of sponsors whose demands were unrealistic, or meddlesome, or, worse, sabotaging. One client wanted close control over every detail of the program: "The client decides that Helen Kane ought to sing 'Annie Laurie' instead of 'That's My Weakness Now.'"[82] Another interfered with the talent: "I saw an eminent manufacturer of perfumery march up to a dull, middle-aged actress and tell her tearfully: 'My good woman, I'm paying for this program and I want you to put some passion into it!'"[83] The most infamous sponsor of all, memorialized in the best-selling 1947 novel *The Hucksters*, was George Washington Hill of American Tobacco. Hill oversaw the revival of the cigarette brand Lucky Strike, partly through the radio program *Lucky Strike Hit Parade* (1935-50). Hill demanded that the program feature the top ten popular dance numbers, although his method for ascertaining the popularity of songs was never revealed. In a pamphlet he wrote on American Tobacco advertising, Hill insisted on following specific hard-sell formulas on radio.[84] As hard-sell strategies receded elsewhere in the industry during the 1940s, Hill's reputation as an obnoxious despot riding roughshod over his advertising advisors grew, until rumor and fact became difficult to separate.

For their part, sponsors who were accustomed to the more predictable outcomes of other industries were frustrated by the unpredictability of entertainment. It was difficult enough not knowing which advertising strategy would be effective, without the added uncertainty of show business. Admen, caught between entertainers' complaints and sponsor interference, were acutely aware of their uncomfortable position as mediators. Their flexibility was limited by their need to acknowledge, in the words of one adman, that the advertiser who "pays the piper" is able "to call the tunes."[85]

No one, neither ad agency, sponsor, nor entertainer, knew what would succeed as an advertising vehicle. Admen struggled to find a way through the entertainment options. One radio entertainer complained that the agencies promiscuously auditioned entertainers on a "hope-it-fits basis" instead of seeking talent that would suit the selling needs of their clients.[86] This was an exhaustive, time-consuming process for both talent and talent buyers. Agencies rarely indicated what they were looking for, if they knew, and the high rates of unemployment during Depression had created an excess supply of talent. Some ad agencies tried to address this problem by bringing more discipline and order to the process. John Reber at JTW argued that it was futile to buy an already-existing program, such as a network sustaining program, and then find a client to fit it. He argued that an agency should begin not with the program but with the client, analyzing the client's needs and then building "a program for the particular client."[87] In JWT's case, its radio program *Lux Radio Theatre* (1934-55) grew directly out of a print advertising campaign begun in 1928 that used movie star testimonials to sell Lux Toilet Soap. *Lux Radio Theatre* carried the movie star testimonial strategy over to radio; movie stars such as Irene Dunn suggested that "9 out of 10" movie stars preferred Lux Toilet Soap.[88] This strategy, serving the client rather than the network, was one of the reasons the agencies became ever more deeply involved in program conception as well as production. Building programs from scratch required a wholesale appraisal of entertainment appeals.

The first consideration was the targeted market. Admen's assumptions about their audience shaped their theories of showmanship. Advertising theorist Kenneth Goode assumed that "Adults in the mass—even opera audiences—think slowly when at all. And are childlike."[89] Advertising historian Roland Marchand describes this as a common attitude in the advertising industry.[90] Hard-sell proponents assumed their audiences had short attention spans and that lowbrow culture, such as popular music, would consistently attract more audiences than highbrow culture, such as classical music.[91] George Washington Hill, the American Tobacco sponsor, resisted the trend to use radio as a vehicle of cultural uplift, arguing, "Let's give the public what the public wants and not try to educate them."[92] William Benton, founder of Benton & Bowles, believed that his success in early radio rested on his relative ignorance of music, which coincided with his radio audience's ignorance of music. In an interview long after the fact, Benton claimed, "I have a tin ear. That's why my ear was so good for radio. Most people in the United States have a tin ear like mine. A totally tin ear."[93]

The assumption that the radio audience lacked taste, or an appreciation for quality, extended into corporate boardrooms as well. Sponsors reliant on highbrow programming such as classical music for "good will" advertising sometimes feared that lowbrow strategies would be more effective and wondered if they should switch tactics. In at least one case, a major advertiser on NBC had to be reassured by the network's president that its highbrow strategy was indeed competitive. Alfred Sloan, the CEO of General Motors, wrote Merlin Aylesworth, president of NBC, that he was concerned that GM's musical program was not "tuneful" enough. Sloan worried that GM was "tremendously limiting the public appeal of our programs by making them so 'high brow' in character."[94] Aylesworth reassured Sloan, asserting that GM's chief competitor, Ford, relied on a "cheap" program and that GM would undermine its aims if it likewise lowered itself to "a common type of music."[95] Aylesworth was reiterating the public service rhetoric with which NBC defended its policies to critics and regulators; the more highbrow programs NBC carried, the less vulnerable it would be to accusations that it was pandering or defiling the lofty ideals of radio as cultural uplift. In the face of a major sponsor's fear that its programming repelled rather than attracted, Aylesworth had to resort to a thinly veiled assertion of class superiority to convince Sloan that GM was pursuing the best strategy.

However, sponsors who assumed that audiences were naive risked underestimating and losing them. As early as 1930, one staffer at JTW, George Faulkner, argued against dumbing down programming to attract listeners. He contended that "The idea that the way to get a big audience is to play down to the moron is all wrong." In fact, Faulkner continued, "that is a theory even the movies have discarded."[96] Faulkner's comment was a backhanded compliment to radio's major competitor, the film industry, but it was a useful way to demonstrate the limits of the strategy, since, unlike the radio industry, which had little or no data to measure audience response, the film industry could use box office receipts as a clear measure of popularity.

On very little evidence, admen had to speculate about what radio audiences wanted. Hubbell Robinson of Y&R wrote an article for the trade press, "What the Radio Audience Wants," arguing that listeners want "entertainment which they can personalize," since direct, intimate medium of radio was experienced not in a mass audience setting but in a private, individualized setting, the home.[97] Movies are consumed in theaters with strangers, a much less intimate setting. Radio, then, might have a competitive advantage if it used radio's ability to "personalize." Robinson was also getting at the issue of "mass audiences." Listeners were individuals, they did not feel themselves to be members of a large, vaguely undifferentiated mass. However, radio audience's privacy made the measurement of their desires difficult if not impossible.

Robinson's insight that radio audiences were not undifferentiated masses would serve him well as a CBS television programmer in the 1950s. Though his was a minority voice in the radio era, it reflected a growing awareness that audiences were far more complex than broadcasting institutions or advertisers had assumed initially. By the end of the 1930s, audiences were conceived not as distractable because of low cognitive ability or lack of taste, but as mobile, their tastes and demands changing continually. In consequence, advertising theorist Warren Dygert recommended that radio programmers stay flexible and attuned to audiences: "If something new seems to be catching on, be ready to work fast. Skim the cream while the milk is fresh."[98] Programmers could not rest on any assumptions; they had to innovate constantly. Adaptive change, not stasis, was the constant. Following and responding to the audience, rather than bringing the audience along, was the new creed.

Another constraint on admen was how to use stars from other entertainment fields, including vaudeville, Broadway, and Hollywood. Star testimonials had been an effective print advertising strategy for beauty products (as in the JWT Lux campaign). However, early radio programming had used few established stars for several reasons. First, many had little interest in the challenge of a new medium, and none in its low or nonexistent rates of compensation. Second, early sponsored programming was predicated on the idea that the product was the star and that known stars would distract the audience's attention. Thus, many early radio entertainers were anonymous, or identified by pseudonyms, or labeled as the (product name) singers. The advertiser was spending money to promote not the entertainer but the product, and thus the personalities and identities of performers were obscured.[99] However, the advantages of using stars soon emerged because of their ability to attract audiences, the weight they carried in product endorsements, and the higher level of entertainment they could provide. A famous performer almost guaranteed audience interest. A JWT staffer noted, "There is one sort of show that will always be good. That is a show on which you spend a great deal of money" for stars such as Clark Gable.[100] Free spending clients, seeking guaranteed audience attention, competed for high-priced stars, driving up talent costs in the process.

This trend in turn provoked a backlash. Adman Leonard Lewis criticized advertisers' insistence on stars whatever their cost, claiming that programming could be commercially effective without star power, as in programs such as American Home Products' *Easy Aces* and Colgate-Palmolive's *Clara, Lu 'n' Em*.[101] Using non-star talent reduced production costs, whereas using stars, as Arthur Sinsheimer, the radio director at the Peck agency, complained, "serves rather to add to the glory of the featured artists than to increase materially the sales of merchandise of the sponsor."[102] Another adman stated flatly that "to place the entertainer in charge of your radio advertising is to subordinate the advertising viewpoint to the artistic viewpoint."[103] The blame for dependence on stars, according to Sinsheimer, rested not with the sponsors, since they could not be expected to know better, but with the advertising agencies and networks, who encouraged this star dependency.[104] In fact all were involved. Agencies and networks, in their effort to keep advertisers interested in radio, looked to stars to reassure advertisers that they were reaching audiences. Many advertisers, worried that a no-name performer could not guarantee an audience, felt that expensive star talent was a relatively wise use of money. However, increased demand for stars, the supply of which by definition is limited, also increased their asking prices: talent costs went up. These costs "cast a chill over many a business mind"; some admen were concerned that radio would price itself out of being an effective advertising medium.[105] Still, on the whole, the use of stars as a selling strategy grew throughout the decade.

In 1934 the advertising trade magazine *Printers' Ink Monthly* asked the stars themselves to weigh in on their significance to radio's commercialism and their relations with sponsors and agencies. The star Fred Waring represented a typical show business perspective when he argued that radio's "product" was entertainment, rather than advertising. Waring said he thought that advertisers should give "radio artists" a freer hand in developing radio entertainment: "Advertisers should realize that people listen to the radio not for the advertising but for the entertainment."[106] However, Waring overlooked the fundamental economic fact that in radio, unlike theater, the monetary transaction was between broadcaster and advertiser rather than performer and audience. In contrast, other performers took a more realistic view of radio, acknowledging the truism that whoever pays the piper can call the tune. The entertainer Eddie Cantor "heartily" disagreed with Waring. Cantor viewed radio as an entirely different commercial enterprise from "show business": "Radio is not the show business but the advertising business with the show business grafted on. Therefore, I say, that the star should listen sympathetically to the sponsor."[107] Other artists in this camp appealed to agencies and sponsors to allow them to become a more complete partner in the selling process. Ray Perkins complained that "There is a tendency on the part of radio time buyers to look upon the performer as a piece of artwork rather than as an employee," as someone who is "incapable of any sympathetic understanding of business matters," whereas if performers were instructed as to the "selling strategy" they could work more effectively for the sponsor.[108] Clearly Perkins held no illusions of creative autonomy.

Other radio performers were more reluctant to subordinate their art to the needs of the advertiser. Singer Jessica Dragonette gained stardom in a music program sponsored by Cities Services, *The Cities Service Concert*, and thought she enjoyed a measure of creative complicity in the program. However, she found in admen humiliatingly little interest in her creative contributions, and was finally forced off the program. Describing a failed meeting about which songs to sing and which skits to perform, Dragonette complained in her autobiography, "looking up at the blank faces, I realized I was casting my pearls before agency men."[109] Radio stars also resented constraints they had not found in live performances. Comedians accustomed to ad-libbing in live performances resented the tight control of their scripts by agencies and sponsors as well as the networks. Fred Allen famously and flagrantly ad-libbed lines, and Colonel Stoopnagle complained that the discouragement of ad-libbing made him feel "restrained, unnatural."[110]

Radio-created stars—that is, stars whose first major breakout happened on radio—chafed less at sponsor and agency creative control. Kate Smith, another singer who gained fame on radio, characterized the best relations between performer and sponsor as mutually cooperative. A radio performer should not agree to be hired by just any sponsor, a radio performer must approve of the product she is to promote: "it is vital that the product must be one of mutual approval and admiration by both the artist and the sponsor. . . . There must be complete *esprit de corps* between sponsor, agency and artist."[111] In the case of JWT's production of the *Fleischmann's Yeast Hour* with Rudy Vallee, the star depended on the ad agency to craft his on-air persona. JWT radio director John Reber explained to staff in 1932 that JWT's current strategy for appealing to audiences was to make the scripts sound as if

> Vallee did the whole thing himself, so that all who like Vallee will like the show because Vallee made it up. The facts are that Vallee doesn't know now what is going to be rehearsed this afternoon. He doesn't write one word of the script. All of the things about how he first met these people, etc., we make up for him.[112]

Radio, then, required artists as well as sponsors and agencies to reconceptualize their roles in creative production.

Although creative conflict with artists was an obvious drawback to the employment of stars, there were a number of other considerations as well. Sponsors employed stars not just to attract audiences but also to create an association between the product and the star. If audiences had a favorable attitude toward the star, perhaps that would carry over to the product. The Lux soap campaign was predicated on star association in the program *Lux Radio Theatre*. But perhaps it wouldn't. Radio star Eddie Cantor performed in a number of programs including *The Chase & Sanborn Hour* and *The Eddie Cantor Radio Show*, with a variety of sponsors, including Old Gold cigarettes, Sunkist, Chase & Sanborn coffee, Camel cigarettes, and Texaco. How would audiences remember which product to associate him with?[113] Some surveys of listeners, asking them to identify the sponsors of major stars, concluded that for most listeners the association of stars with products or sponsors was weak.[114] General belief in star-sponsor association persisted despite evidence to the contrary; sponsors continued using stars as an associative advertising strategy.

The downside of star association was that a star might become involved in a scandal or other popularity reducing circumstance, and through this negative association hurt the sales of the product. This negative version of the persistent belief in star-sponsor association was one of the underlying assumptions behind the witch hunts in Hollywood and radio in the late 1940s and early 1950s for suspected communist sympathizers. Advertisers fired stars such as Gertrude Goldberg who played Molly Goldberg on *The Goldbergs* because they assumed their sales would be harmed by the negative association of a star's political beliefs.

Another risk for advertisers in using stars was that stars could withhold their labor for higher pay when demand for their services was high. The establishment of a radio performers' union in 1937, the American Federation of Radio Artists, threatened to shift more negotiating leverage to labor. What if a star's close and positive association with a program and product gave him or her greater negotiating power for higher pay? These considerations led one adman to recommend to sponsors: "Don't hitch your business to a star. Hitch a star to your business—and then only as a part of your business and its promotional program."[115]

In addition to the problems of managing stars, sponsors, and intra-agency tensions, admen faced the basic problem of creativity in radio. On the one hand, admen sought to reach audiences where they were, using standard and recognizable appeals. On the other hand, they needed to innovate to build new markets. Advertising copywriters sought to make their work fall within the boundaries of "standard innovation," recognizable but new enough to be interesting.[116] Many admen saw advertising as a creative outlet, comparable to, or perhaps a variety of, high art; asserted one, "I do not know of any place in business where there is as much opportunity for original ideas and creative ingenuity as in advertising. . . ."[117] But did advertising's instrumental use of creativity for commercial goals undermine that claim? Admen were supposed to translate commodity into desire. Hill Blackett of Blackett-Sample-Hummert explained, "You must translate soap into how to get a decent complexion, just as you translate . . . cigarettes into how to keep a decent figure."[118] The entry of the advertising industry into radio expanded the range of possibilities for translating commodities into desire; it was a call to innovation.

As agencies debated programming strategies, issues of novelty, formula, originality, and plagiarism often arose. In the earliest years of radio, admen relied on the novelty effect of a never-before-broadcast event. Agencies arranged stunts ranging from unseen tap dancers to the "first commercial program from an airplane."[119] However, by 1934, according to NBC staffer Art Hungerford, "The factor of novelty is no longer so important."[120] Radio entertainment was, in fact, usually an amalgam of the tried-and-true with the novel, as historian Daniel Czitrom has pointed out.[121] Vaudeville provided a large body of pre-sold entertainment and talent to radio, material that had already proved it could attract audiences. Programs such as *Fleischmann's Hour, Chase and Sanborn Hour,* and *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air* transferred the vaudeville model more or less intact to radio: comedy monologue, skit, guest star, orchestra number, vocalist, and weekly visiting artists. Most variety programs were initially based on the vaudevillian concept of a "bill." Vaudevillian labor was also in good supply as the number of vaudeville theaters shrank from 2,000 in 1926 to less than 50 in 1933, victims of the Depression and the new entertainment media of talkies and radio.[122] However, many vaudevillians relied on visual techniques, including pantomime, sight gags, or pratfalls in comedy, or dancing, ventroquilism, and visual novelties. Eddie Cantor and Ed Wynn both carried stage techniques over to radio and had trouble remaining within the strictures of the scripted, timed broadcast. They also had a tendency to play to the studio audience with facial expressions, sight gags, outrageous costumes, and other tools unseen by radio listeners.[123] Consequently, the largest available labor pool was not a perfect match for the new medium of radio. Vaudeville veterans who did best on radio were those who shed many vaudevillian techniques. Jack Benny's comedy, for example, shifted from vaudevillian puns and one-liners to comedic situations revolving around his character as a "braggart and skinflint."[124]

A key reason for vaudeville's prominence in radio was its potential to provide, for advertisers uncomfortable with the vagaries of show business and unsure how to draw audiences, both the tried-and-true and the novel. Vaudeville forms were familiar to audiences, and vaudevillians were familiar with the demands of live performance (unlike some film stars). However, vaudevillians were accustomed to months of touring, giving them the opportunity to hone their acts over time. On radio, they had no opportunity to perfect material over time, and were expected to perform new material weekly, an intensely short turn around time. Another difference was that vaudeville and Broadway performers and their financiers, the producers, understood that not every act would be a hit, not every show would draw an audience. The show business world expected a high failure rate. Radio sponsors, on the other hand, not only expected hits, but demanded new material every week that would retain audiences, bringing them back again and again. The radio performers had to meet a standard of presumed audience expectations week after week, yet produce enough innovative material to keep audience interest. "This risk is intensified on the air, where a different show must be given for every broadcast. The advertiser must first build up his audience, and then hold them over periods of many weeks or months, in the face of shifting public tastes."[125] That is, advertisers faced a need to balance standardization and innovation. On the one hand, advertisers sought to create audience habits. In general, according to William Benton, "Every businessman wants a product that is habit-forming. That's why cigarettes, Coca-Cola and coffee do so well."[126] However, entertainment cannot operate in the same way, though it should induce the same effect again and again, it must do so by means of something new. No single form of entertainment could solve the problem of audience appeal once and for all. As JWT's Robert Cowell pointed out, "The most popular programs on the air do not fall into any one type of entertainment."[127] Neither star nor genre alone could ensure a program's success, as one writer acknowledged in *Printers' Ink:* "The element of gamble cannot, of course, be wholly eliminated in entertainment building."[128] This copywriter went on to recommend that, "The advertiser can take a formula–even an existing program–. . . and adapt it to his needs," after "studying the experience and success of other programs."[129]

Imitation of success was a strategy not limited to radio, of course. The advertising industry can be seen as a cybernetic system or feedback loop of innovation and imitation. Almost every successful advertising campaign generates a host of copycat campaigns. In an article on plagiarism and radio, copywriter Don Gridley acknowledged that "advertising has had to depend partly on people whose genius lies almost wholly in the copying of other's ideas."[130] On radio, however, some admen complained about that most sincere form of flattery, imitation. Gridley asserted that "imitative" radio programs "undermine" the original program's effectiveness, by diluting its appeal, hence forcing program producers to continue to innovate, at great labor and effort. Gridley concluded that "originators" of new program ideas must keep moving ahead of their imitators: "Their only hope lies in keeping ahead of the parade and creating something new a little faster than the imitators can imitate."[131]

Conclusion

Radio forced admen into entertainment and into a medium to which they could not easily apply their traditional strategies. They were forced to conceive and build a new structure in an uncertain time, the Depression. As admen debated ways to use radio, they organized many of their ideas around the concept of "showmanship." Whether this was defined as entertainment or selling or both, admen had to grapple with its meaning as they expanded their role into programming. They attempted to integrate principles of audience appeal into both programming and advertising, sometimes by integrating advertising directly into the program text. Admen wondered how closely the entertainment and advertising had to be associated. They debated the proportion of advertising to entertainment: too much advertising and audiences may tune out, too much entertainment and audiences may not recall the sponsor or the product. Resolving some of these issues had to be done on the job; advertising agencies were thrust into managing the marriage of showmanship with salesmanship with few precedents to instruct them. Clients demanded advertising solutions, broadcasters were eager to shift program responsibility, and audiences sought economical entertainment. Among the challenges facing admen was resistance from within the advertising industry itself, the difficulty of managing sponsors' demands, the lack of information about audience preferences, and the trickiness of handling performing talent and well-known stars. Although radio depended on already existing cultural forms, such as vaudeville, no single advertising or entertainment strategy translated directly to radio, an altogether new medium that reached masses but in individualized personal settings. As agencies rushed to develop and sustain appropriate programming for their clients, they debated issues of originality and imitation.

This chapter examined the overall issues of how radio was theorized as an entertainment and advertising medium by admen in the 1930s. The following chapter examines in more detail the specific practices and contrasting theories of several key advertising agencies active in radio program production in the 1930s.

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CHAPTER 5

DRAMATIZING A BAR OF SOAP: PROGRAMMING AND ADVERTISING STRATEGIES AT BLACKETT-SAMPLE-HUMMERT, YOUNG & RUBICAM, AND BENTON & BOWLES

The previous chapter provided an overview of how the advertising industry in general theorized radio advertising and programming. Admen were deeply engaged in solving the conundrum of how to marry advertising and entertainment, how to adapt existing advertising strategies to radio, and how to strike a balance between standardization and innovation. It should be clear by the range of debates within the industry that there were few areas of unanimity among admen regarding radio. How were these differing theories put into practice at specific agencies? Each agency pursued strategies most congruent with its leaders' basic assumptions about advertising. As discussed in previous chapters, hard-sell proponents held views quite different from soft-sell proponents. In order to highlight the differences within the advertising industry, in this chapter I examine the specific practices of three agencies that exemplified these different approaches, Blackett-Sample-Hummert (B-S-H), Young & Rubicam (Y&R), and Benton & Bowles (B&B). Each contributed innovations that influenced other agencies and shaped broadcast practices. These three agencies were not, of course, the only major radio agencies—others such as J. Walter Thompson, McCann-Erickson, Erwin Wasey, and Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn were also heavily involved in radio. However, I focus on these three agencies because together they illustrate the range and variety of the strategies such agencies used. Blackett-Sample-Hummert was the top producer of daytime serials during the radio era, including *Stella Dallas*, *Ma Perkins*, and *Just Plain Bill*. Under the leadership of Frank and Anne Hummert, B-S-H applied hard-sell "reason-why" advertising strategies to radio programming and invented methods for producing radio entertainment on an "assembly line." Young & Rubicam, on the other hand, adhered to soft-sell theories of advertising, and thus used quite different approaches to radio entertainment from B-S-H; Y&R programs such as *The Jack Benny Program* were known for their humor and use of integrated commercials, strategies designed to avoid alienating audiences. Benton & Bowles drew on strategies from both the hard-sell and soft-sell schools in programs such as Maxwell House's *Show Boat* and *Town Hall Tonight*. What distinguished B&B from other radio agencies was the maverick character of its leaders, William Benton and Chester Bowles. Both men challenged the conventions and verities of the advertising and broadcast industries; they chafed under the restrictions of the radio model and foresaw some of the changes that would evolve in the television era. The quality of available documentation on each of these agencies is variable and patchy; for that reason, rather than attempt a complete history of agency activity, this chapter focuses on the key debates between hard-sell proponents and soft-sell proponents, as well as on significant innovations in radio practices.

Blackett-Sample-Hummert

Between 1932 and 1960, Frank and Anne Hummert produced nearly forty different daytime serials of varying longevity, including *Betty and Bob* (1932-40), *Ma Perkins* (1933-60), *Easy Aces* (1933-44), *Just Plain Bill* (1933-55), *The Romance of Helen Trent* (1933-60), *Backstage Wife* (1935-1959), *David Harum* (1936-1950), *John's*

Other Wife (1936-42), *Our Gal Sunday* (1937-59), *Lorenzo Jones* (1937-55), *The Couple Next Door* (1937-60), *Stella Dallas* (1938-55), *Young Widder Brown* (1938-56), and *Front Page Farrell* (1941-54). According to serial drama historian Raymond Stedman, the Hummerts produced 46 percent of network daytime serials during the years 1932-1937.[1] Between 1937 and 1942, serials were so popular on network radio that seventy-three new ones were introduced. By 1940, nine of every ten sponsored network programs was a serial.[2] During most of their careers, the Hummerts worked at the Blackett-Sample-Hummert advertising agency. B-S-H formed in 1927 when John Glen Sample and his partner, Hill Blackett, lured Hummert away from the Lord & Thomas agency, where Hummert had established a reputation as a successful copywriter under the tutelage of well-known adman Albert Lasker. Hummert's slogan, "Bonds or Bondage," had been credited with increasing war bond sales during World War I.[3] B-S-H launched itself by touting Hummert's copywriting as the most successful ad copy "from a dollars and cents standpoint."[4] Account executive Sample pitched to new clients by saying, "Gentlemen, if you hire us I can deliver Frank Hummert's brain to you."[5]

Hummert's fame as a copywriter developed from his skill in the hard-sell strategy of "reason-why" advertising. Reason-why advertising, originally developed by such admen as Lasker for print media, depended on rational, product-centered appeals that explained the "reason why" the consumer should purchase the product. Reason-why admen believed that an advertisement's effectiveness should be measured only in sales, not in attention-getting. For such admen, humor or attractive illustrations risked deflecting attention from the product to the advertisement. Even those interested in improving the aesthetics of advertising cautioned against the use of humor, as advertising theorist Earnest

Elmo Calkins warned in 1915, "Humor is a very good servant but a bad master."[6] Reason-why copywriters believed their readers had minimal cognitive capacity; advertising had to be simple enough "for the average mind, so that it is easier to *understand* than to *misunderstand it."*[7] Repetition was a key element of reason-why: if the reader could not grasp the concept in one form, then perhaps another would work, or another, or—just in case—yet another. Reason-why copywriters organized their work in a problem/solution structure: a problem was identified (dingy laundry, bad breath, sleeplessness), and then the product presented as the solution. Hummert's own reason-why advertisements in the problem/solution structure included one for Ovaltine asking, "Troubled with Sleepless Nights? Accept, then, this Unique Test"; for Quaker Quick Macaroni asserting, "Here's that New Food Invention which Banishes Burnt Macaroni"; and for Neet hair remover, reassuring readers that, "If Arm or Leg Hair Worries You, Remove Now Without Bristly Re-Growth." [8]

However, as I discussed in Chapter 4, reason-why advertising was regularly attacked by advertising critics for relying on the incomplete fact, or the unverifiable quantitative claim, or the hyperbolic analogy, on "ballyhoo" and "puffery." Claude Hopkins, a mentor of Hummert's and the author of the influential 1923 advertising how-to book *Scientific Advertising* (still consulted by copywriters today), promoted the art of the incomplete fact. According to Hopkins, "Human nature is perpetual. In most respects it is the same today as in the time of Caesar. So the principles of psychology are fixed and enduring"; one of these enduring principles is that most people can be persuaded by statements that resemble facts, especially if they include numbers and figures and quantified information. Hopkins wrote slogans for Puffed Wheat cereal that describe it as "Grains puffed to 8 times normal size" and containing "125 million steam explosions caused in every kernel."[9] Before the term "factoid" had been coined, Hopkins had mastered the concept—how could anyone count the "steam explosions" in a kernel of puffed wheat so as to prove or disprove such a claim? Did reason-why copywriters' embrace of the partially true, the borderline deceptive, and the unverifiable but scientistic undermine the credibility of advertising overall? Or did it successfully sell goods? B-S-H was founded on the belief that reason-why was the best way to sell.

Sample and Blackett's recruitment of the famous reason-why copywriter Hummert was dependent on their promise to him to move aggressively into the new medium of radio. B-S-H's subsequent success in radio was based in part on their canny exploitation of an opening in daytime radio. At that early stage of commercial radio, advertisers and networks were concerned that daytime audiences were too small to justify their investment in programming. Housewives might be too busy and distracted to focus on a sponsor's message. Networks sold daytime air time for half the price of evening air time. The daytime programs that were sponsored by an advertiser tended to be direct selling programs, analogous to today's infomercials, rather than entertainment programs. These offered recipes, beauty tips, and household hints incorporating sponsors' products. By 1933 they were in decline, their audiences small. Advertising theorist Herman Hettinger suggested that "American women are tiring of the repetition of these matters and are demanding more in the way of entertainment."[10] However, certain advertisers, particularly manufacturers of low-priced products such as soaps, cereals, and cosmetics, were seeking greater access to their target market, housewives. These low-margin products depended on high sales volume to achieve profitability; high sales volume was best achieved with heavy advertising. B-S-H convinced such advertisers that daytime radio could regularly deliver at a low cost the female listeners most likely to buy their products. The cheap availability of daytime radio air time promised advertisers a low cost-per-thousand listeners if enough listeners could be attracted. Unlike print media, which was limited by its circulation and print runs, radio had almost unlimited potential to expand its "circulation" or listenership—if audiences were provided with appropriate incentives to listen. How did B-S-H identify the interests of its targeted audience, housewives?

The targeted daytime audience for soap and cereal advertisers was female. Most advertising in general targeted women; as *Printers' Ink* put it, "The proper study of mankind is *man* . . . but the proper study of markets is *woman*."[11] Sample believed that hiring a woman would help B-S-H penetrate this market. However, Hummert was opposed to hiring women at the agency. Sample finally prevailed on Hummert; as he later recounted it, "We were selling a lot to women in those days and I knew that a writer with the women's [sic] touch would be a great asset."[12] Sample selected divorcee and journalist Anne Ashenhurt to be Hummert's assistant. However, as a working professional, Ashenhurst had no more experience as a housewife than Sample or Hummert.[13] The admen's gender essentialism assumed Ashenhurst's superior insight into housewives. Nonetheless, Ashenhurst's experience as a journalist, her attention to detail, and her devotion to improving sales for B-S-H's clients soon proved indispensable to B-S-H's expanding radio production department. By the time she married Frank Hummert in 1935, Anne Ashenhurst was widely regarded as the organizing force in B-S-H's radio department, "translating" Hummert's ideas to subordinates, clients, and networks.[14] Although the Hummerts maintained a reputation for secrecy, their growing production partnership became well-known.[15]

With Ashenhurst on board, B-S-H turned to the problem of inventing programming that would attract more housewife listeners than simple selling talks. Hummert considered the serial format. Noting the popularity of film serials and serialized novels, comic strips, and advice for the lovelorn columns in the print media, Hummert thought that housewives would likewise respond to serials on radio; he later described his insight as a guess, not a carefully thought out strategy: "Not a flash of so-called genius, but a shot in the dark."[16] The format of the serial narrative—particularly its appeal to "tune in next time"—provided advertisers with an opportunity to keep advertisements of their products regularly before their target audience.[17] Open-ended serial narratives organized listeners' attention.[18] One of the first clients to be convinced by B-S-H's idea for daytime serials was the packaged goods manufacturer Procter & Gamble (P&G), for whom B-S-H developed the serial drama *Ma Perkins* to promote Oxydol laundry soap. By 1935, P&G was the leading national radio advertiser, spending over $2 million a year for radio air time and production costs alone.[19] In fact, the term "soap opera" refers to the serials' sponsorship by soap manufacturers such as P&G, as well as their dramatic excesses. To further maximize audiences, B-S-H bought larger blocks of air time and programmed a number of serial programs back to back, hoping to ensure continuous audience attention from one program to another. A one-hour time block could be programmed with four consecutive 15-minute serials. This strategy may have been the first attempt to shape what later would be termed "audience flow" or the movement of audience attention from program to program. Buying longer blocks of time also won the agency price discounts from the networks, increasing economic efficiencies. By 1935, two other B-S-H clients, Sterling Products and American Home products, were ranked sixth and seventh respectively in radio ad spending.[20] In 1937, B-S-H bought more air time on the major radio networks than any other agency.[21] As its client billings increased 167 percent from 1930 to 1934, B-S-H, then, became one of the few advertising agencies to flourish in the Depression, almost entirely because of its involvement in radio.[22]

The Hummerts developed a simple "formula" for attracting daytime listeners. Each program had to be based on a fundamental human problem, particularly a problem faced by housewife listeners of the time. These problems often concerned social division, as in *Stella Dallas*, in which a mother "saw her beloved daughter Laurel marry into wealth and society, and realizing the difference in their tastes and worlds, went out of Laurel's life."[23] *Just Plain Bill*'s initial problem was whether a barber like himself would be able to get on with a grown daughter who had been raised in a higher social class than he. And *Young Widder Brown's* problem was whether a young single mother could ever remarry.[24] As in reason-why advertising strategies, the problem provided the bait with which to hook an audience. The characters were designed to appeal to typical housewives, in congruence with the reason-why theory that copywriters need to put themselves in the shoes of the typical consumer.[25] Hummert claimed that "Our stories are about the every-day doings of plain, every-day people—stories that can be understood and appreciated on Park Avenue and on the prairie."[26] His characters were thus unexceptional and accessible—a mother, a barber, a wife, a married couple. The central character, referred to as the "tentpole" of the narrative, often served to listen to the common, everyday problems of others and offer advice. The kindly and virtuous character Bill of *Just Plain Bill* functioned "much like a super seltzer tablet relieving those in distress," according to serial historian Stedman.[27] The tentpole character functioned much the way the reason-why advertisement did: to direct a person with a problem to a solution.

The Hummerts' programs were often criticized for their glacially slow plot development.[28] This was taken to an extreme in *The Romance of Helen Trent*: the durable Miss Trent remained age 35 for decades as she lost or rejected one suitor after the other, always in love but never marrying or compromising her virtue. But, however absurd, the slow plot development served to retain the attention of intermittent listeners, allowing them to miss episodes and still follow the narrative. Furthermore, as reason-why practitioners, the Hummerts assumed that their slow-witted audiences required slow, obvious, repetitious programming. They staffed their serials with actors who could clearly enunciate their characteristically slow, clear, ponderous dialogue. They also avoided humor, and this too was an intentional strategy, based on the reason-why theory that humor would detract from the product. The portentousness of the Hummert serials soon became the standard of the genre; the proverbial radio soap opera, which opens with the sound of organ music accompanying an announcer slowly intoning the plot developments of the last episode, is actually a parody of a Hummert serial. The slow, humorless, and repetitive nature of these serials was an intentional consequence of the hard-sell advertising strategy known as reason-why.

Reason-why proponents stressed the didactic potential of advertising; so did the Hummerts in their serials[29]—sometimes as specific, public-spirited advice, like the tips for dealing with the rationing of consumer goods during World War II, sometimes as more general embodiments of values regarded as traditional or American. In response to critics who accused the soaps of undermining morale or brainwashing gullible housewives, Anne Hummert pointed to these moral values: "Ours is a religious country, so we try to embody the idea of right. Crime may appear [in a serial], but either the annihilation or change of heart of the erring one must follow."[30] The issue of crime was particularly pertinent during the Depression, as some social commentators feared that Americans faced with poverty and joblessness would resort to attacks on property. To discourage both criminality and socialist tendencies, the Hummerts' scripts were designed to be, according to Frank Hummert, "success stories of the unsuccessful," in which characters such as Bill the barber find success not by amassing wealth but "by endearing himself to others and winning their respect." [31]

The serials' didacticism also supported advertisers' views about what kinds of behavior were appropriate for the women between the ages of 18 and 49 who made up their targeted audiences. Robert C. Allen points out that the Depression tended to reinforce traditional gender roles, confining women to the domestic sphere in a time of high unemployment. Women were exhorted to "keep things going" at home despite the economic crisis and improve their skills at household management despite limited resources. Radio soap operas, which often juxtaposed narrative and advertising as complementary problems and solutions, "contributed to and reinforced" the "cultural consensus" that women's labor be confined to domestic and emotional spheres.[32]

The didacticism functioned not only to promote ideology (in inculcating dominant values) but also to naturalize the insertion of reason-why advertisements in and around the serials' narratives. In most of the serials produced by the Hummerts, the advertising was neither "spot" (that is, textually separate) nor fully integrated into the program's narrative. Instead, they used what the advertising industry referred to as a "sandwich" style of advertising.

After a musical signature was played on an organ, the announcer delivered the opening tag line and a minute-and-a-half-long commercial message, then introduced that episode, returning after nine and half minutes of dialogue, with a closing commercial. The length and style of the commercials closely approximated standards for written reason-why copy of the time. The language was simplistic and repetitive, making the same claims in several different ways. The brand names of products were usually spelled out to ensure brand recognition. The full text of the introductory advertisement of a 1933 *Ma Perkins* episode will illustrate the repetitive effect; this advertisement lasted for one minute thirty seconds and was delivered by a narrator who introduced the day's episode.

> Before we hear from Ma Perkins today though, I want to tell you about something else for a minute that will be of vital interest to every housewife listening, about a remarkable new laundry soap discovery that actually makes any other kind of laundry soap old fashioned and out of date. It's the new, improved Oxydol, spelled O-X-Y-D-O-L, Oxydol. It embodies the latest scientific discovery of the world's greatest soap makers, the Procter and Gamble Company. Whatever soap you've been using in the past, whether it's a granulated soap, a soap flake, or a bar soap, you owe it to yourself to try this new improved Oxydol. It makes washing easier, gets the washing done faster, and is safer for colors and fabrics than any other laundry soap now or ever known. Here's what Oxydol will do for you under guarantee of the world's greatest soap makers. Oxydol will wash your clothes 25 to 40 percent faster, whether you use a tub or the latest improved washing machine. It washes clothes four to five shades whiter by actual scientific tests than any other soap can

> do. And absolutely without scrubbing or boiling. And remember that even your best cotton prints and your children's dainty frocks are safe in mild thick Oxydol suds because it embodies a new discovery which keeps all the fast washing and white washing qualities in the soap and leaves all the harshness out. It's safe for colors, safe for fabrics, and yet so kind to your hands that, well, you're simply amazed at its cleansing power. And now, we find Ma Perkins just where we left her yesterday. . . .[33]

Reason-why tenets are evident in the references to technological progress ("the latest scientific discovery"), quantification (cleans "25 to 40 percent faster"), scientism ("actual scientific tests"), and hyperbole ("remarkable," "greatest," "simply amazed"). The advertisement's length and repetitiousness, excessive by today's standards, suggest how unsure advertisers were amid the Depression that listeners were "getting" the selling message.

The lessons of the serial narratives were also integrated into the advertisements themselves. The same episode of *Ma Perkins* closes with a moral and an advertisement. The widow Ma Perkins, after at first refusing to mortgage her lumberyard to bail out her no-good son-in-law, finally gives in to her children's pleas. The narrator returns to report:

> And so Ma Perkins has a change of heart at last. She realizes what mothers have found since the world began. You can't run other people's affairs for 'em, you can't make them do what you think is best. You've just got to help them. And speaking of help, heh-heh, there's no household job that needs outside help more than washing clothes. Good intentions won't get clothes clean. If you don't use the best soap, well, you just wear yourself out and get a grey, disappointing wash. But suppose every time you washed clothes they came out fresh and sparkling white and colors

unfaded and everything smelling sweet and fresh and clean. Heh, it's almost a joy to work then when you get the right results. And that's the kind of wash you will get if you use Oxydol laundry soap. . . . [34]

The announcer's chatty mode of address, which follows several minutes of folksy and plain-talking dialogue, helps to smooth over any sense of interference or disruption to the listener. Both the fictional narrative and the advertisement operate within a problem/solution structure. The character Ma Perkins functions to dispense advice on the management of family members, while the narrator presents a solution to the increasing demands of household technologies.[35]

Compared to other advertising vehicles, radio serials were labor intensive: they required the constant generation of new material. Yet sponsors were attracted to them because serials regularly delivered listeners at a low cost-per-thousand. Advertisers targeting housewives demanded more serials like the Hummerts', and a number of other serial producers developed them. Irna Phillips, another major force in the formation of the radio dramatic serial, began with the serial *Painted Dreams* in 1930, and went on to produce *Today's Children* (1933-38), and most famously, *Guiding Light* (1937-56 on radio), which continues today as a television soap opera. However, as advertiser demand increased, the problem of simultaneously generating scripts and plots for multiple programs stymied serial creators like Phillips, who insisted on keeping creative control by writing all the scripts herself. The Hummerts, in contrast, developed a script-writing "factory," in which they produced multiple serials simultaneously. With their "assembly-line system," the Hummerts were soon known as the "Fords of the serial industry."[36] In 1939 the Hummerts claimed to generate up to 6.5 million words a year, producing at least 100 scripts a week; their serials were said to take up nearly one-eighth of all radio broadcast time.[37] How the

Hummerts determined their word output is unknown; the specificity of “6.5 million” sounds suspiciously like the hyperbolic, unverifiable factoids employed by reason-why copywriters. Nonetheless, the Hummerts’ claim to generate so many “millions” of words was a testament to their efficiency and prowess in serial production, which would have surely impressed the potential clients to whom such claims were directed.

The script writing factory process enabled the Hummerts to introduce new serials every year throughout the 1930s. The process began with the invention or purchase of a title and character. Many Hummert soap operas were based on characters already proven popular in other media, such as *Stella Dallas*, from the 1937 film starring Barbara Stanwyck, which was in turn drawn from the popular 1923 novel by Olivia Higgins Prouty. The pre-sold character franchise allowed the Hummerts to develop plot lines that "follow the lives of the characters after the last chapter of the book or the final curtain in the theatre."[38] Once the Hummerts decided on a title and tentpole character, they would retreat to their house in Greenwich, Connecticut, and outline a theme in four or five pages and a story line for five or six episodes. These they sent to teams of dialogue writers, one of which would then write a draft, which was read by a script editor, who also kept the dialogue writers current with deadlines and plot shifts. The Hummerts stayed in Greenwich, communicating with the writers only by memo, not in person or by telephone.[39]

Writers were expected to produce fifteen to twenty-five episodes a week, sometimes working on five serials concurrently.[40] They were prized for their speed and efficiency, and discouraged from contributing plot ideas. They were paid by the script, usually $25 apiece; the more serials they worked on, the higher their weekly pay. This piece rate was half the going rate for radio script writers who worked on other radio programs.[41] But the writers, like the actors, were usually employed on more than one serial. When criticized for their low compensation policies, the Hummerts responded that they provided workers with steady employment and thereby guaranteed them a certain level of pay.[42] However, their policies have been credited with stimulating the formation of the Radio Writers Guild.[43] They often shifted writers around from serial to serial, ostensibly to keep their writing fresh, but also to prevent too close an identification of any dialogue writer with any program.[44] They also insisted on anonymity for the dialogue writers.[45] With the spoken tag line "written by Anne Hummert," many of the programs were identified as Hummert creations, thereby creating a Hummert brand. The dialogue writers, however, were not collaborators with the Hummerts, only employees with little control over the plot or characterizations.[46] This mode of script production continues today. According to soap opera historian Robert Allen, dialogue writers of present-day television soap opera scripts are employees of producers who conceptualize the plot lines. The writers do not function in collaborative groups; instead they are intentionally isolated from other writers and the production process.[47] This specialization of labor promotes efficiency and speed.

The Hummerts' control of a creative hierarchy was not unique to them; however, in the anonymity of their writers theirs differed from other assembly-line cultural production processes, such as those found in the film industry. This was because anonymity was part of the ethos of the advertising industry. In advertising, copywriters did not sign their work; they were craftsmen not artists, working for the advertiser’s benefit, not their own. Drawing attention to themselves as creators of an advertisement might detract from the selling message. In his discussion of debates over whether copywriters should "sign" their copy, advertising historian Jackson Lears notes that from the point of view of the advertiser, "the artisan endangered the entire enterprise when he drew attention to his own artifice."[48] Reason-why advocates were particularly wary of any claims to artistry on the part of copywriters.[49] Thus, while the Hummerts were excoriated by critics like Dwight Macdonald for appearing to demean an ideal of creative autonomy for writers,[50] they were merely transposing the values of creative anonymity from advertising into radio programming. To be sure, their strictures on anonymity did not prevent them from branding some of the serials with Anne Hummert's name; but, as Frank Hummert had done in establishing his fame as a reason-why copywriter, they were then advertising their own services like any other product.

By controlling so many serials, the Hummerts often forced the networks and sponsors to cater to them.[51] If a sponsor tried to interfere in their program production, Frank Hummert would threaten to quit the account, claiming he did not tell sponsors how to manufacture soap, so they should not tell him how to write dramas.[52] Hummert's relationship with NBC was particularly fraught. As B-S-H increased its time buying volume at NBC from about $4 million a year in 1930 to almost $10 million in 1934, Hummert became increasingly demanding of NBC staff.[53] By 1936 B-S-H oversaw the advertising accounts of Dr. Lyon's toothpaste, Bayer, Kolynos toothpaste, Anacin, Phillip's Magnesia, and Ovaltine, among others. [54] B-S-H and NBC clashed over continuity control throughout the 1930s. B-S-H argued that its clients, who bought the air time and financed the programming, should have final say over both. B-S-H attempted to control continuity by threatening to withhold payment for time if the continuity script were not broadcast as written, or if there were any interruptions or technical problems. In one instance, B-S-H deducted $8,385 from its charges because it claimed some of its programs were not broadcast clearly; NBC denied there were any transmission problems and demanded payment. [55] B-S-H's resistance to NBC's efforts to regulate on-air content is exemplified in a 1932 order for time, in which it declared, "This continuity is written just exactly as we desire to have it broadcast, and our liability under this order is conditioned upon the continuity being broadcast as submitted."[56] NBC responded that "of necessity" it had "to retain the right of censorship in connection with any programs broadcast through our facilities" and that NBC would always politely "submit proposed changes to the agency or client prior to broadcasting."[57] Janet MacRorie, the head of NBC's Continuity Acceptance Department, critiqued the Hummerts' programs in a 1939 memo to the president of NBC, Lenox Lohr: *Stella Dallas* was a "preposterously long-drawn out story" in which "Stella goes blind occasionally, suffers simply unbelievable illnesses but always comes out on top"; *Just Plain Bill* "drips with woe and jealousy"; and *Young Widder Brown* was a "sex story, pure and simple," which forced her department, Continuity Acceptance, to stay "on its toes to keep bigamy and the more intimate personal relationships between men and women at a minimum."[58] Despite MacRorie's disapproval, NBC was at a disadvantage in negotiating with B-S-H, given the agency's control over so many advertising accounts.

Hummert insisted on special terms for dealing with NBC; he required that all negotiation of time sales and continuity script issues be conducted through salesman Roy Witmer. After NBC was sued for libel in 1932 because it had approved and broadcast a B-S-H advertisement for Bayer aspirin that implied a Bayer competitor was inferior, Hummert refused to negotiate future Bayer copy with anyone at NBC other than Witmer.[59] NBC was able to keep B-S-H and the Bayer account in 1933 only by continuing to agree that nobody at NBC other than

Witmer would contact Hummert.[60] In 1934, trying to resolve the "battle of aspirin," Witmer asked Hummert to refrain from referring to competing aspirin brands as "bargain counter preparations."[61] Hummert claimed to be insulted, replying he had already ceased to use that phrase and that he didn't like being pushed around by NBC: "We place too much on the air for that, and propose to protect our clients in every possible way we can."[62] Hummert also threatened the president of NBC, Merlin Aylesworth, when NBC allowed a Bayer competitor to make competitive claims in its continuity copy. Hummert wrote to Aylesworth that another NBC executive (the future NBC president Niles Trammell) "has evidently taken the stand that he is stronger than Blackett Sample Hummert and I am afraid he is wrong because if this continues any further I personally will see to it that every relationship between us and the National Broadcasting Company is impaired to the best of my ability and I think you know that I usually make good on these things."[63] Ultimately, despite Hummert's fulminations, NBC continued to cater to him. As Witmer explained to incoming NBC president Lenox Lohr, "Hummert is the kind of man who likes fast action and minimum annoyances. He has almost a complex against 'hair splitting.' He is a good friend of ours and can be of tremendous help to us in the building of our daytime revenue."[64] Managing Hummert's demands were simply part of the cost of building the business in commercial broadcasting. Anne Hummert's strategy for dealing with NBC's objections to B-S-H copy was less combative. In a 1991 interview, Anne Hummert described NBC executive Niles Trammell as "very gracious" but as "always laughing at me, because he knew what I was doing." She described a typical meeting regarding advertising copy: "If you say, 'This is the fifth most highly paid beauty expert in America,' he'd say, "Have you got the figures on that, the statistics?' and I'd say, 'I'll change it to probably one of the highest paid.'"[65]

When B-S-H split up in 1943, the Hummerts owned their programs—a condition of Hummert's joining B-S-H in 1927—and were able to remain independent producers, delegating the buying of air time to the newly formed agency of Dancer-Sample-Fitzgerald. In 1948, at the peak of radio advertising revenues, the Hummerts oversaw twelve serials simultaneously. Their stature in the radio industry was such that by the early 1950s, as Cold War red baiting began to infect the entertainment industries, theirs was among the few production companies willing and able to disregard the blacklists promulgated anonymously as "Red Channels."[66] The Hummerts did not alter their approach to advertising or programming to any great degree; however, as the text of this commercial aired during a 1948 *Young Widder Brown* episode indicates, they had by this time softened their hard sell when it came to medicinal claims:

> Ladies, in one respect, all tooth pastes are alike. That is, all of them will clean film from your teeth, will sweeten your breath, but Phillips' Milk of Magnesia Tooth Paste does more. Yes, Phillips' Tooth Paste also protects the beauty of your teeth by actually neutralizing on contact the mouth acids that many dental authorities say are a major cause of tooth decay . . . and remember, these acids are in everyone's mouths. . . . Today ask for P-H-I-L-L-I-P-S' –Phillips' Tooth Paste.[67]

Advertisers continued to sponsor radio soaps into the 1950s because they were produced at an extremely low cost for the number of listeners they attracted. As late as 1958, sixteen serials were broadcast on network radio and only ten on network television.[68] Although they remained on the air longer than most prime-time radio programs, they went off the air at last in 1960, ending the Hummerts' hold on daytime programming. They had lost sponsors and audiences to television soap operas, and affiliates were eager for local control over daytime programming.[69] Radio actress Mary Jane Higby has described the Hummerts' tenacity in the face of the shift to television—changing program times as better slots became available, experimenting with plot lines, introducing new programs.[70] At some point in the 1950s, CBS bought the Hummerts' production company, Air Features, and they retired to a private life.

After the transition to television was complete by the end of the 1950s, not much of the Hummert dramatic "formula" survived in television soap operas. The television soap opera would develop a greater emphasis on characterization and move away from reason-why didacticism. Furthermore, the live, single-sponsored serial program with integrated or sandwiched advertisements would become mostly obsolete with the advent of recorded programming sponsored by multiple advertisers.[71] The Hummerts, unable to reconceptualize advertising and programming strategies for the television era, continued to the end to rely on the tactics they developed in their dominance over radio serials, including such reason-why strategies as simplistic language, repetition, didacticism, humorlessness, and the problem/solution paradigm. However, their legacy remains in contemporary television soap opera production processes, an assembly line that enhanced efficiency and profitability and that maintained a kind of intentional authorial anonymity so as to maintain emphasis on the advertised product. Their hierarchical system of script production survives in contemporary soap opera script production processes, in which the labors of plot conception and dialogue writing are parceled out to specialized writers. More generally, although the Hummerts were attacked by critics of mass culture for diminishing the status of authorship, their work in radio lay the groundwork for the collaborative, team style production processes that typify most television program production today, an outcome of their adherence to advertising industry values and, more specifically, the hard-sell strategy of reason-why advertising.

Young & Rubicam

Young & Rubicam (Y&R), a well-known soft-sell advertising agency, also became a major force in radio. Though it did not innovate production processes, its soft-sell approach helped shape radio program and advertising strategies. It produced some of the top prime-time programs, such as *The Jack Benny Program* (1935-44), *The Kate Smith Hour* (1937-47), and *Town Hall Tonight* (1935-41) with Fred Allen, as well as serials such as *The Aldrich Family* (1939-51), *The Second Mrs. Burton* (1941-60), and *When a Girl Marries* (1940-52), and the radio comedy *My Favorite Husband* (1948-51), the basis for the television comedy *I Love Lucy*. Y&R was founded in Philadelphia in 1923 by two admen who broke away from the well-established agency N. W. Ayer. By 1926, it had relocated to New York in order to service the General Foods' Jell-O account. Its success in copywriting and radio drove its billings from $6 million in 1927 to $22 million in 1937, from clients such as General Foods, Borden, Norwich Pharmical, Packard, and Bristol-Myers.[72]

Founder Raymond Rubicam was well known as an adherent of the Theodore MacManus style of soft-sell advertising (discussed in Chapter 4), which employed indirect approaches, such as suggestion and aesthetically pleasing imagery.[73] The MacManus style aimed not at immediate product sales but at developing a positive image for an advertiser, who might then build a relationship with consumers over time. Arguing that consumers were rarely influenced by direct appeals, soft-sell proponents believed the suggestive approach would have a greater impact, as magazine publisher Cyrus Curtis pointed out, "It's the atmosphere in these [advertisements] that sells . . . the quality that gives prestige, the little imaginative sure touches that bring the thing before you."[74] MacManus criticized reason-why theorists such as Hopkins for practicing "a clever and semi-scientific application of the thesis that all men are fools." MacManus claimed to hold "the mass-mind in somewhat higher esteem" and to make "appeals of a substantial and more or less virtuous character."[75] While reason-why theorists made scientistic claims about the efficacy of their advertising, MacManus believed consumers' responses are too variable to be reliably predicted by some objective scientific method. He relied not on theories of the human mind and behavioral responses but on his imagination for generating advertising ideas. For him and his followers, such as Rubicam, advertising was a suggestive art rather than a scientific technique. In print media, soft-sell admen thus emphasized the visuals over the texts, style and cleverness over "reasons why," and subtle appeals over direct, hard selling exhortations.

Young & Rubicam was known as a creative agency, where copywriters and artists enjoyed some autonomy and control, unlike most agencies, where account executives had final say. In most agencies, the "creative" staff of copywriters and art directors were subordinate to the account executives, who handled the clients; at Y&R the creative staff made decisions about campaigns and were eligible for partnership and equity ownership in the agency. Y&R thus enjoyed tremendous loyalty from its relatively underpaid copywriters; as one adman recalled, it "was more of a religion than it was an advertising agency."[76] As a soft-sell proponent, Rubicam relied on the intuitive or artistic impulse to generate advertising ideas rather than pseudo-scientific rules based on assumptions about human behavior. Encouraging innovation, Rubicam urged copywriters to "resist the usual."[77] Y&R promoted itself to potential clients in the trade press as a unique agency specializing in creative solutions unbound by arbitrary rules. In a trade advertisement in the first issue of *Fortune* magazine, Rubicam wrote an ad promoting Y&R with the headline "Impact" over a photograph of a boxer being hit in the face. The copy read: "According to Webster: the single instantaneous striking of a body in motion against another body. According to Young & Rubicam: that quality in an advertisement which strikes suddenly against the reader's indifference and enlivens his mind to receive a sales message."[78] Rubicam's advertisement argued that attention-getting was the first purpose of advertising, an argument reason-why proponents dismissed. Hard-sell and reason-why proponents avoided the clever word play of advertisements like this, arguing that cleverness does not sell; however, this advertisement attracted clients to Y&R and helped establish its reputation on Madison Avenue as an innovative agency. Paradoxically, Y&R also became one of the key agencies during the Depression to innovate specific market research techniques, a quantitative approach to solving the problems of advertising strategy. In 1932 Rubicam hired professor of marketing George Gallup after noticing his groundbreaking magazine reader surveys. Gallup helped develop radio audience measurement techniques, particularly the "coincidental method," in which listeners were asked what radio station and program they were listening to at that moment rather than what they had listened to the night before. By the end of the 1930s, Y&R's ratings measurement strategy had gained enough interest to be sold to C. E. Hooper, who offered them for sale as the "Hooper Ratings."[79] Y&R's move into market research did not undermine its claim to being a "creative" agency; it simply gave the agency another tool for promoting itself to potential clients as knowledgeable about their markets.

Rubicam himself disliked radio and avoided it, assigning the initial foray into radio to Chester LaRoche (who would later become president of Y&R). According to advertising historian Stephen Fox, Rubicam was an "unreformed print man" who found radio vulgar and too dominated by advertising.[80] Nonetheless, Y&R became a well-known radio agency. Its first radio program was probably the *Radio Household Institute* (1928-32), a kind of "domestic science" program filled with helpful information for housewives.[81] Other early programs included Johnson & Johnson's *Musical Melodrama* and *All American Football Show*. The radio department was officially inaugurated in 1930 under Hubbell Robinson and soon included other radio men such as Tom Lewis and Harry Ackerman. By 1936, Y&R was producing *The Jack Benny Program* for Jell-O and had won that and the Bristol-Myers' *Town Hall Tonight* program away from Benton & Bowles. In 1937 Y&R also produced the *Burns and Allen* program for Grape-Nuts, and *The Kate Smith Hour* for Calumet baking powder, both General Foods brands. Y&R opened an office in Hollywood in 1936 headed by LaRoche and staffed by Bill Stuhler and Don Stauffer. By 1938, 80 of 402 Y&R employees belonged to the radio department, which had its own writers, media planners, and accountants separate from the rest of the agency. Y&R advertised its commitment to entertainment as a selling tool in a 1938 issue of *Fortune* magazine. Asking, "What makes a good radio show?" the copy went on to discuss problems such as appealing to the wrong kind of audience or "inflicting dull or offensive product announcements" on listeners, and concluded that "Young & Rubicam shows are proving daily that product announcements can have the *appeal of entertainment and the force of salesmanship at the same time*" (emphasis in original).[82] This was a clear counterproposal to reason-why advertising theory.

Unlike some agencies, such as Lord & Thomas, which left many program production functions to network program departments, Y&R required total control over its programs and kept all radio workers in-house.[83] In order to generate the widest range of ideas and skills, according to one former employee, "Everyone had to write. Not just produce–write. Programs and commercials both."[84] Whereas Hill Blackett at B-S-H believed that the same copywriters should work in both print and radio, since both involved the same skills, Y&R sought to develop radio copywriting specialists by hiring not admen but showmen with theatrical and radio backgrounds and training them in advertising techniques.[85] So one of the first radio commercial writers at Y&R was a man named Joseph Moran, whose background was not in advertising at all; Moran had figured out how to win contests, often of the sort that asked readers to supply copy or slogans for new products, and had become well-known for living off of contest winnings.[86] Moran's cleverness mattered more to Rubicam than his lack of formal advertising training.

Y&R's combination of the soft sell with a "constant striving for novelty" was critiqued by JWT radio executive Simon in a 1932 staff meeting comparing competing radio departments. Praising Y&R for not putting on an "act" for clients and for not being "married to" particular entertainers, Simon concluded that Y&R programs suffered not from staleness but from too much novelty: "There is so much straining for freshness that many an idea sounds forced and overworked."[87] This was attributed to the agency's employment of former actors and musicians, and to its radio director Hubbell Robinson's literary bent.

Robinson disdained reason-why strategies, arguing in 1932 that, "One more thing the radio audience does not like, and that is to be fooled. They do not like their advertising delivered by sleight-of-hand methods."[88] When Robinson worked at CBS in the 1950s, he was characterized by William Paley as having a "literary flair" that enabled him to produce programs combining "mass with class," such as *Playhouse 90*, a skill that Robinson first developed at Y&R.[89]

Concerned that audiences would resent the sponsor for interrupting the program with commercials, soft-sell proponents such as Y&R (as well as its competitors at Benton & Bowles) promoted integrated commercials, which wove the sponsor's name or product mentions into the program text. While Y&R (and Benton & Bowles) did not originate the integrated commercial (recall JWT's use of Rudy Vallee to discuss Fleischmann's Yeast), the strategy was associated with the soft sell for its indirectness, suggestiveness, and intended inoffensiveness. Integrated commercials developed naturally from the earlier indirect radio advertising strategies discussed in Chapter 2, such as naming programs after sponsors (*Ipana Troubadours*), personifying brands (the Coca-Cola girl), and associating high-brow culture with a company (*Cities Service Concert* with Jessica Dragonette).[90] However, integrated commercials also incorporated more direct selling methods, such as having the characters of the *Burns and Allen* show discuss the merits of sponsor Swan Soap during a shopping expedition.[91] Integrated commercials were not a definitive solution, however; Robinson warned against badly executed integration, especially "selling talk" designed to "sound unlike selling talk": "The creaking of the machinery is so audible that it drowns out the selling point. . . ."

The Y&R produced *Jack Benny Program*, beginning in 1934, provided its best known use of integrated commercials. Opening the program with the line, "Jell-O again. This is Jack Benny talking," Benny brought the sponsor's name immediately into the program text. The program included one commercial and several "plugs" integrated into the body of the show. The announcer Don Wilson, for example, worked in this plug for Jell-O mid-show: "I shopped around until I found half a dozen neckties, each one corresponding in color to a different flavor of Jell-O . . . you know, Strawberry, Raspberry, Cherry, Orange, Lemon, and Lime."[92] Or Benny set up a commercial by discussing his upcoming Hawaiian cruise and asking, "Don, do you think I ought to take along some Jell-O with me?"[93] While Benny's proposal to take Jell-O on a cruise may have been a simple plug, it could also be heard as a joke at the expense of the sponsor, and initially it was not apparent if such joking were acceptable to General Foods. Benny had not been Jell-O's or Y&R's first choice for comedy talent–-other better known comedians were unavailable, the story goes—and Jell-O sales did not increase during the program's first network season, putting Benny's association with Jell-O at risk.[94] Furthermore, Benny had been criticized for having made similar puns and jokes of a sponsor's name during his appearances on the 1932 *Canada Dry Ginger Ale Program*. Benny's vaudevillian joke, "Her father drank everything in the United States and then went up North to drink Canada Dry," apparently displeased the sponsor, which dropped Benny at the end of the season.[95]

JWT radio executive John Reber similarly disapproved of this strategy, naming Jack Benny and Ed Wynn as the worst examples of comedians who "kid the product and make fun of advertising on the radio." At JWT, Reber announced, "Our precept is that we do not kid the idea of advertising itself at all. We do not kid the product. We do not allow the name of the product to be involved in the entertainment of the program except in a few exceptions."[96]

However, Benny's became one of the highest rated radio shows of the 1930s, General Foods eventually measured an increase in Jell-O sales, and Y&R could claim its soft-sell entertaining approach had succeeded where harder selling may have failed. The *Jack Benny Program* thus proved an illustration of Y&R's solution to the dilemma of entertainment versus advertising that Robinson had described in 1932: "[M]ost clients and the lay advertising men, as distinguished from the ones who are specializing in radio broadcasting, insist on as much direct selling talk as they can crowd in. Showmen, actors, script and continuity writers insist on cutting the selling talk to the minimum. On the horns of this dilemma the radio advertising men balance themselves as best they can. . . ."[97]

In 1935 Y&R took over Fred Allen's show, *Town Hall Tonight*, from Benton & Bowles, which was forced by another client to drop the Ipana toothpaste account (sponsor of Allen) in favor of the higher spending Colgate toothpaste account.[98] While Allen wrote most of the scripts of his own program, the agency was responsible for overseeing the scripts and dealing with network and sponsor problems with them. Allen's attitudes toward NBC and his advertising agencies were notoriously negative.[99] He characterized admen as "molehill" men: a "pseudo-busy executive who comes to work at 9 a.m. and finds a molehill on his desk. He has until 5 p.m. to make this molehill into a mountain."[100] Allen resented NBC's efforts to censor his scripts and hamper his ability to extemporize. The NBC Continuity Acceptance department had a similarly negative attitude toward Allen. Janet MacRorie asked NBC program director John Royal if something couldn't be done about Allen: "Do you think it would do any good if we had a meeting with Young and Rubicam and Mr. Allen and discuss the possibilities of a change in Mr. Allen's sources of humor?"[101] Allen's relations with Y&R were similarly contentious; in his autobiography Allen complained that Y&R executive LaRoche, a former college football player, wanted him to change his comedy style: "The quarterback, being an advertising man, knew the importance of the word 'copy.' His solution was that all we needed to improve our show was to copy the Benny program in style and structure."[102] Pat Weaver, who had already proven his facility in radio by producing the *Good Evening Serenade* and *Evening in Paris Roof* programs, was hired by Y&R specifically to oversee Allen's program and approached the task with trepidation. Weaver gained Allen's confidence during one of the first *Town Hall* shows he produced by asking some noisy gentlemen to leave the control room, unaware he had just asked executives from the sponsor and the network to leave their ordinarily privileged position of oversight. Weaver was also willing to play himself in Allen's skits poking fun at the advertising and broadcasting industries.[103]

Despite Allen's problematic behavior as an autonomous radio star, in at least one instance he incorporated his sponsor directly into his program. In a 1939 broadcast of *Town Hall Tonight*, the vice-president of Bristol-Myers appeared, presumably in response to a challenge by Allen. After the typical program introduction of "Sixty minutes of fun and music brought to you by Ipana Tooth Paste and Sal Hepatica. Ipana for the Smile of Beauty. Sal Hepatica for the Smile of Health," Lee Bristol appeared as a guest who describes his unusual job, a regular guest category of Allen's. When Allen insisted on calling his guest "Mr. Bristol," Bristol responded, "Yes. I've heard some of the names sponsors are called by certain radio comedians . . . when the sponsors are out of earshot" (ellipsis in original). Allen asked Bristol how one becomes a radio sponsor, the profiled job of the week, and Bristol replied, "Well, first you have to get a business, naturally," and then advertise it. "Advertising today involves radio. The first thing you know you wake up at an audition. A dotted line appears from under an advertising agency vice-president's coat. And the next thing you know—you're a sponsor." After a description of his typical day, Bristol mentioned he often listens to programs he sponsors, and Allen replied, "Gosh, a sponsor's life is sure tough. You not only pay for radio programs you have to listen to them, as well."[104]

By the mid-1940s, Y&R operated one of the largest radio departments; roughly 20 percent of their employees were involved in radio and overseeing programs including *The Eddie Cantor Show* (1940-47), *The Dinah Shore Show* (1941-47), *The March of Time* (1940-44), *The Baby Snooks Show* (1945-47), *Duffy's Tavern* (1942-50), *When a Girl Marries* (1940-52), *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* (1947-55), *Mr. District Attorney* (1942-44), *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1944-49), and *Father Knows Best* (1949-54). In 1948, the peak year of radio revenues, Y&R oversaw twenty different radio programs ranging from news to soap operas to situation comedies. While it maintained its status as one of the top soft-sell agencies, its radio programs certainly used hard selling strategies typical of the era (spelling out J-E-L-L-O in case the audience was unclear about the brand name, for example). However its close identification with major radio comedians such Allen and Benny underscored its commitment to advertising strategies such as humor that were opposed to reason-why. Benny's and Allen's humorous commentary on their sponsors illustrated a self-reflexivity about commercialism that discomfited traditionalists like Reber. That self-reflexivity would eventually become a basic advertising strategy during what became known as the "Creative Revolution" in the advertising industry of the 1960s. At that time the advertising industry sought to break out of its conventions and rethink its strategies, as advertisers shifted from mass marketing to more segmented markets. Y&R

became a leader in this revolution, in the reflexive pointing to the commercialism of commercials as a method for disarming audience resistance to them.[105] Y&R's soft-sell approach, dependent on making positive associations between products and consumers' emotions, would become the dominant advertising strategy from the 1960s onward, when product-centered hard-sell strategies receded in importance.

Benton & Bowles

A close competitor to Y&R was Benton & Bowles (B&B). The two agencies shared an affinity for soft-sell approaches, and they both produced some of the same programs (usually because the sponsor changed agencies), including *The Jack Benny Program*, *Town Hall Tonight*, *Portia Faces Life*, and *Young Doctor Malone*. B&B also produced *Maxwell House Show Boat, Ziegfield Follies of the Air,* and Palmolive's *Beauty Box Theatre.* Like Y&R, B&B was a young, innovative agency, founded in 1929, that approached the challenges of the Depression and radio with unconventional strategies. As founder Chester Bowles explained in a 1963 interview, "because no one knew anything about [radio], you could improvise and the standards weren't very good, and we were able to do a lot of things that looked quite fresh and new."[106] Advertisers hired B&B for their innovative problem-solving abilities rather than for specific rule-bound solutions to the problems of radio advertising, such as the formulas of B-S-H. The propensity of B&B's founders, William Benton and Chester Bowles, to question standard practices and implement innovations influenced the industry, and B&B thrived as a major radio agency even after its founders left the agency.

Both Benton and Bowles were Yale graduates who fell into advertising in the mid 1920s despite interests in politics and education. While at the George

Batten agency, Bowles worked as Benton's assistant and remained after Benton was fired (for proposing that Batten merge with the up and coming agency Barton, Durstine & Osborne, a merger that subsequently took place, creating BBDO). Benton sought to learn from the best in the advertising industry: he worked under master salesman John Patterson at the National Cash Register Company in the early 1920s, and in 1928 joined Lord & Thomas in Chicago in order to work for Albert Lasker, the famous proponent of "salesmanship in print." While there, he grew interested in new research methodologies. By going out and speaking directly with consumers about Colgate-Palmolive products, he impressed Lasker, who had been dissatisfied with earlier market research efforts that tended to focus on retailers.[107] Benton was also interested in the new medium of radio. In a 1970 interview he claimed that one night leaving Lord & Thomas he was struck on the walk home by "these colored voices leaping out into the street, from all the apartments." Walking back up the street, he counted seventeen radios tuned into the local program *Amos 'n' Andy*, and returned to Lasker insisting he sell the program to their client, Pepsodent, for national network broadcast.[108] However apocryphal the story may be, Benton's interest in radio as a commercial medium developed earlier than that of many others in the advertising industry.

By the time Benton decided to join with Bowles and set up their own agency in 1929, both had become frustrated by the relatively low standards of education and professionalism in the advertising industry.[109] Bowles had carefully analyzed the advertising strategies of General Foods, a large advertiser that by giving several of its accounts to Y&R made it possible for that agency to survive its first year. Bowles reasoned that General Foods could do the same for his and Benton's new agency, so, in June 1929, he approached the company, promising new ideas and new forms of consumer research, and convinced it to transfer some of its accounts from the more established J. Walter Thompson agency.[110] Once the Depression hit, Benton & Bowles grew rapidly by taking advantage of advertiser dissatisfaction. As Bowles put it, "companies were examining their old relationships and were very critical of them and looking for anything new that might be helpful."[111]

B&B focused on a small number of large-budget advertisers in the drug and food industries; along with General Foods, their early clients included Bristol-Myers and Colgate-Palmolive, and each account billed more than $1 million a year. This gave B&B a wider margin for profit than if it had been servicing a larger number of smaller accounts.[112] With the idea that an agency had to do more for its clients in the economic climate of the Depression, B&B also developed new marketing, merchandising, and consumer research strategies. In a time of deflation, B&B recommended that its clients lower prices and improve quality to stimulate consumption. This was a relatively radical idea for consumer goods manufacturers, who had enjoyed wide profit margins on relatively high prices during the 1920s. Client Maxwell House lowered the price on its coffee, while improving its packaging and the quality of its coffee beans, and thus reaped a large increase in sales, capturing market share from its competitor Chase & Sanborn.[113] Bowles (along with partner Atherton Hobler who joined in 1932) insisted that improving value through pricing and quality would work better than any advertising campaign. In order to convince a client to finance such a change, Bowles also suggested that client spend less on advertising appropriations— in the case of Maxwell House, by lowering its annual expenditures from $3 million to $1 million.[114] This tactic helped cement Benton & Bowles' reputation, according to Bowles:

> You see, the interesting thing about this deal was that it included a recommendation for a reduction of the advertising budget, even though the agency made all its money on a percentage basis [of the advertising budget]. So, I think this persuaded people that we had integrity. What we had really was not integrity but a sense of long-range interest. If you could build up long-range relationships, you'd be better off than with the short-range ones.[115]

B&B also recommended that Maxwell House put *all* of its advertising spending into radio, rather than print, another radical idea at a time when radio was still relatively unproven. According to B&B partner Hobler, radio offered an opportunity to reach "three times the audience of any other media" at a much lower cost than print media.[116] As radio became a larger part of their business, Bowles, as the chief "creative" in the agency where Benton was the chief account executive, oversaw all of the radio programs, including Palmolive's *Beauty Box Theatre*, Bristol-Myers' *Town Hall Tonight*, and Maxwell House's *Show Boat*.[117] During the severe downturn of 1932-33, when many agencies cut their staffs, B&B recruited some of the best-known copywriters and radio men in the industry, including Walter O'Meara, Tiny Ruffner, and Tom Revere, to build their radio department.[118] By 1936, B&B oversaw seven different national network broadcasts a week, three of which (Fred Allen's *Town Hall Tonight*, *Show Boat*, and the Palmolive program) accounted for three of the top four shows on the national networks.[119] That year, Benton wrote his mother that B&B's success in show business made it one of the largest "employers of entertainers in the country," which was "a rather anomalous position for a bunch of advertising men."[120]

Maxwell House's *Show Boat* not only became a top prime time program but apparently increased Maxwell House coffee sales by 70 percent.[121] The program opened with the announcement, "Come aboard, folks. Your ticket of admission is just your loyalty to Maxwell House Coffee," indicating the hope that audience gratitude would translate into product sales.[122] *Show Boat* was one of the most expensively produced programs on radio, costing about $6,500 a week for air time and production in 1932, well above average for the time.[123] Benton & Bowles, as the producer using a budget supplied by Maxwell House, paid the performers relatively well in 1932 , reasoning that skimping on talent fees would undermine the program.[124] *Show Boat* was a variety show, with featured guest stars as well as a returning cast of singers and musicians, including a minstrel act named Molasses 'n' January, which traveled by boat up and down the river doing shows. It was built from pre-sold elements: the title and some of the songs came from the composer Jerome Kern's Broadway musical *Show Boat*. *Show Boat* also used integrated commercials in which the performers plugged Maxwell House coffee both in and out of character, both within the program text and also in interstitial "back-stage" moments. According to Hobler, "What [the performers] did and discussed back-stage became an integral part of the show and as much a source of entertainment as the songs and music they performed."[125] Like Young & Rubicam, Benton & Bowles attempted to head off audience alienation by naturalizing the commercial pitch. According to an article in the trade magazine *Advertising & Selling*, "Good radio copy and radio talent, of course, are a sister-act. Talent collects the crowd, and 'softens' it. Copy picks up from there." For proof, the writer cites a Benton & Bowles' commercial:. Tiny Ruffner, the well-known radio announcer for *Show Boat,* talks with the program's chief character, Captain Henry, in a team effort to sell Maxwell House during a 1935 broadcast:

> Captain: And now, I'm going to ask Tiny Ruffner a question. Tiny, exactly what do you mean when you say that everybody who buys Maxwell House Coffee gets full value for his money?
>
> Tiny: Well, I refer to three separate things when I say that—three things that added together *mean* full value. You might get one or two of these three advantages in other coffees—but in Maxwell House you get all *three*— First, there's the Maxwell House blend of choicest coffees—for more than fifty years the favorite of people who really enjoy good coffee.
>
> Captain: And the favorite of all of us!
>
> Tiny: Right you are, Captain Henry. The second, there's the new improved method of grinding that assures you a more perfect cup of coffee by any method of coffee making—by drip, percolator, or boil. Third, there's that marvelous exclusive Vita-fresh method of packing which always brings Maxwell House coffee to you roaster fresh . . . and no coffee can be fresher than that! And it's this combination of all three points that assures you *full* value in every pound of Maxwell House Coffee you buy. The stage is yours, Captain Henry! [Emphasis and ellipsis in original][126]

Captain Henry's polite interrogation, as well as enthusiastic confirmation, bring a softer sell to the otherwise direct rational appeal employed here ("three things" that "mean full value"). B&B also used sound effects to great effect. As Benton later described it, "When we had Captain Andy drink coffee and smack his lips, you heard the coffee cups clinking and the coffee gurgling as it was poured. It put action and actors into commercials."[127]

B&B claimed credit for other innovative strategies. Although other agencies routinely double or triple cast one actor for several parts in order to save on labor costs, B&B's high production budgets enabled them to do the opposite: cast more than one person for a single role. According to Benton, "We'd get a sexy singer, who might not be a good actress, then we'd get the sexiest actress we could find and we'd give her the speaking lines, softening the audience up, getting it warm and ready to melt. Then the girl would come in and sing." Using the listening audience's blindness to such advantage would never have occurred to "people in the theater," argued Benton. "The advertising men made radio. We weren't inhibited. We didn't know you couldn't put two people in one part."[128]

Benton also claimed that he had a "tin ear" for music, giving him an everyman perspective on radio programming despite his educated background.[129] Benton & Bowles consistently sought to reach audiences at their perceived taste levels. Pointing out that "If people don't listen, they don't buy. They'll listen only to what they like," Bowles argued against trying to shape the audience's taste: "We can't give the farmer's wife and the grocer's daughter a taste for Beethoven and Brahms; we can't make them like Shakespeare or Greek tragedy; we can't stop them from enjoying 'The Music Goes 'Round,' or 'Robins and Roses.' We can't ask them to agree with our own tastes in music, entertainment and education."[130] Not imposing tastes also extended to not assuming that any one programming strategy was the "best kind." Benton & Bowles developed programs in a variety of genres and lengths, differentiated for a variety of targeted audiences and products. According to an agency presentation memo, there was no formula for a successful radio program: "The success of most programs varies in direct proportion to the ability of the people who write them and the skill with which they are produced."[131] B&B, then, unlike B-S-H, believed that there were no formulas for attracting audiences, that instead the talent of the participants was the most important element of a program's success.

B&B also produced comedian Fred Allen's program *Town Hall Tonight* until 1935, when the agency gave up the Bristol-Myers toothpaste account in order to keep the higher budget Colgate toothpaste account.[132] In *Town Hall Tonight* B&B experimented with the issue of product identification. Most sponsors advertised only one product per program, not wanting to confuse prospective purchasers and blur the positive association of star with product. However, B&B convinced Bristol-Myers to combine the advertising of two of its products into *Town Hall Tonight*, integrating the marketing through the interlinked slogans: "Take Ipana for the Smile of Beauty. Take Sal Hepatica for the Smile of Health."[133] The risk of audience confusion was worth the ability to market two products for the cost of one. As Fred Allen, star of *Town Hall Tonight*, recalled, Benton pitched the idea to Bristol-Myers by reminding them that combining two programs would "save the expense of one orchestra."[134] Multiple sponsorship would not become standard until the television era, when the savings were more significant to both advertisers and broadcasters, given increased production costs. However, this early attempt at a kind of multiple sponsorship illustrates B&B's willingness to try new strategies and go against conventional wisdom.

B&B's focus on a few large clients rather than many small ones was reflected in its focus on a few radio programs. However, the success of these radio programs at gathering audiences and increasing sales gave B&B a disproportionate amount of leverage with the networks, although not as much as other agencies with higher radio volumes, such as JWT and B-S-H. Whereas JWT received its own direct telephone line to NBC and B-S-H executive Frank Hummert was powerful enough to be able to turn down a request to lunch with the new NBC president, the relatively small volume of B&B's radio business made NBC executives slightly less accommodating. For example, NBC quickly dismissed Hobler's complaint that NBC was undercutting B&B's Palmolive operetta program by allowing other advertisers to sponsor similar programs. NBC Program Director John Royal pointed out that the agency was disingenuous in claiming an exclusive on the operetta format since its other program, *Show Boat*, had also put on operettas.[135] And when B&B radio executive Tom Revere complained about having to pay a music clearance fee and demanded NBC pay it instead, one NBC executive complained in an internal memo to the other, "For every single job we do for Benton & Bowles we do ten for J. Walter Thompson. I do not quite see the necessity for changing a system satisfactory to all agencies except Benton & Bowles when they cause endless trouble and give us small thanks for our pains."[136]

In 1933 Benton proposed that NBC provide more publicity support for itself and its programs through cross-promotion. He suggested that broadcasters, like their counterparts in the film industry, might invest in a "large number of competent publicity men" who could work on getting magazine articles placed in the face of print publishers' resistance to promoting the competing medium. But even more important, "NBC doesn't take sufficient advantage of its own facilities in order to publicize itself."[137] He suggested, for example, having Jack Pearl, the star of the Lucky Strike program, pretend to come on the air accidentally during the Maxwell House program which preceded it: "This ought to do a lot to carry the Maxwell House audience over into the Lucky Strike audience."[138] Benton's interest in audience "flow" from program to program, even those of another agency's client, was ahead of its time. In its effort to remain neutral, to manage the conflicting agendas of its clients and avoid any complaints that it was favoring one advertiser over another, NBC missed the point that Benton and other admen would continue to make repeatedly: that it was in both the network's and the advertisers' interests to build audiences for the overall program schedule. Promoting programs during other programs would raise audience awareness of that schedule and thus improve broadcasting's effectiveness as an advertising medium.

Benton's effort to convince NBC to consider the overall schedule of programming was of a piece with his efforts to improve broadcasting in general. While he was still at B&B, and for decades afterward, he lobbied network chieftains David Sarnoff, Niles Trammell, and William Paley to consider ways to upgrade the programming and reformulate the business model of commercial network broadcasting. In a 1933 presentation at NBC, Benton argued that "Broadcasting must be improved or lose its listeners."[139] He proposed that the networks change their business model. Instead of selling blocks of time to an advertiser, who then had programming control over that "time franchise," the networks might take editorial control over programs, selecting and producing and controlling them as magazine publishers did editorial content, and selling interstitial minutes to advertisers, as magazine publishers sold interstitial advertising pages.

Why would Benton, whose livelihood depended on serving his clients by producing radio programs, argue that the networks should take over the task of production? He feared that a lack of overall editorial guidance undermined audience interest in radio, that advertiser abuse of air time alienated audiences.

He pointed out to NBC that "Advertising programs [are] not built for listeners, but to suit client whims." He was all too aware of advertisers' small concern with the overall success of the broadcast medium or with the "public interest." If the government was not going to become a programmer, as it had in the United Kingdom, then, to admen like Benton, the networks were best situated to rationalize, centralize, and professionalize radio, and thereby maximize its commercial effectiveness. In retrospect, Benton's proposal predicts the television era business model, in which the networks became the program producers, purchasers, and schedulers, while advertisers (for the most part), simply purchased interstitial minutes among programs. In 1933, however, NBC executives regarded the existing radio business model, in which advertisers controlled a "time franchise" and produced, purchased, and scheduled programs, as too well established to change. Wrote NBC executive Wayne Randall in response to Benton's proposal: "Not a chance. Development of present sponsored program has gone too far."[140]

As NBC's negative reaction to Benton's proposals indicates, he had gained a reputation as a maverick in the industry, and in fact neither he nor his partner Bowles were typical of it. Both were Democrats in a predominantly Republican industry, and each would eventually pursue political careers, including service in the Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy administrations. Each worried that the Great Depression threatened American capitalism. Bowles believed that the New Deal "was the only thing that would save the system"; without it, "the whole country would blow up."[141] In 1932 Benton attended a secret series of conferences with corporate leaders about how to respond to the Depression. He condemned their lack of interest in reform: "It is astounding, however, how narrow the viewpoint of such men. . . . How limited their vision. . . . How unconscious, apparently, of the broad social problems which underlie so many of the economic questions the business world is facing."[142] Capitalism, wrote Benton in 1935, has "its back to the wall."[143]

Benton's disillusionment with the business world of 1932 reflected not rebellious opposition but a concern that narrow self-interest could undermine the future stability of the American economy. Both Benton and Bowles subscribed to what some historians call corporate liberalism. According to historian Martin Sklar, early twentieth-century corporate liberalism sought a "reconstruction of the political-economic order on the basis of the mutual adaption of corporate capitalism and the American liberal tradition."[144] Corporate liberals struggled to reconcile bureaucratic and oligopolistic corporate practices with liberal notions of individualism, the sanctity of private property, and free markets. In his concern that the pursuit of short-term profits by selling air time to the highest bidder would undercut the overall value of broadcasting, while a longer-term perspective attuned to the public interest would benefit it. Benton represented a reformist wing of corporate liberalism. As himself a producer of commercial radio programming, he was better positioned and more credible to his peers than the typical radio critics who made some of the same complaints from the outside.

Frustrated by the reluctance of then-stakeholders to change the business structure of radio, Benton sought to develop commercial alternatives. For example, he proposed to NBC in 1933 that it broaden its programming mission beyond advertisers' needs to include "Special 'highbrow' network for 'class advertising'; self-improvement and cultural education material."[145] NBC declined to develop this suggestion also, focusing instead on selling out its prime time slots during the economic crisis of the Depression. In 1936 Benton left his agency, and went on to a career as promoter for the University of Chicago and its theory of the Great Books, and overseer of its radio program the *University of Chicago Round Table*. The *Round Table* gathered experts of the day to discuss pressing issues such as "the need for opposition in government," and usefully allowed NBC to claim that it provided educational programming, though it kept the program ghettoized in a Sunday morning time slot where it reached few listeners.

In 1939 Benton invested in Muzak, a wired music subscription service, and expanded it beyond hotels and restaurants into banks, hospitals, and department stores. Believing that there was an even greater market in individual households for a wired subscription radio service without intrusive commercials, in 1944 Benton set about establishing one, in direct competition with the broadcast networks. He proposed offering subscribers several channels of musical, cultural, and educational programming, uninterrupted by commercials, for about five cents a day. NBC and CBS were alarmed at the potential competition; they did not want their ad-supported business model undermined by a commercially viable alternative. The *New York Times* editorialized against subscription radio as "inject[ing] a poll tax on radio—the payment of a fee in order that the public might enjoy what is already free and their property—the air. This is hardly a liberal conception of the 'freedom to listen.'"[146] Benton's response was informed by his experience in commercial radio: "'The air' may be free. But broadcasting certainly is not. It must always be paid for . . . somehow. Under our present system, people pay for radio through their purchase of radio-advertised goods, all listeners having to submit to the interruptions of commercial announcements. . . . We propose to give the listener, for the first time, an opportunity to pay for some radio programs *directly* rather than indirectly." Noting that no federal broadcast regulations, such as the Radio Acts of 1927 and 1934, include "any suggestion that advertising should prevail in this field," Benton pointed out the historical contingency of the commercial broadcasting system: "Certainly there is nothing in legal theory and very little in tradition that makes broadcasting solely a venture for advertising." The more choice offered listeners, including the choice of direct payment, Benton concluded, "the greater the freedom of the air."[147] A subscription-based service, Benton hoped, would offer more audience-responsive programming than the advertiser-sponsorship model. This service did not come to fruition at the time, but it prefigures cable television just as his magazine subscription model prefigured broadcast television.

Benton's career after advertising and radio also included the founding of the *Voice of America*, a short stint as the Senator from Connecticut, and involvement in the founding of UNESCO. During his senatorial career, Benton wrote legislation for closer public oversight of broadcasters, proposing a Citizen's Advisory Board to ensure that they served the public interest; however, this initiative failed. Bowles likewise became deeply involved in politics, joining the Roosevelt administration as head of the Federal Price Administration and the Truman administration as the postwar director of Office of Economic Stabilization, and becoming governor of Connecticut, Ambassador to India, Representative of Connecticut, and Undersecretary of State in the Kennedy administration. Both Benton and Bowles claimed to avoid listening to commercial radio after leaving the agency. Although both had sold the rights to their names to the agency, the agency and its founders made a mutual effort to disassociate themselves. Remaining partner Hobler later declared, "I had no idea that the names of my partners would come to stand for philosophies far afield from advertising—and from the feelings of some of our clients!"[148] Bowles later characterized his time at the agency as "not a particularly pleasant period."[149] Both admen reconsidered the value of their early success in commercial radio and applied what they learned to public service. In a 1963 interview, Bowles was asked by the interviewer: "What intrigues me was that you said that both you and Mr. Benton weren't very interested in business and yet you had these creative ideas about advertising which no one seems to have anticipated, and you make a marvelous success of your career. How do you account for that?" Bowles replied, "Oh, you try to run away from it."[150] Bowles' comment implies that some of the people who contribute the most innovative ideas to a field or industry may be the people who have the least stake in its conventions and verities.

Conclusion

Although both Benton and Bowles had left the agency before the end of the radio era, B&B continued to grow as a radio and television agency, becoming one of the most successful agencies of the 1950s. Young & Rubicam, likewise grew and prospered over the following few decades. Both still exist, albeit as subsidiaries in conglomerated agencies. B-S-H, however, broke into two new agencies, Hill Blackett and Dancer-Sample-Fitzgerald, when Hummert withdrew in 1943. Neither reached the level of influence B-S-H had had. Although the three agencies profiled here were not the only important agencies of the radio era, together they illustrate the range of strategies and practices of the advertising industry as a whole. Each of these agencies contributed innovative practices to radio advertising and programming. These practices, ranging from serial dramas to integrated commercials, exemplified advertising agencies' role during the radio era. The Hummerts, whose adherence to reason-why advertising theory enabled them to structure an efficient and profitable "formula" and "factory" for producing soap operas, represent the earliest and, perhaps, least sophisticated, approach to the problem of reaching audiences. However, though Hummert's strict formulations lost their saliency, his contributions to the structuring of production processes remain relevant. Young & Rubicam developed their soft-sell approach in reaction to the hard sell theories of admen like Hummert. Making a clear distinction between print and aurality, Young & Rubicam developed the use of entertainment and humor and of reflexive techniques to bring audiences to their clients' advertising message. Y&R's soft-sell approach would become the dominant advertising strategy in the later decades of the twentieth century. Though Benton & Bowles included elements of both the hard sell and the soft sell, its reliance on entertainment and integrated commercials placed it mostly within the soft-sell camp. However, it was more important for its founders' tendency to challenge conventional wisdom, a tendency that helped transform many assumptions and practices in radio. Benton's efforts to question the existing structures and conceptualize alternatives to the radio model, and to rethink ways of reaching audiences, had implications that were more fully realized in the television era, as these ideas became more generally diffused throughout the advertising and broadcasting industries.

ENDNOTES

1. William Stedman, *The Serials: Suspense and Drama by Installment* (Norman, Okla.: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1971, 1977), 501, 267.

2. Stedman, *Serials*, 306-307.

3. "Hummerts to Exit from B-S-H," *Advertising Age*, 16 August 1943.

4. Advertisement, *Printers' Ink*, 27 October 1927, 166-167. Hummert's annual salary in the 1930s was reputed to be up to $150,000.

5. Lawrence E. Doherty, "Adman Sample? He's Florida Land Tycoon," part 1, *Advertising Age,* 7 May 1962, 66.

6. Quoted in Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 48.

7. Quoted in Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 50.

8. *Tide*, May 1929, 8.

9. Claude C. Hopkins, *My Life in Advertising& Scientific Advertising* (Chicago: Advertising Publications, 1966), 223-225.

10. Herman S. Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1933), 215, 226.

11. Quoted in Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1985), 66.

12. Doherty, "Adman Sample? He's Florida Land Tycoon," part 1, 66.

13. I am indebted to Philip Napoli for providing a recording of his interview with Anne Hummert, 7 June 1991, New York, New York.

14. In her interview with P. Napoli, Anne Hummert explains that Frank Hummert's British accent was unintelligible to many.

15. One observer reports that their secrecy was the result of the heavy criticism of their soap operas. Thomas Whiteside, *The Relaxed Sell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 35.

16. "Hummerts to Exit from B-S-H," *Advertising Age*, 16 August 1943, 2; Stedman, *The Serials*, 235.

17. Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1985), 177.

18. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 177.

19. "150 Leading Radio Advertisers in 1935," *Advertising & Selling*, 16 January 1936, 29.

20. "150 Leading Radio Advertisers in 1935," 29.

21. J. Walter Thompson *Newsflash*, 3 February 1937, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

22. Advertisement, *Printers' Ink*, 3 May 1934, 74-75.

23. *Stella Dallas* transcription, "The Egyptian Mummy," no date.

24. Anne Hummert takes credit for inventing these initial basic story problems. Interview with P. Napoli.

25. Hopkins, *My Life in Advertising*, 242-43.

26. Michael Mok, "Radio Script-Writing Factory Outdoes Dumas Pere's Plant," New York *Post*, 30 January 1939.

27. Stedman, *Serials*, 256.

28. See Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 16-18, on critic Dwight MacDonald's assessment of Hummert soap operas as "kitsch."

29. As Allen points out, "Because of their status as vehicles for the advertising of consumer products, soap operas were from the beginning `didactic' in nature." *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 138.

30. Harriet Corley, "Soap Opera Her Empire," New York *Sun*, 12 November 1944.

31. "Radio Serial Has Formula," New York *Times*, 31 July 1938.

32. Allen also argues that the open-ended narrative structure of soap operas allowed for narrative adaptation to changing social conditions while regularly delivering the commodity female audience to the advertisers. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 135-136, 172.

33. *Ma Perkins*, 12 December 1933, recorded transcription, Museum of Television and Radio, New York, New York (hereafter MTR).

34. *Ma Perkins*, 12 December 1933, recorded transcription, MTR.

35. In the 1930s, the dissemination of labor-saving appliances, such as washing machines, elevated acceptable standards of cleanliness. See Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire* (New York: Pantheon), 210.

36. Mok, "Radio Script-Writing Factory."

37. Mok, "Radio Script-Writing Factory."

38. "Radio Serial Has Formula," New York *Times*, 31 July 1938.

39. Mok, "Radio Script-Writing Factory."

40. Anne Hummert only admits to assigning writers to two serials at a time. Interview with P. Napoli.

41. Corley, "Soap Opera Her Empire"; Whiteside, *The Relaxed Sell*, 45; "The Hummerts' Super Soaps," *Newsweek*, 10 January 1944, 80.

42. "Hummert Tells How, Why," *Variety*, 11 May 1938, 27.

43. Robert Landry, "Pioneer Soaper Frank Hummert, Ever the Hermit, Almost `Sneaks' His Obit," *Variety*, 27 April 1966.

44. However, one of their first serials was not written assembly line style. Reporter Charles Robert Douglas Hardy Andrews churned out *Just Plain Bill* scripts single handedly--his typing speed was legendary. See James Thurber, "Soapland," in Warren Susman, ed., *Culture and Commitment, 1929-45* (New York: George Braziller, 1973).

45. Eventually, after the establishment of the American Federation of Radio Artists (AFRA), the Hummerts finally agreed in 1939 to allow dialogue writers' names on the covers of scripts, along with a "supervised by Frank and Anne Hummert" credit. "Frank Hummert Gives His Views," *Variety*, 25 January 1939, 26.

46. J. Fred MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 249.

47. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 53.

48. Jackson Lears, "Some Versions of Fantasy: Toward a Cultural History of American Advertising, 1880-1930," *Prospects* 9 (1984): 350-51.

49. See also Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 43.

50. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 17. See Allen, 15, on the critical assessments that soaps could not be an art form because there are no identifiable authors.

51. Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 160-161.

52. Anne Hummert, interview with P. Napoli.

53. Letter from E. M. Clasen to R. C. Patterson, Jr., 21 December 1934, Box 34, Folder 39, NBC Records, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter NBC Records).

54. Memo from Roy Witmer to Lenox Lohr, 27 February 1936, Box 44, Folder 39, NBC Records.

55. Letter from Roy Witmer to Frank Hummert, 1 June 1934, Box 24, Folder 9, NBC Records.

56. Radio Broadcasting Order, 4 February 1932, Box 6, Folder 71, NBC Records.

57. Letter from Roy Witmer to Frank Hummert, 11 February 1932, Box 6, Folder 71, NBC Records.

58. Memo from Janet MacRorie to Lenox Lohr, 25 January 1939, Box 66, Folder 46, NBC Records.

59. Letter from Frank Hummert to G. F. McClelland, 25 November 1932, Box 6, Folder 71, NBC Records.

60. Letter from Roy Witmer to Frank Hummert, 25 March 1933, Box 16, Folder 7, NBC Records.

61. Letter from Roy Witmer to Frank Hummert, 14 February 1934, Box 24, Folder 16, NBC Records.

62. Letter from Frank Hummert to Roy Witmer, 16 February 1934, Box 24, Folder 16, NBC Records.

63. Telegram from Frank Hummert to Merlin Aylesworth, 1 February 1934, Box 24, Folder 16, NBC Records.

64. Memo from Roy Witmer to Lenox Lohr, 27 February 1936, Box 44, Folder 39, NBC Records.

65. Anne Hummert, interview with P. Napoli.

66. American Business Consultants, *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* (New York: ABC, June 1950); Mary Jane Higby, *Tune in Tomorrow* (New York: Cowles, 1968), 139.

67. Transcript of *Young Widder Brown*, 21 July 1948, Box 25, Folder 10, Rosser Reeves Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter Reeves Papers).

68. Stedman, *Serials*, 346-47, 387.

69. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 126.

70. Higby, *Tune in Tomorrow*, 213.

71. Yet, several soap operas continue to be owned by an advertiser, maintaining a sponsorship structure similar to that of the Hummerts' era. For example, Procter & Gamble still owns *As the World Turns*, *Guiding Light*, and *Another World*.

72. Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 139.

73. Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 71, 127.

74. Quoted in Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 70.

75. Quoted in Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 73.

76. Draper Daniels, *Giants, Pigmies and Other Advertising People* (Chicago: Crain Communications, 1974), 39.

77. Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 137.

78. Quoted in Stan Freberg, "Resisting the Usual," *Y&R and Broadcasting*, 31.

79. "The Story of Young & Rubicam," *Advertising Agency and Advertising & Selling*, December 1949, 52.

80. Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 157.

81. Joan Hafey, "Young & Rubicam and Broadcasting: Growing Up Together," in *Y&R and Broadcasting: Growing Up Together* (New York: The Museum of Broadcasting, n.d.).

82. Advertisement, *Fortune*, May 1938, 93.

83. JWT Staff Meeting Minutes, 2 February 1932, 10, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (hereafter JWT Staff Meeting Minutes).

84. *Y&R and Broadcasting*, 24.

85. Charles Hull Wolfe, *Modern Radio Advertising* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1949), 644.

86. Daniels, *Giants, Pigmies and Other Advertising People*, 44.

87. JWT Staff Meeting Minutes, 2 February 1932, 10.

88. Hubbell Robinson, "What the Radio Audience Wants," in Neville O'Neill, ed., *The Advertising Agency Looks at Radio* (New York: D. Appleton, 1932), 49.

89. William Paley, *As It Happened* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 255.

90. Wolfe, *Modern Radio Advertising*, 627.

91. *Y&R and Broadcasting*, 46-47.

92. Quoted in Arthur Frank Wertheim, *Radio Comedy* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1979), 148.

93. *Y&R and Broadcasting*, 46.

94. LouBrockway, quoted in *Y&R and Broadcasting*, 23.

95. Wertheim, *Radio Comedy*, 141.

96. JWT Staff Meeting Minutes, 21 December 1932, 5.

97. Robinson, "What the Radio Audience Wants," 48.

98. Letter from William Benton to Randolph Catlin, 7 October 1935, Box 34, Folder 34, NBC Records.

99. In his autobiography, Y&R executive Draper Daniels recalled Allen with resentment: Fred Allen "described an advertising agency as '85 percent horseshit and 15 percent commission' but not even the lowest-paid peon and Allenphile at Y&R thought it was funny." *Giants, Pigmies and Other Advertising People*, 39.

100. Fred Allen, *Treadmill to Oblivion* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), 27.

101. Memo from Janet MacRorie to John Royal, 2 February 1938, Box 59, Folder 28, NBC Records.

102. Allen, *Treadmill to Oblivion*, 90.

103. Pat Weaver, with Thomas Coffey, *The Best Seat in the House* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), 66; Allen, *Treadmill to Oblivion*, 235.

104. *Town Hall Tonight* script, Box 66, Folder 55, NBC Records.

105. See Cynthia Meyers, "'Expendable Assets': Creatives and Creativity in the American Advertising Industry of the 1950s and 1960s" (M. A. Thesis, Hunter College, 1992).

106. Interview with Chester Bowles, March 1963, 29, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York (hereafter OHRO).

107. Sidney Hyman, *The Lives of William Benton* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1969), 121.

108. Interview with William Benton, in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 61.

109. Interview with William Benton, 73, OHRO.

110. Interview with Bowles, 23, OHRO.

111. Interview with Bowles, 25, OHRO.

112. Chet Dudley, "A History of B&B," unpublished manuscript, ca. 1938, Box 8, Benton & Bowles Files, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (hereafter Benton & Bowles Files); Letter from William Benton to Elma Benton, 24 May 1932, Benton & Bowles Files.

113. Atherton Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," unpublished manuscript, no date, Box 19, Benton & Bowles Files, 99.

114. Interview with Bowles, 31, OHRO; Gordon Webber, *Our Kind of People: The Story of the First Fifty Years at Benton& Bowles* (New York: Benton & Bowles, 1979), 32.

115. Interview with Bowles, 32, OHRO.

116. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 101.

117. In 1932, General Foods granted more accounts to Benton & Bowles on the condition that they accept a new partner in the firm, Atherton Hobler. Benton & Bowles was reincorporated with Hobler as a one-third partner who also was heavily involved in radio and who stayed at the firm much longer than either founder. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 83-84.

118. Dudley, "A History of Benton & Bowles," 14.

119. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 102.

120. Letter from William Benton to Elma Benton, 8 February 1936; Letter from William Benton to Elma Benton, 11 September 1934, Benton & Bowles Files.

121. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 101.

122. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 97.

123. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 97.

124. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 97.

125. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 98.

126. Michael Varencove, "The Peeled Ear," *Advertising & Selling*, 11 April 1935, 30, 54.

127. Terkel, *Hard Times*, 62.

128. Terkel, *Hard Times*, 62.

129. Terkel, *Hard Times*, 63.

130. Chester Bowles, "Agency's Responsibility in Radio," *Printers' Ink Monthly*, July 1936, 81.

131. "A Presentation of the Services of Benton & Bowles," circa 1943, Box 8, Benton & Bowles Files.

132. Letter from William Benton to Randolph Catlin, 7 October 1935, Box 34, Folder 34, NBC Records. Advertisers disliked having their agency work for a direct competitor and so routinely forced agencies to resign accounts of competitors. In this case, since Colgate's advertising appropriation was much larger than Bristol-Myers', Benton & Bowles took the financially advantageous course, despite their very publicized success with *Town Hall Tonight.*

133. Hobler, "The Triangle of Marketing Success," 111-12.

134. Allen, *Treadmill to Oblivion*, 29.

135. Letter from A. Hobler to Roy Witmer, 10 May 1934 and memo from John Royal to Roy Witmer, 14 May 1934, Box 24, Folder 12, NBC Records.

136. Memo from L. Titterton to Ed Hitz, 8 March 1937, Box 52, Folder 36, NBC Records.

137. Letter from William Benton to M. Aylesworth, 25 August 1933, Box 16, Folder 12, NBC Records.

138. Letter from William Benton to M. Aylesworth, 25 August 1933, Box 16, Folder 12, NBC Records.

139. Memo from Wayne Randall to Frank E. Mason regarding Benton & Bowles presentation, 26 April 1933, Box 34, Folder 34, NBC Records.

140. Memo, Wayne Randall to Frank E. Mason, April 26, 1933, Box 34, folder 34, NBC Records.

141. Interview with Bowles, OHRO, 39.

142. Letter from William Benton to Elma Benton, 11 January 1932, Benton & Bowles Files.

143. Hyman, *The Lives of William Benton,* 153.

144. Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1988), 34.

145. Memo from Wayne Randall to Frank E. Mason, 26 April 1933, Box 34, Folder 34, NBC Records.

146. Quoted in Hyman, *The Lives of William Benton,* 296.

147. Letter from William Benton to Editors of the *New York Times*, dated 28 November 1944, Box 114, Folder 39, NBC Records.

148. Hobler, "Triangle of Marketing Success," 85.

149. Bowles interview, OHRO, 29.

150. Bowles interview, OHRO, 35.

CHAPTER 6

TREADMILL TO OBLIVION:
THE PEAK AND DECLINE OF THE RADIO ERA

The advertising industry's involvement in radio broadcasting and programming expanded throughout the 1940s. During the 1940s, both radio and advertising enjoyed higher profit margins than at any time since the Crash. The broadcasting and advertising industries successfully negotiated the challenges of World War II, preserving their autonomy despite the national mobilization for war. With the exception of a short postwar recession, the period after the war promised continuing economic growth. The network radio model, in which networks sold large blocks of time to advertisers who hired agencies to produce programming, both reached its full maturation and peak financial success in the 1940s, and then began its sudden and precipitous decline. Network radio advertising revenue peaked in 1948, the same year television broadcasting began.[1] Television viewership expanded so rapidly that by 1954 over half of American homes had television receivers. By the mid 1950s, television had supplanted radio as the primary broadcasting medium. In 1948, however, few knew that the radio model was in its last days; certainly its financial success was no indication of its imminent demise. The radio industry's success in attracting listeners and advertisers seemed destined to continue for the foreseeable future. If television were imminent, as many in the industry assumed it was, there was little reason not to believe that most of the practices and conventions of the radio era would carry over intact into television. However, by the end of the 1950s, many of the institutional practices of the radio era—including single sponsorship, advertiser ownership of programming, advertiser control of a "time franchise," and advertising agency program production—were in the process of being replaced by new practices, including multiple or participating sponsorship, advertisements separable from programs, network program ownership, and network scheduling control. The advertising industry, humming busily along in radio, producing programs, protecting itself against critics, extending its reach, increasing its profits, was unaware that its central role in broadcast programming was about to come to an end; the powerful radio ad agency was actually, to appropriate the title of radio star Fred Allen's autobiography, on a "treadmill to oblivion."[2]

This chapter examines the activities of admen in broadcasting during the 1940s, or the last decade of the radio era, an era roughly defined as 1926-50. The 1940s included a world war, a "revolt against radio," a shift to Hollywood, and the looming transition to television. First, I survey briefly the effects of World War II on both the ad industry and radio, relying heavily on historian Frank Fox's *Madison Avenue Goes to War: The Strange Military Career of American Advertising, 1941-45*. Then I outline the causes and consequences of the "revolt against radio," as *Fortune* magazine called it in 1947. [3] Although flush with success immediately following the war, the radio industry was under threat from increasing criticism of the medium's low quality, much of the blame for which was placed at the feet of the advertising industry and sponsor. Facing increased federal oversight, the industry was forced to make a thorough defense of itself. The 1940s were also the peak of Madison Avenue involvement in Hollywood; beginning in the late 1930s, the production of major prime time network programs shifted from New York to Hollywood in order to improve radio's access to movie stars. I briefly discuss how the radio industry first became involved in Hollywood in the 1930s, then analyze the deep-seated mutual mistrust during the 1940s between admen and broadcasters on the one hand and Hollywood denizens on the other. Each camp considered the other to be either out of touch with public taste or guilty of lowering standards. This discursive warfare reached a flash point in the 1947 Hollywood film *The Hucksters,* which represented an adman's moral fall at the hands of a crass radio sponsor and his redemption when at last he rebels.

The last part of this chapter focuses on the beginning of the transition to television, from roughly 1948-52. Here I survey some developments in radio that prefigured television era business practices, including multiple sponsorship, syndication, and prerecorded programming. At the onset of television, admen debated how to make the new medium profitable for both agency and sponsor, especially in face of the far higher programming costs that threatened to crush sponsors, agencies, and broadcasters. Would sponsors continue to pay for all programming costs? If not, who would? Would agencies be able to profit from producing television programming? Would the sponsor's "time franchise," or control over a time period, carry over into television? If not, who would control the schedule? How these issues were debated and resolved by the end of the 1950s is well documented in broadcast historian Michael Mashon's dissertation, *NBC, J. Walter Thompson, and the Evolution of Prime-Time Television Programming and Sponsorship, 1946-1958*.[4] Drawing on Mashon's work, I end this chapter with a brief survey of the views from within the advertising industry as it faced this juncture, concluding with a consideration of NBC-TV president Pat Weaver's earliest efforts to develop the television business model—specifically, Weaver's call to shift to multiple sponsorship, as well as increased network control over programming and scheduling.

World War II and Madison Avenue

During the Depression, the advertising industry was forced to justify its methodologies, even its very existence, to critics and clients alike. No longer confident that advertising alone could pull the economy out of its tailspin, admen had to reformulate and innovate. Although the Depression emboldened its opponents among the critics of capitalism, the advertising industry fought off attempts to increase governmental oversight and confirmed its usefulness to advertisers by developing expertise in the new medium of radio. World War II in some ways provided even greater threats to the advertising industry. The war economy might cause drastic cuts in corporate advertising budgets, decimating the advertising industry. And the federal government, which had put most of the economy on a war footing—nationalizing some key industries, setting prices, imposing excess profit taxes, and requiring industry cooperation with the war effort—might nationalize the advertising or broadcasting industry in order to harness propaganda efforts.

The climate in Washington immediately before the war was not always friendly to the advertising industry. The Federal Trade Commission had been investigating monopolistic trade practices in advertising, and in Congress the Voorhis bill, which failed, would have restricted the ways in which businesses could have deducted advertising costs.[5] However, rather than pursue industrial nationalization, the federal government reacted to the war itself by easing antitrust activity in an effort to gain cooperation from the business world. In fact, federal war contracts, based on a cost-plus formula that guaranteed profitability, plus low interest loans and a reformed tax structure, helped subsidize the revival of many American industries suffering from the lingering effects of the Depression.[6] Further, the advertising industry benefited from the wartime excess profits tax, which gave companies an incentive to increase advertising expenses so they might deduct them and thereby avoid increases in their tax rates. Thus, advertising expenditures in some cases went up rather than down, despite a relative lack of consumer products to advertise.[7] The advertising industry successfully defeated attempts to exempt advertising as a deductible against profits, a move which would have led many advertisers to cease advertising for the duration.[8]

The ad industry suffered its worst contraction during the first half of 1942, immediately following Pearl Harbor; advertising spending dropped to a low point in June 1942. But by the end of the war it had increased until it exceeded the previous heights of the pre-Crash era.[9] During this period, the business world's pre-war resistance to overseas military engagement, typified by many corporate leaders' involvement in organizations such as America First, rapidly eroded. Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn principal Alex Osborn reported to Bruce Barton in March 1942, "that within the past 30 days the philosophy in regard to the war has undergone a radical change. More and more of our clients have recently revealed that they don't care what happens to them as long as we win the war, and they want to do everything they can to aid the war effort."[10] Thus, advertisers' interest in maintaining an active profile as supporting the war effort helped stimulate advertising expenditures, especially for agencies such as BBDO that specialized in institutional, or corporate image, advertising.

Accordingly, faced with client demands to create advertisements despite the shift to war production, the advertising industry, through its trade organizations, attempted to redefine its role in the war effort by endowing it with a public purpose nobler than mere selling. In this vein, Bruce Barton urged a

General Motors executive to "seize the opportunity" in the shift to a war economy "to make the public feel that industry really has a service spirit and ideal."[11] Willard Chevalier, leader of an advertising trade organization, gave speeches during the war that represented advertising as a beneficent force for social good: "In times of peace, [advertising] appeals to their individual desires and aspirations. War transforms it into a powerful instrument of education and community action for the common good."[12]

According to historian Frank Fox, advertising boosters made three arguments for the importance of advertising during the war. First, since wars are expensive, the domestic economy needs to grow, and increased business activity stimulated by advertising is the best way to make that happen. Second, the commercial press embodies the freedoms that the U.S. was defending overseas, and advertising is what keeps the free press free rather than under government control. Third, advertising is the "spiritual essence of freedom itself," the necessary practice of a free economy and a free people, providing freedom of choice and the framework within which the free enterprise system could flourish.[13] Advertising, then, is not a side effect of the American system but a fundamental element; to disallow or restrict it during the war would undercut morale, undermine the war effort, and contradict the mission of American troops overseas. While it might not be able to fulfill its usual aim of stimulating consumption, advertising could raise public awareness of how industry contributed to the war effort, educate consumers about how they also might contribute to the war effort, and preview the goods that would become available once victory was achieved. Such uses of advertising found favor in agencies such as N. W. Ayer, which approached advertising during the war as a "demand management" tool, especially for goods that were in short supply. It might be used to promote products that would be available again after the war, building demand for the future availability. Advertising could thus be a "communications device" that has a "broader function than sales," as Ayer historian Ralph Hower pointed out.[14] Immediately useful in justifying advertising expenditures during wartime, this expansion of advertising's overall purpose would also serve the industry well in the postwar era.

The chief political success of the advertising industry during the war was its domination of federal propaganda efforts. Taking advantage of a general disarray among various federal agencies as to how to use radio for war information and propaganda efforts, the trade organization Advertising Council, renamed the War Advertising Council, stepped into the breach, establishing a clearinghouse for federal requests for radio time, and thereby easing disagreements that had arisen among networks, stations, and sponsors about whose time would be given over for federal purposes.[15] Networks, stations, and agencies donated time and services to propaganda efforts such as "Loose Talk Costs Lives" and "Food Fights for Freedom."[16] Even more significant for the advertising industry was its virtual takeover of the Office for War Information (OWI). In mid-1943, a long simmering conflict between the supporters and opponents of advertising in that office broke out into open conflict. New Deal appointees in the OWI believed that their "honest presentation of war information" would be undercut by the increasing use of advertising and radio strategies in propaganda. They resigned as a group upon the arrival of well-known admen William B. Lewis and Price Gilbert to key positions at the OWI.[17] They feared that such radio men and admen would transform the OWI into an "office of war ballyhoo" relying on "advertising techniques instead of honest information."[18] They assumed that advertising techniques could never be anything but manipulative. One claimed that advertising strategies had the effect of "dimming perception, suspending critical values, and spreading the sticky syrup of complacency over the people."[19]

Admen, on the other hand, saw little if any conflict between information and entertainment. Having conceived advertising as a form of consumer education, many argued that such forms as the radio soap opera could be quite effective at educating audiences by conveying it in a manner that held their attention. The Hummerts, for example, integrated suggestions for victory gardens and recycling into their soap opera scripts.[20] Both the critics and the admen made assumptions about their audiences' ability to understand, the former assuming that entertainment interfered with that ability, the latter that it helped. Historian Jackson Lears points out that many of the critiques of advertising have assumed that only "plain speech" could be honest and transparent, and that the rhetorical strategies of advertising dependent on artifice must thus be inherently suspect or dishonest.[21] This assumption, shared by the resigning writers of the OWI, still reverberates in contemporary debates over the intersection of entertainment, information, and advertising.

Despite the public objections of critics of advertising, the armed services relied on it in radio broadcasts for the Armed Forces Network (AFN). As adman Edward Kirby recalled, AFN "commercials" used jingles to promote war bonds, personal cleanliness, recycling, and security measures. Playing on American Tobacco's slogan "LSMFT: Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco," AFN broadcast spots that announced: "VDMT: Veneral [sic] Disease Means Trouble: For a moment of play you may have to pay."[22] A program AFN broadcast in the South Pacific promoted a prophylactic for malaria: "This program was brought to you by Atabrine, spelled A-T-A-B-R-I-N-E, endorsed by leading Army medical authorities as just the thing to keep you healthy and vigorous. They may taste awful, but fellers, they're healthful–they're wonderful–they're FREE. . . . Reach for Atabrine instead of dessert" (a play on another Lucky Strike slogan: "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet").[23]

The strategy here was to build on soldiers' familiarity with radio advertising techniques in order to impart information that might otherwise be ignored. While ad industry critics decried the use of such reason-why strategies as tendentious and obnoxious, admen such as Kirby believed that "The soldier rather welcomed these because they sound 'more like home.'"[24] While it may have been somewhat self-serving for admen to insist on the effectiveness of commercial radio strategies, it is not hard to imagine that the entertainment value of these "commercials" could have attracted soldiers' attention, if for no other reason than that they could be perceived as satirical as well. By the end of the war, the advertising industry's effectiveness at coordinating propaganda efforts through service in federal agencies, and through the adept transformation of advertisements and radio programs into propaganda vehicles, helped solidify its claim to utility during wartime. As Frank Fox points out, instead of the federal government nationalizing the advertising industry for war propaganda, the industry, in its efforts to coordinate and produce war propaganda, "nationalized itself–while retaining self-control."[25]

The Revolt against Radio

Although the advertising industry had proven its good corporate citizenship by providing time, labor, and services to the war effort, criticism of commercial radio still dogged the industry. Advertising agency dominance over programming was undisputed: in 1945 five agencies were responsible for 46 percent of CBS's billings; their needs as clients of the networks were paramount.[26] This dominance was directly blamed by many critics of commercial radio for degradation of the medium. Because of it, according to one typical critic, radio programming was "either corny, strident, boresome, florid, inane, repetitive, irritating, offensive, moronic, adolescent, or nauseating."[27] Famed radio inventor Lee De Forest fulminated in 1947 that commercial interests had ruined his creation: "You have debased this child, you have sent him out on the street in rags of ragtime, tatters of jive and boogie-woogie to collect money from all and sundry for hubba hubba and audio jitterbug."[28]

Although many in the industry, according to adman Charles Hull Wolfe, were "inclined to close their ears to censure and let the opposition shout itself hoarse," admen and broadcasters had some compelling reasons to address their critics' complaints.[29] Foremost was the ongoing threat of federal intervention. The *FCC Report on Chain Broadcasting* of 1941 had accused RCA of monopolistic practices by running two networks, NBC Red and NBC Blue, simultaneously. FCC Chairman James Fly believed that this gave NBC too much market control; perhaps more competition would improve radio programming. The FCC regulated not networks but only the local stations which depended on the commission for broadcast licenses; however, Fly was able to force NBC to sell off one of its networks by ruling that the FCC would not renew the license of any station affiliated with any network owned by a company that owned more than one network. So, having first picked off its best stations, NBC sold the Blue Network in 1943 to former adman Edward J. Noble, who renamed it ABC.[30] However, as historian Laurence Bergreen points out, the addition of another commercial network had the ultimate effect of intensifying commercialism. While affiliated with NBC, the Blue Network had been able to provide more "public service" and educational programming than other networks because it was cross-subsidized by the Red Network's commercial success. But as ABC, the network had to compete for advertisers by programming as commercially as possible.[31] A 1946 FCC report, known as the Blue Book, reiterated many critics' concerns about the state of commercial broadcasting.[32] The Blue Book asserted that there were not enough public service programs and live local programs, that there was not enough discussion of public issues, and that advertising "excesses" needed to be eliminated or reduced.[33]

CBS head William Paley responded with a speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1946 expressing contrition for "advertising excesses," but most admen and broadcasters vociferously defended their practices and policies.[34] Competing studies drew different conclusions about the level of listener irritation at radio advertising: Paul Lazarsfeld's 1946 study, *The People Look at Radio,* was interpreted by some as proof that listeners do not resent commercials, while a McCann-Erickson report by Herta Herzog and agency head Marion Harper, Jr., concluded that up to one-fourth of listeners were critical of radio advertising.[35] Admen cited a National Opinion Research Center survey that claimed that 62 percent of listeners preferred programs with commercials, and that only 7 percent wanted programs without them.[36]

These attempts to quantify discontent helped commercial radio defenders marginalize their critics as unrepresentative of the American public and therefore irrelevant. JWT adman Carroll Carroll argued that "the critics of commercial radio are critics not of art, not of intrinsic goodness, but of the national taste," implying that the agencies were merely giving audiences what they wanted.[37] Fellow JWT adman Robert Colwell argued that radio's "economic function" of "selling more goods to more people" was far more important than "whether the

Little Mother's Club of Split Lip, Nevada, happens to like the commercials." Radio advertising critics were just "people to whom the commercials are not directed."[38] NBC President Niles Trammell pointed out that while nearly 50 percent of magazine space is routinely devoted to advertising, "only 6.8% of the network's total program time is devoted to commercial announcements."[39] In the face of accusations that they were not fulfilling the compact to serve the public interest by providing "public service" programming, commercial radio defenders redefined commercialism and "public service" until the two seemed interchangeable. NBC executive Phillips Carlin defined public service as "practically everything that we are doing in radio. . . . A comedian lifts people, gets them out of the dumps. I think that is a public service program."[40] Trammell feigned doubt as to what constituted a public service program: "Opinions may differ as to which kinds of programs are most heavily weighted with public interest . . . a debate between two college professors or a debate between Fibber McGee and Molly."[41] Listening to college professors does not interest the public, and for Trammell what is in the public interest is simply what interests the public. He went on, "not only is advertising *in* the public interest, but it is the very *expression* of that interest." It expresses "interest in all that is new, all that is better, all that inspires, stimulates, and drives us to make this a world of peace, of strength, of freedom, of equal opportunity for all."[42]

Many, with Trammell, thus sought to deflect further federal regulation with flowery, hyperbolic rhetoric aimed at improving public opinion of commercial radio. But some within the broadcasting and advertising industries discussed the issue of how to improve commercial radio itself. One suggestion was to set up awards for "the best handling of advertising copy each year" or an Oscars-type award for soap operas in order to make "daytime radio socially and culturally acceptable."[43] Such methods had worked wonders for Hollywood in the form of the Academy Awards and would eventually be used in the advertising and television industries to good promotional effect; but for the moment NBC did not wish to adjudicate any such awards, lest it expose itself to accusations of client favoritism.

Others sought to improve radio advertising. Famed adman Bruce Barton declared in an agency memo that: "This formula by which the listener is treated as a moron was unquestionably effective when it was evolved by Mr. [George Washington] Hill [of American Tobacco] and Mr. [Albert] Lasker [of Lord & Thomas] but those were the days when radio was new, when passenger trains ran at 40 miles an hour and airplanes at 90."[44] BBDO radio department head Charles Hull Wolfe posited that the postwar radio era needed a "new approach to radio advertising" which is "more business like," "more socially conscious," and "more research-minded."[45] Wolfe surveyed radio directors who declared that "The new approach calls for shorter, quieter, less razzle-dazzle radio copy and more straightforward honesty," a virtual concession to commercial radio critics.[46]

Meanwhile, a new emphasis on audience research provided a new opportunity for quantifying advertising's effects and demonstrating its utility. McCann-Erickson agency head Marion Harper, Jr., bought the "program analyzer" from Frank Stanton and Paul Lazarsfeld at CBS, and used it in new business presentations for selling clients on radio. Harper then hired Herta Herzog for qualitative radio research and marketed McCann-Erickson as employing a scientific approach to the problem of radio audiences.[47] Sponsors like General Foods, having accepted radio's effectiveness, wanted more specific information about audiences than just size. Unfortunately for sponsors, pinpointing the effects of radio advertising was elusive, whether measuring audiences or "impact" or "action-factor." According to BBDO executive Wolfe, ARadio advertising, on the basis of tangibility, is halfway between bricklaying and nuclear physics@—like honest physical labor on the one hand and dematerialized intellectual labor on the other hand.[48] Agencies' efforts in the 1940s to move towards scientistic procedures would gain speed in the 1950s, when technocratic ideals would dominate advertising theory. Throughout the 1940s, however, the advertising industry focused increasingly on issues of showmanship—a necessity given the growing interdependence between ad agencies and the Hollywood film industry.

Madison Avenue in Hollywood

Historian Michele Hilmes, in her seminal work *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, points out that interactions between the film and broadcasting industries were ongoing from the first junctures of sound and broadcast technologies. Star extravaganzas were occasionally broadcast from Hollywood; Paramount tried to start a network in 1927 and allied itself with CBS in 1929; and RCA founded RKO studios in 1928.[49] Although a few programs, such as the Rudy Vallee show, were broadcast regularly from Hollywood as early as 1932, Hollywood-originated programming increased dramatically during the "Swing to Hollywood" of 1936-1938.[50] By the latter year there were 25 major transcontinental radio programs originating from Hollywood. Since advertising agencies dominated program production, the result was that Madison Avenue-based agencies became, according to trade magazine *Sales Management,* "as much a part of the Hollywood scene as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, high salaried glamour girls or blossoming ingenues."[51] The symbiosis between radio and

Hollywood peaked in the late 1930s and the 1940s for several reasons: improvements in transcontinental transmission, shifting economic incentives, and changing use patterns of radio and film talent. Until 1935-36, broadcasts originating from Hollywood were more expensive than those originating in New York or Chicago. Network broadcasts were carried on ATT phone lines, the charges for which ATT structured according to a cost-per-circuit mile calculation. ATT's policy was that any broadcast originating in Hollywood or outside New York had to be transmitted to New York first before going back out on longlines to other stations, thus increasing transmission costs considerably.[52] A federal regulatory investigation of ATT's pricing policies forced a downward revision of longline rates, removing a major cost disincentive for Hollywood broadcasts. Another obstacle came from the networks. NBC had established its West Coast facilities in San Francisco rather than Los Angeles. Because of this, until the ATT rate revision, NBC had little incentive to encourage Hollywood-originated broadcasts.[53] NBC president Merlin Aylesworth went to Hollywood to scout for new facilities in 1935, once the pressure from sponsors for Hollywood-based broadcasts had increased and the economic viability of transcontinental transmissions had improved. However, according to John Swallow, manager of the NBC Hollywood studios, parochial attitudes within the broadcasting industry still hindered Hollywood's role in radio: "Most of the trouble was that New York still didn't believe Hollywood would or could ever be a radio center. New York was the spot and talent would always be available there. As a matter of fact, it was harder to try and convince the top radio executives of the day that money should be spent in Hollywood than it was to get motion picture studios to accept radio."[54] Nonetheless, as it became increasingly clear that Hollywood talent could not always commute to New York for broadcasts and as the disincentive of high transmission costs was removed, this attitude underwent revision. While in 1932 NBC broadcasts originating from Hollywood had totaled about 12 hours, by 1937 such broadcasts totaled about 700 hours.[55]

The film and radio industries during this period shared many characteristics and business strategies, including their propensity to prosecute patent wars in order to control technologies, their tendency to form oligopolies, their use of stars for branding, and their continual efforts to resist increased governmental oversight through self-regulation and trade organizations.[56] But the industries also differed in many ways: radio was increasing its profitability during the Depression just when the film industry was suffering narrowing margins, arising from declining ticket sales because of the economy and from increased capital costs because of the transition to sound. Despite the film industry's greater revenues, the radio industry was actually attracting larger audiences at much lower costs.[57] While the film studios welcomed the publicity radio could offer, they were reluctant to anger film exhibitors, who, especially in the face of the declining ticket sales of the early 1930s, feared loss of box office revenue if film stars and material were accessible for free on radio.[58] However, broadcasters worked against these fears to increase the film industry's awareness of their mutual interests. Historian Richard Jewell points to such efforts to broach the divide as RCA's establishment of RKO pictures and NBC / RKO president Aylesworth's attempts to reduce film industry resistance to intermedia exploitation of film talent and material.[59] According to Jewell, radio may have been the primary beneficiary of these alliances with film, since higher ratings allowed the networks to increase time charges and thereby reap growing revenues from film studios themselves, when they used radio to promote films.[60]

Throughout the 1930s film studios, increasingly interested in cross-promotion, evolved steadily away from the hostility of a brief period in 1932-33, when they had banned their contracted stars from radio Even during this short-lived ban, the studios had signed radio talent, such as Kate Smith, Bing Crosby, George Burns and Gracie Allen, for films; clearly they objected not to the use of talent for cross-promotion but to the potential loss of monopolistic control over talent enforced by their star contracts.[61] Eventually, as radio gained ever larger audiences through the 1930s, the studios realized they had more to gain than to lose.   The increased exploitation of "presold" talent, that is, talent already proven to attract audiences, was probably inevitable. At least one studio attempted to extend its monopoly control over talent into radio: MGM in 1937 sold all of its stars, writers, and producers as a package to a radio sponsor, Maxwell House, which paid $20,000-$25,000 a week to MGM for access to its talent, and $15,000-$18,000 a week to NBC for time charges, but subcontracted the actual program production to MGM. The program, based in part on the format of *Lux Radio Theatre*, was called *Hollywood Good News* and eventually evolved into the *Fanny Brice-Baby Snooks Hour*.   The deal spurred other studios to consider package deals with radio sponsors. However, competing endorsement deals, such as the one MGM star Clark Gable had with Chase Sanborn, made such package deals unwieldy and fraught with potential conflicts.[62]

During the rush to Hollywood in the late 1930s, most of the major advertising agencies opened Hollywood offices to oversee Hollywood-based programming. By 1938, 30 percent of Young & Rubicam's revenues reportedly derived from their Hollywood radio shows, including *Jack Benny, Al Pierce and His Gang, Lum and Abner,* and *Passing Parade.* Lord & Thomas produced *Pepsodent Presents Bob Hope.* Ward Wheelock produced *Amos 'n' Andy* and

Hollywood Hotel, based on Hollywood gossip columnist Louella Parson's reporting. Lennen & Mitchell produced *Hollywood Playhouse* and *Old Gold Hollywood Screen Scoops.* William Esty produced *Eddie Cantor's Camel Caravan.* Ruthrauff & Ryan produced *The Big Town* and an Al Jolson program. Benton & Bowles produced four Hollywood programs, the Maxwell House sponsored MGM program, the Joe E. Brown show, the *Joe Penner Show*, and the Jack Haley program.[63] For the most part, the Hollywood offices took direction from their New York headquarters. Most of the primary program conceptualizing, as well as most of the continuity or commercial writing, was generated in New York and transmitted to Hollywood for production. Agency radio directors often had to commute regularly between Hollywood and New York to meet with agency and sponsor executives, usually by train. By the 1940s, it was a regular circuit for admen involved in radio.

Despite these New York-Hollywood links, the shift of program production to Hollywood exacerbated the differences between the print and radio departments in many agencies. Especially in those, like J. Walter Thompson and Young & Rubicam, where radio departments functioned quasi-autonomously within the larger firm, the differences in attitude, style, and work habits became pronounced. Adman James Webb Young recalled running into agency radio men heading to Hollywood by train during the war and commented that "our radio people are more showmen than salesmen," a distinction some admen still found discomfiting in the second decade of agency involvement in programming.[64] "Salesmen" thought themselves businessmen operating within acceptable norms of business; they suspected "showmen" of having no norms or ethics at all. Hollywood seemed rife with showmen who could not be trusted. One adman warned his peers about negotiating in

Hollywood: "The cross, the double cross, and the triple cross with fancy fixings are every-day routine."[65] At an agency staff meeting in 1932, J. Walter Thompson staffers were warned by a visiting Los Angeles newspaper reporter that the film industry was "A billion-dollar industry exploited by the cunning few, run by ignoramuses, [and] thronged with the stupid mob."[66] The prevalence of such attitudes toward Hollywood helps explain why the N. W. Ayer agency, according to house historian Ralph Hower, "recognizing that Hollywood's show atmosphere tends to warp business judgement in men working there . . . arranged for a regular and frequent exchange of top personnel between New York and Hollywood."[67] Agencies' entry into radio had been resisted by some admen precisely because of radio's association with show business; the establishment of agency outposts in Hollywood brought to the fore the risks of ever deeper involvement in the entertainment industry.

At J. Walter Thompson, which produced a greater number of programs based in Hollywood than any other agency, the tension between Madison Avenue and Hollywood was reflected in the longstanding rivalry between radio department head John Reber and Hollywood office president Daniel "Danny" Danker. Reber oversaw all of JWT's radio programs from the New York office, managing the Hollywood programs by telegram, letter, and telephone. The JWT Hollywood office opened in 1934, but Danker had been representing JWT in Los Angeles since 1930, procuring movie star testimonials for Lux Soap, an advertising strategy developed by Helen Resor, wife and partner of JWT president Stanley Resor. Danker, described by Rudy Vallee as "a mean, arrogant, pugnacious, hard-drinking Irishman," was known as the "Lux Playboy": his method was to offer free soap and free publicity to aspiring stars if they consented to appear in print advertisements testifying to the benefits of Lux soap.[68] Clara Bow, Janet Gaynor, and Joan Crawford all appeared in Lux advertisements; Crawford is quoted as saying, "Never have I had anything like it for keeping the skin smooth."[69] If a Lux starlet became famous, she owed a debt to Danker, which usually included appearing in future advertisements for free.

Danker's Hollywood connections began to prove indispensable once JWT moved *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Kraft Music Hall* to Hollywood in 1936. Danker's expense account made it easier for Hollywoodites to "find it pleasant to do business with Thompson people"; he was able to get stars for JWT programs that other agencies could not get at all.[70] It was rumored that his leverage in Hollywood had an unsavory underpinning: "Danny Danker was THE POWER in Hollywood and was said to operate very much like dear Louella [Parsons, the gossip columnist], getting any talent he wanted through blackmail. He also ran a procuring service for visiting executives and had a stable of starlets handy at all times."[71] Carroll recalled that "Mr. Reber did not want Danny to have anything to do with 'his' department. But Danny's power was such in Hollywood that—as our needs for guest stars grew—Danny became more and more essential to the operation. . . . Naturally, as Danny's power grew the seething feud between him and Reber boiled harder,"[72] until Danker's death from a heart attack at age 41 in 1944 ended the conflict. Despite his distaste for Danker, Reber was a Madison Avenue man who saw earlier than most the need to cooperate with Hollywood, the usefulness of the star system to radio, and the fact that radio had to go where the talent was.[73]

Radio agency men were regarded with suspicion not only by their counterparts in print advertising, but also by the genuine "showmen" in Hollywood. JWT writer Carroll Carroll described how agency employees experienced their transfer to Hollywood: "Members of the J. Walter Thompson office, all from New York . . . huddled together for company and protection the way British colonists once did in Africa and Asia. Radio people, considered by the Hollywood picture colony not only as the 'the enemy' but also as 'upstart punks,' 'no status bums,' and 'unwelcome invaders,' were forced to rely on each other for warmth and comfort."[74] When agencies negotiated for talent affiliated with film studios, they were met with resistance. As one unhappy adman put it, "Deep down they resent radio."[75] Condemned sometimes as "showmen" in New York, admen were condemned as "not showmen" in Hollywood. Carroll indignantly objected to this characterization, writing to a friend that it was time to say "a few words in defense of the guys responsible for most of the good radio programs, Advertising Men." Arguing that advertising was "a certain kind of showmanship" and that "National advertisers and their agents, do, today, exercise about 90 percent of the showmanship in radio," Carroll went on to point out that the film industry was developed "in spite of many famous showmen, not with their cooperation"; radio was likewise scorned by "showmen" who "ignored it, laughed at it." Carroll was especially sensitive to the accusation that admen were less creatively autonomous than were, say, Broadway or Hollywood writers: "If advertisers sometimes butt into the jobs of the [radio] writers and directors, so, too, does the money on Broadway and in Hollywood dictate to the creative echelon. But advertising men are attacked for doing what bankers and other angels do" (angels being Broadway investors).[76] For Carroll, the commercial imperatives of radio were no more or less overt than the commercial imperatives of other entertainment industries—a point overlooked by many who blamed commercialism for radio's lack of high mindedness.

During the war, radio's dependence on Hollywood talent increased dramatically, as did talent costs. There were few disincentives to reduce such costs during the war; as Young & Rubicam radio director Tom Lewis noted, "Star-studded, dollar-studded Hollywood creations" had "blossomed in wartime loam, fertilized by paper shortage and excess profits tax."[77] For broadcasters the profit margins ran high, increasing from about 20 percent of revenues in 1937 to about 33 percent in 1944.[78] Once the war ended, they seemed too high to many sponsors: "Talent is often priced out of proportion to its values," as one complained.[79] According to BBDO executive Charles Hull Wolfe, at war's end "more realistic fiscal policies replaced feverish wartime spending," resulting in a wave of cancellations of radio talent contracts.[80] Tom Lewis of Y&R reported that Hollywood talent recognized the "new economy trend," and would reduce fees accordingly, being "more appreciative of the value of radio to the box office" than before.[81] Lewis also noted that the heretofore traditional relationship of New York offices to Hollywood offices was beginning to change, as responsibility for advertising copy was shifting to Hollywood rather than being "teletyped in toto from New York."[82]

Despite increasing audience demand for Hollywood-originated programming, some admen continued to criticize Madison Avenue's embrace of Hollywood values and reliance on Hollywood glamour as a sales strategy. Such a marriage, in the view of one adman complaining about "Hollywooden Idols" in the trade press, was doomed. Pointing out the absurdity of promoting Hollywood films to sell unrelated products, P. H. Erbes wrote a satirical set of instructions to an advertiser: "In order to sell, for example, canned peas, you should devote the large part of your program to selling the latest output of one of the big motion picture studios. You allot twenty-eight minutes of a half hour for the stars to build themselves up, glorify the men who manufacture the pictures and announce selling points about the latest product of the studios. Naturally the listener becomes so accustomed to being sold on things that she is a pushover for the two minutes which are devoted to selling the peas."[83] Erbes's intention is to criticize the use of unrelated entertainment as a selling strategy; however, his description foreshadows the television era, when programs produced in Hollywood without any design to sell a particular product would be interrupted by unrelated 60 or 30 second commercials selling common household goods. Erbes' assumption that programming unrelated to advertising could never be an effective vehicle for advertising would be overturned within the decade.

The Hucksters

The mutual distrust between Madison Avenue and Hollywood surfaced in public discourse with the publication of the novel *The Hucksters* in 1946, followed by the MGM film of the same name starring Clark Gable in 1947. Frederic Wakeman, a former adman at Lord & Thomas who had worked on the American Tobacco account, wrote the novel, which sold over 750,000 copies and was a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection. *The Hucksters* follows the fortunes of adman Vic Norman who, after war service, joins an ad agency to oversee the radio programming of the Beautee soap account. The sponsor, named Evan Llewellyn Evans, was understood by industry readers to have been modeled on Wakeman's former client, American Tobacco head George Washington Hill. In the novel, Evans, like Hill, demands total fealty and obeisance from his agency and intimidates underlings by performing such stunts as spitting on a conference table; this is how he introduces himself to Norman. He lectures Norman on advertising strategy: "Remember, two things make good advertising. One, a good simple idea. Two, repetition. And by repetition, by God, I mean until the public is so irritated with it, they'll buy your brand because they bloody well can't forget it. All you professional advertising men are scared to death of raping the public; I say the public likes it, if you got the know-how to make 'em relax and enjoy it."[84] Initially Norman, though repelled by Evans and his advertising strategies, goes along and invents a radio commercial in which a "colored maid" repetitiously chuckles, "Love that soap."[85] However, Norman eventually regrets such hack work; when he realizes that he actually wants Evans' approval, he is so disgusted with himself he quits. Resisting the crude and manipulative sponsor is Norman's path to redemption.

The novel was received by the mainstream press as a literal report on what was wrong with commercial radio. The broadcasting and advertising industries were concomitantly concerned that the novel, and its popularization in a film, would generate enough negative sentiment to cause further threats of federal intervention. Wakeman, as a former adman, clearly was attempting to indict radio sponsors, whose ability to intimidate and browbeat men of integrity such as Norman made them the clear villains in the degradation of radio. In an interview by the trade magazine *Printers' Ink*, Wakeman insisted his novel was not a condemnation of advertising or the "American system of sales and distribution" but simply an "indictment of despotism in industry, *any industry*, that prohibits the creative function," and in this case, the despot was a radio sponsor. The radio sponsor as despot was a familiar enough type to admen, some of whom had written Wakeman congratulating him on "the fine job he did of portraying their particular pain-in-the-neck client."[86]

The novel, then, articulated a frustration common in the advertising industry: that if clients/sponsors were more reasonable, or knowledgeable, or cultured, they would allow admen to produce better advertising and radio programs, and that most common complaints about advertising and commercial radio would then disappear. Wakeman's caricature of George Washington Hill was especially pertinent on Madison Avenue because Hill was infamous for intimidating subordinates and insisting on repetitious reason-why radio programs and advertising strategies. He oversaw the program *Lucky Strike's Hit Parade,* which was based on his notion that only hit tunes played up-tempo would appeal to listeners.[87] Apocryphal stories circulated of Hill insisting on selecting tunes by dancing to them in his office.[88] Independent radio producer Dan Golenpaul recalled that his fearlessness in standing up to Hill in some confrontation earned Golenpaul gratitude from ad agencies. Admen told Golenpaul that they "found Hill's methods a thorn in their side, because he was getting away with horrible commercials," but they could not openly disagree with Hill without losing the large American Tobacco account. These admen also worried that "their clients were actually in danger of the same thing," that is, believing in crude, repetitive, hard sell tactics instead of moving toward less audience-alienating strategies.[89]

Although Wakeman's critique of the radio sponsor may have been secretly welcomed on Madison Avenue, concerns over the novel's popularization in a 1947 MGM movie starring Clark Gable as Vic Norman and Sydney Greenstreet as Evan Llewellyn Evans "hit ad alley with a sickening thud."[90] A JWT staffer worried that "the picture will do more widespread and popular harm to advertising than the good of all our basic contributions and fine deeds placed end to end from now until Christmas 1950."[91] The film, however, reduced Wakeman's lengthy analysis of the pitfalls of sponsor control of programming into a few brief speeches by Norman and transformed the plot to revolve around a romance between Gable's adman and Deborah Kerr's character (a married woman in the novel but conveniently single in the film). The advertising trade magazine *Tide* accused Hollywood of losing "most of the plot and some of the people."[92] The diminution of Wakeman's insider critique of broadcasting and advertising in favor of the love story did not placate admen who viewed the film as another effort on the part of Hollywood to smear Madison Avenue as the refuge of hacks and craven opportunists.

NBC executives, in particular, were outraged by the film's implication that, as one reported, "sponsors wouldn't be pulling this kind of thing on the air if the broadcasters controlled the programs."[93] The sense of outrage was perhaps more pronounced because Wakeman's direct experience in broadcasting informed his critique, unlike the criticisms of others, such as those Little Mother's Clubs in Split Lip, Nevada. *The Hucksters* underlined the fact that the NBC executives' view of sponsor control of programming as an inherent and necessary condition for commercial broadcasting was a view not entirely shared by the advertising industry. In a 1947 interview Wakeman argued that broadcasters ought to take control of programming precisely to prevent sponsor abuses: "[Y]ou radio people should take back your programs from the hucksters. Take back your networks. Take back your stations and do your own programming without benefit of what any sponsor thinks any program should be . . . commercials can then be sold to advertisers on a dignified, properly controlled basis that will protect the program, not destroy it. It works with newspapers and magazines—why not with radio?"[94] Wakeman articulated one of the key issues admen had identified over and over: that sponsor control of programs mixed up the editorial and advertising functions of the medium. By allowing those functions to be conflated, the radio networks had lost editorial control, allowing low quality programming and advertising to undermine the advertising value of the medium overall. Wakeman's reference to magazine and newspaper business models echoed the point made by admen before him, such as William Benton, that the sponsorship model might not actually provide the best way to use broadcasting as an advertising medium.

When MGM's adaptation of *The Hucksters* was released in 1947, NBC executive Syd Eiges prepared statements of varying degrees of vehemence for NBC president Niles Trammell to make regarding the film. The most outraged of these, never released, described the film as a "vicious and untruthful attack on our American system of advertising" which is "in keeping with the best traditions of the left wingers which Hollywood has so warmly clasped to its ample bosom."[95] Eiges' obvious redbaiting of Hollywood was in line with growing efforts to intimidate entertainment industry denizens with accusations of communist sympathies, which reached their peak in the House of Un-American Activities Committee investigations of Hollywood between 1947 and 1954. Eiges' comment also reflected two prevailing attitudes of broadcasters toward Hollywood. First, that its politics, unlike those of broadcasters, were suspiciously un-American; and second, that its cultural values were corrupt and immoral, like a sexually available woman with an "ample bosom." Broadcasters, by designing their programs to serve the public interest (as they defined it) and the family audience, thought themselves far better qualified than the film industry to foster wholesome values. In 1950, former Y&R adman and then-NBC Television president Pat Weaver also expressed this attitude about Hollywood when he objected to a proposal that it have a hand in setting up a television production code, along the lines of the film industry's Production Code Administration: "I do not know why anyone thinks the movie people understand the rules of good taste, etc. in programming for the all-family audience at home. Only radio has met and knows this problem. And radio-trained men should solve it."[96] Thus, the tensions between Madison Avenue and Hollywood reflected ultimately a rivalry over cultural values, over which culture industry understood and reflected American values best. The advertising agencies working in Hollywood were outsiders; they saw themselves as representing advertisers and broadcasters, who wanted to be seen as reflecting the values of their nationwide audiences in their homes. They had to resist the corruptions of Hollywood, to ensure that their Hollywood-originating programs conformed to the family-friendly standards of broadcasting.

Shifting Strategies of Sponsorship and Program Control

In 1948 network radio advertising revenues reached $210 million, 94 percent of American households owned radios, and the FCC began issuing new radio station licenses, which caused a rapid increase in the number of new radio stations on the air.[97] In 1947, of a total of 1,062 stations, 1,028 (97 percent) were affiliated with a network. By 1952, the FCC had issued twice as many station licenses, 2,331. Although there were more network affiliates, 1,247, they made up a smaller proportion (53 percent) of the whole.[98] By 1952, network radio's percentage of advertising revenues had slid from 46 percent of all radio advertising revenues at the end of the war to 25 percent.[99] The dominance of network radio as a national advertising medium thus eroded rapidly. Advertisers had shifted their appropriations into television, newspapers, and local spot radio. Over the course of the 1950s and into the 1960s, radio shifted away from networking and toward more local station control, away from nationally sponsored entertainment programs and toward less expensive recorded music and talk formats designed for local advertisers.

However, well before the impact of network television, radio advertisers and agencies had already begun to shift strategies in response to the increasing costs of network radio. During the war, some advertisers began to seek cheaper alternatives to national network air time and high talent costs in cooperative programming, where more than one advertiser covers production costs, or syndicated programming, where an advertiser buys a pre-existing program for broadcast in just one region rather than nationally. Such programs increased rapidly on weaker networks such as ABC and Mutual.[100] They were usually recorded on records, called transcriptions. Nonnetwork, or spot, advertising, which cost less than national network advertising, also grew steadily from 46 percent of radio revenues in 1939 to 65 percent in 1949.[101] Agency expertise in spot buying thus also became more important.[102] These developments—spot advertising, coop and syndicated program buying, and transcriptions—allowed agencies and sponsors alike to bypass the national networks. Many agencies, including top radio producer JWT, began subcontracting production to program packagers.[103] By 1950 Frederic Ziv, an independent producer of syndicated radio, argued that spot time buying and syndication were the future of radio.[104]

This was exactly what the networks had sought to avoid by banning the use of transcriptions on their national broadcasts. The network insistence on live broadcasts, reiterated throughout the early television era, was primarily meant to maintain control over affiliates, who could defect or go independent if no longer forced to carry live network feeds. As mentioned in Chapter 3, NBC developed a list of reasons, purportedly in the interest of advertisers, for live broadcasts. However, from the beginning of the radio era nonnetwork programming had included transcribed syndicated programs, that is, recorded programs distributed station to station rather than through the national networks. (*Amos* *'n' Andy* was distributed as a transcribed syndicated program before it was aired on NBC in 1929). As network radio rapidly lost ground in the late 1940s and as the networks redirected their resources toward television, they relented on the transcription ban. Bing Crosby, Jack Benny, and Charles Bergen all argued for the use of transcriptions, at least for their repeat broadcasts. The ban crumbled first at the smaller networks, ABC and Mutual, then at CBS and finally at NBC, although at first transcriptions were allowed on case-by-case basis, which J. Walter Thompson interpreted as a temporary shift rather than a permanent change in policy.[105] But the advent of the Ampex tape format in 1948 eliminated the possibility of returning to a live-only broadcast policy on network radio. Unlike previous forms of audio recording, such as the wax disc recording, audio tape permitted editing; it was possible to cut and paste together a good recording from multiple takes. Ampex audio tape not only improved the quality of recording, it also allowed for the production of perfect performances. By the end of 1948, NBC had not yet allowed its performers to prerecord on Ampex tape. Radio star Ozzie Nelson wrote NBC executive Sydney Strotz asking if the real reason for the tape ban was that RCA had not yet developed its own tape recording format. Although Strotz denied that was the case, he took the matter to NBC President Trammell, saying NBC would have to give in on this point sooner or later, why not do so now?[106]

Meanwhile, at CBS, William Paley had decided to pursue an aggressive policy of network program packaging; he began offering packaged programs to sponsors in 1946. Paley had decided the network needed to take more control over programming, especially over talent, reasoning that stars brought audiences to networks, not the other way around. He helped convince a number of radio stars to form corporations to save on tax liabilities; CBS then purchased the services of the star-corporations, pulling them away from NBC. Some of the stars Paley won over in what were called the "talent raids" of 1948 included Jack Benny, Bing Crosby, and Red Skelton. However, these gains came at a high cost and just as the network was about to lose the bulk of its audiences to television.[107] Looking back, Paley claimed he was trying to secure talent for television. But in 1948, network radio was at its peak, and television had yet to find an audience: it is more likely that Paley's "talent raids" were designed to build the CBS radio network.

Network efforts to increase control over the program schedule had also developed at NBC. In 1943, NBC suspended its waiting list for prime time availabilities, citing not only wartime exigencies but also its interest in controlling the schedule, heretofore dictated by each sponsor in its time franchise. In its notice to advertising agencies NBC pointed out that it was faced "with a far greater responsibility than ever before with respect to the character and quality of our programs" and thus would assign time slots according to the quality of the program offered by a sponsor rather than the sponsor's position on the waiting list.[108] Thus, by the end of the 1940s, both networks and advertisers were working to modify the radio model. Throughout the 1940s, the peak of the radio era, both CBS and NBC moved toward increased network control of programming and scheduling. With the arrival of television, the networks would pursue these strategies even more aggressively.

The Coming of Television

In terms of audience size and advertising revenues, network radio reached its zenith in 1948, the same year television network broadcasts began. Less than 1 percent of households had a television receiver in 1948; however, by

1952, that figure had risen to 34 percent, and by 1954 to 55 percent.[109] In hindsight, television's rapid dissemination appears foreordained; it was poised to pick up the stars, programs, advertisers, and audiences built by radio and carry on. However, the actual transition to television was extremely complex; the process was politically, economically, and technologically contested at every step. The role of the advertising industry during this shift has not always been well explained: often the interests of advertising agencies are conflated with those of their clients, the sponsors, and agencies are falsely characterized as simply resisting change.[110] A full account of the transition to television is beyond the scope of this dissertation; my intention here is only to survey the debates within the advertising industry at the end of the 1940s as the transition to television gained speed.

Broadcast historian Michael Mashon's dissertation, *NBC, J. Walter Thompson, and the Evolution of Prime-Time Television Programming and Sponsorship, 1946-1958*, thoroughly addresses many of the complexities, conflicts, and debates over the evolving structures of sponsorship and program production in early television through the lens of one agency, JWT, and one network, NBC. While most histories conflate the interests of sponsors and ad agencies, Mashon distinguishes them, pointing to the significant differences that divided agencies from their clients. Agencies' economic interests were threatened by the high costs of television programming, even if their clients may have stood to benefit from their continuing involvement in programming.[111] Mashon shows that both networks and agencies were internally conflicted in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The networks on the one hand moved aggressively toward program control, while on the other hand they continued to depend on sponsors and agencies to continue to pay for program production, since they had not yet developed the means to produce enough programming on their own. The agencies, meanwhile, retreated in the face of the high production costs of television programming yet balked at losing their function as overseer of single-sponsored programming. Television programming in the early television period cost roughly ten times more than radio programming; advertisers, agencies, and broadcasters all sought some way to manage the higher costs.

JWT was one of the few agencies that had eagerly anticipated television. As early as 1928 radio director William Ensign reported that, "Television is a lot further developed than I thought," and in 1930 another staffer argued that the agency had been too slow to get into radio and so hoped, "we will get going on television from the first."[112] However, as one adman pointed out in 1947, "Television has been 'in the air' for twenty years. Its enthusiasts have cried 'Wolf!' so often that most people are skeptical about its imminence."[113] Such skepticism was typical of admen deeply involved in radio production. Carroll Carroll wrote other JWT staffers in 1944 that "television will never be the world force radio is, because television will leave little or nothing to the imagination, and it is imagination that gives radio its power." Referring to his own work writing Bing Crosby's patter between songs on the *Kraft Music Hall*, Carroll continued, "Bing Crosby's singing will be enhanced by television, but he won't sound nearly so convincing when everyone sees him reading those casual ad libs."[114] Nonetheless, JWT had begun conducting television experiments in 1930; it oversaw the first one-hour regularly television sponsored program, *Hour Glass* (1946-47), and was producing a television version of the Kraft music program by 1947.[115]

In contemplating television as an advertising medium, most admen applied the lessons they had learned from radio. Like radio, television had the potential for “tremendous intimacy,” believed Bob Foreman of BBDO.[116] Another adman claimed that television would improve on radio’s feeling of “personal contact”: “It more closely approximates person-to-person selling than any other medium.”[117] Yet another adman worried that television commercials’ reliance on live actors would make it harder to make commercials seem “sincere.”[118] And Edgar Kobak, former adman and at that time an NBC vice president, wondered in 1944, “Which is more important in television–the eye or the ear?”[119] As radio was promoted as a medium that brought life to products, so television was expected to offer “the opportunity to show and demonstrate merchandise actually in use.”[120] Unlike print or radio, television had the potential to be a demonstration medium: “It combines sight. It combines sounds. It combines motion, and it also combines immediacy.”[121]

In the late 1940s, many still assumed that sponsor identification was the ultimate aim of television advertising, and that the radio model of single program sponsorship, predicated on audience gratitude to the sponsor, would survive intact. Some, as Mashon points out, were concerned that the visuality of television would disrupt viewer identification.[122] Others actively resisted the first steps toward multiple sponsorship. For example, adman Ned Midgley objected to adjacent commercials for different products, arguing that if gratitude were the basis of radio advertising, “the listening public was so confused it could not tell what product to buy!”[123] And in 1948 a BBDO staffer noted that programs under multiple sponsorship on network radio had not worked out because of disagreements about program control.[124] Ad industry attachment to sponsor identification was thus still strong at the cusp of the television era. But at the same time many were increasingly skeptical of the old model. And others had already dismissed the impact of gratitude on sales, as JWT staffer Robert

Colwell had already concluded in 1932. "Participating sponsorship," two or more sponsors per program, had been increasing, initially as a cost savings measure; its success on a number of daytime radio programs (e.g., *Breakfast Club, The Marjorie Mills Hour*) reassured many advertisers that audiences could distinguish among different advertised products, that a program and a product did not require tight association for the advertising strategy to be successful. Eventually radio admen were forced to concede, as did Charles Brower of BBDO in retrospect, that the sponsor identification strategy was ineffective in television: "One sacred cow that we all believed in was ground to hamburger. That was 'sponsor identification.'"[125]

What forced this concession, more than any other factor, was the most pressing issue facing ad agency entry into television: the high costs of television production. One reason the advertising industry had been able to lure advertisers to radio was the very low cost-per-thousand audience members that radio offered, compared to more established media such as newspapers. Its production costs were low (except for high priced talent), and its national reach was impressively broad by the end of the 1930s. Television, on the other hand, had tenfold higher production costs and no proven national reach.[126] An agency could cover its radio programming costs by charging the sponsor a commission on talent in addition to its commission on time costs. However, the entirely different scale of cost for television production made this impossible: even both commissions could not cover programming costs.

In a 1949 memo regarding the General Electric television program, a BBDO staffer explains that BBDO was splitting the commission for the time with the producing agency, Young & Rubicam, but that Young & Rubicam would recoup its production costs in part from BBDO's share of the commission, potentially resulting in a net loss to BBDO for the account. The result, according to the memo writer, was that Young & Rubicam "seems, at present, to regard television as a 'loss leader.'"[127] Despite agency interest in serving accounts by continuing to oversee programming, the future profitability of such service on television seemed dim. Mashon describes how JWT continued under John Reber to maintain the radio model of agency control in the 1947 production of *Hour Glass*, fighting with NBC over script approval, yet as early as 1946 other JWT staffers, such as Robert Colwell, realized that Reber's radio formula was declining in usefulness.[128] In a *Variety* article reporting on problems with JWT's *Kraft Television Theater*, NBC program director John Royal claimed that JWT controlled the production only because NBC was "giving the advertising men a chance to learn the new medium," and that eventually the network would probably have to control production. Royal went on to cite approvingly the agencies that "have already turned over all phases of production to the networks."[129] In fact, as Mashon reports, even in radio production, agencies' increasing disinclination to take on the costs of production led them to the view that "no harm" would come from allowing networks and independent producers to package programs, so long as the agencies could retain supervisory or script control.[130]

In an undated memo most likely written in the late 1950s, an N.W. Ayer staffer described how and why advertising agencies left television program production. The first factor, according to the unnamed writer, was the networks' "attitude" toward gaining control over the schedule and their desire to remove the threat of sponsor and program defection to rival networks. As long as the networks did not own the programs, they would be vulnerable to the threat of the program's owners taking them elsewhere. The second factor was the "agency profit margin," which was decimated by the increased costs of television production, costs agencies could not recoup through the "price" they charged clients, that is, the 15 percent commission.[131] Unlike, for example, the film studios, which could finance a production and then benefit from its ownership, agencies simply did not have investment capital, since their financing was limited to agency commissions. The last factor was the rise of program packagers such as Goodson-Todman and Barry-Enright. These were program specialists who could reap economies of scale by producing several programs in the same genre or format, for example, quiz shows. Such packagers could get by with a much smaller staff than an advertising agency, which had to serve multiple clients and their various program needs. And, unlike agencies (but like film studios) they could also benefit from shares in program ownership.[132]

By the time Pat Weaver accepted a position at NBC in 1949 to oversee the development of NBC television, his experience at Young & Rubicam and at radio sponsor American Tobacco had exposed him to some of the worst and best of the radio business model. Weaver had handled difficult talent while overseeing Fred Allen's *Town Hall Tonight* (1935-38), and he had survived the most infamously difficult radio sponsor, George Washington Hill, during his tenure at American Tobacco (1938-41). At NBC Weaver tried to convince the network, sponsors, and agencies to use more participating sponsorship. Like other admen before him, Weaver used the term "magazine plan" to suggest that participating sponsorship was merely the application to broadcasting of an already successful advertising model: advertisers might buy interstitial "pages" of time within a program and leave the editorial content, or program, to the network. As an experienced radio man, Weaver had seen at first hand that program quality and audience service suffered in advertiser-controlled programming; the advertiser was concerned first and last with advertising needs, not the needs of the audience or the integrity of the program. As a newly appointed television executive, Weaver was also concerned about the sustainability, given its high costs, of television as an advertising medium. In 1949 he wrote a memo at NBC pointing out that television could not follow the radio "pattern" because "There is not enough money to put on full programs for a single product (as generally the case in radio)."[133] Mashon delineates Weaver's multiple strategies for attacking these problems: attracting smaller advertisers with daytime magazine programs (*Today, Home*), attracting participating sponsorship from large advertisers for prime time spectaculars, and urging advertisers and the agencies to reconsider the viability of sponsor identification.[134] Weaver described these ideas very simply: "In short, these plans all try to approach the television medium as if the parallel were more like the magazine field than the radio field."[135] Weaver's idea that the networks should function like magazine editors, overseeing content while selling "pages" of advertising time, was shared by many prominent admen at the time, including agency heads Fairfax Cone and Raymond Rubicam.[136]

Weaver was not alone in pushing these changes–in fact he carefully handpicked a number of former radio men to assist him at NBC—and his ideas were already circulating through advertising and broadcasting. But Weaver did become the point man, so to speak, in instituting and articulating the reasoning for the shift from the radio model to the television model. Broadcast historian Michele Hilmes has critiqued the notion that Weaver was the "author" of the magazine plan, pointing out the use of participating sponsorship in daytime radio.[137] And to be sure Weaver did not invent the television model, in which networks control programming and sell interstitial advertising time to advertisers. However, he pushed hard for the general use of the magazine plan at NBC, and he was in a position to execute it. As I have shown, from the initial conception of the radio model of single sponsorship admen had questioned its utility and proposed "magazine" style models instead. Weaver's career at NBC is practically a reply to Frederic Wakeman's complaint about the ruination of radio by sponsor control.

Conclusion

The 1940s, then, contained both the peak of the radio era, of the domination of broadcasting by advertising agencies and sponsors, and the beginnings of national network radio's rapid decline and replacement by television, which led to the withdrawal of advertising agencies from program control and the demise of single sponsorship. The temporary and artificial conditions of the war, such as the wartime excess profits tax, provided a safe harbor for the advertising industry in what could have been a very difficult business environment. The immediate postwar years were marked by radio's greatest financial successes as well as increasingly vocal criticisms of commercial radio, requiring admen and broadcasters to defend commercial radio practices. The interpenetration of Madison Avenue and Hollywood, which reached its height in the 1940s, highlighted debates among broadcasters and admen concerning cultural values and control in mass entertainment. The film version of former adman Frederick Wakeman's novel *The Hucksters,* which criticized sponsor control of programming, exacerbated tensions between the broadcasting and film industries. Although the radio industry was reaching its largest audiences and reaping its highest prices for air time by 1948, the radio model's days were numbered. The looming approach of television stimulated debates among admen about the viability of television as an advertising medium. Clues of how the television model would function were already evident in the changing economics of radio in the 1940s, including the increase of multiple sponsorship, spot advertising, and recorded and syndicated cooperative programming. Although the actual transition into the television model, in which networks controlled programming and scheduling, took most of the 1950s to develop, the first NBC-TV president, the former adman Pat Weaver, was the key executive who articulated and executed strategies to this end, building on his extensive experience with radio's single sponsorship model.

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CONCLUSION

In his autobiography, *Adventures in Advertising*, Young & Rubicam founder John Orr Young described the radio era as a time when advertising agencies brought "the show world to the world of commerce."[1] Advertising theorist Kenneth Goode described the adman's role in radio as "helping every businessman become his own showman."[2] The merger of "showmanship and salesmanship" would "spell success."[3] Even more romantically, the radio era was a time "when advertising joined hands with showmanship" to create commercial entertainment.[4] To be sure, after the radio era, the hands of advertising and showmanship were less closely intertwined. With the advent of television and its expensive and complex production processes, advertising agencies were pushed and pulled out of programming. But their contributions to the formation and conceptualization of broadcasting as a commercial entertainment medium nonetheless are significant and enduring.

The basic premise of this dissertation is that one cannot understand the history of television without understanding the radio era, and that one cannot understand the radio era, and the original formation of commercial broadcasting, without understanding the crucial role of the advertising industry. Both the radio era and the advertising industry have been underanalyzed in most broadcast histories. This dissertation, through a detailed analysis of admen's debates, theories, and practices in radio advertising and programming, has sought to deepen and enrich our understanding of American commercial broadcasting—not only its history but also its current predicament. For now, at the cusp of yet another transition in the history of broadcasting, the media industries must figure out all over again how to attract and engage audiences for commercial messages through the vehicle of entertainment programming.

From the beginning, the advertising industry was conflicted about broadcasting. Admen's reluctance to enter radio was informed by their attachment to professional standards developed in print media and their suspicion of the use of entertainment for selling. Broadcasters called upon specific admen to tell the "wonderful story" of broadcasting to the advertising industry, which was urged to consider radio the "fourth dimension" of advertising. During the 1920s, broadcasting needed the advertising industry more than the advertising industry needed broadcasting. The Depression, however, not only pushed advertising agencies into the new medium as a way to find new clients but also pulled them in, as broadcasters sought to shift programming costs onto advertisers. Admen and their agencies were best positioned to take on the role of mediating among advertisers, broadcasters, and audiences because, unlike broadcasters or Broadway producers, they would keep the advertiser's commercial goals paramount in their development of broadcast programming. Once advertising agencies were established as the primary program producers, they had to negotiate the basic elements of the radio business model with the other key broadcast institutions, that is, the networks. Even during this first decade of radio, some admen understood that the single-sponsor format and lack of network editorial control threatened to alienate listeners and thus undermine broadcasting as a commercial medium. Admen debated among themselves how best to address this problem. Focusing on issues of showmanship, admen explored the challenges of developing and adapting entertainment and advertising to radio, a medium unrelated to print and now decisively associated with entertainment. Particular advertising agencies applied hard-sell or soft-sell strategies to both advertising and programming with differing aims and results, reflecting general differences within the advertising industry regarding radio. By the 1940s, the radio model, in which admen provided the key mediating function among advertisers, broadcasters, and audiences, was at its high water mark; yet the 1940s were also the beginning of the end of the radio era. The shift of program production to Hollywood, together with changing industry practices designed to manage the increasing costs of star-studded radio entertainment, prefigured some of the changes to the broadcast model that would be realized in the television era.

Many radio-era strategies, such as sponsor identification and advertiser control of programming, would decline during the television era in part because the admen who had practiced them began to understand their drawbacks. The problems of the radio model—the lack of centralized editorial authority or scheduling control, the lack of centralized programming production, the reliance on advertisers seeking sales rather than entertainment, the constraints on innovation—had to be resolved before television could be structured as an effective and profitable advertising medium. During the radio era, broadcasting was conceptualized primarily in ad agencies, in the 1950s it was conceptualized at television networks—and many admen likewise moved from agencies to networks, bringing their hard-learned lessons from their experiences in radio and its single-sponsorship model. Admen deeply involved in radio, such as Pat Weaver, played key roles in structuring the television model. Television's adoption of the "magazine plan," in which advertisers purchased only interstitial minutes like magazine pages, was in part a reaction to the radio model and its weaknesses.

By the end of the 1950s, after a series of technological, regulatory, industrial, economic, and cultural changes far too complex to summarize adequately here, the television model was well-established. The supply chain of programming had been transformed. In the radio model, developed during the economic crisis of the Depression, broadcasters sold large blocks of air time to advertisers, who then selected, financed, and produced programming with the aid of their advertising agencies. The networks did not determine which programs aired or when. Single sponsorship, in which one advertiser owned a program, was predicated on a tight association between the advertised product and the program—a principle that curtailed program innovation. In the television model, the networks finally took over editorial control of broadcasting, working like magazine editors to select, produce, and schedule programming (or editorial content). Freed from a sponsors' control of an entire time block (the "time franchise"), networks were able to select and place programs in order to create the best schedule for building and retaining audience interest and attention, or "audience flow." Like magazine pages, advertising was relegated to interstitial minutes rather than integrated or tightly associated with programming. By separating program and advertisement, networks had more flexibility to develop programming strategies for appealing to the largest audiences possible, and then, in turn, to sell minutes at the highest possible prices to advertisers seeking access to those aggregated audiences. The networks' profit margins resulted from the spread between what they paid for programming and what they charged advertisers for air time. During the 1960s and 1970s, the networks enjoyed a tripartite oligopoly structure, in which three networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) exercised control over producer and advertiser access to air time and audiences, and therefore over prices both for air time and programs, guaranteeing profitability.

The challenge of the relatively high costs of television programming was met by reorganizing production financing. Advertising agencies simply could not carry the burden of television costs; they did not have the capital or the access to program ownership equity stakes that would make such investments possible, since the programs were owned by their clients, the advertisers. The networks sought alternative program suppliers, ranging from in-house producers to specialized program packagers, who could focus on program production exclusively and thus reap economies of scale unattainable by the advertising agencies, whose clients' needs had to come foremost. By the end of the 1950s, the film studios had become key program suppliers, especially of filmed episodic series.[5] The major Hollywood film studios had suffered severe setbacks in the 1940s and 1950s: their efficient vertically integrated oligopoly was decimated by the requirement of the Paramount Decrees (1938-48) that they sell off their theater chains; their ability to enter the nascent television industry was blocked by rules barring them owning television stations; and their audiences shrank as television penetration increased. The studio system's eventual reorganization into a "New Hollywood" industry structure included the recycling of film techniques, sets, and talent into television program production. The studios' greater access to capital and their retention of program ownership gave them a much better chance at profiting from the highly risky business of television program production than the advertising agencies would ever have enjoyed. Consequently, the oligopolistic television networks were able to forge a partnership with the film studios, in which the film studios sold their television programs to networks at a price lower than their costs ("deficit financing") in return for the majority of syndication revenues when the program moved into the aftermarket of reruns and international sales.

Advertising agencies, relieved of the burdens and expenses of program production, focused on their core businesses: media buying and advertisement production, that is, commercials. Advertisers and agencies could bring greater resources (money, time, and talent) to bear on the advertisements themselves once they were no longer responsible for producing the entertainment as well. The sixty-second commercial would evolve into the most expensive (if measured by cost per minute) and elaborately produced television form. Agencies' media buying skills—advising advertisers on where and when to place commercials—depended on their continuing sensitivity to audiences' tastes and viewing habits. Although agencies were no longer selecting and producing entire programs for their clients, their expertise in predicting and evaluating audience responses became even more important to advertisers faced with a much greater choice of where to place their advertising. Once advertisements were unlinked from programs, advertisers no longer had to look for a program to fit the commercial message; advertisers and their agencies looked for *audiences* and were now free to follow them to whichever program they viewed.

The television model of commercial broadcasting built upon and modified the radio model. It rested on the same premises: that programming (or editorial content) would be subsidized by advertisers, and that the primary economic relationship was not between producers and consumers of programming, but between distributors (the networks) and advertisers. In both broadcast business models, consumers received "free" programming in exchange for being organized and aggregated to receive advertising messages. The television model, however, improved upon the radio model in key ways. By detaching advertisement from program text and by centralizing editorial control in networks, the television model provided far greater flexibility for advertisers and networks to develop strategies for attracting audience attention. Once the issue of program financing had been addressed by reorganizing the production supply chain, a much wider range of programming and advertising strategies was available to networks and advertisers for building broadcasting into the single most important and effective advertising medium of the twentieth century.

Now, a half century later, the era of the television model, during which broadcast networks controlled programming and advertisers' access to audiences through the sale of a limited inventory of commercial time, is itself coming to an end. Subscription television services—that is, cable and satellite distribution—have created a direct economic relationship between viewers and programmers that was not possible during the broadcasting era. Digitized distribution platforms, such as digital video recorders, video on demand, and internet file sharing, threaten to increase viewers' ability to time- and space-shift their consumption of programming, challenging the basic programming, scheduling, and audience management strategies developed during the television era. The clear demarcation between advertising and program texts that was established with the magazine plan in early television may begin to blur as advertisers once again seek new strategies for locating and engaging audiences. Some of the "new" strategies will be closely related to the "old" strategies of the radio era, including product placement, integrated advertising, and single sponsorship, all of which are gaining ground with advertisers in today's television environment.

Advertisers are already pressuring their agencies to reconceptualize advertising in a world of time-shifting, commercial-skipping viewers. In a 2005

Daily Variety article, the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency announced that, in response to its clients' demands, it has "refocused on its showbiz roots" and plans to offer advertisers expertise on how to marry entertainment and advertising. Pointing out that JWT had produced radio and television programs from the 1920s through the 1950s, executive vice president John Garland claimed that "We're going to migrate entertainment to the core of our thinking" in an effort to solve "this equation of marrying the advertiser and their enterprise and interfacing efficiently with what Hollywood does on a daily basis."[6] Although the language may be different from that of the radio era, the issues are similar. The advertising industry may once again become more central to entertainment creation as advertisers seek alternatives to the 30-second television commercial, including program sponsorship and product placement.

In this dissertation, I have sought to define the issues and conflicts within the broadcasting and advertising industries of the radio era, showing how admen developed, theorized, and practiced advertising and programming. I have focused on admen, rather than the advertising industry per se, for several reasons. First, admen worked in various institutions, including advertising agencies, sponsors, and networks, yet they shared a common ground in training in advertising theories and strategies. By using "admen" as an analytical lens, I have sought to capture some of the interindustrial circulation of ideas throughout broadcasting. Second, admen articulated many intraindustry tensions, resulting from a fundamental lack of unity within advertising and broadcasting institutions. The radio industry included a variety of stakeholders with differing agendas; and the advertising industry was not a unitary and unified "black box" of ideology production but a multifaceted, complex, and conflicted aggregation of institutions and individuals. Third, I have tried to highlight the significance of individual agency within the larger institutional structures. While specific individuals may not have been able singlehandedly to transform the structures of an entire industry, certain individuals have had a disproportionate historical impact despite structural constraints. Pat Weaver's championing of the "magazine plan" on network television in 1953 was prefigured in 1933 by another adman, William Benton, also deeply involved in radio program production. An innovative idea must often circulate until the time is ripe, or until an existing structure is in great need for reform, at which point a well-positioned individual may be able to execute it. The Bentons and Weavers of history are not necessarily heroic, but they are crucial to the ongoing interplay of individuals and structures in the process of historical change.

Finally, in order to avoid the simplistic determinism of both advertising's critics and defenders, I hope to have complicated our understanding of the effects of an institution such as advertising on popular cultural forms. Advertising's economic imperative may be its structuring force, yet it must also articulate and express contemporary cultural tensions in order to communicate with its audiences. Admen's involvement in radio advertising and programming demonstrates how directly advertising institutions have had to address the cultural issues of their day. The advertising industry has not played an ancillary, merely economic role in institutions such as broadcasting; it is itself a cultural industry, shaping and responding to popular culture forms. I hope to have contributed to the continuing dismantling of the artificial distinction between cultural forms that can pose as "art for art's sake" and those that more obviously serve instrumental purposes, such as advertising. By questioning such distinctions, we do not lose the ability to make qualitative assessments of cultural products; on the contrary, we will make such assessments more effectively if we no longer ignore the significance of cultural forms formerly debased for their economic or instrumental applications. Admen in broadcasting produced cultural products of varying quality and significance; this dissertation is intended to begin a more inclusive assessment of the commercial cultural industries and their significance in American history.

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