*Cynthia B. Meyers*

# Advertisers and American Broadcasting: From Institutional Sponsorship to the Creative Revolution

American broadcasting, unique among media industries, relied on sponsors and their ad agencies for program content from the 1920s through the 1950s. Some sponsors broadcast educational or culturally uplifting programs to burnish their corporate images. By the mid-1960s, however, commercial broadcasting had transformed, and advertisers could only buy interstitial minutes for interrupting commercials, during which they wooed cynical consumers with entertaining soft-sell appeals. The midcentury shifts in institutional power in US broadcasting among corporate sponsors, advertising agencies, and radio/television networks reflected a fundamental shift in beliefs about how to use broadcasting as an advertising medium.

**Keywords:** advertising, broadcasting, radio, television, sponsorship, commercials

For its first six decades or so the American broadcasting industry relied entirely on advertising revenue, unlike other forms of twentieth-century mass media, such as newspapers, magazines, and movies, which all drew revenue from additional sources such as subscriptions and ticket sales. This dependence made radio and, subsequently, television perhaps the most commercial of American media industries. In its first decades, critics of American commercial broadcasting decried the influence of advertisers on program content and denigrated radio and television programs as "tatters of jive and boogie-woogie."[1] During the mid-1940s "revolt against radio," a wide range of critics—educators, consumer groups, women's clubs, federal regulators—blamed broadcasting's

[1] Lee De Forest, quoted in "The Revolt against Radio," *Fortune*, Mar. 1947, 101.

*Business History Review*, 2021: page 1 of 35. doi:10.1017/S0007680521000222
 ISSN 0007-6805; 2044-768X (Web).

overcommercialism for having ruined its potential as a medium of education, cultural uplift, or, at the very least, good taste.[2] Defending commercial broadcasting as a form of popular culture, one advertising executive complained that "the critics of commercial radio are critics not of art, not of intrinsic goodness, but of the national taste."[3] Meanwhile, industry boosters promoted broadcast advertising as a "bulwark" of a "free" broadcasting system.[4] Commercialism, in their view, was a vital engine of democracy rather than a sign of its corruption. As one advertising executive put it, broadcasting'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."[5]

By their contemporaries, the role of advertisers (and their advertising agencies) in broadcasting was either celebrated or vilified; scholars writing about the period have routinely joined in the latter project. I would like to provide a more nuanced examination of this role. If we want to understand how and why American commercial broadcasting evolved we need to understand broadcast advertisers and their advertising agencies' rationales, assumptions, beliefs, and practices in all their frequently contested complexity. The key issue for advertisers was how to use radio, and then television, as an advertising medium; while boosters may have focused on what they believed worked, and the critics on what was they believed was inappropriate, underlying all the debates over broadcast advertising were assumptions about advertising's function, its impact on audiences, and the power of media effects. A turning point in these debates took place during the shift from what I call the "single-sponsorship era" of radio and television, from roughly the late 1920s into the 1950s, to what most historians call the "network era" of television in the early 1960s. By the mid-1960s, prerecorded programs had replaced live broadcasts during prime time; three national networks had replaced ad agencies as the buyers and schedulers of programs; and independent producers and major film studios had replaced ad agencies as the producers of programs, while those agencies were relegated to the production of interstitial commercials and the purchase of airtime. Episodic series, with continuing characters and storylines, supplanted variety shows and anthology programs as the dominant broadcast format. Meanwhile, the advertising industry itself

[2] Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935–1947* (Berkeley, 2004); Victor Pickard, *America's Battle for Media Democracy* (New York, 2014).

[3] Carroll Carroll, quoted in "Revolt against Radio," 172.

[4] Niles Trammell, "We Should Not Be Complacent," *Broadcasting*, 24 Oct. 1946, 20.

[5] Robert Cowell, quoted in John Gray Peatman, ed., *Radio and Business: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Radio and Business*, (New York: City College of New York, 1945), 31.

changed dramatically during the 1960s in what is now known as the "Creative Revolution." The "hard sell" of repetitive, product-centered advertising listing "reasons why" to buy was replaced by high-concept, user-centered "soft sell" strategies, employing humor and emotional appeals in briefer, more succinct, and visually less cluttered ads.[6] Advertisers shifted from providing product information to creating popular culture—ads that functioned as brief, highly produced emotional touchstones designed to move or amuse cynical consumers.

These simultaneous dramatic changes in both the broadcasting and advertising industries at midcentury were not coincidental. To understand them we must first understand something that has been largely forgotten: the foundational assumptions underlying the use of "single sponsorship" as the primary form of broadcast advertising. In what follows, after a review of pre-television broadcast historiography, I will explore these assumptions through a case study of a specific type of broadcast sponsor: the "institutional" or "corporate image" advertiser. Although institutional advertisers were only one type of broadcast advertiser, they are particularly significant in the pre-network era because they were the most forthright in offering sponsored programming they believed served the public interest—which was, according to federal regulators, broadcasting's mandate.

Contemporary, and scholarly, criticism of these sponsors is easily found; I would like to explore the rationales underlying these advertising strategies. Creative workers, such as writers and performers, have famously chafed under the constraints of such sponsors' advertising goals and content control.[7] Scholars have focused on the political and ideological goals of institutional sponsors' program content—a very rich vein to mine.[8] I believe we can understand this moment in broadcast history better if we take account of such sponsors' beliefs in institutional

[6] Histories of the advertising industry include Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, 1985); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994); Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore, 1998); Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York, 1983); Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion* (New York, 1984); and Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York, 1984).

[7] Rod Serling's complaints can be found in James Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948–1961* (Baltimore, 2007), 205; and Erik Barnouw, *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate* (New York, 1978), 50–51. See also Catherine L. Fisk, *Writing for Hire: Unions, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

[8] William Bird, *"Better Living": Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935–55* (Evanston, IL, 1999); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, "Creating a Favorable Business Climate: Corporations and Radio Broadcasting, 1934 to 1954," *Business History Review* 73, no. 2 (1999): 221–55; Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York, 2010).

programs as *advertising* before the turning point in the mid-1960s drastically altered them. I will do so using material from a private archive heretofore rarely accessible to scholars at the advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO), as well as the David Susskind papers, illuminating the perspectives of a particular agency and its client, the Armstrong Cork Company, as they oversaw the live television docudrama *Armstrong Circle Theatre* (1950–1963). I will then go on to show how, by 1963, those beliefs were challenged by emerging strategies for using television as an advertising medium. The commercial replaced the program as the primary vehicle for an advertiser's communication with its public, and programs, rather than reflect an advertiser's commitment to the public interest, became the anodyne backdrop for visually and aurally stimulating commercials produced by advertising "creatives."

## Single Sponsorship in the "Golden Age" of Radio: 1920s–1940s

American broadcasting's singular reliance on advertising revenue was not inevitable.[9] Susan Douglas, Susan Smulyan, Robert McChesney, and Kathy Newman each document early resistance to radio's commercialization, identifying different turning points for the triumph of commercial broadcasting over alternative models. Michele Hilmes argues that there was no one single moment of decline into commercialism; rather, radio was commercial from its "earliest moments."[10] A variety of factors led to the advertising-supported business model. Thomas Streeter notes that the political climate in the United States was hostile to tax-supported programming, which was perceived as an improper assumption of state power over media and a violation of the First Amendment.[11] Although patent-holders and manufacturers could profit from selling radio equipment, broadcasters could not charge audiences admission fees to broadcast programs, as the signals were

[9] Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York, 2011).

[10] Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922* (Baltimore, 1987); Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920–34* (Washington, DC, 1994); Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928–35* (New York, 1993); and Newman, *Radio Active*; Michele Hilmes, "Beating the Networks at Their Own Game: The Hollywood/ Ad Agency Alliance of the 1930s" (unpublished paper presented at Society for Cinema Studies conference, 1995), 2. See also Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis, 1997); Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, 1933–53* (New York, 1968); and Clifford Doerksen, *American Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the Jazz Age* (Philadelphia, 2005).

[11] Thomas Streeter, *Selling the Air: A Critique of the Policy of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States* (Chicago, 1996).

available to anyone with a receiver. Seeking a way to monetize its radio patents, American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T) began offering "toll broadcasting" in 1921. Like a telephone booth of the air, AT&T's radio station WEAF sold airtime on its transmitter to businesses for presenting promotional "selling talks"—charging the sender, not the receiver of the message.[12] However, concerns that audiences would reject "direct advertising" on the air led many, including then secretary of state Herbert Hoover, to encourage businesses such as department stores to use radio for "indirect advertising" instead, that is, as a promotional or public relations medium.[13] To attract audiences, some companies canceled the "selling talks" and hired performers to fill their rented airtime with entertainment, often naming the programs after their products, including *The Ipana Troubadours* (1923–1934), *The Eveready Hour* (1923–1930), and *The Clicquot Club Eskimos* (1923–1936). Each advertiser hoped that this "free" entertainment would inspire audiences to feel "gratitude" and "good will" and in turn to buy its products.[14] Once audience demand was evident, these advertisers sought to reach listeners beyond the range of a local broadcast signal by linking stations together for simultaneous transmission. And so, by 1923 the foundations of American commercial network broadcasting were laid: an advertiser-controlled program was transmitted over distance by telephone landlines to multiple stations, having been produced in broadcast station facilities by an advertising agency hired by the advertiser.[15] The economies of scale involved presented strong incentives to individual stations to join networks of stations linked by landlines, and national advertisers realized that radio networking allowed them to penetrate multiple markets on a scale hitherto unseen in the print media, even by national magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post*.[16]

During the Depression, while other media industries suffered revenue losses, spending on radio advertising increased, from $18 million in 1929 to $165 million in 1937.[17] But in broadcasting, unlike in print media, advertisers controlled the content through the practice of single

[12] William Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEAF Experiment, 1922–26* (Cambridge, MA, 1946), 152.

[13] Herbert Hoover, "Opening Address," Recommendations for the Regulation of Radio Adopted by the Third National Radio Conference, 6 Oct. 1924, 4; Ronald Arcenaux, "Department Stores and the Origins of American Broadcasting, 1910–1931" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2007).

[14] Edgar H. Felix, "Broadcasting's Place in the Advertising Spectrum," *Advertising & Selling*, 15 Dec. 1926, 19.

[15] Laurence Bergreen, *Look Now, Pay Later: The Rise of Network Broadcasting* (Garden City, NY, 1980), 30; Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 79.

[16] Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 38; "Reminiscences of Frank Atkinson Arnold: oral history, 1951," in Radio pioneers project, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 8.

[17] Warren Dygert, *Radio as an Advertising Medium* (New York, 1939), 7.

sponsorship. The national broadcast networks, National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), simply rented each block of airtime to a single advertiser, which was then responsible for the programming. As one advertising executive put it in 1932, "When radio began the broadcasting companies couldn't afford to pay for their entertainment. . . . They said to the large national advertiser, 'If you will put on a fine singer and a fine orchestra and a fine quartet, why, we will let you mention the name of your company.'"[18] But this collapsed the traditional divide in media between editorial content, controlled by the publisher, and advertising, controlled by the advertiser. The broadcasters, both local stations and national networks, although accountable to federal regulators for serving the public interest, essentially abdicated program control to advertisers. And advertisers, lacking expertise in audience attraction strategies, usually hired their advertising agencies to oversee or produce the programming.[19] Hence, radio programs were, as one advertising executive put it, "the product of the advertiser and his agent, and not the product of the networks."[20]

The Depression spurred some hitherto reluctant advertisers to try program sponsorship. The practice of naming the program after the brand was, it was assumed, the most effective way to ensure "sponsor identification," or audience awareness of the sponsor's brand, with the hope that listeners' gratitude would extend to their purchasing decisions and so was practiced by tobacco companies (*The Lucky Strike Hour*, 1928–1934); automobile companies (*The Ford Sunday Evening Hour*, 1934–1942); and food manufacturers (*Kraft Music Hall*, 1935–1949). Companies that manufactured multiple brands often sponsored multiple programs, each identified with one brand. For example, General Foods sponsored *The Maxwell House Show Boat* (1932–1937), *We, the People* (1936–1942), and *The Jell-O Program with Jack Benny* (1934–1944), among many other programs.[21]

Although radio advertising boosters celebrated the arrival of "big business" into "show business," most advertisers distrusted the "show business."[22] They relied on their advertising agencies to ensure that

[18] Howard Angus, "The Importance of Stars in Your Radio Program," *Broadcast Advertising*, Feb. 1932, 26.

[19] Cynthia B. Meyers, *A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio* (New York, 2014).

[20] Leonard T. Bush to Niles Trammell, 6 Sept. 1939, box 67, folder 37, NBC Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison (hereafter, WHS).

[21] Peter Kovacs, "Big Tobacco and Broadcasting, 1923–60: An Interdisciplinary History" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2017); Jim Cox, *Sold on Radio: Advertisers in the Golden Age of Broadcasting* (Jefferson, NC, 2008).

[22] Roy Durstine, "When Advertising Turns to Showmanship," *Broadcast Advertising*, 15 June 1938, 19.

the entertainment (the "showmanship") fulfilled the advertising goals (the "salesmanship").[23] Despite some resistance among agencies loyal to print media, many agencies leapt at the opportunity to generate more media commissions by overseeing and producing sponsored radio programs for their clients.[24] Agencies applied specific theories of advertising to the programs they produced for sponsors. For example, Blackett-Sample-Hummert (B-S-H) practiced a form of "hard sell" advertising that emphasized product information, repetition, and the product's ability to solve problems.[25] B-S-H applied those strategies to the dozens of daytime serials it produced for companies such as Procter & Gamble and General Mills (e.g., *Ma Perkins*, *Stella Dallas*, *Just Plain Bill*). Young & Rubicam (Y&R), in contrast, practiced the "soft sell," entertaining audiences rather than annoying them with product information. They disarmingly satirized hard-sell advertising during comedy shows and slid the brand name slyly into the program text, as in comedian Jack Benny's opening line, "Jell-O again, this is Jack Benny," for his program sponsored by General Foods.[26] J. Walter Thompson (JWT) mastered the celebrity association strategy on radio. Believing that stars were the most efficient means of attracting audiences, JWT featured guest stars from Hollywood on *Lux Radio Theatre* (1934–1955) and a variety of musical and comedy guest stars on *Kraft Music Hall* (1933–1949).[27]

Yet single sponsorship had drawbacks. Some argued that radio was "selling its editorial pages" by collapsing the distinction between advertising and editorial content.[28] Single sponsorship prevented broadcasters from controlling their schedule: advertisers were granted a "time franchise" and programmed it according to their own interests regardless of adjacent programs, audience demand, or competing networks. As an NBC executive noted, it was not clear "who owns the time and

[23] "The program or commercial broadcast should . . . be developed and supervised, not by outsiders, but by an advertiser's own agency with a thorough understanding of sales and advertising objectives." Memo, BBDO Radio Department, 1 May 1932, BBDO Records, New York. (Note: BBDO-New York allowed me access to their uncatalogued private records in 2014 but they have since donated these materials to Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.)

[24] Agencies usually earned a 15 percent commission on the price of media space. This commission was putatively charged to the media outlet. For example, if the newspaper charged $100 for ad space to an advertiser, the agency "billed" the advertiser $100 but only forwarded $85 to the publisher. Agency sizes were measured by the amount of annual "billings" to media outlets. On radio, agencies not only earned a commission on airtime but also usually charged a percentage of talent and production costs as well.

[25] Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 158.

[26] Meyers, *Word from Our Sponsor*, 167.

[27] Meyers, *Word from Our Sponsor*, 208–24.

[28] Advertising Agency Executive, "When Will Radio Quit Selling Its 'Editorial Pages'?" *Advertising & Selling*, 22 July 1931, 17–18. (Note: the original article was bylined "An Advertising Agency Executive.")

who has a better right to say what is to be done with it."[29] Meanwhile, the advertiser was limited to reaching only the audiences that tuned into its program. While General Foods hoped that audiences would buy Jell-O dessert because they enjoyed the comedy of Jack Benny, General Foods could not convey the merits of Jell-O to the audiences of other programs. Moreover, in closely identifying Jell-O and Jack Benny, General Foods made the product's reputation vulnerable to the star's; Benny's humor might so offend some listeners as to drive them to the consumption of rival desserts. By the late 1940s, this fear of offending audiences and losing sales would motivate the blacklisting of certain broadcast performers and writers.[30]

By the mid-1940s, sponsor identification was well accepted as an effective way to sell. Despite, or because of, World War II and the excess profits tax, which allowed advertisers to deduct advertising expenses even though few consumer products were available, the radio industry boomed.[31] Networks enjoyed increasing revenues from advertisers outbidding one another for airtime. Program production had shifted from New York to Hollywood in order to better access high-powered star talent.[32] However, complaints about advertiser control of programming had continued throughout the radio era. Sponsors, complained some, "tramp with hobnailed shoes over the gossamer fabric of the entertainment."[33] Some sponsors, having footed the bill for both the airtime and the talent, expected to have a say in program details; as one observer reported, "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!'"[34] The radio sponsor appeared as a blustering, controlling figure in Hollywood movies such as *A Letter from Three Wives* (1949) and *The Hucksters* (1947).[35] Critics blamed sponsors and ad agencies for ruining what they believed should have been a source of education and cultural

[29] Donald S. Shaw, "The Policy Racket in Radio," *Advertising & Selling*, 12 Aug. 1937, 31, 63.

[30] "How to Keep the Reds off the Air—Sanely," *Sponsor*, 5 Nov. 1951, 86. For more, see Cynthia B. Meyers, "Inside a Broadcasting Blacklist: *Kraft Television Theatre*, 1951–55," *Journal of American History* 105, no. 3 (2018): 589–616.

[31] Gerd Horton, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley, 2002); Frank Fox, *Madison Avenue Goes to War* (Provo, UT, 1975); Hilmes, *Radio Voices*.

[32] Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana, IL, 1990), 49–74.

[33] Dygert, *Radio*, 14.

[34] Staff Meeting Minutes, 2 Feb. 1932, 4, J. Walter Thompson Records, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History, Duke University (hereafter, Hartman Center).

[35] Alan Havig, "Frederic Wakeman's *The Hucksters* and the Postwar Debate over Commercial Radio," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 28, no. 2 (1984): 187–99; Newman, *Radio Active*, 169–74.

uplift, instead promoting blandness, censorship, and blacklisting.[36] In 1947 *Fortune* magazine documented a "revolt against radio," blaming sponsors for "corny, strident, boresome, florid, inane, repetitive, irritating, offensive, moronic, adolescent, or nauseating" programming.[37] Radio and advertising industry figures vociferously defended radio commercialism, citing studies showing audiences were less critical of broadcast advertising than radio's critics.[38]

The struggles over the appropriate usage of the public airwaves resurged in the postwar period.[39] The *FCC Report on Chain Broadcasting* of 1941 had accused RCA of monopolistic practices by running two networks, NBC Red and NBC Blue, simultaneously. The FCC's decision not to renew the license of any station affiliated with any network owned by a company that owned more than one network forced NBC to sell off its less profitable network, NBC Blue, which was renamed American Broadcasting Company (ABC).[40] The subsequent 1946 FCC report, known as the Blue Book, reiterated many critics' concerns that there were not enough public-service programs and that advertising "excesses" needed to be eliminated or reduced.[41] Defenders reacted by redefining "public service" as whatever commercial broadcasters were doing, as when an NBC executive claimed, "A comedian lifts people, gets them out of the dumps. I think that is a public service program."[42]

Although 94 percent of American households owned radios by 1948, and national network radio advertising revenues totaled $210 million, the dominance of network radio as a national advertising medium eroded rapidly shortly afterward.[43] National networks had captured 46 percent of all radio advertising revenues in 1945; this figure had slid to only 25 percent by 1952.[44] By the beginning of the 1960s, most radio stations had disaffiliated from networks and had shifted to cheaper programming—radio programming became dominated by "formats"

[36] See David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (New York, 2011); Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station*, 192–218; William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Champaign, IL, 1992), 93–112; and Barnouw, *The Sponsor*.

[37] "Revolt against Radio," 101.

[38] Herta Herzog and Marion Harper Jr., "The Anatomy of the Radio Commercial," *Advertising & Selling,* July 1948, 69; Charles Hull Wolfe, *Modern Radio Advertising* (New York, 1949), 602.

[39] Pickard, *America's Battle*.

[40] "Blue Network Sold to Former Ad Man Edward J. Noble for $8,000,000," *Printers' Ink*, 6 Aug. 1943, 33.

[41] Federal Communications Commission, *Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licenses* (Washington, DC, 1946).

[42] Philips Carlin, quoted in Peatman, *Radio and Business*, 25.

[43] Christopher Sterling and John Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting* (Belmont, CA, 1978), 533, 516.

[44] Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 516.

based on categories of recorded music.[45] Radio's centrality in American popular culture was rapidly eclipsed by television, the rise of which, according to Hilmes, resulted in radio's role as the foundational electronic medium being "thoroughly forgotten."[46]

## Single Sponsorship in the "Golden Age" of Television: The 1950s

In retrospect, television's rise to dominance as the central entertainment and mass advertising medium seems inevitable, but it took many in the industry during the 1940s by surprise. A JWT executive claimed 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."[47] While television's ascendance was rapid, it was not immediate. Fewer than 1 percent of households had a television receiver in 1948; by 1952, that figure had risen to 34 percent, and by 1954 to 55 percent.[48] As William Boddy, James Baughman, and Christopher Sterling and John Kittross document, the transition was complex, contested, and fraught.[49] The technical and regulatory issues included struggles over spectrum allocation and the addition of UHF to the existing VHF standard; determining standards for station licensing and color television technology; the challenges of live broadcasting; content regulation; and the development of electronic recording (videotape).[50] But underlying those issues was the question of how to make television into a profitable business. And at its advent, the answer was unclear. Radio program production required only talent, scripts, and microphones; television production required far more labor, rehearsal, and equipment: sets, lights, costumes, and cameras, all of which increased broadcast

[45] Alex Russo, "Radio in the Television Era," in *A Companion to the History of American Broadcasting*, ed. Aniko Bodroghkozy (Hoboken, NJ, 2018), 135–52; Eric Rothenbuhler and Tom McCourt, "Radio Redefines Itself, 1947–1962," in *Radio Reader*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York, 2002), 367–87.

[46] Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, xiv.

[47] Memo from Carroll Carroll to Danny Danker et al., 28 Apr. 1944, Carroll Carroll Papers, Hartman Center.

[48] Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 535.

[49] Boddy, *Fifties Television*; Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station*; Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 248–312.

[50] Bergreen, *Look Now, Pay Later*; Susan Murray, *Bright Signals: A History of Color Television* (Durham, NC, 2018); Deborah Jaramillo, *The Television Code: Regulating the Screen to Safeguard the Industry* (Austin, TX, 2018); J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation under Television* (New York, 1990); Michael Z. Newman, *Video Revolutions: On the History of a Medium* (New York, 2014).

production costs tenfold.[51] Although the networks were poised to seize greater programming control, they sought to charge television's higher production costs to sponsors, whose ad agencies faced financial losses overseeing television programming as long as their compensation was limited to commissions.[52] Meanwhile, both agencies and sponsors, though eager to avoid increased costs, balked at any diminution of their program control. The early 1950s, then, was a transitional period during which the television and advertising industries wrestled over how to change radio-based practices to fit the business needs of television.[53] One alternative to single sponsorship was the "magazine concept": the networks, like magazine editors, would select the programming and then would sell interstitial airtime to advertisers, like ad pages in a magazine scattered among articles.[54] Advertisers would then be able to reach various audiences at various times, extending their reach; they might avoid dangerously close association with one program or star; and networks could shape the broadcast schedule to serve audiences overall rather than the narrower interests of competing advertisers. More important, more advertisers would be able to advertise on television at a lower cost, no longer being solely responsible for the financing of an expensive program. Others opposed this plan on the grounds that broadcast advertising depended on a tight association between a program and the sponsor. Ads for different products during one program would, according to one advertising executive, so confuse the audiences that they "could not tell what product to buy!"[55] But it was immediately clear that television's exponentially higher production costs made single sponsorship financially unfeasible for many advertisers. Consequently, at the advent of the television era, the networks moved to gain program and schedule control.[56] Program packagers and Hollywood studios began replacing

[51] Kenneth Michael Mashon, "NBC, J. Walter Thompson, and the Evolution of Prime-Time Television Programming and Sponsorship, 1946–1958" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1996), 84.

[52] Memo from Tax Cumings to Ben Duffy, 23 Aug. 1949, box 76, folder "GE," Bruce Barton Papers, WHS (hereafter, Barton papers).

[53] Mashon, "NBC"; Randall Lee Vogt, "The Rise of an American Television Model: Network Scheduling, Production, and Sponsorship of Programs from 1948–1959" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1993).

[54] Cynthia B. Meyers, "The Problems with Sponsorship in Broadcasting, 1930s–50s: Perspectives from the Advertising Industry," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 3 (2011): 355–72.

[55] Ned Midgley, *The Advertising and Business Side of Radio* (New York, 1948), 95.

[56] Mashon, "NBC"; William Boddy, "Operation Frontal Lobes versus the Living Room Toy: The Battle over Programme Control in Early Television," *Media, Culture and Society* 9, no. 3 (1987): 347–68.

advertising agencies as program suppliers to broadcasters.[57] To spread out program costs, networks began moving toward the magazine concept, selling "participating" sponsorship, when more than one advertiser sponsored the program, and "alternating" sponsorship, when two advertisers alternated weeks. Meanwhile, a number of advertisers, and some ad agencies, held on to their belief in sponsorship and the primacy of the advertiser's role in programming.

The early years of television were in part a struggle between institutional (or corporate-image) advertisers and consumer product advertisers.[58] The consumer product companies, such as Procter & Gamble, sought to reshape broadcasting into a more efficient, adaptable platform for marketing specific products, while the institutional advertisers, like US Steel, wanted to continue sponsoring culturally uplifting programs, such as classical music and dramas with serious themes, to prove their commitment to the public good and to align their company with values such as technological innovation, Americanism, or high art. Such advertisers could employ national stars of stage, music, and screen to associate with themselves the highbrow culture they made available to mass audiences.[59] Roland Marchand explains that many large firms turned to institutional advertising in order to "humanize" themselves, hoping to create a "corporate soul" and build a form of "social legitimacy."[60] As Anna McCarthy notes, institutional advertising was "a kind of indirect political speech that sought to locate corporate interests on a moral plane that transcended the market, rendering them equivalent to a public good."[61] Institutional advertising campaigns often overlapped with various other public relations efforts: worker education and corporate welfare, industrial films, world's fairs, and arts sponsorship.[62] Institutional advertising was also often openly didactic—demonstrating a manufacturing process, explaining research agendas—as in BBDO's segment, "News from the Wonderful World of Chemistry," during *Cavalcade of America*.[63] Some have pointed out the political rather than commercial goals of institutional advertising. William L. Bird argues that in the 1930s

[57] Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin, TX, 1994).

[58] Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 159, 162.

[59] Merlin Aylesworth to Alfred Sloan, 21 Dec. 1934, box 27, folder 28, NBC Records, WHS.

[60] Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley, 1998), 167, 170, 9.

[61] McCarthy, *Citizen Machine*, 32.

[62] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*; Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC, 2011); L. L. Golden, *Only by Public Consent: American Corporations' Search for Favorable Opinion* (New York, 1968).

[63] George Albee, "The Du Pont Cavalcade of America" (unpublished manuscript, ca. 1947), box 11, folder 23, Advertising Department Records, acc. 1803, DuPont Records, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

it was part of a battle strategy to attack the New Deal through a "new vocabulary of business leadership."[64] Elizabeth Fones-Wolf notes that institutional advertisers on radio waged not only public relations campaigns for their images but also engaged in "advocacy advertising," designed to influence public policies.[65] McCarthy similarly argues that much Cold War–era television institutional advertising was part of an effort to build a postwar liberal consensus.[66]

Institutional advertisers on television often sponsored anthology drama programs: usually the performance of a different play every week with its own cast, characters, set, and story.[67] Often broadcast live (with no retakes or editing), these programs were lauded by critics at the time as more authentic than episodic series (with continuing characters, such as situation comedies), serials (such as soap operas, with open-ended narratives), or filmed series (such as westerns) in part because they more closely resembled legitimate theater.[68] Live anthology dramas such as *Philco Television Playhouse* (1948–1955), *US Steel Hour* (1953–1963), and the *Goodyear Television Playhouse* (1951–1957) are remembered today as the apotheosis of "golden age" television. Yet, despite the mostly positive critical reception of these programs, their sponsors are often remembered as suppressors of art and truth seeking only to fulfill narrow commercial goals.[69] Infamously, writer Rod Serling reported being asked by a tobacco company to avoid the words "lucky" and "American" in order to avoid unintentionally plugging a rival tobacco company.[70] But most of these sponsors wanted to be seen as "patrons of the arts."[71] And, like other cultural patrons, many sponsors believed their financial contribution entitled them to a say in the cultural production process. As one advertising executive pointed out, "If advertisers sometimes butt into the jobs of the writers and directors, so, too, does the money on Broadway and in Hollywood dictate to the creative echelon."[72] These sponsors believed their purpose was to elevate the cultural tastes of audiences they assumed needed educating and, in so doing, associate their companies with the good taste those audiences would acquire. This effort, as McCarthy points out, has largely been

[64] Bird, *"Better Living."*

[65] Fones-Wolf, "Favorable Business Climate," 226.

[66] McCarthy, *Citizen Machine*, 1–30.

[67] William Hawes, *American Television Drama: The Experimental Years* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1986); Molly Schneider, "Americanness and the Midcentury Television Anthology Drama" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2016).

[68] Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 80.

[69] Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, 50.

[70] Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station*, 205.

[71] McCarthy, *Citizen Machine*, 39.

[72] Carroll Carroll to Abel Green, 20 Dec. 1946, Carroll Carroll Papers, Hartman Center.

overlooked: "Fifties television is so closely identified with the period's hyperactive consumer culture that those sponsors who turned to TV with other things in mind besides selling products have largely been forgotten."[73]

## The Case of Armstrong Circle Theatre

*Armstrong Circle Theatre* (1950–1957 on NBC; 1957–1963 on CBS) illustrates many of these institutional advertising ideas and practices; unlike better-remembered programs such as *US Steel Hour* (1953–1963) and *General Electric Theatre* (1953–1962), it has been neglected. US Steel and General Electric were large embattled corporations fighting public relations wars against critics of "big business"; *Armstrong Circle Theatre* sponsor Armstrong Cork, in a smaller industry, thought of itself as a corporate liberal company practicing what its executives believed to be progressive policies and pursuing their ideals of civic responsibility. The program, then, is less easily dismissed as mere corporate propaganda and so may show more clearly the motives and beliefs of broadcast advertisers in their full complexity. This live anthology program was described by one of its executives as having "the feeling of fine entertainment, coupled with authenticity, believability, and importance."[74] Beginning on television in 1950 as a half-hour live program presenting a different play every week, it expanded in 1955 to a one-hour live program that dramatized "true life stories taken from the headlines of today," with the tag line "This really happened."[75] As Armstrong's executives put it, "by entertaining our viewers with stories that reflect man's hopes and dreams—by fulfilling the need for viewing something of value and substance, we hope to bring to television a show of stature and importance."[76]

Armstrong, based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, began as a maker of bottle corks in 1860 and then expanded into insulation and flooring products, in part to use waste cork.[77] Over the next few decades, Armstrong manufactured industrial products such as acoustic insulation, fiberboard, fiberglass, asphalt tiles, gaskets, and plastics; to consumers, Armstrong marketed flooring materials, such as linoleum and enamel-surfaced flooring branded "Quaker rugs."[78] Its Presbyterian founders

[73] McCarthy, *Citizen Machine*, 243.

[74] "You Don't Need Ratings to Get Good Results," *Sponsor*, 6 Feb. 1956, 37.

[75] "Coming Up: Our Biggest TV Season," *BBDO Newsletter*, Aug. 1955, 2, BBDO Records.

[76] "This Really Happened," Armstrong Circle Theatre brochure, 1955, 1, 2, box 5, David Susskind Papers, WHS (hereafter, Susskind papers).

[77] Myron Berkley Shaw, "A Descriptive Analysis of the Documentary Drama Television Program 'The Armstrong Circle Theatre,' 1955–61" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1962), 15, 17, 18.

[78] Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 18–20.

sought to build a corporate culture around a "golden rule" of reliability: "Let the buyer have faith," not "Let the buyer beware."[79] In contrast to what was then current practice, Armstrong published prices for its products, treating each buyer equally instead of favoring some with better prices.[80] "The Armstrong Creed," composed in 1922 by then director of advertising and future president Henning Prentis Jr., mandated "fair and honorable" treatment of customers, employees, and its local communities.[81] Armstrong Cork was not, like DuPont or US Steel, in constant conflict with unions and government regulators.[82] Nonetheless, it promoted similar claims to having innovated in product diversification, career training of employees, investment in research and development, and experimentation in new advertising media.[83]

In 1917, Armstrong hired the Batten Company to advertise its flooring in wide-circulation general interest consumer magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*.[84] Prentis, Armstrong's director of advertising, resisted the then dominant theory, promulgated by Albert Lasker at Lord & Thomas, that advertising is "salesmanship in print."[85] Rather than make repetitive hyperbolic claims about product attributes, Prentis ordered that Armstrong's print ads should instead simply "show beautiful rooms," thereby inspiring readers to improve their homes.[86] Illustrations of colorful, comfortable rooms were headlined with appealing phrases such as, "Can any other floor give all these comforts?" (1926), "The floor of magic texture" (1927), and "A lot of happy days will start in our new morning room" (1934). Prentis also developed brochures, such as *The Attractive Home: How to Plan Its Decoration* (1927).[87] By such methods, Armstrong increased its sales volume from $6.2 million in 1910 to $25.7 million in 1920 and to $32.5 million in 1930.[88]

Beginning in 1928, Armstrong advertised on NBC's "Blue" network as a sponsor of the musical program *The Armstrong Quakers* (1928–

[79] William A. Mehler Jr., *Let the Buyer Have Faith: The Story of Armstrong* (Lancaster, PA, 1987), 4–5.

[80] Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 27; Henning Prentis Jr., "The Historical Cycle in Business," n.d., 16, box 75, folder "Armstrong Cork," Barton papers.

[81] Mehler, *Let the Buyer Have Faith*, 128.

[82] Its corporate historian claims the first serious strike did not occur until 1970. Mehler, 151.

[83] Mehler, 6, 20, 23, 40, 56, 58.

[84] John Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," *Television Magazine*, Nov. 1958, 92.

[85] Tom Dillon, "How Armstrong Got Fifty Years Ahead of American Industry" (speech at Armstrong Cork Management Meeting, 7 Mar. 1977), 12, BBDO Records; Jeffrey Cruikshank and Arthur W. Schultz, *The Man Who Sold America: The Amazing (But True!) Story of Albert D. Lasker and the Creation of the Advertising Industry* (Boston, 2010).

[86] Dillon, "Fifty Years Ahead," 13.

[87] Dillon, 11.

[88] Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 24.

1931), which included the musical jingle "A Quaker Rug in Every Home."[89] In 1931 the program also included news commentator Lowell Thomas.[90] The use of "Quaker" as a brand name reflected both Armstrong's Pennsylvania location and its effort to associate itself with the Quakers' reputation for honesty. After a hiatus from broadcast advertising during the worst of the economic downturn, Armstrong returned to radio sponsorship in 1938 with a serial, *The Heart of Julia Blake*, aimed at housewives.[91] In 1941 Armstrong sponsored a weekend daytime live anthology radio program, *Theatre of Today* (1941–1954). The program opened with the words "It's high noon on Broadway" and a five-minute newscast, followed by a dramatization based on a recent news story.[92] Avoiding stories about crime, the program aimed at "a wholesome treatment of current events" and featured well-known performers including Helen Hayes, Ray Milland, and Vincent Price.[93] Having tripled its sales volume since 1940, and crediting its radio program with some of that increase, in 1950 Armstrong executives decided to sponsor a television program in addition to its radio program.[94] At that time, many radio sponsors assumed they needed to get into television early to secure a time "franchise" on the schedule. *Armstrong Circle Theatre*, a half-hour live program on NBC-TV, featured well-known plays with some well-known performers like John Cassavetes; it was "distinguished by the lack of violence, murder mysteries, Westerns, and farces in its story material."[95]

Guiding Armstrong's advertising strategy was its advertising agency, BBDO, known for creating institutional advertising for large corporations such as General Electric, General Motors, and DuPont. Originating as the George Batten Company in 1891, BBDO was formed in 1928 when Batten merged with the Barton Durstine & Osborn agency, founded in 1919 by three former journalists. Its most famous founder, copywriter Bruce Barton, is remembered as the author of the 1925 best seller *The Man Nobody Knows*, which exhorts the modern businessman to model advertising on Jesus's short, pithy parables.[96] Barton, whom Marchand calls a "forger of institutional souls," was instrumental in

[89] Shaw, 30, 33.

[90] Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," 92.

[91] Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 33.

[92] Mehler, *Let the Buyer Have Faith*, 64; Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 34.

[93] Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 34.

[94] Sales volume in 1940 was $57.3 million; by 1950 it was $186.7 million. Shaw, 24.

[95] Ed Roberts, "Television" (unpublished manuscript, ca. 1966), 6, BBDO Records. According to Shaw, Armstrong spent $10,000 for production costs and $15,000 for airtime costs for each telecast. Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 42.

[96] Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows* (Indianapolis, 1925). See Leo Ribuffo, "Jesus Christ as Business Statesman," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1981): 206–31; Warren Susman, *Culture as History* (New York, 1984), 122–49.

the shaping of General Electric and General Motors during the 1920s.[97] Barton argued that business could be a form of "service" and that advertising, "the voice of business," could keep manufacturers honest by publicizing brand attributes and educating the public.[98] Barton suggested that General Electric not advertise light bulbs so much as promote electricity use.[99] In a 1926 GE ad overseen by Barton, electricity consumption is represented as social progress for women. Headlining an image of a housewife hand-cranking a non-electric washing machine: "Any woman who does anything which a little electric motor can do is working for 3 cents an hour!"[100]

BBDO staff applied the concept of advertising as a form of consumer education to the agency's radio program productions. BBDO's work on radio began in 1925 with an opera program for a radio manufacturer, *The Atwater Kent Hour* (1925–1934). In late 1931, BBDO claimed to produce "88 separate shows per week for 29 different clients, over a total of 913 stations."[101] Although BBDO produced some entertainment programs, featuring, for example, bandleaders Tommy Dorsey and Guy Lombardo, its most prestigious programs were designed as institutional advertising. Instead of selling cars on the General Motor's radio program *A Parade of the States* (1931–1932), Barton wrote a "testimonial" intended "to sell America to Americans by a weekly radio tour of each state."[102] For DuPont, BBDO produced *Cavalcade of America* (1935–1953), an anthology drama based on historical events (e.g., Alfred Nobel's contributions to dynamite) that was vetted by historians like Frank Monaghan, scripted by such well-known authors as Carl Sandburg, and performed by stars such as Orson Welles and Cary Grant.[103] *Cavalcade*, claimed DuPont, "offers a new and absorbing approach to history, the incidents being re-enacted so as to emphasize the qualities of American character which have been responsible for the building of this country."[104]

BBDO's high-minded approach to advertising—as education, service, and corporate-image building rather than a hectoring hard sell of products—was also reflected in its production of *Time* magazine's

[97] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 134.

[98] Bruce Barton, "What Advertising Has Done for Americans," *Financial Digest*, Mar. 1928, 7; Barton, "Speech to Be Delivered over the Radio," 30 Nov. 1929, 7, BBDO Records.

[99] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 151.

[100] Reproduced in *BBDO 1891–1991: The First 100 Years*, 24, BBDO Records.

[101] "New Audition Room to Be Ready for Operation Saturday," BBDO *Newsletter*, 9 Oct. 1931, 7.

[102] Bruce Barton, *A Parade of the States* (Garden City, NY, 1932); Bird, *"Better Living,"* 32–38.

[103] Martin Gram Jr., *The History of the Cavalcade of America* (Kearny, NE, 1998).

[104] DuPont press release, 27 Sept. 1935, box 36, folder "Cavalcade," Public Affairs Department, acc. 1410, DuPont Records, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

radio program, *The March of Time* (1932–1939).[105] Another live radio drama based on actual events and people, but scripted by BBDO staff and accompanied by a live orchestra, the program featured actors who impersonated newsmakers, such as Amelia Earhart on her last airplane journey, and re-enacted events such as the burning of the Hindenburg airship (the live re-enactment of which radio listeners heard later on the same evening it happened).[106] Each of these programs, like much of BBDO's advertising, was designed to be educational, uplifting, and weighty. By basing the program texts on actualities rather than fiction, BBDO could associate its clients not with frivolous entertainment but with serious matters of civic concern. Furthermore, by fictionalizing those events, BBDO could shape the representation of history and current events in ways that could reflect well on its clients—the goal of every effective public relations effort.

By 1951, BBDO was still producing network radio programs and was beginning to place clients on television.[107] Anticipating that the agency role in television would resemble that in radio, in 1951 BBDO employed 150 in its television department, including producers, writers, and directors.[108] But it was clear even at this early stage that producing programs for television would not be profitable for the agency. So BBDO began buying "package" shows from independent producers rather than producing the programs within the agency. To protect their clients, BBDO kept script and casting approval while the independent producers took over the bulk of program production tasks. BBDO remained in charge of producing the commercial messages as well as negotiating the airtime schedule and costs with the networks.[109] By 1954, BBDO was directly producing only one television program, *Your Hit Parade* for American Tobacco, while maintaining agency "script control" over programs produced for DuPont, Campbell Soup, and Armstrong.[110] For overseeing seventeen shows in 1956, BBDO's "billings" to its clients for television airtime totaled about $72 million, a large increase from $50 million in 1955.[111] Thus, although BBDO, like many other ad agencies,

[105] Cynthia B. Meyers, "*The March of Time* Radio Docudrama: *Time* Magazine, BBDO, and Radio Sponsors, 1931–39," *American Journalism* 35, no. 4 (2018): 420–43.

[106] "Time Marches On," *BBDO Newsletter*, 7 May 1937, 5, BBDO Records.

[107] Radio programs of 1951 included *Jack Benny* for American Tobacco, *Theatre Guild on the Air* for US Steel, and *Cavalcade of America* for DuPont; TV programs of 1951 included *Your Hit Parade* for American Tobacco and *Betty Crocker* for General Mills. "Facts about BBDO," Feb. 1951, 19–22, BBDO Records.

[108] "Facts about BBDO," 22.

[109] "A Media Man's View of Television," *BBDO Newsletter*, 30 June 1949, 2, BBDO Records.

[110] Alfred Jaffe, "A Week at BBDO," *Sponsor*, 17 May 1954, 141.

[111] "BBD&O Soars to $72,000,000 Record in Repping 17 Teleshows for Clients," *Weekly Variety*, 11 July 1956, 1.

had changed its role from radio to television, it made an effort to retain content control. For example, BBDO continued to vet and blacklist suspect talent (through a department run by Jack Wren) and openly announced this process when asked by journalist John Cogley.[112] In a 1952 meeting, Armstrong president Prentis noted that BBDO "does a fine job in keeping Armstrong out of trouble on this score."[113] BBDO's unusual openness about this practice was characteristic of its concern with its clients' public images.[114]

Thus, BBDO was well known within the industry for producing radio and television programs for industrial clients and for claiming that institutional advertising strategies worked.[115] Armstrong had long collaborated with BBDO to help represent it as an honest, reliable manufacturer building long-term relationships with its customers. BBDO executive Robert Foreman claimed to have come up with the idea in 1955 of changing the format of *Armstrong Circle Theatre* from half-hour plays to one-hour dramatizations of current news stories (which he called "actuals"); he also claimed to have engaged the well-known producer David Susskind's production company Talent Associates to handle production duties.[116] The switch from a half-hour length to one hour doubled Armstrong's costs, so the program was telecast on alternating weeks.[117] In 1957, *Circle Theatre* moved from NBC to CBS for a better time slot and there alternated with *US Steel Hour*, also overseen by BBDO.[118] Prominent entertainment stars were no longer employed, since they "would tend to reduce the feeling of authenticity in our documentary flavored programs" and so Armstrong executives intended instead to make "the story itself the star."[119] This change saved money, of course. Stories were to be "newsworthy as well as

[112] John Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting*, vol. 2, *Radio-Television* (New York, 1956), 118.

[113] John Danforth to Alex Osborn et al., 1 Aug. 1952, box 75, folder "Armstrong Cork," Barton papers.

[114] For more on BBDO's blacklisting, see Cynthia B. Meyers, "Advertising, the Red Scare, and the Blacklist: BBDO, US Steel, and *Theatre Guild on the Air*, 1945–52," *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 4 (2016): 55–83.

[115] BBDO claimed to have measured the "good will" that the *Cavalcade* program produced for DuPont. "Facts about BBDO," 32.

[116] Foreman claimed he was inspired by reading *Time* magazine, a former client of BBDO; Robert Foreman, interview, n.d., BBDO Records. Susskind also produced the *DuPont Show of the Month*, *Kaiser Aluminum Hour*, and *Philco Television Playhouse*, among others. Stephen Battaglio, *David Susskind: A Televised Life* (New York, 2010), 24. See also Peter Labuza, "When a Handshake Meant Something: Lawyer, Deal-Making, and the Emergence of New Hollywood" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2020), 255–66.

[117] *Circle Theatre* alternated weeks with *Playwrights '56* in 1955–1956 and with *Kaiser Aluminum Hour* in 1956–1957, both on NBC. Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 44.

[118] Shaw, 44.

[119] Faye Lee, quoted in Shaw, 72; Robert Costello, quoted in Shaw, 71.

noteworthy."[120] To emphasize the seriousness of the program, host-narrators, including John Cameron Swayze (1955–1957 at NBC) and Douglas Edwards (1957–1961 at CBS), functioned as quasi newscasters.[121] The first live broadcast of the new version of *Armstrong Circle Theatre* concerned a geologist who discovered uranium, portrayed by an actor in the fictionalized re-enactments; the program closed with an appearance of the actual geologist, reinforcing its claim to verisimilitude.[122] The narrative traced the geologist's triumph over various setbacks, thereby not only "combin[ing] fact and drama," according to one of the Talent Associates producers, but also "present[ing] some potential solution, some hope for our citizens to consider."[123] Many of the featured stories would concern overcoming adversity—surviving the sinking of the *Andrea Doria* or the Spring Hill mine disaster, overcoming drug addiction, and defecting from East Germany.[124]

Among institutional advertisers, it was a common refrain that business should serve the public. Their involvement in television programming, explained Armstrong president Clifford Backstrand in 1958, should reflect "a keen sense of history, of the significance of business to the over-all social and political life of a nation. We have to be public servants."[125] This was not, claims Armstrong's corporate historian, mere "paternalism" but a sincere belief that long-term corporate success was linked to the well being of its employees and communities.[126] Armstrong's advertising director, Max Banzhaf, made the connection explicit between the company's corporate liberal policies, its financing of educational programming, and its economic success: "We do it to make a profit."[127]

Armstrong and BBDO's policy of vetting all scripts was based on the assumption that the medium of television had powerful effects on viewers; according to Backstrand, the program was "a mirror to America of what Armstrong is."[128] To present a story that was not fully aligned with Armstrong's values would undermine the purpose of the

[120] Unsigned letter to David Susskind, 21 July 1955, box 3, "Reports" folder, Susskind papers.

[121] "This Really Happened." Edwards resigned from the program in April 1961 because CBS News changed its policies and no longer allowed its journalists to appear on entertainment programs. Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 47.

[122] Battaglio, *David Susskind*, 24.

[123] Robert Costello, quoted in Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 64.

[124] For short-story versions of three telecasts, see Trudy and Irving Settel, *The Best of Armstrong Circle Theatre* (New York, 1959).

[125] Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," 54.

[126] Mehler, *Let the Buyer Have Faith*, 58.

[127] Bob Chandler, "Armstrong Exec Uncorks Some Revealing Conclusions about TV," *Weekly Variety*, 29 Jan. 1958, 41.

[128] Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," 54.

sponsorship. So, producers from Talent Associates met biweekly with Banzhaf and with BBDO executives to review story ideas and drafts of scripts.[129] No stories were developed without Armstrong and BBDO approval. This was justified in part by Armstrong executives' view of television as an invasive medium: "The t.v. medium invades homes," argued Banzhaf, "and has no right to present programs that are in bad taste or fail to live up to their major responsibility to the public."[130] Talent Associates was provided with Armstrong's editorial policy: "Stories should be based on actual case histories, with the theme of success over obstacles, long-awaited and long-deserved hope fulfilled, or a crisis met and mastered." Stories with a "morbid or pathological background" should be avoided. Aiming at the family audience, Armstrong executives insisted that the program "leave our viewers with a feeling that what they've seen on the television screen is something of value."[131] Banzhaf vetted the story ideas carefully for moral outcomes; for example, for one proposed about the criminal "Pretty Boy" Floyd, Banzhaf insisted it focus instead on the efforts of Floyd's brother to live a noncriminal life.[132] *Circle Theatre* was designed to avoid the mindless pleasures these executives assumed were typical of mass culture; Backstrand claimed that they had no interest in appealing to "unthinking people who tune in just for entertainment."[133] Besides selecting stories that concluded with an appropriate moral, they rejected proposals linked to controversial subjects, including Alger Hiss and racial integration.[134] The producers at Talent Associates were neither surprised nor bothered by such rejection.[135] Susskind, as one of the top producers of live television anthologies, told Myron Shaw in 1962 that he was "bored" with the complaints by other producers about sponsors: "The great majority of sponsors and advertising agencies do give you your creative head. . . . There is no vicious, insidious, ignorant set of strictures laid upon you by an agency or sponsor."[136] While Susskind would very publicly complain about sponsors insisting on talent blacklisting, this comment most

[129] "You Don't Need Ratings," 86. By 1962, about one hundred people were involved in *Circle Theatre's* production, including six researchers, forty technicians, and ten BBDO representatives. Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 74.

[130] Shaw, 54.

[131] "Armstrong Circle Theatre Editorial Policy," ca. 1955, 3, box 3, "BBDO" folder, Susskind papers.

[132] Mary Cummings to Jacqueline Babbin, 21 Dec. 1955, box 3, "BBDO" folder, Susskind papers.

[133] Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," 54.

[134] Babbin to Cummings, 21 May 1957, box 3, "BBDO" folder, Susskind papers; Murray Horowitz, "'People Love Facts and Costello Loves People' Themes TV's 'Circle,'" *Weekly Variety*, 15 Nov. 1961, 29.

[135] Costello, quoted in Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 76.

[136] Shaw, 77.

likely reflects his own alignment with the aesthetics and goals of institutional advertising strategies: the production of educational, uplifting morality tales.[137]

At its advent, when fewer than half of American households owned television sets, television provided advertisers access to more affluent audiences than radio.[138] As Banzhaf explained, because Armstrong flooring is only purchased a few times during a consumer's lifetime, "the character of the program and reaching the people of the greatest influence in the market are more important" than reaching everyone.[139] "Ratings" and audience size, an increasing factor in network programming decisions, did not concern Armstrong executives.[140] Banzhaf noted, "We don't aim to sell the product in a single program, but rather to build an image over a period of seven or eight years."[141] In a 1958 interview, Banzhaf argued that the audience perception of the program's quality would matter more than its popularity: "Being associated with programs of taste and quality has a more lasting affect [*sic*] on the public than being successful for a short while with something frivolous."[142] According to Banzhaf, "Show-wise, the program provides a good climate for our commercials. The feeling of fine entertainment coupled with authenticity, believability, and importance, ties in directly with the current theme in all our flooring advertising."[143] In 1956, when Armstrong was spending $7 million per year on advertising, at least $2 million of its advertising appropriations were spent on television, most of which went to production costs and airtime. For that expenditure, Armstrong broadcast five minutes of advertising messages during the one-hour program—about one-twelfth of the paid airtime. Several of those minutes promoted some of Armstrong's consumer products (a typical commercial for the Quaker floor covering featured a housewife easily sweeping up a broken Christmas ornament from the seamless Armstrong floor), and at least one of those advertising minutes was devoted to an "institutional" message designed to promote the company itself.[144] In the view of these Armstrong executives, they were taking up very little of the audience's time with commercial messages; the program was the true vehicle for shaping its image with audiences.

[137] David Everitt, *A Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television* (Chicago, 2007), 270.

[138] "Buyers' Market Challenge," *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 11 Apr. 1949, 90.

[139] Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," 91.

[140] "You Don't Need Ratings," 37. Banzhaf later told *Variety* that ratings are a "false god"; Chandler, "Armstrong Exec Uncorks," 25.

[141] Shaw, "Descriptive Analysis," 52.

[142] Chandler, "Armstrong Exec Uncorks," 41.

[143] "You Don't Need Ratings," 37.

[144] "You Don't Need Ratings," 37, 82.

Viewership for live anthology television programs began to drop in 1956 and they began disappearing from network schedules.[145] By 1958, despite reduced viewership and a general trend toward prerecorded formats (videotape or film), Armstrong announced that it was going to continue with *Circle Theatre* because "the good will the program is creating for the Company" makes it "a sound advertising investment."[146] As a relatively low-budget live program, *Circle Theatre* delivered a relatively low cost per thousand viewers; BBDO claimed its cost was 25 percent lower than the cost of the "average evening program."[147] Backstrand remained a believer in live performance: "It is more 'actual,' and we have more control over it than if it were filmed."[148] Hollywood studios, he no doubt feared, were less likely to accommodate a sponsor's dictates than Susskind's group.[149] Banzhaf argued that to sponsor one of the Hollywood studio-filmed westerns then becoming so popular would defeat the purpose of broadcast sponsorship because it would prevent "sponsor identification" between Armstrong and the program: Armstrong "could hop aboard the horseopera bandwagon, like everybody else," but "it'll be virtually impossible to tell who sponsors which."[150]

But trends continued to move in the opposite direction. In 1961, CBS refused to air a *Circle Theatre* performance titled "Window on the West," which used television clips from actual newscasts in Soviet-dominated countries to show American audiences how the United States was portrayed in the communist world. A columnist noted that CBS's program philosophy had recently become "fact is fact; fiction is fiction; and never the two should meet"; *Circle Theatre* was clearly an amalgam of the two.[151] In a statement, CBS announced that the program "did not fall within the classification of a purely dramatic show, and, therefore, was unsuitable to be carried on the network."[152] In other words, CBS had a news division, from which it was earning substantial revenues, and it no longer wanted to allow any sponsor or other producer to

[145] Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 189.

[146] Craig Moodie, memo, 5 Apr. 1958, box 3, "Armstrong Circle Theatre" folder, Susskind papers.

[147] "This Is BBDO," credentials, July 1959, 23, BBDO Records.

[148] Watson, "Backstrand of Armstrong Cork," 91.

[149] Ralph Cohn at Screen Gems explained, "As you know, we have never found it practical to grant an advertiser any contractual right to pass upon the entertainment value of any of our programs." Cohn to Dan Seymour, 13 Apr. 1956, box 27, "Clients Eastman Kodak: Screen Gems, 1956" folder, Dan Seymour Papers, JWT Records, Hartman Center.

[150] Chandler, "Armstrong Exec Uncorks," 25.

[151] "TV Draws Fact and Fiction Lines; Circle Theater Is Caught Between," *National Observer*, 21 Jan. 1963, n.p.

[152] "TV Draws."

 https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680521000222

provide newslike programming that would compete with it.[153] But this was also an indication that BBDO's strategy of dramatizing actuality was falling from grace. Having lasted longer than some of the other institutional advertising programs, in 1963 Armstrong dropped *Circle Theatre* and became instead an alternate sponsor of the Danny Kaye program on CBS.[154] Armstrong's then director of advertising, Craig Moodie, conceded it was in part because the networks' expansion of documentary programming had left few stories for their docudrama to fictionalize.[155] Armstrong's new president, Maurice Warnock, declared that he intended to focus on leading the company through change, including Armstrong's television advertising strategy.[156] By 1965 Armstrong had switched to cosponsoring *Gidget* (1965–1966), a comedy about a teenage girl surfer, starring Sally Field, in a complete repudiation of the advertising and programming strategy it had pursued with *Circle Theatre*.[157]

## The Magazine Concept in the Network Era: The 1960s

By the late 1960s, the transition to what historians call the "network era" was complete: the surviving three major television networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) not only had gained control over program content and scheduling but enjoyed a buyer's market with program producers—who were usually forced to grant equity in program ownership or syndication rights to networks in return for a place on the network schedule—and a seller's market for airtime with their customers, the advertisers.[158] Leveraging the public outrage over the 1958–1959 "quiz show scandals," in which producers of sponsor-controlled game shows were discovered to have rehearsed contestants, networks claimed they would be more responsible stewards of the public airwaves.[159] But the number of single-sponsored programs on network prime time had already been declining, having dropped from seventy-five in 1955 to forty in 1959 to

[153] "TV Draws." See Michael Socolow, "'We Should Make Money on Our News': The Problem of Profitability in Network Broadcast Journalism History," *Journalism* 11, no. 6 (2010): 675–91.

[154] Mehler, *Let the Buyer Have Faith*, 130; "Sponsor-Scope," *Sponsor*, 24 June 1963, 22. *General Electric Theatre* ended in 1962; *Cavalcade of America* ended in 1957.

[155] "Sponsor-Scope," 22.

[156] Mehler, *Let the Buyer Have Faith*, 129.

[157] "Armstrong Makes Its Move," *Sponsor*, 15 Mar. 1965, 38–39.

[158] Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 132; Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York, 2005).

[159] William Boddy, "The Seven Dwarfs and the Money Grubbers: The Public Relations Crisis of US Television in the Late 1950s," in *The Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, IN, 1990), 98–116.

twelve in 1964.[160] The percentage of network programs sold as "participating" or "cosponsored" increased from about 11 percent in 1953 to 84 percent in 1963.[161] The decline of single sponsorship helped increase the number of advertisers using television from 1,206 in 1956 to 1,316 in 1963.[162] By 1968, national television networks had tripled their advertising revenues from about $550 million in 1955 to about $1.5 billion.[163]

Critics of advertiser control of programs had assumed that network program control would improve program quality, as networks would presumably select programs based on audience demand rather than advertisers' tastes.[164] To measure such demand, networks used ratings, such as Nielsen's audience sample, and they quickly canceled programs not meeting ratings expectations, even if those programs had sponsors willing to pay.[165] Institutional advertisers resisted network program control and magazine-format advertising; a General Electric executive, a longtime BBDO institutional advertising client, warned in 1962, "It is doubtful that we would continue to use television as a means of institutional communication should the magazine concept ever become a reality."[166] The magazine format, some believed, would remove the advertiser's sense of responsibility: "When you take away an advertiser's personal involvement—when a program can no longer reflect any degree of corporate pride or corporate public responsibility—then an advertiser must consider his tv investment in purely amoral and statistical terms." The networks favored programs that attracted mass audiences, such as westerns, detective series, and situation comedies. As had been the case during the pre-network era, critics claimed that popular programs catered to the lowest tastes or "lower common denominator."[167] Some critics of the networks' relentless pursuit of "ratings" defended the single-sponsorship system as less commercial; A. Frank Reel argued for the important role of institutional sponsors in maintaining quality because they "often used their influence to obtain better shows, regardless of audience ratings, because of the beneficial effect on their corporate or product image."[168]

[160] Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 159.

[161] "Co-Sponsorship Stages Strong Network Comeback," *Sponsor*, 1 June 1964, 42.

[162] "TV's Cost Spiral," *Sponsor*, 1 June 1964, 30.

[163] Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 518.

[164] Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station*, 301.

[165] Karen Buzzard, *Tracking the Audience: The Ratings Industry from Analog to Digital* (New York, 2012).

[166] "The Magazine Concept: Who's For It Today?," *Sponsor*, 19 Mar. 1962, 50.

[167] John McMillin, "Commercial Commentary: TV's New Non-Influentials," *Sponsor*, 25 Sept. 1961, 42.

[168] A. Frank Reel, *The Networks: How They Stole the Show* (New York, 1979), xvii.

Institutional advertisers and agencies also bemoaned the networks' newfound dependence on Hollywood movie studios. By 1964, nearly 80 percent of prime-time network programs were prerecorded on film instead of performed live.[169] Film studios, many in the ad industry assumed, catered to audiences' base needs for entertainment while institutional advertisers were more sensitive to family home viewing. Reflecting a commitment to the didactic over the merely entertaining, one executive complained in 1961, "Hollywood producers are exerting far more influence over the content of tv programs than sponsors ever did. . . . Which type of company do you think would be most likely to put on the air tv programs of high quality and real public interest and service—a Dupont or a Warner Brothers?"[170] DuPont, as an institutional advertiser in need of positive public relations, had produced *Cavalcade of America*, designed to educate audiences about American history, whereas Warner Bros. was simply a film studio that had long churned out genre films about gangsters and cowboys and was now doing the same for television.

By 1963, *Sponsor* magazine reported that the competition between Madison Avenue and Hollywood over program control had been resolved. Advertisers, no longer vetting scripts, were no longer perceived by Hollywood producers as "blue penciling heavies." Advertising agencies were less worried about controversial topics in programs because advertisers were no longer tightly associated with those programs.[171] Agencies, meanwhile, no longer had direct contact with the program producers, sending their comments to the network program departments instead. They cared more about the position and length of commercial breaks than the content of the program.

The magazine concept was blamed for creating more "clutter" and for overcommercializing the viewing experience. During the single-sponsorship era, commercials were often textually integrated into a program that advertised only one product or brand. These commercials were often embedded in the program texts, sometimes by using cast members or announcers to promote the product, helping to smooth any disjuncture between entertainment and advertising. But in the network era, networks began to sell interstitial minutes during a program to more than one advertiser, and some of those advertisers used their sixty seconds to "piggyback" two thirty-second commercials, thereby increasing the number of commercials.[172] Some observers objected to seeing more

[169] Albert Kroeger, "A Long, Hard Look at the Genealogy of Network TV," *Television Magazine*, Apr. 1966, 35.

[170] McMillin, "Commercial Commentary," 42.

[171] "What Hollywood Doesn't Tell Madison Ave," *Sponsor*, 15 July 1963, 33, 35.

[172] "30-30 or Fight, Agencies Defend Piggybacks," *Sponsor*, 3 Feb. 1964, 34.

and shorter commercials for more products interrupting programs. TV critic Les Brown argued, "When the advertiser was the sponsor, it behooved him to be sensitive to the frequency and length of his program interruptions." But now that advertisers bought minutes scattered over many evenings and programs, "he is unburdened of the aesthetic decency as well as other responsibilities."[173]

At length, as the magazine concept became more established, the advertising industry reached widespread consensus about its advantages. Television, according to a BBDO executive, had become more efficient at reaching large audiences and more flexible for advertisers, who were not only freed from season-long time buys but also "unburdened of program-development risks."[174] *Sponsor* magazine noted in 1964 that "agencies have abdicated program production as, virtually, have networks, preferring to let independent packagers take the risks involved."[175] Agencies soon realized the many advantages of ceding program control: they could blame the network or producer or star if a program failed; they could claim better objectivity in advising their clients, since they were no longer financially and emotionally invested in any particular program; and they no longer had to risk their own profit margins. It was, in many measures, a relief. In retrospect, as one television executive explained, the network takeover of program control was "kinda like [the US] taking over for the French in Vietnam"—a Pyrrhic victory for the networks, perhaps, and a fortunate defeat for the agencies.[176]

Advertisers changed their notions of how to use television for advertising: instead of an "identification" medium, in which audiences make a close association between program and advertiser, television would be a "dispersion" medium, in which advertisers try to reach as many homes as possible, their advertising "scattered" across multiple programs.[177] Commercials, dispersed among many time slots and programs, could spread the message with "volume" instead of "intensity," or, as one observer put it, advertisers changed their targeting of consumers from a "William Tell" to a "Machine Gun Kelly" approach.[178]

Thus, during the 1960s, advertisers and their agencies almost completely reversed course on a strongly held belief about broadcast advertising. According to Fairfax Cone, leader of the Foote, Cone &

[173] Les Brown, *Television: The Business behind the Box* (New York, 1971), 65.

[174] "As Good a Buy as Ever," *Sponsor*, 1 June 1964, 30.

[175] "TV's Cost Spiral," 30.

[176] Bob Shanks, "Network Television: Advertising Agencies and Sponsors," in *The Commercial Connection: Advertising and the American Mass Media,* ed. John W. Wright (New York, 1979), 98, 97.

[177] "Net TV—Where Is It Headed?" *Sponsor*, 11 Sept. 1961, 25ff.

[178] Shanks, "Network Television," 98.

Belding agency, in the early 1960s "sponsor identification was still an important measurement of value, and this held down interest in commercials." To sponsors, the programs were more important than the advertising, so "little thought" was put into commercials. However, by 1969, Cone notes, the situation had reversed: "Now the commercial became important, and new attention was paid to each one. . . . Commercials that might appear anywhere there was a time spot for sale had to stand on their own."[179] Rather than focus on developing programs with which to associate their brands, advertisers began focusing instead on creating commercials that would keep audiences attentive.

By the late 1960s, both the television and advertising industries had reached new heights. The three networks—NBC, CBS, and ABC—had consolidated bottleneck control over programming and advertiser access to audiences.[180] While radio at its peak in 1948 had accounted for 12 percent of all advertising spending, by 1969 television accounted for 19 percent of all advertising spending, and national network television accounted for nearly 47 percent of spending on broadcast advertising. The limited inventory of airtime, enforced through a trade association code that capped the number of minutes available during prime time, helped propel airtime prices upward, from an average of $30,000 per minute in the early 1960s to over $160,000 by 1970.[181] Advertisers, once able to create or destroy programs at will, could only either buy in or cancel out of slots during a program determined entirely by the network; as one advertising executive lamented, "An advertiser's power to control or affect programming is reaction rather than action."[182]

The three networks assumed a captive audience (roughly 90 percent of viewers) who had few alternatives; success in their tripartite oligopoly consisted of one network maintaining a marginal advantage over the other two. To attract mass audiences, assumed to be the entire family, the networks scheduled the "least objectionable programming"; for example, programs such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–1971), *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960–1968), and *Green Acres* (1965–1971) made no reference to any of the social and cultural upheavals of the late 1960s. As one television executive explained, networks sought programs "that will attract mass audiences without unduly offending these audiences or too deeply moving them emotionally. Such ruffling, it is thought, will interfere with their ability to receive, recall, and respond

[179] Cone, *With All Its Faults*, 298, 299.

[180] Barry Litman, "Network Oligopoly Power: An Economic Analysis," in *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (Boston, 1990), 115–144.

[181] Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 518, 394, 440.

[182] Shanks, "Network Television," 96.

to commercial messages."[183] These generic network-controlled programs were designed to provide anodyne context for the true purpose of television: exposing viewers to commercials. The advertisers no longer needed the programming to be "a mirror to America" of a corporation's image, as Armstrong's Backstrand had assumed *Armstrong Circle Theatre* needed to be; they only needed programs that attracted the targeted market segment.

Meanwhile, beginning in the late 1950s, the advertising industry also went through a significant shift. It began to turn its attention from the mass market to segmented markets.[184] Manufacturers created multiple brand extensions to target those market segments and thus needed to expand advertising budgets.[185] So, for example, Procter & Gamble's toothpaste brands included Crest, for customers fighting cavities; Gleem, for those seeking white teeth; and Denquel, for those with sensitive teeth. Advertisers began to view consumers as increasingly sophisticated and cynical about advertising.[186] The long-dominant hard-sell product-centered ad strategy, which might focus on many "reasons why" to buy a soap brand—its cleansing power, purity, low cost, unique ingredients, and performance in scientific tests—suffered from declining credibility. The soft sell, promulgated by such theorists as Theodore MacManus (1872–1940), had long countered the hard sell's emphasis on product information by appealing to emotions instead. A soft-sell ad for a soap brand might feature not an account of the cleansing power of the product but a woman lovingly embraced by her husband, implying that the soap might help satisfy the consumer's emotional need for love.[187] Or, a soft-sell ad might attract a reader's attention with clever concepts, puns, humor, or visually arresting imagery—all strategies long disdained by the hard-sell theorists such as Claude Hopkins (1866–1932).

By the late 1960s soft-sell-influenced "hip" advertising had conquered the ad industry and "the idea became mightier than the marketing."[188] Later called the "Creative Revolution," this definitive and permanent shift toward the soft sell meant that the long-dominant hard-sell strategies, including repetitive verbosity, product information, hyperbole, and multiple "reasons why" to buy, crammed into busy

[183] Shanks, 94.

[184] Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York, 1990).

[185] Kovacs, "Big Tobacco," 361.

[186] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago, 1997), 63.

[187] Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 71–75.

[188] Ted Morgan, "New! Improved! Advertising! A Close-up Look at a Successful Agency," in Wright, *Commercial Connection*, 299.

layouts, suddenly seemed old fashioned and patently less credible to not only consumers but the advertising industry as well. Creating advertising was less likely to be a businesslike and rational process of identifying a brand's "unique selling proposition" and more of an intuitive process of finding images and ideas that would resonate with audiences and disarm their resistance.[189] To counter consumer disappointment with hard sell's hyperbolic product claims, Creative Revolution leaders including Bill Bernbach at Doyle Dane Bernbach specialized in underselling, creating slogans such as "We're number two—we try harder," for Avis. Perhaps most famous is their ad for the Volkswagen Beetle, which appeared the size of a thumbnail on a page of mostly white space under the headline "Think Small." The ad copy noted the advantages of "small" insurance and "small" repair bills and being able to squeeze into "small" parking spaces, obviously mocking the hyperbolic hard-sell claims of "bigger, better."[190] Bernbach also sought to elevate the status of the copywriters and art directors, known as "creatives," and to ease advertisers' suspicions of them: "It is ironic that the very thing that is most suspected by business, that intangible thing called artistry, turns out to be the most practical tool available to it." However, Bernbach was not altogether a romantic; he believed advertising to be a craft in the service of a specific goal: "Properly practiced creativity *must* result in greater sales more economically achieved."[191] Bernbach's emphasis on developing a compelling single concept for an ad, rather than a list of product attributes, ignited a wave of new advertising that, according to Thomas Frank, "pandered to public distrust of advertising and dislike of admen."[192]

Shattering the stereotype of the martini-swilling adman in a gray suit, new boutique ad agencies sprang up, staffed by "countercultural creatives" sporting bellbottoms and miniskirts and seeking inspiration in psychedelics and New Age encounter groups.[193] Their "hip" advertising employed minimalist graphics and flippant language about products that mocked consumer culture and made regular references to escape, defiance, rebellion, or nonconformity.[194] Campaigns traded on sexual innuendo, fantasy, and comedy. Copywriter Mary Wells Lawrence's Braniff Airlines print campaign featured images of attractive young flight attendants changing uniforms midflight under the headline

[189] Rosser Reeves, *Reality in Advertising* (New York, 1960), 121.

[190] Frank Rowsome Jr., *Think Small: The Story of Those Volkswagen Ads* (New York, 1970).

[191] Quoted in Bob Levenson, *Bill Bernbach's Book* (New York, 1987), 113, 25.

[192] Frank, *Conquest of Cool*, 54.

[193] Cynthia B. Meyers, "Psychedelics and the Advertising Man: The 1960s 'Countercultural Creative' on Madison Avenue," *Columbia Journal of American Studies* 4, no. 1 (2000): 114–27.

[194] Frank, *Conquest of Cool*, 238.

"Introducing the Air Strip."[195] Art director George Lois's ad for Maypo hot cereal featured famous male athletes crying like spoiled children, "I want my Maypo! I want it!" These ads attracted consumers' attention by playing against expectations in order to get in "under the radar" of consumers' defenses against advertising. Frank argues that the Creative Revolution was not just a response to the youth market or the rise of market segmentation; neither was it an effort to destroy or reject consumer culture. The business world, he argues, shared the counterculture's critiques of mass culture as a system of conformity and therefore welcomed the changes brought by the counterculture as a way to "revitalize American business and the consumer order generally."[196] Hip advertising and the Creative Revolution thus solved the crisis of creativity and rejuvenated the ad industry when consumer cynicism, increased regulation, and saturated markets had threatened it.

Although Creative Revolution television commercials were perhaps less racy and outrageous than the magazine ads, given network standards and indecency rules, there was a noticeable aesthetic shift in the mid-to-late 1960s toward a more cinematic visual style, sometimes referred to as the "New York school of film." Gordon Webber of the Benton & Bowles agency described this "New York Look" as a "synthesis of intimate, fluid movement and dynamic editing that eventually would find its way into feature film-making."[197] Agencies began hiring directors who hoped to break into Hollywood filmmaking, replacing the industrial filmmakers trained in didactic techniques, and they showed an increasing interest in close-ups, long shots, location shooting, more rapid editing, and shorter shots. Directors were often allowed some latitude to try shots not included on a storyboard, and eventually they became key collaborators in commercial production.[198] By 1969, the traditional hard-sell agency Foote, Cone & Belding was experimenting with sudden edits, shots of less than a second in length, naturalistic soundtracks, and minimal dialogue.[199] Pepsi and its agency, BBDO, hired filmmakers and producers such as Ed Vorkapich and Jerry Bruckheimer to direct commercials using pop music, young people cavorting in swimsuits, and avant-garde

[195] Mary Wells Lawrence, *A Big Life in Advertising* (New York, 2002).

[196] Frank, *Conquest of Cool*, 9. On the influence of counterculture style on 1960s television programming, see Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Durham, NC, 2001).

[197] Gordon Webber, *Our Kind of People: The Story of the First 50 Years at Benton & Bowles* (New York, 1979), 130.

[198] Charles Anthony Wainwright, *The Television Copywriter: How to Create Successful TV Commercials* (New York, 1966), 50.

[199] Cone, *With All Its Faults*, 319.

editing techniques and camerawork.[200] The documentary filmmakers Albert and David Maysles, known for their "direct cinema" or "fly on a wall" style, made commercials for Jell-O and for Champion Spark Plugs.[201] Their handheld camerawork and emphasis on spontaneity signaled a kind of authenticity that might resonate with cynical consumers.[202] Moreover, such commercials might stand out from the program in which they were embedded, perhaps attracting the audience's attention with their cinematic style or use of popular music.

These changes helped elevate the cultural prestige of the television commercial. Some called the late 1960s "the golden age of arty commercials."[203] Earlier hard-sell television commercials, such as those featuring announcers repetitively intoning product information and demonstrating products, were relatively cheap and simple to produce. The new focus on cinematic aesthetics led to a drastic increase in television commercial production costs; according to one estimate, such costs increased 72 percent between 1963 and 1967.[204] As commercial aesthetics evolved, agencies hired more specialists, such as sound consultants for "sound logos"; music composers for original music; famous photographers such as Irving Penn; and commercial actors, who received residual payments.[205] Improving production quality required more location shoots, elaborate lighting, and special effects. Agency employee roles shifted: a television art director—"part director, writer, diplomat and general overseer of the entire commercial project"—began to replace the copywriter altogether.[206] Advertising, once defended as a rational business practice based on scientific research, became an art, a cultural form on a par with other cultural forms.[207]

For the trade organization American Association of Advertising Agencies, in 1972 the agency Benton & Bowles produced a fifteen-minute documentary titled *Stalking the Wild Cranberry*, "a behind the scenes look" at how commercials were made, designed to improve the public's attitude toward advertising.[208] Showing every step in the

[200] Ed Vorkapich, oral history interview, 23 Nov. 1984, "Pepsi Generation" Oral History and Documentation Project, National Museum of American History.

[201] Jonathan Price, *The Best Thing on TV: Commercials* (New York, 1978), 96–97. The best-known films by the Maysles include *Gimme Shelter* (1970) and *Grey Gardens* (1975).

[202] Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago, 2008), 215–25.

[203] Price, *Best Thing on TV*, 4.

[204] Webber, *Our Kind of People*, 131.

[205] "Specialists on Commercials Mean Cost Increases for Advertisers," *Sponsor*, 15 June 1964, 34–37.

[206] "The Ad-Producer—A New Breed," *Sponsor*, 4 May 1964, 48.

[207] Wainwright, *Television Copywriter*, 17.

[208] "Stalking the Wild Cranberry: The Making of a TV Commercial" (George Gage Productions, 1972), https://archive.org/details/stalking_the_wild_cranberry_1972.

making of a Grape-Nuts cereal commercial that featured the celebrity naturalist Euell Gibbons, the film includes re-enactments of the creative process. Hiply dressed executives meet in space-age meeting rooms, redesigned to reflect the agency's "commitment to creative work."[209] In a meeting of the creative department, one executive explains that this is a chance to do something "really fresh and original in the cereal category." They discuss how their trip to the cereal factory helped them understand how Grape-Nuts are made from natural ingredients; then the creative partners, the art director and copywriter—sitting in front of the famous poster of Bob Dylan designed by Milton Glaser, a clear signifier they are members of the Creative Revolution—discuss potential spokesmen, from bakers to wheat farmers, before settling on Gibbons, author of a book on natural foods. One creative cogitates, "Perhaps we could base our commercial on something like wild cranberries? What if we had a scene in the snow, and he says something like 'I'm gathering part of my breakfast,' and you don't see anything but snow until you get to a close up of the cranberries. Then we could go to an inside scene where he's putting the cranberries on the Grape-Nuts." Subsequent scenes show the making of the storyboards, the client meetings, and the production of the commercial in a snowy mountainous location, where technical challenges are laboriously surmounted in multiple takes. Following the editing process, the screening of the commercial for approval by the creative director is the "moment of truth." The creative director wants a closer zoom in on the cranberry bush; fortunately, they have such a take, so after re-editing and client approval, the commercial runs. The narrator concludes, "Finally, an idea that began life in an art director's office more than two months before is transformed by a small army of specialists, a long chain of events, into a television commercial." This Grape-Nuts commercial, then—despite its use of such traditional strategies as a testimonial by a celebrity, product claims ("made from natural ingredients, wholesome wheat and barley"), and the fiction of Gibbons picking cranberries that likely grow better in summer bogs than winter snow—is presented as an authored creative text, its cinematic documentation legitimating the commercial as a cultural form rather than an irritating interruption of the viewers' pleasure.

## Conclusion

By juxtaposing the efforts of *Armstrong Circle Theatre*'s heroic geologist, who overcomes daunting setbacks to discover uranium, with those

[209] Webber, *Our Kind of People*, 149.

of Benton & Bowles' heroic creatives, who overcome their own daunting setbacks to sell Grape-Nuts, we can appreciate the distance the advertising and television industries had come in the course of several decades. The strategies of an institutional advertiser such as Armstrong, guided by an expert agency such as BBDO, were based on specific assumptions about broadcast advertising: that radio and then television would have powerful effects on audiences; that sponsors then had to operate in the public interest as they defined it; that to avoid pandering to what they viewed as superficial and degrading mass cultural tastes, they needed to sponsor uplifting and educational programs; and that audiences would appreciate their sponsorship of such edifying programs and think positively of them through the power of sponsor identification. However, as BBDO executive Charlie Brower later recalled, sponsor identification was the "sacred cow that we all believed in" but it "was ground to hamburger."[210]

By the mid-1960s, most in the industry had entirely revised their views of how television could best be used as an advertising medium. Advertising, no longer a form of education and information about products or corporate beneficence, had to be as entertaining, or more so, than the programs. Commercials became the most expensively produced minutes of television airtime, employing top actors, writers, directors, and cinematographers, plus visually striking imagery, cinematic techniques, and catchy jingles and pop tunes in order to capture audience attention. Advertising agencies, no longer program producers, became overseers of expensive commercial productions and expert time buyers, weighing ratings, demographics, and costs per thousand as they collected higher and higher commissions from networks charging higher and higher prices for airtime. Institutional advertisers like Armstrong no longer financed entire programs designed to educate and enlighten mass audiences, serving a quaint notion of public interest predicated on corporate paternalism. Instead, network-era television featured prerecorded episodic genre programs, produced primarily by Hollywood film studios, financed and scheduled by oligopolistic networks, designed to offend the fewest viewers, and serving merely as vehicles for aggregating targeted audiences for interruptive commercials. Advertisers and their agencies, no longer responsible for program content, were free to innovate advertising strategies designed to pierce consumers' resistance, and, by investing heavily in airtime, together they helped build network television into the dominant advertising medium of the twentieth century.

. . .

[210] Charlie Brower, *Me, and Other Advertising Geniuses* (Garden City, NY, 1974), 213.

Cynthia B. Meyers is the author of *A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio*, as well as articles in *Journal of American History*, *Cinema Journal*, *American Journalism,* and other publications. She is Professor of Communication, Art, & Media at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York City.