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# Living in Media and the Future of Advertising

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**The future role of advertising and its professionals in society is considered using media theory and the production perspective on advertising as work. Given advertising's reliance on media to tell its stories, and people's everyday lives playing out within those same media, the moment these worlds collide provides an excellent starting point for futuristic exploration. Using a taxonomy of media as artifacts, activities, and social arrangements, advertising is considered in terms of an aesthetic opportunity, an ethical call to action, and a social responsibility.**

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In this article, I consider the future role of advertising and its professionals in society through the prism of “media life” (Deuze 2012), considering our lives as lived *in* media, rather than *with* media. The key to understand contemporary digital culture is to appreciate the profound role media play in all aspects of our lives, insofar that thinking of media as an external agent affecting people's lives—assuming there is an outside to media—has become the illusion. Given advertising's reliance on media to tell its stories, and people's everyday lives playing out within those same media, the moment these worlds collide provides an excellent starting point for futuristic exploration.

In what follows, I examine the future of advertising with an approach informed by earlier research among and about the working lives of advertising professionals (Deuze 2007, 2011, 2015), coupled with subsequent work on the media lives of people around the world (Deuze 2011, 2012, 2014). The scholarly endeavor to critically analyze advertising can benefit from a production perspective (as outlined in Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009; Perren and Holt 2009; Paterson et al. 2015), especially as it relates to what motivates, drives, and inspires people to pursue (creative) advertising work.

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First, I outline the principal components of media life, showing how the ongoing convergence and integration of advertising, marketing, and media companies coincides with an increasingly pervasive and ubiquitous mediatization (Hepp and Krotz 2014) of everyday life. This process signifies the importance of using media theory to appreciate the role of a cultural industry, such as advertising in contemporary society. Second, using a comprehensive definition of media as infrastructures (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2004), I move on to consider media as distinct artifacts, activities, and arrangements that serve to structure people's daily lives. This breakdown of media is then coupled with specific observations of how advertising as work is currently evolving. This taxonomy of media and advertising comprises an aesthetic opportunity (for example, to tell beautiful stories across and through the media manifold), an ethical call (to be accountable in a world of permanently online and connected media use), and a social responsibility (given the profound role commercial media play in people's lived experience of the social).

The integration of media theory and a production studies framework allows for a peek behind the curtain of advertising as work, potentially fostering respect for what those in advertising do to make it work, while at the same time opening up the field for a critical appraisal of its roles and responsibilities in society.

## **MEDIA LIFE**

Media are to us as water is to fish. This does not mean life is determined by media; it just suggests that, whether we like it or not, every aspect of our lives takes place in media and that our engagement with media in many ways contributes to our chances of survival. As effectively bonded groups are essential for survival, as is our ability to monitor our environment and each other for clues to who we are and what we are supposed to be doing, today much of such bonding and monitoring occurs in media. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides (2005) offer a short list of specific adaptive challenges universally faced by humans, which upon reviewing reminds us of how it to a large extent reads like a summary of people's everyday activities in media:

foraging (hunting, gathering), kinship, predator defense, resource competition, cooperation, aggression, parental care, dominance and

status, inbreeding avoidance, courtship, mateship maintenance, trade-offs between mating effort and parenting effort, mating system, sexual conflict, paternity uncertainty and sexual jealousy, signaling and communication, navigation, habitat selection, and so on. (p. 45)

Foraging occurs through shopping online; our fragmented family lives get invigorated and new meaning through mediated connections; we defend ourselves through software privacy and do-not-track settings; parents monitor offspring through nanny cams and family messaging groups, and several studies report that high levels of social media use predict negative relationship outcomes, such as breakups, divorce, and cheating (Gershon 2012; Clayton, Nagurney, and Smith 2013). All of these challenges occur not only in media; media must be seen as a central organizing platform on which the everyday struggles of existence play out. Media, in terms of devices, interfaces, and uses, shape and are being shaped by our interactions in making survival—as workers, family and community members, consumers, citizens, partners, and friends—possible.

It is no surprise media have become central to our understanding of the world and our role in it. Media are so much more than the companies that produce content for it, the technologies we use, and the way media fit into our everyday lives. In our largely unreflective way of living in media, there is no outside to media. We are drawn into media in what I consider a process where the media world and the system world have collapsed into the lifeworld (Deuze 2014). In that sense, effective reflection on the role of media in our life is complicated because the lifeworld is the world we experience most directly, instantly, and without reservation.

Part of media life means coming to terms with a supersaturation of media messages and machines in households, workplaces, shopping malls, bars and restaurants, and all the other in-between spaces of today's world. Research in countries across all continents consistently shows how, through the years, more of our time gets spent using media, and how being concurrently exposed to media has become a regular feature of everyday life. Consuming media regularly takes place alongside producing media, as meaningful distinction between such media activities as zapping, zipping, viewing, reading, and downloading, and such actions as chatting, forwarding, remixing, editing, and uploading, disappear from people's active awareness of media use.

The fusion of media-making and -using activities over the past few decades can be considered to have taken place in the context of a sociocultural convergence, where the key categories of human aliveness and activity converged in a concurrent and continuous exposure to, use of, and immersion in media. It must be clear that media are not just types of technology and chunks of content occupying the world around us—a view that considers media as external agents affecting us in myriad ways. If anything, today the uses and appropriations of media can be seen as fused with everything people do, everywhere

people are, everyone people aspire to be. Seeing media as key to our chances for survival in today's world, therefore, is not a far-fetched notion, as media are most certainly continuously mediating our lived experience as much as media are mirrors of it.

It is in this context of theorizing media beyond the all-too-easy boundaries of technology-nature-humanity that I would like to consider a future of advertising. The field, taking as its cue the more or less effective delivery of brand messages to an audience of (potential) consumers, experiences challenges similar that those of other key professional storytellers (i.e., media professions like journalism, film and television production, marketing communications, and public relations; see Deuze 2007). Media-savvy publics question, critique, or altogether opt out of advertisements, one-to-many distribution models are failing, and audiences are increasingly enlisted as colleagues in conceptualizing, creating, curating, and circulating advertising.

In (often futile) attempts to tame the unruly beast of contemporary media culture, the advertising industry has consolidated over the past few decades, with global holding firms gobbling up shops, studios, and firms at an accelerated pace, quickly followed by managerial regimes intended to standardize and streamline practices across their networks. In terms of media, transnational groups introduced concepts such as integrated marketing communications in the 1990s, aimed at breaking down the boundaries between different above the line (advertising, media planning, and production) and below the line (sales promotions, public relations, and other marketing services) disciplines within companies. The assumption behind all of this has been that by facilitating so-called through-the-line communication the traditionally insular and thus unwieldy nature of work within large full-service organizations would become more flexible and consumer focused, and would be able to move with the market between and across a variety of media platforms and channels.

The paradox of these developments is that in media life, full-service agencies and otherwise integrated advertising companies should be having a field day with their work, as people are clearly emotionally engaged with all their media, and the cross-platform digital data generated in media life promises precise targeting of skillfully crafted promotional messages to eager consumers. Yet the opposite seems to be true: Advertising's effectiveness is diminishing; people are learning to bypass advertising in sophisticated ways; and the outlook for work in the industry is shifting from stable job descriptions and career paths based on a more or less comprehensive portfolio of completed works to online-only digital trajectories beyond any form of work-life balance. In this supposedly more flexible and entrepreneurial arrangement of work in the industry, professionals are most likely to make myriad difficult-to-qualify contributions to projects and teams featuring complex work that is often more about continuously customizing a brand experience for a particular consumer

segment than joyfully producing a brand message that gets sent out over the airwaves of broadcast radio and television or undersea cables of the Internet.

It is safe to say these are fascinating times for media management and work generally, and the advertising industry (and research community) specifically. To critically analyze the role of advertising in everyday life, I suggest we have to conceptualize clearly what it means to live in media, and what challenges and opportunities such a life may bring to media industries and professionals. Leah Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (2004) propose a comprehensive framework for conceptualizing the role (new) media play in society, industry, and everyday life, considering media as infrastructures that run underneath, through, and in the background of social structures. As infrastructures, they argue, media incorporate “the *artifacts* or devices used to communicate or convey information, the *activities* and practices in which people engage to communicate or share information, and the social *arrangements* or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices” (p. 7; emphasis added). The power of this definition is that it includes existing approaches that would externalize media, while recognizing how media have also become an integral part as building blocks (to continue the architectural reference) for everyday life. When considering the history as well as the contemporary role of media, one would always have to consider these three principal components—media as artifacts, activities, and arrangements—in conjunction.

To Lievrouw and Livingstone’s (2004) foundational work I would add an interpretation of media as not just material but also emotional infrastructures. Media are material in their existence as devices, platforms, hardware, software, contents, and services; yet they are also emotional in terms of how we make sense of ourselves and others through mediated witnessing, how media structure and arrange daily interactions, and what we generally feel about media (and, in media, about one another and the world in which we live). Media are not “cold machines” that simply enable telecommunication and mediatization. Media are equipment as much as emotion; they elicit affect as much as they offer affordances. Considering media as material as well as emotional infrastructures, I am always reminded of the significance of appreciating the magical nature of media, as famously expressed in Arthur C. Clarke’s third law of prediction, published in 1973: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” Clarke hints at a profound consequence of living our lives in media: we operate under the illusion of control, but in reality we are governed by media in that we generally have no idea of how they work, relying completely on impenetrable lines of code and endless arrays of wires, waves, cables, and chips to shop and find love online, to be informed and entertained, and to give meaning to our fragmented families. Media are indeed magical in that way. This is not necessarily a disempowering realization; it is, however, an important perspectival point of departure for outlining the

profound role media play in everyday life in terms of their existence as artifacts, activities, and social arrangements. Hereafter, I use each of these elements in the definition of media to outline a particular aesthetic, ethical, and social responsibility challenge for (the future of) advertising.

### MEDIA AS ARTIFACTS: MEDIA ARE EVERYWHERE

Although a general review of the evolution of media as artifacts is beyond the scope of this article, it is safe to say that media do meet criteria of the scientific theory of evolution: In the course of media history our artifacts have exponentially multiplied—every year there are more, not fewer media at our disposal—and these devices become more differentiated and complex all the time. Media converge and diverge at a rapid pace, often not necessarily progressing along neat linear trajectories, with different media “species” becoming dominant not exclusively based on the objective quality of their features; their successful survival often better explained by fitness with their environment. (As examples, one could think of the videotape standards war between VHS versus Betamax in the 1970s and 1980s, and the resurgence of vinyl album sales since 2006).

The ubiquity and pervasiveness of contemporary media render them almost invisible. It is difficult to notice or remember what specific activity you are involved in using what particular function of what distinct device. Added to this must be a recognition of the growing role of machine-to-machine communications in a contemporary context of the Internet of things. Media do not just become omnipresent in our lives because we use (and like) them a lot; media beget media. All in all, I contend that the evolution of media as artifacts suggests an increasingly seamless and altogether ambient lived experience of multiple media as we navigate everyday life.

Given these circumstances, advertising pundits, professionals, and professors have been pontificating about the consequences of media everywhere, generally suggesting increased automation as advertising and brand messages are expected to flow more or less seamlessly across a world of connected devices. The solution to the dilemma of the disappearing audience tends to be offered through the promise of addressable advertising, rendering mass communication pointless as the advertiser now has to promote personal relationships with consumers who are outfitted with artifacts that afford a permanently connected, always online, and progressively mobile telecommunication presence.

Pointing out the somewhat naive, all-too-easy, and insufficiently sanitized image of media and information technologies conjured by such predictions should be the first step in deconstructing this future. As media proliferate, interoperability suffers, permanent upgrades and repairs become the norm, and the skill level required to effectively operate this complex machinery excludes rather than includes the broader populace. A problematic element beyond the permanently beta state of

media hardware and software is their planned obsolescence. Consumer electronics are not designed to last; they are made to be discarded, preferably quickly. There is not now and never will be a future blissful state of newfound stability wherein everyone—like the various life-forms in the *Star Trek* universe—knows what to do (and technology acts accordingly). In fact, the opposite seems far more likely: a forever frustrating experience of bewildering complexity.

From a creative point of view, the evolution of media as artifacts into a “media everywhere” universe is quite exhilarating. Specifically, a pervasive and ubiquitous digital media environment can inspire new forms of storytelling, combining stories and experiences within and across media in an recognition of people’s migratory, mobile, and multisited behavior. Here a distinction can be made between multimedia, crossmedia, and transmedia storytelling practices for media professionals, each of these approaches potentially coupled with participatory modes of storytelling (where the citizen-consumer comes in to contribute to one or more phases of the production process). Although these modes of storytelling, as briefly reviewed here, are not necessarily new, with the ongoing digitization of both media work and media life comes inspiring opportunities to design innovative ways to connect people, ideas, and brands.

In multimedia storytelling, the production of a story can take on many forms—spoken and written word, music, photography and video, animations, illustrations, and infographics—yet generally is produced within one specific channel (for example, a website). In journalism, this is sometimes referred to as “snowfalling” the news, a respectful reference to a comprehensive multimedia reportage titled “Snow Fall” by the *New York Times* (Branch 2012). The multichapter series on events surrounding a deadly avalanche integrated video, photos, and graphics in a natural way, with content almost seamlessly flowing across the page.

Another option for storytellers combines the potential of different media forms with the opportunity to reach and engage audiences across more than just one channel. In effect, such crossmedia storytelling takes a story and tells it in ways particular to the form best suited for the channel on which it is published. Transmedia storytelling—a term coined by Henry Jenkins—takes it one step further by outsourcing some creative agency to the media user, as the idea of a complete and finished full story is abandoned in favor of a multiplatform array of multiple stories, using different media forms, appearing in as many channels. In recognition of the creative opportunities of telling stories in these different ways, in 2016 the Cannes Lions for the first time include a Digital Craft award category, next to other relatively recent related categories such as Integrated (added in 2011), Innovation (added in 2013), and Cyber (a category refurbished in 2014).

New multimedia, crossmedia, and transmedia modes of storytelling inspire so much more than the 30-second television commercial or a magazine spread. Especially when coupled

with the cocreativity of consumers as people manipulate multiple media in a permanently connected lived experience, I would call this the aesthetic opportunity of advertising in media life: a chance to tell better stories, using multiple media in complex and exciting ways, integrating the cocreativity of consumers. In other words, taking advertising as an art form as well as a craft seriously.

### **MEDIA AS ACTIVITIES: MEDIA ARE WHAT WE DO**

Beyond media as artifacts are the many different ways people use media. Given the increasingly complex media environment, Graham Meikle and Sherman Young (2012) go as far as to observe that “[f]or many people, the media are no longer just what they watch, listen to or read—the media are now what people do” (p. 10). In terms of what people do, the range of mediated activities has become almost as multiplied and diversified as the various kinds of media artifacts used. A bird’s-eye view of how people use media in a variety of contexts around the world does suggest something universal, though: the more we use media, the less likely we are to deliberate about it. In most countries around the world, reports and studies on the amount of time people use media are more or less similar: Almost every waking moment is either directly (paging through a magazine, making a phone call, tuning in to a show on the radio, surfing to a particular website, and so on) or indirectly (having music, images, and video in the background while traversing public spaces, a computer or mobile phone in always-on mode, surrounded by technologies that capture, record, and archive our behaviors) spent with media. Yet when asked about it, people tend to forget most of their media use, mainly because they are concurrently exposed to multiple media at the same time, and most of their media use occurs combined with other everyday activities such as working, socializing, and eating.

The mundane nature of media use has additional properties beyond its concurrence and generally less-than-deliberateness. Consider the verbs deployed to describe people’s principal media activities throughout much of the (offline) 20th century: reading, listening, viewing, typing, zapping, and calling. In today’s online media environment, one has to add to this list activities: cutting, pasting, editing, forwarding, linking, liking, chatting, texting, zipping, (re)mixing, redacting, uploading (and downloading), sharing, rating, recommending, commenting, so on, so forth. In 2008 web usability consultant Jakob Nielsen coined the distinction between these two types of activities in terms of lean-back versus lean-forward media. Beyond the significance of these concepts—in articulating the embodied nature of our media use—Nielsen’s distinction marks a subtle shift in media activities from those that are primarily consumptive in nature to a range of behaviors that seem more productive, if not creative. In media life, media using equals media making, often without deliberate intent (or consent) of the user. This is not to exclusively privilege the

kind of creativity on display by those who write or edit Wikipedia entries, create and share their own videos on YouTube and Vimeo, and are otherwise engaged in such “hard” forms of creativity. This is a relatively small group compared to the vast majority of media users who have become creative in one way or another without necessarily realizing it, participating in the “soft” creativity of constructing a social reality in media different from one that is simply consumed.

Considering media as what we do opens up space for future explorations where media beget more human qualities as they are quite literally moving in closer to our most personal, intimate lives. Rather than viewing them at a distance in the living room or at a kiosk or library, today’s media are in our pockets and ever so close to our bodies. Instead of just learning through media about the privileged professionals that make up politics and business, we experience in media such profound emotions as love, wonder, hate, and desire regarding people we know—people like us. Those professionally engaged in predicting a future of advertising therefore point toward a new humanity and a focus on human experience and emotions as the Holy Grail of the profession. Advertising in this context would be expected to become part of people’s lives, building and sustaining personal relationships through human buy-in, emoting based on human needs, setting brands and consumers on an emotional journey where advertising becomes a sustained and rewarding presence in people’s lives.

Such lofty expectations of advertising as a personal partner and a force of good in peoples’ lives are not exclusive to the business. Mark Balnaves, Debra Mayrhofer, and Brian Shoemsmith (2004) poignantly predicted a “new humanism” in all media professions, considering a reconfiguration of the relationship between organizations and publics “because of corporate collapses and environmental and other disasters created by corporations [...] the rise of participatory technologies; and [...] because audiences do not want to participate in modern surveying and market evaluation techniques” (pp. 191–92). They argue how this new humanism can be considered an antidote to corporate one-size-fits-all thinking, instead favoring a more engaged, critical, and interactive approach; the authors suggest “a more spiritual and ethical way of life” (p. 200).

In the summer of 2015 the American Press Institute published the results of its survey among 10,481 alumni of 22 prominent schools of journalism and (mass) communication, the primary gateway to careers in the media. One of the most remarkable conclusions from this study was that these media professionals identified ethics as the most critical skill in their workplace, with 84% citing it as very important. There is a direct link between media collapsing into the lifeworld and media professions potentially embracing a new humanism or at least a human-centered way of working: ethics. The fundamental issue for advertising (and other media professions) in media life related to the way people use media comprises an ethical opportunity. Doing the right thing in a digital culture is of key importance where, as Danah Boyd (2010) has stated,

for most people “there is more to be gained by accepting the public default than by going out of one’s way to keep things private. And here’s where we see the shift. It used to take effort to be public. Today, it often takes effort to be private.” Advertising professionals have a chance to consider the ethics of open-ended gathering and manipulating of people’s digital shadows as their lives move online; to appreciate the ethics of permanently blurring the boundaries between independent information (generally considered to be the benchmark for quality journalism) and the sponsored experience of branded content (as in native advertising); to recognize how the integration of advertising into all aspects of life—as life gets lived in media—runs the risk of reducing any and all human experience to a branded and therefore, for all intents and purposes, fake experience.

Digital game developer Jesse Schell, in a speech at the 2010 DICE (Design Innovate Communicate Entertain) conference of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, showed a picture of a computer game player staring out his bedroom window, with the tagline: “REALITY. Worst Game Ever.”<sup>1</sup> Schell considered how people’s experience of reality as somehow fake or unreal extends to all kinds of everyday experiences in media life: Watching television has become a daily ritual of zapping from one “reality” genre to another, going to the grocery store one finds aisle upon aisle featuring “genuine” products (variously labeled as organic or otherwise formally branded as ecofriendly), frequenting fast-food places has become a pilgrimage to acquire “real” food (featuring fresh fruit and vegetables, certified meats, without preservatives or additives); and politicians and artists alike tend to be judged on their level of “authenticity.” To explain this sudden rush to reality, Schell (2010) suggests that “all this virtual stuff that has been creeping up to us [...] has really cut us off from nature [...] We live in a bubble of fake bullshit, and we have this hunger to get to anything that’s real.”

The hunger for reality beyond the perceived fakeness of a comprehensively branded and mediatized existence can perhaps never be satisfied. In this context we have to critically consider the discovery of new humanism and the human experience by media professionals in general and advertisers in particular. To what extent are we contributing to rendering reality, ourselves, and each other to something unreal and altogether fake when unreflectively endorsing and promoting products, services, and experiences in it? An ethical challenge would be to prevent a media life where each and every person, as a media user, becomes a product. To take a stand against a media life so fused with infinite branding experiences that it becomes a consuming life, driven by the formula, in the memorable words of Zygmunt Bauman (2007), “No consumer unless a commodity” (p. 12). Let us turn the ethical challenge into an opportunity—a chance for advertising practice as well as research to dedicate itself to promoting a better world,

supporting socially responsible corporate governance, and advocating for consumer rights and sovereignty.

The ethical dimension of advertising in media life relates primarily to the totality of the human experience as a potential branding (and branded) experience. This raises a question about the social context and arrangement in which advertising functions.

### **MEDIA AS ARRANGEMENTS: WE LIVE IN MEDIA**

In 2006 *Time* magazine declared all of us—“YOU”—as its annual Person of the Year, featuring a front cover with a YouTube screen functioning as a mirror. The person holding the magazine would be looking at himself or herself. The centrality of ourselves as having to take responsibility for reconstructing the world and our lives in it through (the way we use) media cannot be underestimated. In her work, José van Dijck (2013) highlights the conflation of self-expression, (mass) self-communication, and self-promotion at work in social media, as the majority of our time in media gets spent with ourselves (and one another) directly or indirectly on social platforms such as Facebook, WeChat, and Google: “After all, social media are not neutral stages of self-performance—they are the very tools for shaping identities” (p. 213).

On one hand, it indeed seems as if people’s private media work in media life revolves primarily around identity work. The number of digital selves proliferate—from medical dossiers to online registration databases, from voluntary customer card services to the archives of telecom providers, from omnipresent scanners, monitors, and cameras to the selfie and location check-in phenomenon so common in mobile media. A crucial contemporary aspect of the relationship between self and social identity is the skillful maintenance of multiple selves existing in the world, each of which can have a profound impact on who we (think we) are. Such identity work may inspire incessant self-disciplining in an attempt to fit in everywhere. By this account, in a society of multiplied selves media are all-powerful as agents of oppressive blandness and self-similar collectivity. At the same time, media can provide a liberating experience, lifting the self up from oppressive regimes of external control, instead offering at least some modicum of individual agency—as exemplified by one’s mastery over the privacy settings of online social networking websites or through manipulating location-sharing settings on a smartphone. Of course, such mastery tends to remain confined to corporately controlled online (and offline) enclaves. One element of media as a social arrangement refers to the distinct nature of individuals as they move through the world. The relationships with others (and with the world at large) in such a scenario are all filtered through the interfaces, algorithms, software settings, and hardware specifications of the “personal information space” we create around ourselves. This space is what Peter Sloterdijk (2004) calls a *mediasphere*, forming an invisible electronic shell around us whereby our entire

experience of others becomes mediated. Sloterdijk seems convinced life in a bubble of media leaves people blind to coexistence.

Beyond the individual, our experience of the social in media life begets a distinct mediated character—a character that is altogether confusing and complicated yet always and ostensibly about connection and connectivity. Whether it is the uncanny experience of attending a concert or marriage at which more people seem to be recording the event than in fact witnessing it, or simply by trying to articulate a more or less coherent sense of self, media are inextricably linked, enmeshed, and involved with social reality. In this process, media come to arrange such realities: adding perspectives and dimensions (while obfuscating others), introducing others into (and excluding others from) events without necessarily being copresent, enabling participation in otherwise (or formerly) utilitarian experiences of life. All such experiences are ultimately about connection: recording a slice of life to impart it to others, uploading a preferred self to seek recognition from others, witnessing and being witnessed by others. Perhaps our personal information space is not so much blind to coexistence but rather overstimulated by it?

It needs to be emphasized, once more, how difficult it is for individuals to not just be able to manipulate and control their media environment but also to understand and oversee the (potential) implications of their media use. Whether it is relatively benign behavior such as choosing to download a torrent file or streaming a movie, or involves one’s active participation in the great social movements of our time, such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Together, it is impossible to imagine these occurrences without the infrastructural role personal, networked, and mobile media play in providing the contours of such events.

Advertising tends to see its role in this at once deeply individual and complicatedly social arrangement as one to bring back order to the chaotic, hyperfragmented public-private arena. The industry does so by collectively framing citizens as having become unruly consumers forming unpredictable masses (for advertisers) who can only be “tamed” through the professional dissection of big data by qualified market researchers in conjunction with precisely targeted messages and customized brand experiences concocted by crackerjack creative teams. Market researchers, futurists, and industry experts predict that interactivity through multiple technologies and devices will change how consumers interact with marketers and advertisers, shifting the focus toward permission-based advertising, and capitalizing on opportunities when consumers invite brands to participate in their everyday lives.

The industry’s framing of this newly empowered consumer is not without problems. Joseph Turow (2005), for example, considers the construction of 21st-century media users by marketers, advertisers, and public relations consultants as chaotic, self-concerned, and willingly contributing to a pervasive personal information economy as only serving an emerging

strategic logic of mainstream marketing and media organizations “to present their activities not as privacy invasion but as two-way customer relationships, not as commercial intrusion but as pinpoint selling help for frenetic consumers in a troubling world” (p. 120). The industry perspective allows marketers to both aim at curbing the consumer multitude into controllable segments, lifestyle groups, and subcultures, as well as interacting with consumers as active agents. The primary function of advertising and marketing in this arrangement becomes all about reducing the advertisers’ anxieties, lack of knowledge, and imagination regarding the consumer.

The important issue here is not whether the advertising industry is still useful at all in enhancing the consumer experience—although that surely must be part of the debate industry and the academy should have. The way media fit into all aspects of our lives—making any kind of life outside of media the object of imagination and illusion rather than a reality one can work with—should raise the stakes for the way advertising can see and position itself in the world. Media professions in general and advertising in particular have a profound role to play in media life, if only because these professionals can be considered to be better skilled at living their lives in media. Such great communication power comes with great responsibility. Should the advertising of the future still be all about the more or less effective delivery of brand messages to an audience of (potential) consumers? Quite possibly it can make a real difference in the working lives of consumers, for instance, by cajoling companies and corporations toward socially responsible practices, by supporting and representing local, national, and international nongovernmental organizations as they do the work and go to places where institutional structures are less than effective, by promoting a *better* life rather than (just) a *consuming* life.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

On March 11, 2012, Linds Redding, a New Zealand-based art director who worked at BBDO and Saatchi and Saatchi, used his personal blog to post a reflection on his working life and career in advertising. What made his words all the more poignant was the fact that the 52-year-old died later that year from inoperable esophageal cancer. I quote at length from his powerful reflection on a lifelong career in advertising as it relates to the aesthetic, ethical, and socially responsible challenges I outlined in this article:

[D]uring the nineties technology overran, and transformed the creative industry like it did most others. Exciting new tools. Endless new possibilities. Pressing new deadlines. . . At first it was a great luxury. We could cover so much more ground. Explore all the angles. . . Or as the bean counters upstairs quickly realized, we could just do three times as many jobs in the same amount of time, and make them three times as much money. . . generally standards plummeted. . . research was the new god. . . And here’s the thing. It

turns out I didn’t actually like my old life nearly as much as I thought I did. . . What do I think? I think you’re all fucking mad. Deranged. So disengaged from reality it’s not even funny. It’s a fucking TV commercial. Nobody give a shit. This has come as quite a shock I can tell you. I think, I’ve come to the conclusion that the whole thing was a bit of a con. A scam. An elaborate hoax.

The key to understand Redding’s lament is what he calls the ongoing hybridization of the arts and business: the need to create great work and make money with it at the same time. In terms of the management and organization of work, media companies and careers can be considered quite special, partly because of this delicate and contested balance between the creative autonomy of culture creators and the instrumental management of commercial enterprises. Zygmunt Bauman (2005) considers the relationship between commerce and culture a sibling rivalry, as “management’s plot against the endemic freedom of culture is a perpetual *casus belli*. On the other hand, culture creators need managers if they wish. . . to be seen, heard, and listened to, and to stand a chance of seeing their task/project through to completion” (p. 55).

My argument here, about the future of advertising as media work, is that it has a choice to use the contemporary challenges as opportunities to embrace a more critical, ethical, and socially responsible role in this world. Clearly, its traditional role as cultural intermediary has become somewhat obsolete, just as much as the classical gatekeeping role of professional journalism is waning. In an interview with Simon Goodley of *The Guardian* newspaper of March 3, 2015, Saatchi and Saatchi’s executive chairman, Kevin Roberts, proclaimed how “Marketing is dead. Strategy is dead. Management is dead.” Instead, Roberts is quoted as claiming that the advertising business is now all about creating a movement of people with shared values—people who actually love their brands. Other news media featured similar interviews with similar profound yet meaningless quotes at the time of Roberts’s ascendancy to the chief position at the renowned agency. What all those media overlooked or bypassed in great haste, is Roberts’s conviction that the future of the global economy lies in inclusive capitalism—something he mentions in every interview and in his lectures at universities around the world.

Inclusive capitalism is a way of thinking about capitalism that is primarily focused on addressing the world’s poverty through the provision and sale of goods and services specifically to low-income people in a targeted attempt to improve their lives. As Prahalad and Hammond (2002) have argued, inclusive capitalism depends on “the willingness of big, multinational companies to enter and invest in the world’s poorest markets. By stimulating commerce and development at the bottom of the economic pyramid, MNCs could radically improve the lives of billions of people and help bring into being a more stable, less dangerous world” (p. 4).

It is less than inspiring to read advertising professionals wax unreflectively about newly empowered consumers, precisely

targeted campaigns, or branded life experiences. I am invigorated by industry leaders embracing a more socially responsible, ethical, and creative role to play in the world today. The majority of products and services promoted and sold to us through advertising forever remain unquestioned. To some extent that responsibility in our society has been outsourced to journalists and documentary filmmakers. This should not mean, however, that advertising professionals and scholars are not accountable for their work. When we study the effectiveness and impact of brand messages, it matters what these brands stand for and whether they contribute to a better, more just world.

If we chose to ignore that part of our work as researchers, we are implicated in the ongoing commodification of life's experiences. If we fail to appreciate how the men and women in advertising try to make it work—and specifically how we can contribute to a better understanding of how they *could* make it work—it becomes more difficult to articulate advertising with aesthetics, ethics, and social responsibility. The future of advertising is neither totally technological nor is it a new humanism. It is an ethical opportunity to do beautiful work that contributes to a better life.

## NOTE

1. Image uncredited. Retrieved from <http://i.imgur.com/P59m9.png>.

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