CHAPTER ONE
Advertising, Branding & Consumerism – A Literature Survey

Introduction

Over the last few years, Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (2000) has become a cultural touchstone for anti-corporatist sentiment around the world. It has inspired the sort of devoted following and ready recognition by which the big brands it critiques are actually defined. Almost by surprise, *No Logo* prompted a popular and critical reception somewhat atypical for a non-fiction title, particularly one written by a relatively unknown Canadian journalist. *I-D* magazine anointed Klein 'a young funky heiress to Chomsky', while the *Irish Times* deemed it, knowingly enough, 'as persuasive as any advertisement.'[5] The first Flamingo edition, published in January 2000, sold over 40 000 copies in the British Commonwealth alone. A second edition, published exactly one year later, sold over 370 thousand copies – and continues to sell at a rate of some 4 thousand a month.[6]

These figures are noted here not as much as a tribute to Klein's commercial success as an indication of a certain mood amongst a growing readership. *No Logo* has become a focal point around which a sub-genre of brand-related literature has emerged and prospered. Its appeal and reach is indicative of a discernible trend towards sweeping, didactic critiques of contemporary consumer culture. Such titles include Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counter Culture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1998), Kalle Lasn's *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge – And Why We Must* (1999), and Alissa Quart's *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (2003). From the cautionary to the dystopian, their arguments differ in degrees, but not in kind. The tenor of Klein's case has reverberated far and wide:

> [Many] of us feel the international brand-name connections that crisscross
> the globe more keenly than we ever have before – and we feel them
> precisely because we have never been as 'branded' as we are today.[7]

For Klein, the 1990s launched an era of 'advanced branding', whereby major brands like Nike, Starbucks and Wal-Mart do not just piggyback culture – they *are* the

culture, to the extent that logos, slogans and jingles have utterly obscured the costs borne by labour, education, and public life generally. If nothing else, *No Logo* is a record of these costs.

In *No Logo*, Klein focuses on the mega-brands of contemporary consumer culture, and the acute brand consciousness that separates otherwise identical products. In this culture, brands are like transmission lines, and communicate messages as disparate as family values, sexual orientation, and political causes. As advertisers overload their imagery with dense and complex meanings, and dot the semiosphere with symbols that are both distinctive and familiar, brands become a sort of consumer shorthand. In turn, as more and more brands go global, and exploit the capacities and resources of multinational corporations (MNCs), this shorthand becomes the *lingua franca* of the post-GATT world.

As the international movement of Starbucks, McDonalds, Polo *et al* accelerates and strengthens, consumers around the world become brand literate. As they negotiate the dizzying swirl of graphics, jingles and slogans, these consumers process the advertised world as both the extension and reinforcement of the socio-political landscape. In some cases, certain symbols come to symbolise more than whatever 'brand charisma' the marketers orchestrate. For example, as Klein recounts, the bigger the brand, in terms of international presence and power, the more susceptible it is to activist agitation. From the anti-sweatshop protests against Nike, to the human rights protests against Shell, to the infamous McLibel trial that saw two English environmentalists draw worldwide attention to corporate censorship and free speech – all these (and more) demonstrate the cultural potency of brands. Effectively, the catalogue of brands constitutes a vocabulary in itself. Moreover, this has less to do with consumers' obsessional preoccupation with brand-based showiness (although there certainly is that); rather, it has to do with the finely graded differences between brands, and the cultural know-how that has evolved accordingly.

At around the same time that Klein was 'taking aim at the brand bullies', Australian entrepreneur Dick Smith was doing much the same. *No Logo*'s sub-title became Smith's clarion call. In 1999, he launched his own range of Australian-made, Australian-owned food products. Within its first nine months, the eponymous brand

had generated retail sales worth $27.8 million.[8] The market-tester product, Dick Smith Peanut Butter, secured a 15 per cent share of the lucrative $72.4 million market within the first few months of its release.[9] In the brand wars, Dick Smith Foods was up against supermarket giants like Kraft, Heinz, Kelloggs and Coca-Cola. These multinational players had an estimated $500 billion hold on the food industry, the home-grown proportion of which was worth $150 billion.[10] However, in lieu of a big advertising budget, or a cutting-edge marketing pitch, the Dick Smith brand relied on a mood rather than a strategy. Rather than showcase an innovative product, or the promise of sex appeal, or any other of the familiar devices used in advertising, the Smith line espoused an altogether loftier purpose: the national good. As Deborah Light of *The Bulletin* put it:

> Marketing jingoism isn't new, nor is pushing the cause of the Aussie battler, but no one's ever seen it used on a scale like this and suddenly, divisive social issues – jobs, foreign profits, tobacco, monopolies – are forcing decisions in the aisles and at the check-out.[11]

On the surface, Klein and Smith were rhetorically allied, and both took to task the major multinational brands for tangentially related reasons. Moreover, just as Klein's profile grew alongside a burgeoning appetite for brand-based commentaries, so too did Smith's intervention inspire a spate of like-minded campaigns. From headache tablets to tinned fruit, the call to 'Buy Australian' became an increasingly common one. Put simply, both Klein and Smith spoke of a clear and distinct cultural shift: a widening curiosity about how branding, advertising and consumption affect – if not constitute – contemporary life. They both presumed a necessary literacy among their publics, one that had been shaped and sharpened by over a century of advertising.

The paths by which *No Logo* and Dick Smith Foods 'arrived' are both well worn and amply documented. Klein was certainly not the first to bemoan advertising's effects on culture, and Smith was certainly not the first to harness and market a form of patriotism. The historical coincidence of Klein and Smith *is* significant, but each has a rich and complex heritage. What follows, then, is an attempt to appreciate each player's discursive baggage, and to track some of the works that foreshadowed the various concerns and criticisms that Klein and Smith eventually articulated. While Klein and Smith have obviously been foreground here, their leads, so to speak, were

largely determined by the star wattage each generated, either academically (more so Klein) or popularly (more so Smith). They have been chosen as useful props around which subtler ideas can be drawn and developed. Basically, both Klein and Smith have displayed a finely grained and multifaceted response to contemporary branding. If nothing else, each took issues and ideas that had been brewing for decades, if not longer, and cast them in terms that were clear, simple and widely accessible. There is, in other words, a subtle affinity between the emotion, imagery and rhetoric that Klein and Smith so often invoke, and Bushells' appearance in *Last Cab to Darwin*; this thesis will look at how this association emerged, and the critical implications thereof.

Essentially, what follows is a literature survey, but one that has been abridged for the sake of analytical expedience. In particular, Klein follows a long and dense trail of polemic, rationale, argument, and counter-argument. She is just one of numerous critics who have identified and decried the many and varied effects of contemporary advertising; she may have spotlighted the major super-brands, but her arguments can hardly be divorced from the vast literature that has already unpacked this particular stance. Furthermore, while this review will survey works that complement, if not share, Klein's perspective, it will also acknowledge alternative readings of advertising, branding, and consumerism. This is done less to provide a balanced overview, since the scope of the various 'sides' defies such artificial weighting. Rather, it is to stress the at-times bewildering omnipresence of the forces under attack. Specifically, it is not 'just' neo-conservatives that have argued against Klein, or at least against the general argument she makes. For example, seminal contributions from Cultural Studies and Media Studies have expanded understanding of the issues immensely. In turn, such works will also be considered.

On the other hand, the body of literature with which Smith will be associated is rather uneven. The writing of Australian advertising history – and analyses thereof – has been patchy, at best. Therein lays the imperative for more contributions such as this one. That is, advertisements, and particularly certain brands, *do* add to the national vocabulary, and their stories and symbols imbue the popular imagination with enduring associations. For example, and as far as this thesis is concerned, Bushells has authored the cultural mood and reflected the nation's history just as importantly as 'real' authors have. As such, this review will consider what little *has* been written

about Australia's advertising history and consumer culture, and will establish a critical position accordingly.

This survey has been arranged with these objectives in mind: in order to appreciate why a certain brand was chosen to demonstrate a given thesis; and to appreciate how this thesis either echoes or departs from previous accounts of similar processes. So, this survey will divide the relevant literature into two, broad blocs: firstly, advertising, branding and contemporary consumer culture; and secondly, advertising, branding and consumerism in Australia. This early demarcation will assist in processing the numerous connections that will be forged later on. Moreover, each bloc will include a range of perspectives, from various disciplines, regions and ideological persuasions.

Bloc One: Advertising, Branding & Contemporary Consumer Culture

(a) Broad Overviews

Firstly, this survey will consider texts that have presented generous overviews of a specific milieu: contemporary consumer capitalism. Essentially, members of this culture assume a disposition and mindset that is fuelled by and for consumption. A significant proportion of such cultures communicate through the consumption of commercially bought goods and services. Not only that, they exhibit a general tendency to buy into (both literally and figuratively) the spectacle and spin of advertising, branding, public relations and hype. Incessant promotion is not just tolerated as an inevitable intrusion into an otherwise non-consumerist culture; rather, it is generally regarded as a meaningful extension of it. In this way, there is no break between commerce and culture, and no time out from a consumption-based reality. In turn, such assessments have inspired both relief and regret. Generally, those that trumpet market democracy and consumer sovereignty express relief, while those that dismiss such concepts as euphemisms express regret. This is, of course, a highly simplistic summary of just two of the main positions, but it does, at the very least, anticipate the most common approaches in such literature.

Ultimately, this thesis considers how just one brand (Bushells) has paralleled the cultural shifts of one just nation (Australia). Initially, though, the literature review

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will, in order to move from the general to the specific, deal predominantly with literature that either emanates from the United States, or treats the United States as the primary point of reference. The reasons for this are historical, as certain developments in the United States did contour its cultural climate in ways that eventually influenced Australia's commercial evolution.

Given that Australia's early history was inextricably tied to British interests, this emphasis on American influence might seem, at first glance, misplaced. To be sure, methods for packaging, branding and advertising were already underway in Britain at the time of Bushells' introduction in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the history of advertising and consumer culture in Britain is well documented. In fact, as Victoria Morgan points out in *Cultures of Selling* (2006), even in the 1700s, in England's provincial towns, shopkeepers were displaying a burgeoning interest in advertisements, billheads and tradecards. For Morgan, these new forms of printed advertising:

> ...conveyed ideas about novelty and fashion, as well as about the availability of commodities. Beyond this, they provide insights into the concerns of the shopkeepers who were keen to tap into discourses of civility and respectability.[12]

This tendency – to overlay the acquisition of goods with a psychological and/or semiotic dimension – only intensified over the following century. Indeed, in *The Commodity of Culture of Victorian England* (1990), Thomas Edison argues that, from the mid 1800s, England became increasingly preoccupied with the traffic of meaningful things: the building of auditoriums, banks, stock exchanges and corporation headquarters all primed that culture for placing an ever-greater premium on the production, purchase and display of commodities. Specifically, for Edison, the Great Exhibition of 1851 was not only a triumph of technology and design; it effectively inaugurated the 'era of the spectacle.' All the hallmarks of the modern marketplace were there: the veneer (and fusion) of abundance, leisure, democracy and style. These *ideas* were as crucial to the Exhibition's appeal as the *things* it housed. In turn:

> From the exhibition advertisers learned that the best way to sell people commodities was to sell them the ideology of England, from the national identity embodied in the monarchy to the imperial expansion taking place in Africa, from the many diseases threatening the national health to the many boundaries separating classes and genders.[13]

These points are raised here to stress that any analysis of advertising, branding and consumer culture cannot treat the United States as *the* point of origin; and it should be noted that, insofar as Australia's earliest commercial players were generally of British (not American) stock, they came from a society that was already familiar with relatively modern forms of commercial communication. However, it is argued here that, as much as advertising in Britain pre-dates the introduction of Bushells in 1883 (and indeed the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788), this thesis pays far more attention to the development and influence of American advertising. For reasons explored in further chapters, from the late 1800s, for its sophistication, infrastructure and success, Britain's advertising professionals looked to the United States in awe and admiration. In the United States, advertising had glamour, prestige and respect – traits that saw it lauded throughout the capitalist world. So, even though advertising *was* firmly established in England by the late 1800s, as Diana and Geoffrey Hindley put plainly, the English 'had still much to learn from America, as agents and the Americans themselves never tired of repeating.'[14]

As such, works that document and explain this situation warrant some consideration here. In *The Mirror Makers* (1997), for example, Stephen Fox traces the development of the advertising industry in the wake of the United States Civil War. This period saw the power and effectiveness of advertising surface for the first time, with patent medicines the first to be advertised on a national scale. Crucially, the nascent industry was bolstered and buttressed by the extraordinary social and economic shifts of the nineteenth century, with developments in communications and transport opening up new marketing opportunities and capacities. More specifically and spectacularly, though, there were the extraordinary possibilities afforded by an explosion in manufacturing potential, launching what Fox terms 'equality between supply and demand and the novel problem of competitive selling in an economy of abundance.'[15]

Similarly, in *Fables of Abundance* (1994), Jackson Lears links the expansion of commerce and trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with new ways to

visualise and achieve success and satisfaction. For Lears, advertising validated a way of being in the world, reconfiguring ancient dreams of abundance (such as Carnival feasts) to fit the modern world of goods. Like Fox, Lears sees this system perfected in twentieth century America, as corporate advertising streamlined visions of excess along the model of industrial efficiency, aligning the desire for plenty with supply-side interests.

In *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes* (1998), Juliann Sivulka takes this parallel – between the history of advertising and the history of the United States – even further. Sivulka traces the history of advertising from 1492 (that is, modern American history generally). Moving thematically from the New World, to the Civil War, to the Western Frontier, and then Urbanization, Sivulka finally lands on New York and Chicago, the cities that finessed advertising for the modern world. Sivulka also correlates the growth of the advertising industry with the blossoming opportunities for profit, such as population growth and the spread of literacy – market inducements, of a sort. In this way, the advertising industry in the United States provided a template by which increasing capacities to supply commodities could be matched to increasing capacities to nurture their demand. In other words, advertisements were seen as increasingly essential in order to prise newfound wealth away from households that were once self-sufficient. From the late 1800s,

> [More] businesses began to recognize that advertising could do more than reduce overall production costs by increasing sales. It could also create desires – desires that could fuel a consumer economy. People bought articles that they did not know they wanted until advertising pictured the product's benefits and told them they couldn't live without it.[16]

In this period, developments and inventions propelled more developments and inventions – coal energy, mechanised reapers, sewing machines, the light bulb, the telephone, powered streetcars, the phonograph, moving pictures, the development of a national railroad system, mail-order catalogues – all these things (and more) helped move new products to growing populations. By the twentieth century, the United States had pioneered developments in packaging, trademark legislation, slogans, branding, and the art of the 'soft sell'; in short, the hallmarks of advanced consumer capitalism. In its eagerness to transform advertising into nothing short of a science,

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the Advertising Men's League of New York even commissioned psychologist Harry L. Hollingworth. His brief was to forecast the consumer mind in any given market, the result of which was *Advertising and Selling* (1913). This was Hollingworth's attempt to:

> [Formulate] and systematize those facts and laws which relate to the processes of appeal and response in the selling and advertising of goods, and to undertake investigations which might result in the discovery of new facts and principles of both practical and scientific interest.[17]

In terms of imagery, ideals and advice, advertising in the early twentieth century did not just refer to modernity and progress; in a very important sense, it delivered it. According to Roland Marchand, for example, the 1920s and 1930s were pivotal decades in the history of both advertising and modernity. In *Advertising the American Dream* (1985), Marchand explains how, in this period, advertising pictured and presented a new modern scale, one of cars, skyscrapers, suburbs, industrial hierarchies and brand proliferation. Armed with market research, advertising agents moved beyond the supposedly neutral delivery of product information, to the psychological by-products of possession. As a result, advertisements became sophisticated, emotive vignettes.

For Marchand, these advertisements were not only responsible for promoting the fruits of the mechanical age. Rather, they also doubled as social counsel for the anxious and overwhelmed – that is, those whose sense of self was rattled by the pace and pressure of modern life. So, copywriters evolved from 'salespeople' to 'confidants', and offered clues for survival in the uncompromising, urban world. In this way, advertisements defined and dramatised the Good Life for the modern era. Somewhat liturgical, they amounted to a secular iconography, complete with heroic proportions, adoring throngs, and 'invitations to technological idolatry.'[18]

The spread of such advertising in the United States appealed to more than just consumers' increasingly sophisticated spending habits; it also appealed to a sensibility and orientation distinct to the new age. As Michael Schudson argues in *Advertising, the uneasy persuasion* (1993), social mobility was sold as both a distinct possibility and a powerful ideology. New patterns of socialisation brought new values, as identity

formation became largely a matter of lifestyle choice, not heritage. In turn, the burgeoning mass media helped showcase this wider world of consumer choice, by broadening horizons and blurring provincial demarcations.[19] With this heightened sense of status and variety, commodities thus became effective symbols for identity creation. Accordingly, 'reading' these signs became a modern skill, since brands meant more in a society preoccupied with both identity and mobility. In short, the different brands communicated specific meanings to increasingly brand-literate consumers.

Clearly, this is just a skeletal overview of the transformative changes that took place; indeed, their significance overwhelms the scope of this thesis. For now, though, it is enough to acknowledge the precedence this pattern set for advertising industries around the world, many of which (including Australia's) were to borrow ideas and techniques straight from Madison Avenue. Moreover, this pushed the United States to the fore of many 'advertising' discussions thereafter. Put simply, the United States had a first-rate industry that was to both inspire and incense, with its success seen as something to either emulate or undermine.

(b) Siding with the Bullies

To consider one common contribution to this discussion, one might start with titles that take a rather sanguine approach to advertising, branding and consumerism. These maintain that advertising and branding are basically inevitable and at times helpful additions to a modern democracy – the whistles and bells of free trade. In such accounts, whatever harmful effects are sometimes attributed to consumerism are either sidelined and ignored, or considered annoying bumps in an otherwise ideal environment. However, even this literature spans shades of optimism, from the outright celebratory, to the quietly conservative, to the faintly apologetic. What they *do* share is an overall acceptance of the form and function of contemporary consumerism, and a ready accommodation of its cultural freight, including (and especially) advertising and branding. Effectively, the so-called bullies are spared condemnation.

Perhaps the most common justification for advertising in such literature is to suggest that it merely follows consumer cues, rather than fabricate or exploit them. As such, advertising simply holds a mirror to the dizzying array of human desires. This is the central claim in Daniel Starch's *Principles of Advertising* (1923). For Starch, an advertisement can be held accountable for just five simple functions: to attract attention, arouse interest, create conviction, produce a response, and impress the memory. In what will become a familiar defence in such literature, Starch emphatically denies advertising's capacity to create new wants. He writes,

> Man already has certain desires present from birth, which are part of his fundamental make-up. All that a seller can do is to direct these desires in certain directions, or stimulate them to action, or show by what new ways an old desire may be satisfied.[20]

This air of humble innocence permeates a lot of this sort of literature. Real power is often located outside the advertisement, as if to forfeit advertising's reason for being: to persuade – and therefore to demonstrate its power to influence both thought and action. In *Truth in Advertising* (1963), for example, Walter Weir reduces the advertisement to little more than a hint of what may come if a particular good or service is consumed. For Weir, this does not constitute a 'sell', as such; merely, a visual and/or verbal suggestion regarding what may be. So, since an advertisement alone cannot 'sell', which requires the consumer's volition to actually close the deal, it can hardly be blamed for any manipulation or deceit. According to Weir:

> It [only] excites interest in a product and if the interest excited is sufficient, the consumer hies himself to a corner grocery, or a neighbourhood hardware store or a nearby automobile dealer to confront the product, to appraise it. At the last minute his confidence in the product and what it may do for him may not be strong enough to consummate the purchase – which is where, and why, effective and informative packaging and point-of-sale material can be highly productive and successfully supplement the advertising.[21]

Here, one can see another advantage often attributed to advertising: it delivers technology and progress to an advanced society, satiating every consumer whim with 'new and improved' goods and services. In this way, advertising is imbued with the grandeur and purpose of modernity itself. Such is the line pursued in *The Anatomy of a Television Commercial* (1970). Edited by Lincoln Diamant, this documents Eastman

Kodak's 'Yesterdays' advertisement, which was first broadcast in 1967. As befits an industry tribute to a single advertisement, Diamant's rationale for choosing 'Yesterdays' was that, at just two minutes long, it had 'Aristotle's dramatic requirement of magnitude, dealing with important subjects and products.'[22] This book features in-depth, first-person contributions from all facets of the production process – printing and distribution, soundtrack compilation, market planning, and so forth. Effectively, the advertisement emerges as a finely crafted example of modern-day technology serving eons-old impulses. Not only that, its emotional resonance seemingly precludes suggestions that these impulses are anything other than natural and healthy.

This idea, that advertising does little more than bring new-world wizardry to the marketplace, also appears in *Madison Avenue U.S.A* (1958), by Martin Mayer. Echoing Starch with what becomes a familiar refrain in such accounts, Mayer insists that advertising is 'simply' selling, and that attempts to link its practice to anything more sinister are basically misguided. However, whereas Diamant's take on the well-produced advertisement borders on the breathless, Mayer's is slightly more restrained (but no less common). According to Mayer, critics generally over-estimate the power of the advertising industry[23], and are essentially displaying an age-old distrust of Rhetoric. By his logic, to charge advertising with corrupting contemporary life is to assume that the slick, expensive efforts of agencies actually pay off. Mayer goes so far as to suggest that advertising personnel actually deserve sympathy. Since their work is rarely recognised as the result of any one person, beyond the home agency that is, they are denied the joy of individual praise:

> Advertising is selling, and the great satisfaction of selling is closing the sale. The advertising man never can close a sale; in fact, he can never be certain that it was his effort which made the sale possible. Worst of all, he works in black anonymity.[24]

Another defence of advertising is found in Kenneth A. Longman's *Advertising* (1971). For Longman, not only does advertising assist the busy populations of advanced societies; the interplay of persuasion and description is actually enjoyed, and allows time-strapped citizens to consider buying decisions in their own time, and at leisure. In what is another popular refrain among like-minded authors, Longman

argues that attacks on advertising (for example, that it is wasteful, manipulative and misleading) are merely masking separate attacks on society and consumerism. Here, Longman places advertising on a parallel plane, reflecting society but not 'of' it. Moreover, Longman refutes the numerous critics that have lamented the apparent wastefulness of the branding process, with a generic product superfluously multiplied for the flimsiest of reasons. For Longman, branding does not duplicate the same product senselessly but, rather, creates 'charcterizational value'[25] that can genuinely enhance the experience of consumption. Longman writes:

> If the taste of food can benefit from the lighting and seating arrangements in a restaurant, and if a man can create an atmosphere through the things he wears, then a laundry detergent can benefit from the associations it gains through advertising. Why shouldn't washday be a little bit entertaining because of whimsical television commercials that associate it with medieval chivalry or with marvellous washing machines that grow to immense size?[26]

Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson, authors of *Marketing Aesthetics* (1997), take a similar tack. For them, in a world where most basic needs are readily met, it is the satisfaction of experiential or aesthetic needs that constitutes value for the consumer. Nike Town, for example, is considered a triumph of 'experiential space'. It enables Nike to connect emotionally with consumers, and shifts customer satisfaction away from specific product attributes to a more long-term and intimate relationship with the brand. This view pinpoints the crux of brand rationale: that customer satisfaction has moved beyond questions of utility to questions of identity, so advertisements now communicate the 'identity' of a brand to a similarly conceptualised demographic, and prod this demographic to consummate its identification through consumption.

In *Brand Warriors* (1997), for example, the (then) vice president of global marketing for Levi Strauss jeans, Robert Holloway, highlights the importance of brand identity quite explicitly. Working around research that fifteen to nineteen year-old males buy approximately 30 per cent of all jeans sold, the brand prioritises those attributes young men supposedly identify with most: rebellion, originality, excitement and fun. As Holloway describes it:

> [When] we're successful with young consumers, the Levi's brand will live with young people through that crucial period when they 'find

themselves'. And, more than that, the brand becomes an enduring point of identification 'for young consumers with that period in their lives. They choose the brand as a sort of uniform or symbol of youth; and, in Western cultures, as a symbol of independence and freedom – even defiance.[27]

It is not uncommon, then, for proponents of branding to define it in decidedly emotive terms. In *The Future of Brands* (2000), Rita Clifton and Esther Maughan claim that, not unlike a personal, human relationship, the most successful brands offer (and indeed guarantee) consumers 'a "relationship", a "reputation", a "set of expectations", a "promise".'[28] What is more, according to such literature, these qualities do not just enhance the economic transaction of retail: they are essential for grounding the consumer in something 'real' and 'felt'. In *The Soul of the New Consumer* (2000), David Lewis and Darren Bridger go so far as to deem consumption in the contemporary economy nothing short of a life-changing salvation, a portal to genuineness in an otherwise unstable world. With the displacement of traditional social cues, the market takes centre stage: 'We live in a society where common ideals and political resolve have been largely replaced by shared meanings revolving around brand names and advertising images.'[29] For Lewis and Bridger, though, this is more of a lucrative opportunity than a sad loss. Without irony or judgement, they claim that:

> With work, family and society no longer providing a ready means of self-actualization as in the recent past, people are increasingly seeking authenticity in one of two ways: through spirituality and through 'retail therapy'.[30]

Similarly, according to Geoffrey Randall, a successful brand has charisma, and can generate consumer satisfaction that is independent of the product or service to which it is attached. However, in yet another tribute to consumer sovereignty, Randall maintains that consumers are the ultimate arbiters; *they* must be sufficiently convinced that a brand is discernibly different to its competition. As he argues in *Branding* (1997), the process is a trick of perception. The challenge for advertisers is to strike the closest symmetry between the brand's identity (which they can partially control in the marketing mix), and the brand's image, which is in the minds of consumers, and which advertisers *cannot* control. So:

> If they [consumers] can perceive that a product has a unique identity that differentiates it from similar products, and they can describe it and the unique set of benefits it offers, then it is a brand.[31]

Indeed, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, branding has come to constitute a significant sub-genre in marketing and promotions literature. Like Randall, Jack Vaughan and Wayde Bull argue in *The Phantom Overhead* (1996) that a charismatic brand has an uncanny power to generate considerable momentum (that is, sales). Again, it is a qualitative difference that must be perceived by consumers, not assumed by advertisers. Moreover, by way of advice, Vaughan and Bull insist that this charisma must be channelled to every facet of a brand's existence, ensuring that the complete consumer experience evokes a sense of unity, consistency and clarity. As such, the brand must communicate through:

> [The] mission, the values, the culture, the beliefs, the language, the atmosphere, the employees, the tone, the reactions, the way the phone's answered, the community interaction, the R&D, the building. Everything.[32]

Ironically, another common approach in this sort of literature is to underplay the effects of advertising. Critics of advertising tend to draw direct links between its practices and principles and a social structure that is less than committed to the public good. Its defenders, however, tend to blur any such correlation by questioning the degree to which any of advertising's effects can be proven, much less attacked. In *Advertising in Contemporary Society* (1996), for example, Kim B. Rotzoll and James E. Haefner point to the 'quixotic nature' of human thought and behaviour, and the idea that consumers' frame of reference is irreducibly fluid. Not only does this befuddle advertisers' efforts to hook consumers, it also undermines critics' efforts to separate advertising from the rest of the marketing mix (such as price, packaging, point of sale, and so on). In turn, it is, according to Rotzoll and Haefner, virtually impossible to cite any of advertising's effects with any degree of certainty. In this way, they draw a line between the advertising itself, and the promotional infrastructure it inspires.

This idea, that advertisements are not as effective as their critics claim they are, can also be construed to represent consumers as the final decision-makers in any market

situation. All the energy and expenditure of sellers is, eventually and inevitably, dwarfed by the powerful position of choice-spoilt buyers. Max Sutherland and Alice K. Sylvester pursue this point in *Advertising and the Mind of the Consumer* (2000). They argue that advertisements work best when they reinforce what consumers already think or feel. In other words:

> Advertising is usually the weaker influence compared to what we already know or have in our minds. Any ad campaign is most likely to lead to advertising failure if the message is inconsistent with our existing beliefs.[33]

Again, it can be seen how advertising is treated as a mere function of human agency, thereby forestalling a more critical interrogation of it. By all accounts, advertising is the business of persuasion. What is questioned here, though, is its success rate. Without such 'proof', this argument goes, advertising has less to answer for, and therefore its critics have less of a case.

(c) Taking Aim (a broad church)

For its many critics, advertising is not just the business of persuasion; it is what Raymond Williams termed 'a form of cultural production which is highly specific to the phase of the corporate market.'[34] Few things encode and enact the consumerist ethos as effectively as an advertisement. Whilst advertising is only one facet of any brand's marketing, and a very limited way to conceptualise what manufacturers and marketers actually do, it remains, by definition and by design, the most obvious. As Kathy Myers notes in *Understains* (1986), advertising is a metaphor for an age, an economic and ideological snapshot of any given society:

> [That] provides a method for understanding the link between images and Utopias, occupation and ambition, class and culture, commodities and capitalism. It provides an analysis which is, by definition, political.[35]

There is little chance of extracting the role of this industry from the workings of modern consumer capitalism. This can either cloud the extent to which it contributes to consumerism (what its defenders, apologists and practitioners claim), thereby undercutting attempts to cite its ills with much certainty or precision. Or, conversely,

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as the following authors suggest, it actually makes advertising *more* blameworthy. As it brazenly trades insecurity and fear for greed and waste, advertising thrives in a general climate of acquisitiveness and individualism, and diverts time, money and energy from the greater social good. For all the peddling, critics argue, advertising produces nothing of value. In these more scathing accounts, advertising is seen to, among other things, hijack contemporary existence, and cannibalise the most intimate thoughts and experiences. As Leslie Savan writes in *The Sponsored Life* (1994):

> Virtually all of modern experience now has a sponsor, or at least a sponsored accessory, and there is no human emotion or concern – love, lust, war, childhood innocence, social rebellion, spiritual enlightenment, even disgust with advertising, that cannot be reworked into a sales pitch.[36]

Since advertising is such an obvious auxiliary to social and economic conservatism, its many critics form a pretty broad church. In many of the texts to be discussed here, advertising is considered the symbolic apex of a culture that gorges on artifice and manipulation, one that consumes itself out of any lasting and meaningful purpose. Fred Inglis, for example, makes this point in *The Imagery of Power* (1972). Inglis mounts what is a rather common case against advertising: that it is one of the primary means by which the capitalist West perpetuates itself, and sustains consistently high consumption levels on the back of so-called innovation and novelty. For Inglis, advertisements' power stems from the fact that they do in fact speak certain truths: consumers generally *do* aspire to wealth, sexual attractiveness and competitiveness – advertisements 'cannot make something out of nothing.'[37] The desires and drives might be real; what is false, though, is the suggestion that they can be met or satisfied with commodities.

In such literature, then, advertising becomes a convenient screen upon which critics can project a general dissatisfaction with the promises of consumerism – namely, that it is possible to purchase sociability, attractiveness, charisma and beauty. In turn, advertising is indicted for its inevitable inability to bridge what it promises (social status and personal fulfilment) with what it offers: commercially sold goods and services. In Sut Jhally's *The Codes of Advertising* (1990), it is this exploitation of false expectations (as opposed to 'false needs') that the author condemns. Like Inglis, Jhally focuses on the meanings that advertisements communicate, and their function

in increasingly alienated and disconnected lives. As industrial capitalism empties goods of 'true' meaning, advertisements fill in the empty shell, and their power is built on the social need for this meaning. For Jhally, then, advertisements' importance is in direct proportion to the primacy of market transactions in contemporary life. As the twentieth century oriented industrialised societies away from the old-world triumvirate of religion, work and family, people necessarily searched elsewhere for compensatory fulfilment: the consumer marketplace.

So, while critics of advertising often admit to advertising's surface advantage – that people generally do, for better or for worse, admire and pursue material and personal advancement, they question (if not flatly reject) the extent to which such atomistic 'growth' advances the general good. That is, critics often treat advertising as the most shameless and obvious incubator of self-centredness and superficiality. They argue that advertising defines personal betterment only in terms consonant with the market, to the detriment of anything that falls outside these narrow parameters; and at the expense of alternative ways by which betterment might be conceived. Such is the case Stuart Ewen makes in *Captains of Consciousness* (1976). Ewen considers advertising a sophisticated diversionary tool, placating the socially disenfranchised with utopian images of market abundance. He writes:

> Advertising raised the banner of consumable social democracy in a world where monumental corporate development was eclipsing and redefining much of the space in which critical alternatives might be effectively developed. As it became the voice of American mass-produced and consumed culture, it did so within a context of shrinking arenas for popularly defined culture.[38]

In turn, such authors sometimes make impassioned calls for readers to reassert their citizen rights, rather than submit to the monotony of endless consumption. As such, this literature often dichotomises contemporary society, with politicised, empowered citizens on the one hand, and deluded, debased consumers on the other. In Jean Kilbourne's *Can't Buy My Love* (1999), this distinction is considered less a reflection of people's intrinsic worth, or lack thereof, than of the endemic, corrosive power of advertising. For Kilbourne, advertising has produced a 'toxic cultural environment'[39] that has redefined sexuality, romance, success and normalcy. Consequently, the mass-produced stories of mostly American copywriters effectively replace the age-old

stories of tribes and communities around the world. Herein lays another of advertising's oft-cited effects: its apparent levelling of tastes and habits across the globe. Rather than attribute this worldwide trend to any inherent appeal, or as an index of rising incomes and discretionary spending, Kilbourne sees it as a sinister force of cultural imperialism. As such, according to Kilbourne, advertising sells a worldview based on cynicism, dissatisfaction and constant craving, what amounts to a propaganda effort unrivalled in world history.[40]

As it is presented in this discourse of cultural imperialism, advertising both represents and brings about a certain sensibility. In *Advertising International* (1991), Armand Mattelart considers this the fundamental feature of modern advertising:

> [That] behind the concept of advertising in its instrumental sense –
> namely, the 'multiple and impersonal announcement of goods, services or
> commercial ideas by a named advertiser, who pays an agency and a
> transmitter (the medium, or advertising support) to deliver his message to
> the market' – behind this concept is hidden another, an idea deeply rooted
> in the history of the mode of communication: that of a new model of
> social organization, a new means of creating consensus, of forging the
> general will.[41]

According to this school of thought, advertisements effectively foreground and necessitate this environment, creating the conditions needed to render their contents meaningful. So, according to Mattelart, advertisements do not just inform would-be consumers, but that in some cultures advertisements constitute something far more ambitious: the promise of a different way of life, one in which the commercial impulse infiltrates and alters everything and everybody.

So, while advertising's defence partly rests on an inability (or reluctance) to pinpoint the specific, identifiable effects of any one advertising campaign, critics often maintain that its power and presence is felt in the long term; that is, advertisements socialise, incrementally defining the desired goals and priorities of the consumerist society. Such is the argument presented in Gillian Dyer's semiotic study of advertising, *Advertising as Communication* (1982). According to Dyer, advertisements thus work on the aggregate level, scripting the 'good life' with idyllic, alluring, vivid imagery. The audience does not read them literally; their messages are

not absorbed verbatim. Rather, they 'teach us ways of thinking and feeling, generally through fantasy and dreaming.'[42] In this way, the pervasiveness of advertising is said to move beyond the strictly empirical.

The considerable literature against advertising often detours through schools of thought that have enjoyed better days, or at least in terms of academic salience. As it has been suggested in this chapter, advertising has become, over the last century, a convenient means by which social criticism can be articulated. Since advertising champions much of what many social critics protest against, its cheerleader status renders it readily amenable to open attack. Moreover, this becomes a multi-pronged attack, since social criticism straddles a spectrum of causes, interests and eras. In turn, while the general arguments of advertising's critics tend to overlap, one can still discern the internal imprints of other, perhaps somewhat unfashionable currents. This is not to suggest that such contributions have become either anachronistic or irrelevant, but that they can be at least partly understood as belonging to a particular place and/or time.

The literature against advertising's supposedly subliminal effects is a case in point. These texts belong to the post-Second World War interest in 'brainwashing', a term that was, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, coined in the United States in 1950, and became a national fascination that was played out in the popular media. In *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) for example, Vance Packard purportedly chronicles the 'mass psycho-analysis' of the professional persuaders, or, those advertising agencies that used the 'depth approach' of Motivational Research (MR). This approach involved intense, interrogative interviews that were designed to uncover consumers' deepest drives and secrets, which were said to be based on four basic motivations: sustenance, security, status and sex. The practice was developed after a James Vicary claimed that subliminal perception could be manipulated, and was made famous by its most prominent advocates, Alfred Politz and Earnest Dichter. For Packard, though, MR rendered consumers pliable and manipulable, and at the mercy of both advertisers and social science. Importantly, though, while Packard profiles the main practitioners of MR, he stops short of overstating advertising's crimes, pointing out that *most* advertising is tasteful, honest and artistic.[43]

Similarly, in Philippe Schuwer's *History of Advertising* (1966), advertising's efforts to convert, modify and arouse perceptions are literally equated with propaganda, with clever ad tricks that effectively brainwash a hapless public. According to Schuwer, the high rotation rate of slogans and symbols is designed to induce an obsessional condition, and to numb consumers' critical faculties to the point of mute submission. In turn:

> The real indictment concerns the attack made on our personality, the subconscious alteration in our tastes and inclinations. The public is subjected to these hidden pressures without being aware of them. The fear of such insidious influences causes alarm and distress.[44]

Wilson Bryan Key's *Subliminal Seduction* (1973) is even less restrained. Key is particularly interested in the practice of subliminal embedding, whereby 'monstrously clever' artists, writers, photographers and technicians embed pictures, emotionally loaded words and images into advertising visuals. These act as subliminal triggers to motivate purchasing behaviour. According to Key, every major advertising agency has at least one embedding technician, with 'sex' the most frequently embedded word in the American advertising industry. He writes:

> Media content is assembled in small bits and pieces, but presented as an avalanche of perpetual stimuli in which the bits and pieces have become invisible. To penetrate the illusions and trickery, we must take a close-up, almost molecular approach to media content analysis.[45]

While claims of subliminal advertising have certainly waned in recent years, even amongst the most ardent of advertising's critics, the work of Vance Packard continues to influence readings of advertising. This is because it reinforces a widespread suspicion of the industry and its effects on the cultural psyche. In *The Manipulators* (1998), Jeffrey Robinson attributes the tenacity of this suspicion, despite mostly successful attempts to debunk the 'science' of subliminal advertising, to two main factors. Firstly, Packard virtually evangelised his claims with speaking tours around America, and indulged his newfound celebrity as popular alarmist. Secondly, there was the satisfying reassurance of his rhetoric. Robinson writes that:

> [It] was enough to confirm an image of Madison Avenue many people wanted to believe – that advertising was an evil art; that advertisers could,

> without our knowledge, inoculate us with a 'buy this' virus that would cause us all, instantly, to break out into a spending rash.[46]

Of course, *all* texts are subject to the push and pull of history and circumstance. Certainly, titles like *The Hidden Persuaders* and *Subliminal Seduction* clearly worked from the intense paranoias and preoccupations of the post-war decades, and hark back to the moment 'brainwashing' entered the pop-cultural lexicon. Nonetheless, all texts inevitably bear the track-marks of time and place. All the titles surveyed in this section ('Taking Aim') express a common and unequivocal disdain for advertising, but they still differ slightly in terms of assumptions, interests and agendas – such is the nature of a body of literature that ranges disciplines and decades. All the same, and as Robinson suggests, however much an argument peaks and troughs academically, its cultural endurance cannot be underestimated, nor its impact on subsequent interpretations of similar processes, practices and people. In turn, this literature survey will not necessarily move to more 'complete' or 'accurate' accounts, as though the ones reviewed thus far have been sub-standard, irrelevant or unbalanced. Rather, in light of the continuing resonance of these titles, and the fact that all work must be considered within some sort of context, it will simply move towards titles that work within different frameworks.

(d) The Postmodern Turn

In the last few decades, there has been a discernible shift away from such 'ad-centric' critiques (that is, critiques that focus almost exclusively on either the textual content of advertisements, or the operation and function of the advertising profession) to ones that position advertising within broader cultural processes and practices. In turn, ways of understanding advertising have developed beyond the simple polarity discussed so far: that is, to be either 'for' or 'against' it. Rather than treat advertising as an annexe to society and culture, more authors are bridging its logic and language with other industries, institutions and philosophies. This ushers in what will be termed the 'postmodern' turn in this survey.

Importantly, this is not to suggest that the following titles either share a common vision, and nor do they necessarily defy the general tendency to be either 'for' or

'against' the processes under review. If nothing else, though, they do broaden the focal beam to include issues and ideas outside of the advertising industry, without exactly abandoning the basic interests and questions that have been considered so far. The 'postmodern' rubric suggests, at the very least, two things. Firstly, the following titles openly incorporate the insights afforded by seminal post-structuralist and postmodernist theorists, which in turn colours their impressions of contemporary culture. Secondly, this analytic turn renders the 'advertising' banner used so far somewhat insufficient for fully understanding how advertising generates meaning or 'makes sense' in contemporary life. Rather, as the following authors suggest, advertising might be better served analytically if it is considered within wider understandings of consumerism, visual culture, and postmodernity. This no doubt disrupts the cleanliness of the survey so far, since it demands a wide-angle approach that is less than sympathetic to the simple plotting that has navigated the literature so far.

From the outset, the depth and complexity of the term 'postmodern' should be acknowledged. While there is not the space here to elaborate too much on its numerous permutations, since it encompasses a plethora of pressing, philosophical concerns, one can draw out its main propositions, as they relate to the topic at hand. At the very least, and in several important accounts, it refers to a certain sensibility in contemporary culture. Specifically, it concerns significant developments in manufacturing and consumption. While marketing and promotions emerged in the wake of developments in mass production, it was during this later, postmodern stage that advertising assumed the dimensions and significance it enjoys today.

According to David Harvey, for example, the year 1973 constitutes a watershed moment in the evolution of capitalist production. With the shift from the relatively stable Fordist system of production to one of ferment and instability (what is often termed 'flexibility'), a new regime of value emerged and prospered. In keeping with the hype and promise of the advertising world, it was one that privileged difference, the ephemeral, fashion, and the commodification of all cultural forms. As Harvey writes in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), the effect was 'to re-emphasize the fleeting qualities of modern life and even to celebrate them.'[47]

The shift to new methods of production – flexible, electronics-based automation – made small batch production possible. This had a monumental impact on the marketing of consumer goods. Whereas assembly-line production was premised on a generic mass market, the new techniques meant niche markets could be catered – the optimum situation for brand differentiation, the 'lifestyling' of consumer products, and the pluralisation of consumption. In turn, the fractured, fragmented marketplace was the economic embodiment (if not facilitator) of a distinctly postmodern subjectivity. As Douglas Kellner argues in *Media Culture* (1995), postmodern culture displaced the traditional expressions of identity – the moral, political, and existential choices and commitments one makes – and replaces them with a glorified theatricality. In this way, advertising, in particular, was the privileged domain for this disjointed postmodern identity, an unabashed celebration of role-play and reinvention. Increasingly, advertisers exploited the signifying potential of brand differentiation, and invited consumers to experiment with the postmodern markers of identity: image, looks and style.[48]

Where manufacturers welcomed these new marketing opportunities, as economies of scale made way for economies of scope, others denounced what appeared to be yet more endorsement of the consumerist tendency. It seemed that consumer societies had cheerfully submitted to what Fredric Jameson termed 'a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense.'[49] Free to indulge markets that were ever more specific, manufacturers could bombard consumers with a bewildering array of desirable commodities, and communicate their desirability with ever more sophisticated advertising. At a more philosophical level, then, it is often suggested that this historical juncture signalled a loss of sorts. With increasing numbers of people drawn into the cultural orbit of advertising, PR and spin, a distinct triviality apparently took hold, a preoccupation with spectacle and consumption that eventually overrode alternative expressions of meaning and feeling.

So, it is within this context that the literature to be surveyed here may be understood: put simply, contemporary analyses of advertising are often situated within a broader discussion of postmodern culture. As such, 'advertising' is not treated as a localised and self-contained unit, but as a springboard to more abstract enquiries. In turn, 'advertising' is set against a rather dense grid of economic, social and political

configurations; it both underpins and oversees the priorities, interests and assumptions that structure contemporary life. Advertising has become a topic that almost invariably runs through most contemporary cultural criticism, whether they are accounts of what has been termed postmodern culture, consumer culture, promotional culture or even visual culture. As theorists, critics and commentators suggest new ways of reading society and culture, advertising is increasingly seen as both a screen and source for cultural expression.

Rather than use advertising as the point of departure, these texts consider the practices and priorities of the culture that places a high premium on advertising. This has some very important implications. At the very least, it suggests that it is becoming less meaningful to discuss advertising as though it had an internal rhythm that could be understood or explained through advertising alone. In these more recent accounts, it is suggested that advertising inhabits (as well as exhibits) a more pervasive and overarching cultural disposition. What this does, though, is direct one away from just advertising, and towards the social, economic and political developments that have helped choreograph a culture within which advertising can play such a significant part. To return briefly to the parlance of *No Logo*, the following titles do not so much deal with the brand bullies as consider the contours (both seen and unseen) of the 'playground' that allows and encourages the brand bullies to *be* bullies.

The most common and obvious accounts of this culture are ones that deal with the role of consumption. Robert Bocock's *Consumption* (1993) looks at how consumption has emerged as a major socio-cultural practice within Western capitalist societies. Specifically, Bocock considers how and why these practices have become so central to the social construction of identity. He argues that, as befits the fluidity and flexibility of the postmodern era, consumers assert a sense of identity and difference by rummaging through the marketplace, and playfully ignore the conventions of the past. Bocock writes:

> Categories of taste, of style, interest, pastimes, political or religious 'belonging' may change rapidly under postmodern conditions; what were under modern conditions seen as distinct, and separate, even mutually exclusive, patterns of consumption and leisure-time pursuits, become mixed together, less mutually exclusive, in post-modernity.[50]

In this way, advertising provides a never-ending montage of available options, as manufacturers flatter the consumers' increasingly nuanced tastes with a staggering variety of product choices. Moreover, argues Bocock, since consumption is fashioned around identity, spending habits and brand choices become means by which consumers communicate to society who they are, or what they aspire to. Advertising thus works on this identity-formation, and imbues commodities with the semantic attributes that the consumers desire in them.

Jean Baudrillard (1988) presents a more dystopian picture of the role of consumption in contemporary capitalist societies. For Baudrillard, postmodern life posits consumption as a way of life, to the exclusion of everything else. By his account, the shopping centre houses the spectrum of contemporary cultural life, and to be happy is to spend. With characteristic aplomb, Baudrillard dissolves formerly separate spheres (work, leisure, culture and nature) into the simple activity of perpetual shopping. In turn, he inverts the logic of consumer sovereignty, and regards product choice and brand variety as industrial constraints, imposed in order to mystify pollution, decay and social arbitrariness. Put simply, consumerism has, according to Baudrillard, sapped the spontaneity and individuality out of everyday life:

> We have reached the point where 'consumption' has grasped the whole of life; where all activities are sequenced in the same combinatorial mode; where the schedule of gratification is outlined in advance, one hour at a time; and where the 'environment' is complete, completely climatized, furnished and culturalized.[51]

Whilst accounts as bleak as Baudrillard's are certainly not uncommon, in the last decade there has been a noticeable retreat from the kind of criticism that rested on a simple contrast between needs and wants (that is, the kind of critique that lambasted advertising for obscuring any distinction between the two). In *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997), for example, Don Slater argues that any division between material essentials/needs and material luxuries/wants is not as natural as critics suggest. Rather, human nature develops in line with the objectified world it has created – therefore, human needs are *not* fixed.[52] This undermines many critics' view that advertising manufactures and sustains a seemingly infinite list of wants. Slater

maintains that people understand their needs in terms of projects, goals, social conventions and norms. So, it is highly possible for a consumerist culture to effectively redefine 'normal' enough times to disfigure the critics' essentials-to-luxuries continuum.

Advertising has also been seen as just one facet of capitalist society's promotional dynamic. That is, advertisements are not alone in their infamous complicity with hype and cliché. In *Promotional Culture* (1991), Andrew Wernick argues that to treat advertisements as separate texts is a convenient but misleading abstraction. According to Wernick, the signs and symbols of advertising are drawn from a common cultural pool. As advertising recycles familiar representations of celebrities, social stereotypes and mythic allusions, it becomes an effective source of idioms, quotes and givens. This doubles advertising's role; it becomes a part of both a shared cultural vocabulary, as well as a commercially activated and motivated chain. In turn, according to Wernick, this promotional web becomes a thick, communicative complex, an indeterminate circle that has no distinct points of entry or exit. What is more, he argues, this relentless promotion has fostered a concomitant sensibility that oscillates between harmless irreverence and hardened scepticism, or cynical privatism and mass apathy.[53]

Sometimes, the literature dealing with postmodern culture exhibits a pointed ambivalence, a reluctance to condemn contemporary capitalist practices too quickly or too categorically. More specifically, Cultural Studies posits a very different range of perspectives, one that not only undermines the main criticisms directed at consumer culture, but also opens up new ways of seeing the processes being described. Drawing on both the empirical evidence of cultural ethnography, and the theoretical cues of new conceptual paradigms, these cultural theorists recognise the ingenuity of consumers. They challenge the more incendiary critiques of consumer culture: as consumers are shown to actively negotiate commodities and advertisements, rather than blindly submit to their inscribed meanings, the idea that advertisers dupe or exploit consumers needs to be re-examined.

For example, according to John Fiske, a prominent exponent of this position, the abundance and prominence of advertising is proof that it is anything but effective. For

Fiske, advertisers are forever condemned to lag behind consumers' real interests and desires. Fiske echoes the work of Michel de Certeau. In *The Practices of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau stresses the unstable and empowering possibilities of everyday cultural practices, including consumption. In his analysis, consumption is a creative act in itself, a process by which social meanings are constructed and contested.[54] Fiske works from this assumption, and focuses on the ways consumers create their own spaces for expression and control within consumer society.

This focus on appropriation reveals a somewhat unexpected distribution of power. Whereas power is usually conceived in terms of political-economy, with the interests of consumers seemingly subordinated to those of manufacturers and advertisers, Fiske follows a bottoms-up distribution of power, a type of power that is devious and dispersed. Translated to consumption habits, Fiske, like de Certeau, suggests that the meanings of commodities are generated not in the controlled environment of advertising, but in the ways of use – that is, the point at which active consumers incorporate commodities into their everyday lives. In *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) he writes:

> There is so much advertising only because it can never finally succeed in its tasks – those of containing social diversity within the needs of capitalism and of reducing the relative autonomy of the cultural economy from the financial, that is, of controlling not only what commodities people buy but the cultural uses they put to them.[55]

Here, consumption practices appear a lot more elastic and unpredictable than is usually conceded. Moreover, the role and effectiveness of advertising in contemporary culture is understood through a much wider prism, one that is partly shaped by the oft-ignored productive capacities of everyday consumers. What this does, then, is recover advertising from a purely institutional comprehension of it, to see how and where it intersects with other cultural inclinations. In *Changing Cultures* 1992), for instance, Mica Nava argues that the emergence of a particular kind of 'selective buying' presents shopping as a thoroughly politicised act, as consumers make purchasing decisions based on a range of ethically-informed concerns. For Nava, the popularity of, for example, 'The Body Shop' and 'Ark', owes much to

consumers' increasingly sophisticated knowledge of green issues – and the extent to which common consumer habits are implicated. In this way, writes Nava:

> People are not only not duped, they are able through their shopping to register political support or opposition. Furthermore they are able to exercise some control over production itself, over what gets produced and the political conditions in which production takes place.[56]

This acknowledges a distinct literacy among consumers, a capacity to cut through the advertised world with a savvy knowingness that can readily undercut the advertisers' best efforts.

If nothing else, this type of literature considers advertising and consumption against an almost irreducible matrix of planned processes and unforeseen consequences. At the same time, though, it also suggests that even though this matrix might defy ironclad conclusions, it need not escape enquiry altogether. So, contemporary postmodern culture is not quite the nihilistic mess of a Hollywood apocalypse. It *can* be examined and illuminated, but it requires an updated analytical framework.

The discourse of visual culture is one such framework, and it offers relevant leads for this study. As Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall explain in *Visual Culture* (1999), this discourse centres on ways of looking and ways of seeing, and considers the semantic and technical transcendence of the visual in post-war popular culture. This culture increasingly takes place on and before a bewildering apparatus of visual technology: television, billboards, web-cams, computers, camcorders, ATMs, and surveillance cameras, to cite a few of the more pedestrian examples. In addition, Evans and Hall write of a 'picturing sensibility' among this culture, or a growing capacity to visualise life, that is, to conceptualise and capture meaning in primarily visual terms. For Evans and Hall, traditional modes of analysis have failed to adequately appreciate 'the visual' – not least because the critical tools have been ill equipped for the task. They write:

> [That] a study of, say, the meaning of 'Hollywood', a contemporary lifestyle magazine, the advertising industry or an episode of the Jerry Springer Show would be incomplete were we to limit ourselves to the analysis of words, or interpreted images as if they only functioned as

artefacts to be read rather than as sights and often exhibitionist performances to be looked at.[57]

Against a distinctly modernist tendency to study the 'constituents' of visual culture separately and almost canonically (such as cinema and art), theorists of visual culture tend to eschew such an elite aesthetic. On the contrary, they tend to direct attention away from formal, structured settings, to the centrality of visuality in everyday life. Nicholas Mirzoeff, for example, focuses on those areas of visual life that are most taken for granted – to the point that they are usually ignored. Moreover, he attributes this widespread complacency to a tightness of fit, between the everyday habits of everyday people, and the enveloping panorama of visual cues. As Mirzoeff points out in *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999):

> Consider a driver on a typical North American highway. The progress of the vehicle is dependent on a series of visual judgements made by the driver concerning the relative speed of other vehicles, and any manoeuvres necessary to complete the journey. At the same time, he or she is bombarded with other information: traffic lights, road signs, turn signals, advertising hoardings, petrol prices, shop signs, local time and temperature and so on. Yet most people consider the process so routine that they play music to keep from getting bored.[58]

In this image-saturated era, the kaleidoscope of paintings, photographs and electronic images do not compete with each other, as though viewers' attention or comprehension cannot stretch beyond the one image at the one time in the one place. Contemporary culture is not something played out parallel to visuality, or in spite of it, in cracks not yet filled in with imagery. Put simply, seeing is not just a part of everyday life: it *is* everyday life. This directly affects the study of advertising. Advertisements often present idealised images, inviting consumers to identify with a 'better' life (that is, better than a life *without* the advertised commodity); they are commercially driven tableaux of a constantly deferred happiness.

Like other producers of images, advertisers try to govern ways of seeing. In *Practices of Looking* (2001), Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright discuss the ways advertisers coordinate the practice of looking at advertisements. Essentially, Sturken and Cartwright repeat the litany of strategies that made up earlier, Marxist-inspired critiques of advertising, such as the interpolation of the commodity self, the reification

and fetishisation of commodities, and the exultation of pseudo-individuality. Sturken and Cartwright do not challenge or question the intentions of advertisers. However, they bring to this list of strategies and intentions an acute appreciation of the polysemic quality of all cultural texts, including advertisements. This refers to the multiplicity of meanings that any one text can generate, and a multiplicity that depends on the interplay of contextual variables. So, the moment of production does not 'own' the meanings of any given text; the moment of consumption can be equally fecund. In other words:

> Advertisers invest a lot of time and money in studying the impact of their advertisements on audiences precisely because they understand that they cannot have full control over the meanings their images will produce. Researching how different audiences interpret and use the images they encounter affords image producers a greater ability to anticipate received meanings; however, it will still not provide them with full control over the meaning of the image in various contexts and among different viewers.[59]

Of course, not all accounts of this visual culture allow this much creativity and resistance on the part of consumers and viewers. Visual culture *has* been interpreted as a quasi-conspiratorial façade. In *Image Makers* (2000), Robert Jackall and Janice M. Hirota present the 'visual turn' in contemporary culture as the nominal triumph of advertising, public relations and the ethos of advocacy. Collectively, these have, they argue, forged a blanket of spectacle, one that is designed to mask the social and organizational realities of a thoroughly bureaucratised world. For Jackall and Hirota, their combined effect is to dazzle society with make-believe, and to induce a state of awe that can go some way to compensate the alienation that has been fostered by extreme rationalisation. That is, the fantasy images provide some sense of validation, and reinforce the values, aspirations and achievements that people (think) they have. According to Jackall and Hirota:

> Many men and women find comfort and engagement in particular worlds constructed by image makers. To the extent that representations of a particular world reflect their own predilections, these men and women compulsively affirm both second-hand and momentarily fresh images alike. If they hear echoes of their own sentiments, they accept both bland euphemisms and tall tales from private and public officials, and they take public relations fronts as solid buildings instead of movie-set facades. If scripts tug at their own memory strings, they respond with the emotion to the sentimental narratives that ad makers fashion.[60]

Basically, then, the postmodern turn has not been at the total expense of more interrogative, Leftist-leaning critiques of consumer culture. Indeed, if anything, it has galvanised a new generation of social critics. Often, attempts to understand the independence of contemporary consumers (such as Fiske's analysis of active consumers) are construed as a neo-conservative nod to the socio-political status quo, an excuse out of institutional, economic change. In turn, discussions on advertising are nowhere near resolved. However much Cultural Studies researchers unearth the many and varied ways consumers negotiate and even resist advertising, branding and consumerism, critics cite the institutional tenacity of capitalist dynamics and systems.

This section ('The Postmodern Turn') was *not* an attempt to redraw the discursive map, or to suggest that postmodern insights are any more conclusive or complete. Rather, it was to suggest that the battleground was not as straightforward as once thought. That is, advertising does not exist on some separate realm that can be either removed or analysed away from other processes and considerations; and nor can it be fully understood without a clearer understanding of how consumers relate and respond to it. Indeed, as Celia Lury points out in *Brands* (2004), as much as branding's significance can be associated with the sophistication and prominence of contemporary marketing, it is also true that other issues and processes are at work. For Lury, amongst the most pressing of these are developments in graphic and product design, media, law and accounting.[61] In other words, branding can be seen as a powerful organisational principle, one that underpins, facilitates and integrates several areas of social, political and economic life; its benefits are thus communicative, logistical and qualitative. The point is, these more recent titles have added to the discussion about advertising, branding and contemporary consumer culture; not silenced it.

To recap briefly, the literature survey so far has sketched some of the main ways that the roles of advertising, branding and consumerism have been analysed. Many of these titles were either from or about the United States, since it pioneered and perfected many of the strategies and ideologies to be discussed. In turn, this literature can be more or less divided into three major strands. Firstly, there is the literature that is, for all intents and purposes, sympathetic to the general principles and practices of

advertising. Secondly, there is the literature that, whilst stretched over several disciplines and decades, is essentially inimicable to advertising. Thirdly, there is the literature that draws on understandings of postmodern cultural life, that is to say, literature that deals with the issues and ideas generally attributed to the postmodern era. Collectively, the literature works through the beliefs, values, and interests that have dominated advertising discourses for over a century. Moreover, whilst the literature twists and turns away from the simple polarity of 'for' and 'against', the basic rationales and criticisms regarding advertising persist. As such, the 'postmodern turn' does not so much answer questions as find new ones. In the next bloc, the focus will shift to Australia, and how these ideas were dealt with in literature from and/or about Australia.

Bloc Two: Advertising, Branding & Consumerism in Australia

The primary focus of this thesis will be an iconic Australian brand that has signified Australia's evolving identity. However, to get to that point, to make a case for the nation-building significance of what are otherwise 'just' memorable marketing campaigns, the place of branding and brand marketing in Australia must be appreciated. That is, it needs to be seen what existed (tangibly or otherwise) for this brand to enjoy such cultural anchorage, to the extent that it became a reference point for the nation's sense of self. So, in order to get to that level of analysis, two things need to be addressed. Firstly, the various ways advertising in Australia has been understood and analysed, since branding is a specialised field in this more general topic (that is, advertising, promotions, and marketing); and secondly, the cultural conditions in Australia that allowed brand logic to structure and stabilise consumers' behaviour.

(a) Accounts of Advertising in Australia

The first commercial advertisement in Australia was in 1803 in the *NSW Government Gazette*. For a variety of reasons, though, the literature on advertising in Australia is a distinctly post-World War Two phenomenon. Firstly, it was in the post-war years that certain fears and anxieties regarding advertising really surfaced – not least due to the post-World War Two dominance of transnational advertising agencies.[62] Secondly, it

was in this period that the Australian marketplace assumed some of the features and attributes of modern consumer capitalism, such as the arrival of supermarkets. Thirdly, it was during this time that Australian culture began a noticeable drift away from its Commonwealth heritage, towards a more United States-style understanding of progress and modernity, concepts that were closely linked to the diversity of brands and the sophistication of retail, advertising and shopping arrangements.

In short, from the mid to late 1940s, the new and improved world promised by twentieth-century advertising was changing Australian culture with unprecedented speed and intensity. At the same time, it was the United States that so many Australians identified as the major source, inspiration and example of these changes. In her account of growing up in the northern Queensland town of Charters Towers, *Growing Up in the 40s* (1983), Unice Atwell saw the arrival of American soldiers in 1942 as the small town's first encounter with New World luxuries, something that she expressed in distinctly consumerist terms:

> They had the charm of the exotic about them, called the local mothers 'Ma'am', and had about twice the spending power of the Australian troops, plus such wonders as Coca-Cola and American cigarettes.[63]

In turn, cultural commentators, public intellectuals and industry figures soon made sense of these monumental changes publicly, and rendered their analyses part of mainstream popular discourse. Not unlike the experience in the United States, discussions about advertising in Australia also engaged in more abstract, fundamental considerations, such as the costs and benefits of a supposedly affluent society, and the distribution of its celebrated spoils. What indigenised the Australian debate, though, was the intense local interest in Australia's cultural identity, which many feared was under threat from transnational influence. Even in the last decade or so, the fears that linked advertising and 'Americanisation' have merely been replaced by similar fears that link advertising and globalisation. The point is that advertising in Australia is often viewed as a measure of cultural resilience, or lack thereof.[64]

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, these questions were dealt with in a succinct publication, co-authored by R. C. Luckie and Harry Harte, and commissioned by the Army Education Service: *Advertising* (1947). With prescient

simplicity, it is essentially two short papers, one by Harte, a Melbourne advertising figure, who argued for advertising, and the other by Sydney journalist Luckie, who argued against it.

According to Harte, advertising was the god-sent lynchpin of the modern economy. Without it, consumers would be ill-informed (since advertising relates product information); inconvenienced (since national advertising presupposes wide distribution); and lacking variety (since brand variety means freedom of choice). Essentially, Harte grounds advertising's advantages in classic economic considerations – all of which assume near-perfect market conditions: it raises living standards by making new inventions widely available, and thus stimulates aggregate demand for goods and services, which in turn encourages investment and boosts employment.

For Luckie, advertisements amount to little more than emotional manipulation and economic propaganda, and address the masses with the lowest common denominator. He foreshadows the thinly veiled anti-consumerism that would characterise much post-war Australian intellectualism, and writes:

> The human character as advertising would have it is full of the fear of being thought inferior, full of suspicion of anything that it does not understand, and full of dislike for intellectual strength and reasoning power. For there is no profit to be made out of people who have confidence in their own powers, intellectual curiosity, and a habit of thinking.[65]

As it happens, many of the criticisms of advertising in Australia *are* channelled through criticisms of consumerism, Americanisation and, more recently, globalisation. Moreover, this tendency to conflate separate processes lends itself to hyperbolic vitriol, as exaggeration obscures or misrepresents the issues involved. R. R. Walker noted this tendency in *Communicators* (1967). Overall, Walker presents a pretty forgiving picture of the people, practices and philosophies of both Australian advertising, and the free market. Put simply, Walker considers it futile to isolate advertising from the general assumption that free competition remains the best system yet to distribute material riches. As for advertising's critics, what he calls the 'educated elite', Walker writes:

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This shunning the facts of life, this reluctance to accept manufacturing and marketing as a major motivating force in the economy seems to breed minor manias that find expression in protests and pamphlets that give an unbalanced picture of business method and integrity. By and large, competition takes care of quality and pricing and progressive product improvement.[66]

A little over a decade later, Walker was still fairly positive about the place and purpose of advertising in Australia. In *Soft Soap Hard Sell in Adland Australia* (1979), Walker repeats his claim that advertising's critics are more or less ignorant of economic realities. He argues that critics often overlook the fact that advertising is one of several surface indicators of accepted economic practise, and is as recoverable through a product's cost structure as wages, transport, and so on. Moreover, Walker dismisses criticisms that advertising fosters waste and greed as ideological anachronisms. Instead, Walker considers advertising a logical corollary to the modern marketplace, and a useful reference point for informed decision-making. That is, 'Like it or not we live in an age where strictly "unnecessary" accumulations and refinements of appearance, taste, purpose, colour, texture have become important.'[67]

Whilst Walker certainly presents a decidedly favourable assessment of advertising in Australia, his optimism pales in comparison to contributions from the industry itself. For example, *Advertising in Australia* (1975); edited by Tim Hewat and produced by the Advertising Federation of Australia. Essentially, and perhaps not surprisingly, Hewat works on the rather hopeful assumption that Australian consumers simply cannot be duped. As such, according to Hewat, 'the basic fact of advertising is that it works only when the product or service is good, and it's what people want.'[68] By limiting itself to the immediate utility of ostensibly straightforward product information – as opposed to the far more ambiguous role of persuasion – this understanding of advertising clearly mirrors the usual industry claims. That is, that advertising does nothing more sinister than help consumers appreciate the diversity of the marketplace, and rationalise their buying decisions. Again, by acknowledging the autonomy and independence of consumers, any impression of industry hubris is seemingly forestalled.

There is, then, a sense of paranoia and PR in this kind of industry-issued literature. Such literature often begins on the defensive, and appears keenly aware of popular and intellectual scepticism and/or resentment towards the industry. For example, the final chapter of *Advertising in Australia* is in a Q & A format, and seems to tackle the most persistent criticisms of advertising (such as, 'Is there too much advertising?' and 'Why is advertising misleading, deceptive, a pack of lies?'). These are answered, predictably enough, from a strictly industrial perspective, and not tempered or challenged by critical refutes. Similarly, *Understanding Advertising* (1975), which is edited by Kenneth A. Fowles and coordinated by the Australian Association of National Advertisers, is inevitably skewed. Essentially, this amounts to a 'how-to' manual, with industry insights on researching, writing and producing an advertisement. Again, it seeks to address common queries about advertising from those in it, with representatives from major agencies (for example, George Patterson), major advertisers (for example, Coca-Cola), major retailers (for example, David Jones), and market research (for example, the Roy Morgan Research Centre). Overall, like *Advertising in Australia*, *Understanding Advertising* mounts a case for advertising that is driven more by self-serving assumptions than balanced arguments.

The autobiographical accounts of prominent Australian figures also offer some clues about the nature of the local advertising industry. In *Life Has Been Wonderful* (1956), George Patterson draws a spectacularly glamorous image of his half-century in advertising. Indeed, Patterson insists that anything more revealing than these anecdotes – of a globetrotting socialite who enjoys celebrity parties, sumptuous dinners and world class art – would compromise his professional integrity. So, his account of the important early accounts (like Palmolive, Ford, Dunlop and Gillette) is scant, at best. As Patterson explains:

> Since so much is claimed for advertising, it may be asked why these memoirs do not contain more specific advertising campaigns including the successes as well as failures. Apart from the fact that such a story would itself require a book, it has to be realised that advertising plans and tactics for an agency's clients are, of necessity, confidential.[69]

Patterson concludes this memoir with the Dorothea Mackellar poem, 'My Country'. While radically different in tone and vigour, John Singleton's autobiography, *True*

Confessions (1979) takes similar swipes at advertising's critics. Singleton is particularly aggrieved by those that constrain the advertising industry, such as government regulators and the Media Council of Australia. Despite his larrikin language and candid address, then, Singleton is far more robust in his politics. He dismisses even the idea of a 'common good', and claims that legislation for consumer protection is 'one of the greatest brainwashing confidence tricks perpetuated by socialist governments throughout the world in their campaign to destroy business and move all power to the State.'[70]

All the same, the overall impression is of an industry that was at ease with Singleton's knock-about persona. More specifically, Singleton maintains that the advertising profession was more than forgiving of his lack of education and propensity to get drunk.

Interestingly, in Anne Coomb's observational account, *Adland* (1990), the popular appeal of this machismo image in Australian advertising is one of the first things she mentions. Coomb details the merger of Australia's (then) biggest advertising agencies, Mojo and Monahan Dayman Adams – Mojo MDA – in early 1987. While more a profile of competing ambitions and clashing personalities, Coombs intersperses this dramatic account with comments and observations of the industry. Tellingly, she seems to confirm the common perception that the advertising world calls for charlatanism. She writes, 'It soon became clear to some extent that they were all actors. If there is an industry that advertising resembles it is show business.'[71]

In many ways, it was John Sinclair's *Images Incorporated* (1987) that really organised and analysed the range of issues surrounding advertising in Australia, in terms that acknowledged the various academic, industrial and ideological concerns. This is not to say that what came before was either inadequate or sub-standard. Rather, Sinclair works through a wider range of concepts and arguments, historically and critically, at length and in depth. More specifically, this overview distinguished itself from the existing literature by using critical tools sharpened by postmodern and post-structuralist insights. So, Sinclair considers the various claims made against advertising by the Left alongside new research into the active audience. Sinclair

appreciates the function and purpose of advertising, as well as its intense and fiercely contested symbolism:

> On the one hand, advertising occupies a special position within the economic organization of Western society because advertising is an industry in its own right and, as well, forms the most obvious link in a chain of marketing practices by which advertising is connected with the production process itself. On the other hand, advertising deals in ideas, attitudes, motivations, dreams, desires and values, giving them cultural form through its 'signifying practices', the processes by which words and images are given meaning. At this level, advertising diffuses its meanings into the belief systems of society.[72]

Sinclair thus pre-empts more recent accounts of advertising by acknowledging what it means, not just what it does. He also positions advertising in Australia within a broader historical shift towards open markets, niche brands and the international ascent of promotional symbols, processes and practices. As such, Sinclair hints at new ways of analysing the meanings and effects of advertising. He is simultaneously aware of both the economic and ideological implications of the industry, as well as the meanings generated by active, engaged consumers. Citing the extraordinarily high rate of product failure in Australia (the fact that most new products advertised fail to inspire sufficient demand to make them economically viable), Sinclair is neither complacent about advertising's intentions, nor ignorant of its actual effects.

Besides these more analytical accounts of advertising in Australia, there are also several (largely) pictorial accounts of Australia's advertising heritage. In *The Australian Advertising Album* (1975), for example, Brian Carroll fashions a somewhat nostalgic, scrapbook-style collection of print advertisements and posters from the late nineteenth century to around 1945. Annotated with brief histories about the changing laws, attitudes, personalities and media, Carroll effectively showcases advertisements that chronicle Australia's blossoming product and brand variety. From the relative crudity of the patent medicine days, to the developments in clothing, transport and household appliances, Carroll seemingly supports advertising's role in illustrating and delivering convenience, glamour and satisfaction for Australian consumers. Furthermore, Carroll foreshadows the tendency in recent years to appreciate advertising history as history proper, as opposed to it being sidelined as either a subordinate or separate consideration.

A far more comprehensive retrospective of Australia's advertising history, in terms of the number and variety of products and brands, is *Symbols of Australia* (1980). Edited and written by Mimo Cozzolino, this documents the use of Australian patriotism as a marketing tool, and illustrates the extent to which broader social, political and economic issues can be read off advertising imagery. Essentially, this is a compilation of brands that contain either obvious Australian symbolism (such as native flora and fauna, native animals, or local colloquialisms), brands that have become famous extensions of popular culture (such as Vegemite and Aeroplane Jelly), and brands that are distinguished somehow by their humour or obscurity. Interestingly, Geoffrey Blainey and Philip Adams – or, two famous figures from the worlds of Australian history and Australian advertising, respectively – share the introduction to this book. They both address the oft-ignored place of advertising history in Australia. Blainey, for example, contends that:

> The trademark is valuable as a barometer of nationalism. While much has been written about early nationalism in the labour movement, less has been written about the nationalism of merchants, shopkeepers and factory owners.[73]

Adams makes the ironic point that, with time, advertisements are seemingly absolved of any stigma, and become folded into the archive of popular imagery. Indeed, Adams hints that it is only from this perspective that most people really appreciate the contribution advertisements make to the popular imagination and to the spirit of the day:

> It is well known that every intelligent, educated person with a refined sensibility despises and detests advertising, regarding all who toil for Mammon as the moral equivalents of used-car salesmen and the social equals of lepers. Yet *old* advertising is different. Already 1960s TV commercials have lost their commercial sting, metamorphosising into the iconography of nostalgia. Like popular songs, faded photographs and old Boomerang Songsters, they give us a sense of our past, reminding us of what went on beneath the newspaper headlines and the epic concerns of academic historians.[74]

There is often a sense, then, that advertising feeds the popular culture despite the scorn and suspicion it almost invariably attracts. In other words, these accounts seem

to make a case for seeing specific advertisements (here, Australian ones) with a fresh perspective, and momentarily ignore whatever political and/or economic baggage the industry itself entails. This is a big ask: to appreciate the aesthetic, nationalist or even kitsch value of memorable campaigns, on the assumption that such advertisements interest or impress consumers in ways that are separate to overarching, systemic considerations. This requires a sort of detachment from the 'politics' of advertising, and an acceptance that an advertisement can have a cultural life and a popular resonance quite apart from any covert or implied ideology.

In *Great Australian Advertising Campaigns* (1992), for example, Neil Shoebridge profiles twelve famous Australian advertising campaigns. Shoebridge starts with the premise that most advertising is akin to wallpaper, whereby people know it is there, but fail to pay much attention to it. In turn, Shoebridge discusses twelve campaigns that, by virtue of their cleverness, strikingness, honesty or weirdness, cut through this advertising clutter – that is, distinguished themselves from most, largely forgettable campaigns. Such campaigns include the 'Louie the Fly' campaign for Mortein insecticide, the Paul Hogan campaign for Winfield cigarettes, and the 'Which bank?' campaign for the Commonwealth Bank. However, in a move not unlike the apologetic accounts seen in the last 'bloc', Shoebridge reminds readers that whatever ingenuity one encounters in advertising, it is almost always a result of accident or chance. For Shoebridge, to suggest otherwise is to exaggerate the industry's radar for genius, much less for getting it right:

> Advertising is not a science. Some elements of the advertising business can be approached on a scientific basis, such as the planning of media schedules or the segmentation and analysis of different groups of consumers, but the heart of a successful advertising campaign – the idea – cannot be created scientifically or, in some cases, rationally.[75]

The logic here seems to be that different advertisements succeed for very different reasons, so it requires a certain amount of luck to strike the right harmony: between the nature of the campaign, and the consumer mood of the day, which can turn to indifference at a whim and without warning. However, this argument inadvertently undermines the idea that consumers will not respond to what they do not want, since it

implies that a remarkable enough campaign will override whatever consumer barriers or filters are 'usually' in place.

Overall, given the maturity and sophistication of the contemporary Australian marketplace, the Australian literature on advertising is nowhere near as comprehensive as it should be. Moreover, what literature there is tends to gloss over, if not ignore, the more complex and contentious issues and debates. What might be worth considering, though, is the growing literature on Australian *consumerism*. In the last decade, several authors have looked at the development of consumerist processes and a consumer culture in Australia. Whilst many of these titles tend to collapse the topic of advertising into a more general discussion of consumerism, they do, at the very least, open the topic up to a more intense level of academic enquiry. As such, they will be considered in the next section. This is not to underplay the insights, opinions and arguments just discussed; rather, it is to build on these contributions with a more sociological approach, and to locate the processes within some sort of historical framework. Again, this is done in order to prepare the ground for subsequent chapters, and to see how accounts of Australian consumerism have perceived and documented the growth of brand consciousness in Australia.

(b) Consumer Culture in Australia

In the first 'bloc', it was clear that the modern history of the United States is very much a history of consumerist processes and market considerations. As such, the symbols and imagery of its culture – such as advertising – offer clues to the values, priorities and interests of the society. In this section, that same assumption will underpin a survey of works that look at consumption and consumerism in Australia. As it will be seen, these works will complement and consolidate what has already been reviewed as they deal with similar themes, institutions and ideologies.

Perhaps the simplest way to approach this topic is to consider the history of shopping in Australia, the ways by which ordinary consumers have procured goods and services outside the realms of self-sufficiency. Of course, this is very different to consumption, and assumes a historical point at which consumption was no longer limited to what could be produced, prepared and exchanged without market institutions and

commercial arrangements. This is a vital consideration, since it anticipates the many developments, inventions and expectations that would eventually characterise and support a commodity market (such as advertising).

In several important respects, the shopping heritage of New South Wales (NSW) is of particular importance here. Indeed, as Joy McCann explains in *A Lot in Store* (2002), NSW became, perhaps inevitably, the benchmark by which similar processes in the other states were understood. The first state pioneered most of what is now considered essential for a consumerist environment. From the government store that supplied the early Sydney Cove settlement with essentials, to the regular Saturday produce markets in what is now called Circular Quay, to the Continental-style opulence of the Strand Arcade and the Queen Victoria Building, NSW – and in particular Sydney – cultivated and accommodated an appreciation for product variety, leisurely shopping, and fashionable brands; that is, the distinguishing features of a consumerist culture. By the early twentieth century, the competition for a growing population, plus the increased supply of generic items, saw shop owners spend more time, attention and money on upgrading the *experience* of shopping. In addition to matters of pricing, things like shop interiors, variety and service were also considered. McCann writes:

> Cool, light and airy shops were considered attractive, and a far cry from the small, cramped, gas-lit shops of the early days of the colony. Awnings, colonnades or verandahs became important features, protecting both window displays and customers.[76]

Similarly, Beverly Kingston's history of shopping in Australia, *Basket, Bag and Trolley* (1994) is a seminal study of Australia's shopping history. Kingston also traces the emergence of shopping in Australia from the arrival of the First Fleet. More specifically, she traces the emergence, from as early as 1806, of a particular sensibility, an appreciation of novelty, status and conspicuous consumption. As with McCann, Kingston's findings are important in that they locate the appeal and endurance of a consumerist mindset within Australia's early colonial history (as opposed to something accidentally imported with Hollywood or American soldiers). In turn, Kingston draws a picture of post-gold rush affluence that transformed the cities and towns of Sydney and Melbourne. With the improvement of streets and footpaths, and the building of smart, elegant shops, the built environment was

increasingly geared towards consumerist habits. Not unlike the elegant promenades of Paris and London, the city strips were, between the 1860s and 1920s, upgraded with arcades and department stores. Indeed, in *Temptations* (1993), Gail Reekie sees the rise of department stores in Australia in thoroughly gendered terms: these stores 'courted women' and re-formulated modern sexual mores in terms of shop-floor etiquette for a bureaucratised retail space. For Reekie, this meant that:

> The sexual culture of the department store was marked by complex rituals of sexual power, accommodation and transaction that suggest that male retailer and female customer were engaged in a relationship very similar to that established within courtship conventions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[77]

For the purposes of this survey, it is worth noting the place of advertising in this history – that is to say, advertising for everyday commodities such as essential foodstuffs, since this was aimed at more than just the upper middle class (unlike the fashion catalogues from London). According to Kingston, the growing importance of such advertising in Australia is closely related to changes in the production and distribution of goods and services. Until the 1920s, storekeepers and grocers provided the information and 'advice' that advertising would eventually provide. That is:

> Before the introduction of pre-packaged foods, the skills of the grocer (most general storekeepers were basically grocers) and his knowledge of quality were invaluable to his customers. To a large extent the quality and variety of the food they could buy depended on his professionalism. As branded and pre-packaged goods became available the manufacturers first tried to familiarise grocers with the contents so they would then advise or recommend the new products to their customers.[78]

In the inter-war years, though, as newspapers, magazines and radio advertisements delivered more and more of this advice to Australian women (Kingston foregrounds the decision-making power of women in this history), there was a steady erosion of the grocer's input. Effectively, as Kingston explains:

> [Advertisements] gradually deprived the grocer of his role as an expert and established a direct link between the manufacturer and the purchaser. The grocery business ceased to be a skilled trade in which some knowledge of blending teas, roasting coffee, or buying butter and cheese was essential.[79]

Until then, advertisements were more like general reminders for consumers to remember the *store*, as opposed to specific products. Since the availability and price of most items was subject to seasonal variations, price and brands were rarely mentioned. However, as the grocer's expertise became increasingly superfluous, the well-placed advertisement eventually became the manufacturer's most important conduit to its customers.

The point is that, to really appreciate the significance of advertising, it is essential to frame its ascendance within key historical shifts. More specifically, it needs to be seen how these shifts facilitated and even encouraged a cultural environment within which advertising in general could flourish, and certain brands in particular could triumph. In *What's in Store?* (2003), Kimberly Webber and Ian Hoskins consider some of these issues. Webber and Hoskins look at Australia's retail heritage alongside changes in the nation's social climate, economy and demography. Like Kingston, they trace crucial triggers in the pace, composition and directions of colonial life back to the gold rush. With wealth creation, shopping could emerge as less of a chore than a question of enjoyment, entertainment and choice. With ancillary developments from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, such as mail-order catalogues, gas lighting, road improvements, hydraulic lifts and finally diffused car ownership, 'fantasy' shopping was more reality than fantasy. That is:

> In the century between the gold rushes and World War II, the story of Australia's main streets was one of almost continuous growth and expansion. Mass advertising campaigns turned luxuries into necessities and resulted in Australians spending more than ever before on consumer goods.[80]

In all this literature, authors repeatedly stress the popular association of improved consumer conditions (measured in terms of product choice, availability and accessibility, and convenience) and modernity. In other words, as more Australians became accustomed to twentieth century standards of variety and quality, the capacity to enjoy more commodities more selectively was considered an index of social progress. In *The 1950s...how Australia became a modern society, and everyone got a house and car* (1987), Stella Lees and June Senyard discuss Australia's burgeoning

sense of modernity in almost exclusively consumerist terms. For Lees and Senyard, the 1950s were watershed years for the nation's image, identity and aspirations. After decades of Depression-related thrift and wartime frugality, the 1950s lifted Australians' spirit and spending, with growing affluence, growing product choice and a cultural shift away from British prudence to American consumerism. In turn, advertising was responsible for reflecting this new sense back to consumers, and for convincing ordinary Australians that this new world of household 'mod cons' and everyday luxuries was indeed theirs. According to Lees and Senyard:

> Advertisements for white goods showed the ordinary housewife relieved of difficult, tedious work through the purchase of a steam iron, an automatic washing-machine or a new stove and now able to appear relaxed and glamorous. The advertisements for these rather expensive items showed the suburban family just like the people next door, familiar, friendly and able to have all those things they needed for a good life.[81]

In these accounts of Australians' increasingly sophisticated palette, particular attention is paid to the 'everyday' aspect of these changes. The size and variety of Australia's marketplace was available to ordinary wage earners. Through advertising, though, and media generally, it was imbued with the paradoxical appeal of both fantasy *and* accessibility. Advertisements had to be exciting enough to stimulate the imagination, but not so amazing as to alienate the average household. As Kim Humphery explains in his history of Australian supermarkets, *Shelf Life* (1998), branding had much to do with this balance, between the aura of fantasy and the probability of possession. Branding promised the most mundane of products an escape from its ordinariness, an escape that was necessarily open to potential consumers. Even (or perhaps *especially*) staples like biscuits and tea were tied to issues and ideals much larger than any immediate utility:

> To these packets can be added colours, company logos, promotional spiels, and images. The identity of a product as a material thing becomes increasingly drawn into the cultural realm until even the most everyday of products seems to lose some of its materiality and becomes bound up with ideas and emotions to do with cleanliness, uniformity, convenience, progress, modernity, class, status, gender roles and identities, luxury, sensuality and so.[82]

As the literature reviewed in this section shows, then, to understand how advertising has affected and incorporated the national character, it is worth considering the social context within which advertising had a chance to thrive. However, it should also be apparent (from the works' year of publication) that this is a relatively recent 'move' in the writing of Australian history, and is consonant with a shift away from traditional accounts of history that were limited to decidedly conservative definitions of politics, economics, and society. Through these more recent histories, one can appreciate the place of both consumerism and advertising, from the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, to the epochal social changes mid century, to now. The point is that consumerist processes and questions of taste, status, fashion and leisure have been a part of Australian culture for well over a century. Moreover, advertisements played an important role in this history, and mediated the opportunities, values, and interests of a culture and an economy committed to consistently high levels of consumption. Still, there is much to be written; there remains a gap regarding the specificities of such advertisements, and the place they have assumed in Australia's national identity. This thesis is one small way to address this gap.

Conclusion

In this literature survey, two very broad categories have been considered: literature that deal with advertising and consumerism in general, and literature that deal with advertising and consumerism in Australia. As this chapter has shown, while the literature that deals with the former is rather extensive and complex, the Australian literature is less so. While there is a growing appreciation of the rise and intensification of consumerist processes, discussions or compilations of specific advertisements tend to take the form of nostalgic catalogues, and bypass a more critical engagement with the underlying issues, or the wider implications. This thesis is an attempt to address that, and to complement much of the existing literature with a contribution that both acknowledges these works, and builds on their findings. The next chapter will outline the methodology by which, through one particular case study, this will be achieved. Indeed, this thesis will show that, through the Bushells brand, so many of the interests, aims and anxieties outlined so far can be both contextualised and explained – and in a way that says much about Australia's cultural history.

Notes to Chapter One on pp. 255-258.

CHAPTER TWO
Methodology – from Barthes to Bushells

Introduction

A key concern of this thesis is the extent to which one brand's advertisements have communicated discourses of broad cultural significance. From the literature surveyed in the last chapter, though, it is clear that there is much debate about the ways by which *any* text can be interpreted. For example, where some theorists see in advertisements the means by which certain ideologies are sustained and strengthened, others refuse to concede that *any* text is susceptible to such reductionist analysis. Given the logic of advertising, this is an especially vexing impasse. On the one hand, advertising is, by practically all accounts, the business of persuasion: marketing implies that goods and services have points of difference that can be reconfigured (spuriously or otherwise) as relative merits. As such, few would dispute that advertisements have at least *this* function and purpose. On the other hand, though, and far less certain, is the degree to which other attributes and associations can be ascertained. Herein lays the methodological challenge for this thesis: identifying the likely interpretations of various advertisements for the Bushells brand, in a way that is analytically edifying. With this in mind, this chapter will outline and explain the methodology to be used in subsequent chapters.

Research Focus

As a guide, one particular concern oriented research for this thesis: the cultural insights that can be inferred from various advertisements for the Bushells brand. More specifically, it needed to be seen how Bushells' address to Australian consumers either presupposed or idealised certain conditions – political, economic and social. In short: what can be learned about contemporary Australian culture from Bushells' advertisements? This pursuit was informed by at least three things: familiarity with the various theoretical positions that have been already advanced for the analysis of consumerism generally, and advertising in particular (many of which were noted in the previous chapter); a wide embrace of Bushells' advertising history and heritage – from press clippings and faded coupons to magazine campaigns and television

commercials; and a close reading of white Australia's cultural history, from 1788 to the present.[83]

With all this in mind, it became clear that, although Bushells was not introduced until 1883, and even though, for the most part, the commodity in question was tea, its marketing referred to and relied on much broader processes, both historically and thematically. In other words, in ways to be illustrated and analysed in chapters to come, these advertisements often intersected with discourses that seemed disparate at first sight, but which were, on closer inspection, powerfully connected. For this reason, the research question ('What can be learned about contemporary Australian culture from Bushells' advertisements?') was kept wide enough to accommodate these discoveries, but specific enough to link their appearance to the one succinct study – that is, of Bushells.

As mentioned already, the research question was initially inspired by a theatre prop. In a play that looked at the state and sensibility of contemporary Australian culture, *Last Cab to Darwin*, a Bushells sign seemed like such an economic portal into Australia's past. In terms of research, though, from the literature surveyed and the various perspectives considered, it became clear that there was more to this observation than the logistics of set design. Brands work *through* culture; by spotlighting imagery and associations, they appeal to connotative resonance, and, for the sake of analytical enquiry, this makes for a promising start.

Since the Bushells brand was introduced in 1883, and has been marketed continuously until the present (2006), the research field was marked accordingly. That is, this thesis considers Bushells' advertisements from the late nineteenth century until today. However, it should be noted from the outset that not *every* Bushells advertisement in this period has been included. Rather, only those that, at the author's discretion, either display or demonstrate some sort of break, amendment or revision. This has been done in the interests of brevity and pertinence; as much as possible, though, it will be noted if and how a particular motif or campaign was either a short-lived experiment, or a long-term formula (and the critical implications thereof).

Bearing in mind that the thesis is to cover over a century of Australian history, the advertisements were located in diverse media. As this thesis will show, this is an important point in itself, as different titles and changing media addressed specific audiences and thus entailed adjustments to Bushells' address. So, this thesis tracks the media within which Bushells advertised most frequently, and considers what this meant for the brand. In the late 1800s, this was the *Bulletin*; in the decades after federation, this was the *Sydney Mail*; in the interwar period and the decades after the Second World War, this was the various magazines that were aimed primarily at middle class women, particularly the *Australian Women's Weekly*; and since the 1980s, this has been advertising campaigns designed for commercial television. These advertisements were catalogued chronologically, and will be sequenced accordingly for analysis. Examples will be provided throughout this thesis.

Theoretical Position

In the previous chapter, it was noted that, over the last few decades, there has been a growing realisation that all media texts are subject to a seemingly endless array of interpretations, or 'readings'. As noted, this has much to do with the various discursive positions from which texts can be viewed and understood. Whatever the 'text,' its meanings are never fixed and universal, but always unstable and unpredictable. As Stuart Hall has so influentially argued, there is no guarantee that how a text has been 'encoded' will mirror how it will be 'decoded'.[84] That is, whatever interests, agendas and preferences are invested in the production of a text will not be always served in the interpretation of that text. Moreover, and as Roland Barthes has pointed out, to insist on some sort of intrinsic or essential meaning for a text will inevitably and arrogantly privilege one particular perspective. For Barthes, this usually meant a bourgeois or middle class one, at the expense of other, alternative perspectives.[85] Seminal research in Media Studies and Cultural Studies has supported this stance. Drawing on the empirical evidence of cultural ethnography, and the theoretical cues of new conceptual paradigms (such as the one popularised by Michel de Certeau, noted in the literature survey), these researchers have recognised readers' ingenuity and autonomy. Reception studies has shown that audiences often interpret texts in ways that are both creative and highly idiosyncratic, in a manner that often evades (if not defies) conventional assumptions and stereotypes.

This has a direct impact on textual analysis. It means that any interpretation one makes of a text (say, an advertisement for Bushells) will only ever be provisional, and contingent on whatever discursive variables are in play. So, there can be no 'final' analysis, overarching and infallible. Subsequently, and instead, all this thesis aims to do is outline likely interpretations, given some knowledge of the various contexts within which the advertisements appeared. Following Alan McKee, it is argued here that:

> There is no such thing as a single, 'correct' interpretation of any text. There are large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances.[86]

To identify likely interpretations, as opposed to definitive ones, this thesis will thus consider the context of the advertisements, in detail and in depth. Again though, this is the result of a decision-making process; context is also always framed in terms that reflect the analyst's interests and concerns. Still, given the openness of a text's meanings, what cultural theorists call its 'polysemy', the most that one can do is acknowledge that, even likely interpretations are far from innocent or pure – but, if nothing else, they can be canvassed and considered. So, to do this, the 'context' within which the following advertisements are analysed will be: firstly, the aims and interests of Bushells. Even though these advertisements were generally composed by copywriters in advertising agencies, they were invariably beholden to Bushells' market imperative: to lift sales of its brand. In this regard, Bushells' intentions are hardly atypical. That is, and as John Fiske puts it:

> Advertising tries to control the cultural meanings of commodities by mapping them as tightly as possible onto the workings of the financial commodity. Advertising works hard to match social differences with cultural differences with product differences.[87]

Secondly, the space(s) and time through which the advertisements were distributed will also be discussed. As O'Shaughnessy and Stadler argue, texts appear in both a particular media space and in a wider social space:

> A magazine advertisement appears in a particular magazine and is sold in a particular shop, in a particular location – town, village, city, and so on – in a particular society and country...[t]exts, therefore, are not presented in isolation but are surrounded by other texts – magazine articles, television programs and so on – that will in turn influence our readings.[88]

In terms of both genre and geography, then, space is textually rich – there are numerous texts to consider. Analysis will therefore take account of this 'intertextual network'. In this network, as Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield explain, 'the constituent parts of a text refer back to, quote, and react with all the other texts that exist around them, and that have existed before them.'[89] In this way, a text is made meaningful by its reference to other texts. This thesis will consider these intertextual links at length, in an effort to get closer to the likeliest interpretations of Bushells' advertisements. Similarly, since time-frame affects how a text is read, particular attention will be paid to the historical context of the texts under review. This will usually mean those social concerns, major trends and dominant discourses that either characterised or featured in the time period in question. So, it needs to be seen how these advertisements made sense in relation to other texts around them, at that particular time.

Thirdly, analysis will consider the text's audience. In most instances, in the broadest sense, this refers to consumers of tea in Australia. On this point, though, and as it has already been suggested, one should not be too quick to speak for audiences. So, this thesis concedes that there is a very real difference between an 'inscribed reader' and an 'actual reader'. The former refers to the reader imagined by the text's producers (in the case of this thesis, Bushells' marketers); whilst the latter refers to the real-life reader who interprets the text.[90] Going back to Hall, then, there is no sure 'fit' between the inscribed reader and its actual counterpart: it is just as likely that the actual reader will interpret the text in ways that are either contrary to or a modification of what the text's producers would have anticipated or aimed for.[91] As such, given the initial research question, this thesis will consider the inscribed reader, or the ways that Bushells has cued certain reading positions for its advertisements. This will be seen through the various discourses Bushells has co-opted or used in its appeals to its audience, and therefore the politics of representation.

To put it another way, it needs to be seen how Bushells' advertisements wrote the audience into particular scenes, scripts and scenarios, and what this says about the type of consumer Bushells imagined for its brand. This foregrounds the notion of 'lifestyling', a marketing term that pinpoints the growing pressure on advertisers to match commodities to increasingly nuanced market groups, or niche markets. It is a feature of advanced consumer capitalism, and a reflection of more sophisticated ways to categorise consumers. As Frank Mort explains:

> In a society where large swathes of the population already possess consumer basics like fridges, TVs and washing machines, advertising must find a different language to promote product awareness. The aim is to suggest atmosphere – a style of life – with a message which is 'emotional' rather than rational or informational. Colour, sound and shape are the things which mark out individuality, nudging consumers to identify with commodities through mood and association.[92]

This thesis will thus identify the 'inscribed reader' by considering the strategic choices Bushells has made in relation to 'mood and association', and will regard this as indicative of the kind of 'lifestyle' that Bushells either took for granted, or called into being. It will be shown that, besides the immediate goal of boosting sales, these advertisements communicated through images of what was assumed to be a desirable lifestyle, and thus referred to discourses of immense cultural relevance. So, as contrived as it is the 'inscribed reader' points to many of the most prevalent values, ideals and biases in contemporary Australian culture. In this way, and as Judith Williamson has argued:

> Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves. And we need those selves. It is the materiality and historical context of this need which must be given as much attention as the equation of people with things.[93]

Accordingly, in order to explain how Bushells' advertisements allude to particular cultural discourses, this thesis will sketch the 'material and historical context' that rendered one address more logical than another; and will, in turn, discuss the broader, cultural logic of this exchange. In this way, this thesis shows that the brand dealt in difference: in its calculated use of some images and ideals at the expense of others, each advertisement was a meaning-making exercise that, considered in certain

contexts, was likely to generate a particular interpretation. So, to return to the initial research question, it will be shown that each Bushells advertisement to be discussed constitutes a meaningful text that does offer some insight into contemporary Australian culture.

The richness of textual analysis is in its multiple possibilities for contextual analysis. For the sake of readability and expedience, the following chapters *do* construct a narrative of sorts. Like a (conventional) biography of a flesh-and-blood subject, Bushells' history has been sequenced in a similarly accessible way. Yet, true to the logic of the branding process, this biography will be shown to reflect aspects of and insights into contemporary cultural life. Moreover, just as culture is in constant flux, so too will the following chapters acknowledge this momentum. This means that the focal beam will shift, for example, from questions of class or gender to, say, questions of technology or nationhood – depending on whatever cultural currents prompted Bushells to adjust its brand.

There is a sound and considered rationale for this stance. Following John Rickard's seminal distinction, it more readily accommodates a "cultural history of Australia" as opposed to a "history of Australian culture".[94] Whereas the latter treats 'culture' as something circumscribed and specific, and posits its study in almost teleological terms, the former suggests something altogether different. Rickard was primarily interested in the perceived (and in his opinion, arbitrary) divide between high culture and popular culture; however, his work is also useful in not only demystifying 'culture' but in seeing it as a process of (at the very least) immigration, transplantation and derivation. In turn, Rickard's interest in change and difference serves this thesis well too: the methodology outlined here will point analysis to findings that are edifying and meaningful, without claiming any sort of totalising force. If 'culture' is accepted as an ever-changing and irreducible field, simultaneously porous and malleable, then it stands to reason that any attempt to plot its history and identify the most salient issues faces considerable challenges, not the least of which is deciding what to include and exclude; and then justifying the criteria by which such decisions are made. In this regard, Rickard's distinction helps one move away from a conception of both 'culture' and 'history' as either static or knowable; and towards a sense that such studies must be – inevitably but not regrettably – inflected and limned.

As such, this methodology (the three-part approach to textual analysis outlined above) is an apt one: like Rickard's interest in 'cultural history', textual analysis foregrounds a pluralistic inclusiveness: the intertextual field is as wide and diverse as the culture that produced it.

Thematically, the following chapters span a wide variety of issues and processes. One theme, however, recurs more often than others: the development and influence of American advertising on cultural forms in Australia, especially consumer practices. This is done for the sake of contextual analysis: in order to make sense of dominant trends and discourses, it needs to be seen how they emerged and flourished – to the point that they had a discernible effect. To this end, one returns, more often than not, to the United States: as a site of advanced consumer capitalism, for over a century, the United States is incomparable in terms of its size and international standing. As the following chapters show, the United States was especially important in terms of perfecting (if not pioneering) many of the features of commercial culture. For this reason, this thesis treats the United States as an important reference point. Where other influences are at work (such as British and French) they are detailed and explained, but the United States still looms as the larger influence.

At no point is it suggested that the process was as ever as straightforward as simple transference or imitation – the dynamics of cultural change are far too complex and nuanced for such a superficial reading. What is suggested, though, is that, in order to explain why the Bushells brand evolved one way and not another, it helps to know which currents were shaping Australian culture one way and not another; where these currents could be linked to the United States, this thesis will explain why and how. If nothing else, the fact that this connection surfaces so frequently (between the Bushells brand and American influence) shows that, the branding process is, like any cultural phenomenon, an elastic one. It is not enough to study the origin of the product, or the heritage of the owner: a brand must reflect contemporary culture – and subsequent chapters will show that, increasingly, in various ways, and for a variety of reasons, this involved some degree of American influence.

Conclusion

With all the aforementioned qualifiers and caveats, this thesis will thus advance likely interpretations of various Bushells advertisements, and will contextualise them according to: Bushells' aims; the space and time of the advertisements' distribution; and the type of reader constructed by the advertisements. As such, the aim is to show what can be learned about contemporary Australian culture from Bushells' advertisements, in these contexts. In turn, and on the one hand, it concurs with Graeme Turner that, 'all readings are interested, all readings have an objective in mind, and all readings have to be offered as possibilities rather than conclusions.[95] On the other hand, though, it will show that, when contextualised in a certain way, there is much to be learned about contemporary Australian culture through the textual analysis of Bushells' advertisements.

Notes to Chapter Two on pp. 258.

CHAPTER THREE
A Taste for Tea – How tea travelled to (and through) Australian culture

Introduction

However 'everyday' it seems, the availability, quality and popularity of tea in Australia has fluctuated widely since the early colonial years. By the time Queenslander Alfred Bushells set his sights on the local market in 1883, tea had become a staple foodstuff in Australia. That said, though, tea had *not* arrived with the First Fleet in 1788, or at least not as part of the official supplies. As such, the speed with which it became an ordinary item in the average household says much about the ingrained tendencies of the new colony, as well as the commercial logic of the late nineteenth century. Ironically, for a product that has become so widely entwined with images of tradition and conservatism, the popularity of tea in early Australia was, in many ways, the perfect symbol of the modern era.

In terms of locating the start of Australians' interest in tea, letters among the Historical Records of New South Wales suggest that it was transported along with the colony's reluctant pioneers. One letter, for example, hints at a strong appreciation for tea. It was written by a female convict in November 1788, and presumably sent to family or acquaintances in Britain. Moreover, it suggests an appreciation that seemingly bridged the settlement's social strata. Writing from Port Jackson, the female convict goes some way in describing the general misery of her new home. Recounting the dearth of basic amenities in the new settlement, she bemoans the general lack of bedding and shelter, before specifying one product that was particularly missed: tea. Indeed, she deems her fellow females' grievances 'past description, as they are deprived of tea and other things they were indulged in in (sic) the voyage by the seamen, and as they are totally unprovided with clothes, those who have young children are quite wretched.' In the letter's sole note of optimism, she writes: 'We are comforted with the hopes of a supply of tea from China'.[96] Of all the deprivations she could pretty much expect in her new penal environment, the anonymous author singles out tea as the most devastating, and suggests that she was not alone in missing its apparently soothing effects. In turn, it is safe to infer that the

tea habit spanned the echelons of late eighteenth century British society, so much so that even members of a far-flung convict class mourned its absence. With this in mind, this chapter will trace the means by which tea became such a fixture in Britons' everyday life, to the extent that neither scarcity nor costliness could dim its popularity.

The Arrival of Tea in Britain

The intensity with which members of the First Fleet longed for tea was a fair reflection of the British palate of the late 1700s. Indeed, the fact that the fondness for tea straddled the fleet's social spectrum, from the military and civil officers to the motley assortment of English, Irish and Scottish convicts, highlights the extraordinarily widespread appeal of the beverage in Britain. This feat was all the more spectacular given the relatively short time that tea had actually been available in England, much less commonly and popularly enjoyed. In fact, at the turn of the eighteenth century, Great Britain was one of Europe's major consumers of *coffee*. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch points out in *Tastes of Paradise* (1992), documents from around 1700 cite some 3 000 coffeehouses in London alone. So: '[with] a population of 600 000 that would have meant one coffeehouse for every 200 people.'[97] This ubiquity did not just suggest a general love of coffee, *per se*; coffeehouses often housed intense debates and discussions, and many were hotbeds of intellectual fervour and political engagement. For the men of London, these coffeehouses were popular meeting points, and accommodated the gamut of seventeenth-century social interaction – business, politics and leisure.

Given the almost panoramic presence of coffeehouses in Britain in the early 1700s, and London in particular, the rise in prominence and popularity of tea was both swift and dramatic. In just fifty years, tea had usurped coffee's place in the daily life of most Britons. Moreover, just as coffee's popularity was furthered by the cultural dynamic of the coffeehouse, certain fortuities were similarly instrumental in lifting tea's profile. In *Tea for the British* (1973), for example, Denys Forrest argues that the introduction of tea to Britain coincided with the advent of commodity advertising in England. Indeed, Forrest contends that the first commodity to be advertised in a London newspaper was in fact tea. In September 1658, the front page of the

subsidized weekly *Mercurius Politicus* ran a three-line promotion of an exotic and 'physicians approved' beverage from China.

While the advertisement was London's first (mediated) encounter with tea, the Continent was already well accustomed to it.[98] From the late 1500s Dutch merchants were transporting consignments of tea from China to Bantam, on the island of Java, from whence they were shipped to Europe. These imports generated the most interest in Holland, Germany, France and Portugal. It was via tea's popularity in Portugal, though, that Britons' curiosity was eventually stirred. In Portugal, according to Forrest, tea:

> ...found its way into aristocratic and then into Court circles – so much so that when the Infanta Catherine of Braganza came to England in 1662 to marry King Charles II, her dowry included not only the island of Bombay but the beneficent habit of drinking tea.[99]

Queen Catherine's penchant for tea imbued it with the social cachet that the Royal Court of King Charles II would soon want to emulate. So, from the 1660s, expensive green varieties were imported into London, and were occasionally and ostensibly promoted for their medicinal benefits. Until the late 1690s, though, tea remained prohibitively expensive for most Britons, with only a privileged few able to enjoy it as a novel treat.[100] Moreover, its consumption was still largely demarcated on gender lines; tea in the drawing room was reserved for the men of the house, while the ladies were still drinking coffee.[101]

From its initial reception in the Royal Court, tea consumption did eventually spread throughout Britain in the course of the eighteenth century. To explain how tea became more accessible and affordable, two factors warrant particular attention: the strength and influence of the English East India Company, and the role of tea smugglers. Both were instrumental in positioning tea so highly on the British menu, to the point that it was, by the mid 1700s, a familiar item in the average labourer's household. More importantly though, or at least as far as this discussion is concerned, they helped render tea an accessible indulgence for even the poorer classes, members of which ended up in Sydney's penal settlement. For this reason, both factors will be briefly considered here.

The story of the English East India Company is a rich and complex one, and brackets centuries of maritime, mercantile and political history. The Company was conceived by a group of London merchants in 1599, keen to start trade with the Indies after Dutch traders had raised the price of the region's pepper. Formed in 1601, the joint-stock trading company came to epitomise and exploit England's fortunes as a sea-based hegemony. The pioneering work of Spanish and Portuguese explorers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had opened up world sea-routes and radically broadened trade capacities. From Spain and Portugal to the Netherlands, France and England, the emerging trade giants used the principle of comparative advantage to organise favourable trade arrangements. In this way, the Company's successes owe much to the period's general refinement of knowledge and infrastructure, stimulated by the formidable prospects for profit and growth. The Company spectacularly integrated contemporary developments in ship construction, cartography and navigation. In the simplest terms, the burgeoning strength of the Company, economically, culturally and politically, can be tracked alongside its deft negotiation of changing market opportunities. In its first few decades, pepper, indigo and various spices comprised most of the Company's cargoes. By the 1670s, calicoes, chintz, cotton-piece goods and silks had taken over. From around 1709, expanding trade with China saw tea become the Company's chief concern. It is this third strategic turn that concerns this thesis: in prioritising tea so highly, the Company effectively orchestrated its widespread accessibility and affordability.

Several factors help explain the remarkably rapid ascent of tea in the Company's operations. As mentioned earlier, until the early 1700s, coffee was the beverage of choice for most Britons. Even among the tiny coterie that could afford it, tea had yet to become an item of everyday consumption. According to Michael Greenberg, the Company's transition from Indian textiles to Chinese tea, and therefore its direct influence on British drinking habits, was an expedient move compelled by duress. As Greenberg points out in *British Trade and the Opening of China* (1951), the Company turned to tea since, during the early eighteenth century and through a series of Acts, British textile manufacturers had successfully secured Parliamentary protection against the Company's imports of Eastern fabrics. As such, writes Greenberg, 'Tea

was the only available article that could be forced into universal consumption without competing against home manufacture.'[102]

From the early 1700s, and under the Company's monopolistic management, tea consumption spread well beyond a discerning minority. It also inspired an array of accompaniments and accessories, to the point that it became both regularised and ritualised. The first dramatic jump in demand was in the 1720s, and coincided with the expansion in sugar imports from the West Indies.[103] By concentrating on the relatively cheap variety of bohea tea, the Company helped lower the price of tea from around 16 shillings a pound (which was what the more expensive green varieties fetched in the 1690s) to around 7 shillings a pound. As John Keay argues in *The Honourable Company* (1993), by 1770 tea had become the most important item in the Company's portfolio: from 200 000 pounds of tea sold in 1720, to almost 3 million in 1760, and 9 million by 1790. By then, the price of bohea had fallen to just 3 shillings a pound.[104] As tea's accessibility grew, a symbol of privilege and power evolved into an article of mass consumption and wide popularity.

Not only did tea consumption become far more affordable, its social, cultural and economic effects further strengthened its appeal. Three of these effects, as explained by Philip Lawson in *The East India Company* (1993), are of particular relevance here. Firstly, tea was a relatively cheap habit, and its naturally addictive chemicals (particularly caffeine and tannin) were barely harmful; the habit required little more than a spoonful of leaves, a pan or kettle of boiling water, and some sugar or milk. Secondly, consumption was encouraged by the steady socialisation of tea drinking. Codes and conventions soon developed around matters of deportment, dress and decorum, most of which required an assortment of tongs, caddies, platters and such. This sort of socialisation saw the development of afternoon tea as a fashionable eighteenth century ritual.[105] Thirdly, the growth in tea imports necessitated increasingly modern modes of distribution. From the Company's bonded warehouses, licensed distributors, most of who were based in London, had to devise means of efficient national distribution. To this end they used commercial travellers, sales catalogues and newspaper advertisements; then, to arrange customer orders, they involved brokers, commissions and extended capital investments. The cumulative

effect of distributors' efforts was to help entrench the smooth and successful delivery of tea from the Company's warehouses to the shopkeepers' shelves.[106]

Besides the Company's market dominance and political influence, the spread of tea consumption could also be attributed to the considerable role of smugglers, or 'interlopers', who found tea to be as lucrative as silk, tobacco and brandy. Before 1784, the tax on tea sold in England had reached a staggering 112 per cent, *ad valorem*. So, even as the Company lowered prices, the poorest Britons had little option but to maximise their small quantities by adding sloe, liquorice and ash-tree leaves. Clearly, the high tax rate generated considerable revenue for the national treasury, but it was also an incentive for smugglers. As such, British, Dutch, French and Portuguese smugglers introduced and maintained a strong parallel trade in tax-free tea. By the 1760s the illicit trade had grown from a small-scale, haphazard affair into a highly structured and successful operation. Mindful of this threat, the Company was especially vigilant of its Canton headquarters, its entry-point into China, and patrolled its buildings there at great expense.[107] All the same, until the customs reforms of the 1780s, smuggled tea constituted a significant proportion of the tea consumed in Britain. Indeed, until then, according to W. A. Cole, 'the smugglers' sales probably equalled, if they did not surpass, the quantities sold by the East India Company, and were almost certainly greater in absolute terms than they had been forty years before.'[108]

In August 1784, the situation eased significantly with the passage of the Commutation Act. With this Act, the tax on tea was reduced to just 12½ per cent, and the Company effectively undercut the smugglers' only advantage. Within just one year, the Company's tea sales increased from 6, 500 000 to a staggering 16, 300 000 pounds weight, and the demand for tonnage in the Company's China service increased from 6000 to 18 000 tons per annum.[109] After the passage of the Commutation Act, and the subsequent fall in the price of official tea, smugglers looked elsewhere for easy profits. The Company's market primacy was reinstated and no longer challenged. Nonetheless, it is worth stressing the social significance of smuggled tea. At their prime, and over several decades, smugglers had undeniably extended the consumption of tea by offering Britons a cheaper counterpart, at around half to two-thirds of the legal price.

Given the surreptitious nature of smugglers' underground commerce, there is little way to ascertain the true extent of this consumption, or the types of consumers it relied on. It is not unlikely, for example, that the more affluent classes would have supplemented their legitimate supplies with the smuggled tea. All the same, what figures there are confirm an extraordinary amount of tea in Britain, particularly between the 1740s and the 1780s, far exceeding the Company's share. W. A. Cole's essay on eighteenth century smuggling, one of the more thorough discussions of tea smuggling in particular, concludes that, 'on the eve of the Commutation Act illegal sales of tea probably amounted to somewhere between four and six million lbs a year.'[110] The availability of so much cheap tea constituted a significant secondary source, even though it was of varying and sometimes dubious quality.

The fact that members of the First Fleet had expressed a real attachment to tea suggests that, by the late 1780s, even the poorer members of British society had developed a tea habit. Clearly, the smugglers' inexpensive offerings had broadened the already growing trade in tea, particularly for those who may have found the highly taxed tea (pre-1784) beyond reach. There is, then, a logical progression: from the activities of tea smugglers, especially between the 1740s and the mid-1780s, and the degree to which members of the First Fleet lamented its absence. So, it is argued here that for a product that was a veritable luxury in the early 1700s, tea had, by the close of that century, become an article of popular and broad-based consumption. Two factors helped instigate and sustain this situation: the market clout of the East India Company, and the intense and extensive trade in contraband tea. Their combined influence helped insinuate tea into the everyday course of eighteenth century British life. Thereafter, the tea habit accompanied Britons wherever they went. What is more, in those far-off places where tea was scarce, the various means by which it was procured conveyed the extent of its widespread and deep-seated popularity.

Tea & Sydney Cove

If nothing else, the early history of tea in Britain suggests that tea's emergence as an article of everyday consumption was practically enabled by a combination of forces, not least being the profit motives of Company merchants. That said, once it *was*

adopted as a regular and popular habit, tea could be said to have become a part of British culture. In turn, this helps explain the almost immediate attempts to bring tea into Sydney's penal settlement. To appreciate these efforts, it helps to sketch, however generally, the nature and climate of this settlement, at least to the extent that it could be seen to accommodate and encourage a market for tea. As it will be argued, the processes by which tea consumption grew and intensified in early Australia were not merely incidental. Rather, these processes effectively parallel monumental steps in Australia's colonial history.

As could be expected, the decision to colonise Botany Bay with convicts was hardly encumbered by questions of diet or lifestyle. In August 1786 an unsigned document was presented to cabinet: 'Heads of a Plan for effectively disposing of convicts'. In *The Fatal Shore* (1987), Robert Hughes cites two main interests behind this proposal. Firstly, it was hoped that it could relieve the pressure on Britain's swelling jail and hulk population, especially in the metropolis; secondly, the Pacific region was thought to be a suitable source of raw materials for masts and ships' timber, to be used for British fleets in India.[111] The cabinet gave its approval and promptly chose Captain Arthur Phillip to lead the expedition and govern the new colony. It was a hastily planned and poorly resourced venture from the start. According to Hughes, the 736 convicts on the First Fleet amounted to a 'Noah's Ark of small-time criminality'.[112] They were drawn from all over England, but most were Londoners, and most were incarcerated for crimes against property. More to the point, few were equipped with the trade skills necessary for colonising unknown territory; amongst them, there was only one gardener, one fisherperson, two brick-makers, two bricklayers and one mason. In short, London's plan for a soon-to-be self-sufficient outpost was highly ambitious, if not outright untenable.

One index of the expedition's inadequacies was its food supply. Perhaps unsurprisingly, provisions for the First Fleet were far from bountiful, much less appetising. The Fleet, which sailed for Botany Bay from Spithead on 13 May 1787, was fitted out, assembled, provisioned and despatched by many government departments and private contractors, but mostly by the Royal Navy. The Navy's victualling department saw to the expedition's provisioning, both for the voyage and for a period of two years after landing. Significantly, the logistics of the voyage were

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almost inevitably compromised by the trade priorities of London merchants, and in particular those of the East India Company. As Charles Bateson writes in *The Convict Ships* (1959), three of the Fleet's vessels (half the transport) were to be released from government employ as soon as they had disembarked their passengers and discharged their stores. These vessels, Bateson notes, 'were to commence a new contract with the East India Company, which had chartered them to proceed to China to load tea for the London market.'[113] For the First Fleet's 8½-month voyage, on the other hand, the weekly rations lacked even a modicum of such indulgence. Both the marines and convicts subsisted on tiny quantities of bread, salted meat, peas, oatmeal, butter, cheese, and vinegar, with three quarts of water a day. The selection reflected the common wisdom of the day; the vinegar, for example, was mistakenly considered a bulwark against scurvy. What authorities could not have anticipated, though, was the settlement's capacity to access relative luxuries rather quickly, such as tea, and the effect this would have on early Sydney trade.

To appreciate the means by which tea was brought to Sydney Cove, it is worth considering briefly the settlement's first few years of deprivation and desperation. In turn, the growing availability of and demand for tea will appear all the more remarkable. Not only were the official provisions dramatically inadequate, the land yielded little return to the pioneer farmers, the various convicts and discharged marines who were instructed to clear and sow the land. Put simply, within a matter of months, supplies had dwindled to precariously low levels. Within the first year, rations were reduced to just flour, beef *or* pork, peas, butter and rice. By early 1790, and on the brink of starvation, rations were reduced again to just flour, pork and rice. There was an overall slump in the amount of public work. Weakened by hunger, the convicts worked only as much as their bodies allowed. Those that could fish or hunt were allowed slightly larger portions, with authorities keen to prolong their strength and endurance. For the five years of Philip's governorship, then, the colony faced a critical shortage of basic provisions, an obvious indication of insufficient planning, London's indifference, and a general ignorance of the climate and terrain.

Ironically, it was this combination, of bland rations, sluggish agriculture, and a hungry settlement, that proved a perfect inducement for enterprise and trade. Significantly, this had very little to do with any foresight or overtures from London. Despite the

failure of early food harvests, the food shortage under Philip was eased significantly thanks to some surreptitious business between some military officers and ships' masters. In *A Short History of Australia* (1995), Manning Clark writes that, in time:

> ...the news circulated that there was profit to be made from the sale of a shipload of goods at Sydney Cove. Whalers arrived from England and the United States of America with cargoes of goods they sold to the officers before sailing south to hunt the whales and seals.[114]

The first to exploit this mercantile opportunity were the military officers of the New South Wales Corps. These officers were in an extraordinary position. They could access foreign remittance, in the form of Paymaster's bills drawn on the agents to whom their salaries were paid in London. As such, besides the government, the officers virtually controlled the colony's purchasing power.[115] In addition, since basic supplies were, for the first decade or so, distributed in the form government rations, convicts' income could be spent on imported goods, particularly 'non-sustenance commodities'. So, from the early 1790s, using their unique claim to capital as leverage, the officers basically monopolised the access to and distribution of such commodities, re-sold them at hugely inflated prices, and introduced an array of otherwise unattainable articles to the colony. In 1794, for example, the *William* arrived from England via Rio with beef, pork and tea – with tea the only item of the three not included in government rations. Under Philip, tea was still deemed an unnecessary indulgence, much like sugar, and there was very little allowance made for it in any of the government institutions (the orphan schools, hospitals and prisons). As such, the officers' proximity to cargoes of tea was shrewdly reconfigured as a lucrative market opportunity.

The commercial activity of military and civil officers in this period is a matter of considerable contention. By most accounts, it is clear that certain officers manipulated a unique situation to their personal advantage. As G.J. Abbott argues, few of these officers planned to stay in the colony beyond their term of service. They were looking to supplement their salary with easy short-term gains, and the arrival of speculative cargoes offered a timely opportunity:

The sale of cargoes during Phillip's governorship had shown a profitable avenue of investment, one in which the officers had an initial absolute advantage in that they commanded the colony's only source of foreign exchange.[116]

This trade began in April 1792, when Captain Manning of the *Pitt* received Paymaster's bills prior to his departure for Bengal; that October, the *Royal Admiral* arrived with a cargo, and shops were opened in Sydney and Parramatta to retail the goods.

Central to this development was the arrival of Major Francis Grose, who came to the colony in 1792 as Lieutenant-Governor and Commandant of the New South Wales Corps. While the breadth of Grose's influence is beyond the scope of this chapter, it will suffice to note that Grose reoriented the economic environment in favour of the regimental class. This included a revised and discriminatory ration scale, the granting of land to ten of his officers, and the large-scale removal of convicts from public labour and into the service of farming officers. Such actions helped buttress the officers' already privileged position. Backed by sterling, the officers' advantage often surfaced as aggression and intimidation. Under Grose, officers' profits from the speculative cargoes ranged from 500 to 1 000 per cent. For historians, the main point of concern is the overall and long-term effect of the officers' trade. In *British Imperialism and Australia* (1939), for example, Brian Fitzpatrick considers Grose's 'squirearchy' an economic perversion, detrimental for all but a pampered clique. According to Fitzpatrick, the result was 'a system highly profitable to perhaps one in two hundred of the colonial population and oppressive or ruinous to the one hundred and ninety-nine.'[117]

As much as officers *did* demand exorbitantly high prices for the commodities, it is also true that this trade broadened the range of goods available in New South Wales. Most infamous was the strong traffic in rum, wine and spirits, about which much has already been written. What is of particular importance here, though, is the inclusion of tea in these cargoes. Indeed, it was the cargoes' small 'luxuries', such as tea, tobacco and sugar, that stretched the settlers' fare beyond the crudely rudimentary, to include items of cultural significance. That is not to say that officers had too much of a say in the cargoes' contents. Generally, they either purchased cargoes brought speculatively,

persuaded captains to return with specific merchandise, or ordered through a Calcutta agent, Augustus Beyer. Of note, however, is the fact that tea figured prominently in one of the few instances where officers *did* charter ships for specific cargoes: the chartering of the *Britannia* in 1792 and 1794, and of the *Thynne* in 1799. As D. R. Hainsworth points out in *The Sydney Traders* (1981), in 1799 Augustus Beyer sent the *Thynne* to Sydney for the officers, 'loaded with 9,106 gallons of rum, with sugar, tea, coffee, pepper and textiles.'[118]

In several ways, tea's route to Sydney reflected the political geometry of imperial enterprise. Firstly, the interests of the East India Company were not far from the officers' trade. Indeed, with Phillip's return to England and the colony under Grose's governorship, ships' captains effectively gambled on the Company's involvement. Fearful of any violations of its monopoly, the Company's watchdogs readily seized vessels and cargoes as contraband. As it was noted earlier, though, it was the Chinese tea trade that the Company focused most of its energy on, particularly from its Canton headquarters. In turn, it was the Calcutta-to-Sydney connection that facilitated the flow of tea into the colony. It was not until the 1820s that the Company began to relax some of the rules and regulations of its trade with China. Secondly, the sea-based trade depended on articles that withstood time and travel. As Michael Symons argues in *One Continuous Picnic* (1984), English merchants consolidated the empire with the trade of tea, sugar and flour, portable commodities that literally extended London's eighteenth-century hubris. Effectively, '[its] ships' providores foreshadowed the modern food industry, essentially the business of preserving food for those detached from the soil.'[119] The fact that storable staples (like tea) arrived in time to relieve a demoralised population, otherwise at the mercy of insufficient rations and stagnant agriculture, says something about the practicalities and potential of such enterprise.

From the start of the nineteenth century, Sydney's commercial environment was beginning to assume some of the conventions of modern trade. While the government initially monitored supplies and rations through the government store, the Commissariat, it was not long before small-scale enterprise provided something that resembled retail. In fact, when the *Sydney Gazette* appeared in 1803, it advertised a range of shops. A produce market had emerged on the western side of Sydney Cove, where the eggs, fruit and vegetables were unloaded from the fertile Hawkesbury

farming area. It was open from dawn to noon each Tuesday and Saturday. In 1810 Governor Macquarie relocated it to the more central location at Market Street. By this time, however, a significant number of grocers, butchers and bakers were already catering to the growing population. These grocery stores supplemented the regular produce markets by selling the less perishable items, particularly sugar, wheat, flour and tea, which were fast becoming the four staples of the settlers' diet. [120] While settlers had initially got by with bartering and London bank drafts, a regular currency and bank was established in 1817.

While these small-scale grocers certainly helped refine and regulate Sydney's trade, their work was far from smooth or reliable. The early 1800s saw the price of tea fluctuate widely, as the colony's supply alternated between scarcity and surplus. According to Hainsworth, for example, the news of a tea shortage (and therefore high prices) would reach shippers in Rio, London, Calcutta or Canton; they would quickly load tea cargoes for Sydney, only to see prices plummet with their arrival, which would then slow the flow, and thus induce another shortage. In this way, within less than a year, the price of tea could swing between 10 and 30 shillings a pound. The supply and subsequent price of sugar was similarly vulnerable to this pattern of shortage-glut-shortage. Frustrating as this was, it nonetheless trained the burgeoning retail community to sharpen its organisational acumen. Hainsworth writes:

> [T]he skill of the Sydney merchant came, therefore, in calculating ahead; in estimating not merely how long it would be to the next scarcity, but also how long it would take for him to get a message to his agents and a consignment back. [121]

As such, Sydney trade was modernised more by the street-smart resourcefulness of pioneer retailers rather than any top-level involvement of concerned officials.

Enterprise and Initiative

By the 1820s, the economic life of the colony owed much to the initiative and drive of a business-oriented labour force. Specifically, that group of individuals that staffed the Sydney markets, or set themselves up as dealers, hat makers, innkeepers, pastry cooks – in short, the variety of individuals that responded to the market potential of

New South Wales. As mentioned earlier, officers of the New South Wales Corps can be seen to have introduced the penal colony to a few of the luxuries of a free economy. However, this system lasted only as long as the officers' privileges remained unchecked, and their trade was the colonists' only portal to such luxuries, roughly until around 1800. From then, another commercial community was making an enduring contribution to the emergent market environment.

Whilst happy enough to import, officers considered retail itself somewhat ignoble. Deferring to English custom, officers generally distanced themselves from commercial dealings that risked sullying their social standing, that is, direct retail. On the other hand, a growing band of emancipist traders proved that they were more than willing to meet the colony's retail needs. Indeed, they had little to lose in terms of prestige, and much to gain in terms of currency. As it turned out, several ex-convicts and emancipists famously *exceeded* the short-term mercantilism of the officers. Before the close of the eighteenth century, significant wealth was being made by the likes of Simeon Lord, Andrew Thompson, Henry Kable, James Underwood, Isaac Nichols, and Thomas Abbott. Whether through importing, exporting, shipping, building, dealing, or sealing, their direct engagement in trade helped determine the contours of early Australian commerce. One of the most successful of this group was Simeon Lord, whose Sydney sentence was to prove spectacularly fortunate. Lord landed in New South Wales on the Third Fleet in 1791, an illiterate, unskilled labourer and convicted petty thief. After just eleven years, though, Lord had amassed enough wealth to own an impressive four-storey stone mansion.[122] Having completed his penal servitude to Captain Rowley of the New South Wales Corps, Lord set his sights on the profit potential of the visiting ships. Lord successfully petitioned the government to engage in the cargo trade, and quickly became one of the more active participants in the maturing market. From importing sugar to exporting sealskins, Lord's profile grew and his influence spread. After 1800 he was trading on a scale that rivalled the officers' early efforts. By then, many of the officers had either left New South Wales or drifted into pastoral farming.

For all their ambition and initiative, traders that hoped to exploit the strong tea market still faced a formidable obstacle in the form of the East India Company. A few, like Lord, tried to clandestinely strategise around the Company's charter, but to no avail.

An open trade link with China was the most coveted prize. There were significant cost savings in a direct and regular trade with Canton, as opposed to an indirect one with merchants based in London or Calcutta. Moreover, despite the relative costliness of tea (ranging from eight to twelve shillings a pound), demand continued to outpace supply. Indeed, by 1814 there was an acute shortage; when an American ship, the *Traveller*, came into port from Canton that year with a cargo of tea, Governor Macquarie readily broke the Navigation Acts to allow it to enter and unload.[123] From the early 1820s, though, the Company gradually relaxed its grip, or at least to the extent that such trade was *legally* possible. However, even as a trade channel opened up, Sydney merchants were confronted with another problem: finding an export that the Chinese would want as much as Australians wanted tea. To this end, dried sealskins proved a viable option, but they still had to compete in a Chinese market already glutted with American merchandise. All the same, the situation must have improved by the time of Commissioner Bigge's visit. In his comprehensive review of the progress of New South Wales, Bigge reported to London in 1823 that tea consumption was 'almost incessant' in New South Wales.[124] As in Britain, tea had fast become the colonists' (non-alcoholic) beverage of choice.

Besides the perseverance of importers and wholesalers, the street-level work of retailers also helped provide a ready supply of everyday items. Just as emancipist traders often triumphed despite their origins, several ex-convicts also proved similarly savvy in terms of identifying and meeting retail opportunities. Indeed, these opportunities inevitably preceded the development of a commercial infrastructure. Aspiring retailers seized moneymaking moments as they came, pre-empting the laws and facilities that would eventually oversee and support their work. As such, they showed a level of business acuity that either belied an unsavoury past, or confirmed an astute disposition. Tea was a common element in these often spontaneous, bottoms-up arrangements.

For prospective traders, tea's portability and relative affordability made it an attractive means to easy money. As early as 1798, for instance, one particular convict, writing home to her father in England, tells of a remarkable reversal of circumstance. The woman's good fortune afforded her a house, various livestock, and, having obtained a licence, a reliable business under the name, 'Three Jolly Settlers'. Significantly,

though, it was on the voyage *to* Botany Bay that she first showed her commercial competence. During the six-month journey, she kept a brisk trade in sugar, thread, tobacco, and tea, and stocked up from port to port.[125] As the success of this apparent novice suggests, tea had become one of the surest and easiest articles to market. Those that could access it wholesale and then retail it in New South Wales were more or less assured of a relatively quick return.

From the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century numerous women repeated the sort of drive that was behind the 'Three Jolly Settlers'. For the British and colonial authorities, women's labour was conceived in traditional, domestic terms. Whether employed by the government or a private master, it was generally assumed that a woman's economic utility was limited to what she could manage within a household, and such work was assigned accordingly. However, as Portia Robinson argues in *The Women of Botany Bay* (1993), not only did many ex-convict women transcend the lowly status ascribed to them by contemporary prejudice, but they were also instrumental in accelerating and vitalising the economic life of the colony. In particular, lots of women ventured into retail and trade, and obtained whatever government licences and contracts would allow them a rightful place in the infant economy. In this way, their contribution, in terms of enterprise and initiative, clearly trumped all official expectations. As Robinson explains:

> What was unexpected was that women of no trade, women with no prior skills, women who could neither read nor write but signed their names as 'X', became a part of the successful working women of the penal colony, making their livelihoods at occupations for which they had no prior skill or training.[126]

Not only did many women become directly involved in the colony's commercial realm, but they also helped promote and showcase Sydney's growing sophistication. Besides beers and spirits, for which the many female publicans were chiefly responsible, female retailers also introduced New South Wales to a wide variety of grocery items, as well as European fashions and accessories. The colonial press was replete with their advertisements, itself a sign of increasing market options. Josephina Rens, for example, advertised a shop of fashionable clothes from Paris; Mrs Stuart of Brickfield Hill advertised ladies wear and groceries; while Mrs Dockrell of George

Street advertised clothing, books, tobacco, gunpowder, pepper, and tea.[127] Collectively, such women helped bring to the blossoming environment a measure of style and modernity, and provided a prototype for the soon-to-be ubiquitous grocery store. They also patently outshone the Commissariat. On that point, though, the Commissariat *did* remain important well into the first few decades of the 1800s, not only as a barometer of both the fiscal climate and general product range, but as a general store for staples and necessities.[128] Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging those factors that helped broaden and diversify market choices, especially the oft-ignored contribution of women.

More in Store

As the population grew, its access to a wider range of household goods grew accordingly. By 1841 the population had risen to 131 000, and imports from Britain alone had grown by 632 per cent. Sydney, in particular, helped sustain and champion such activity. In *A Lot in Store* (2002), Joy McCann considers Sydney's role in nurturing and encouraging the nation's market potential:

> Over the next century Sydney established itself as a major point of distribution of imported goods to the rest of eastern Australia. As the number of free settlers in the country increased, more specialised shops began to appear.[129]

For over a century, Sydney remained the nation's retail epicentre. Whilst it was eventually rivalled by Melbourne, in terms of fashion consciousness and European-style predilections, it still pioneered and then perfected the conditions of an increasingly consumerist society. The boom in overseas trade, particularly in the 1830s, did not just have an economic effect on the colony. Rather, as John Molony points out in *The Native-Born* (2000):

> [R]egular contact with the islands of the Pacific, with India, China, the Straits, North America and Great Britain meant that the youths who were born in Sydney and continued to live there grew up in a world that in some considerable measure was cosmopolitan.[130]

Besides meeting market demand, the rise of specialty shops also heralded a new professional category, one that would have a huge impact on Australians' shopping practices for over a hundred years: the grocer. As Beverley Kingston argues in *Basket, Bag and Trolley* (1994), from the early 1800s advertisements in the colonial press began to reflect a general shift away from government stores, which had functioned as universal providers, towards more autonomy and self-sufficiency for a growing number of small households. From the mid nineteenth century, as the quantity and quality of general supplies stabilised, grocery stores were accommodating the everyday needs of these households. Indeed, according to Kingston, the local grocer assumed particular importance in this period, and offered services that would eventually be rendered redundant. That is, before the introduction of pre-packaged foods:

> [T]he skills of the grocer (most general storekeepers were basically grocers) and his knowledge of quality were invaluable to his customers. To a large extent the quality and variety of the food they could buy depended on his professionalism.[131]

The rise and spread of these general stores pointed to important developments in the history of colonial Australia. Their strength and influence can be tracked alongside larger social, economic and demographic shifts. For example, the gold rushes of the 1850s had a huge impact on the pace, composition and direction of colonial life. While the first general stores opened soon after European arrival, they became markedly more efficient and organized in the wake of the gold rushes. These stores essentially had to modernise to reflect the growing wealth and sophistication of their customers, with a broader product range and a more robust pursuit of customer satisfaction. This pursuit included services and skills that were ultimately supplanted by modern technologies.

Before the near-complete takeover by pre-packaged goods and advertising, customers relied on the time and expertise of the grocer. Lacking substantial product information, customers depended on the grocer's knowledge of the origin and use of household goods. Moreover, on top of mere functionality, the grocer's personal traits were an equally important part of the transaction. As Kim Humphery explains in *Shelf Life* (1998):

> Punctuality, proper' handling of the goods, efficient preparation of the 'orders', courtesy to the customer, cleanliness in appearance – all these attributes were seen as necessary to the grocer.[132]

It was the grocer's duty to receive wholesalers' instructions and endorsements and then to process this into helpful advice for consumers. Before mass advertising, manufacturers tried to endear the grocer to their merchandise, in the hope that it would then be recommended to households at the grocer's discretion. In comparison, the customer had very little to do since, by virtue of necessity, the grocer's judgement governed many of the purchasing decisions. Indeed, there were very few goods for the customer to actually touch, much less compare.

The Arrival of Branded Tea

As it has been shown, tea fast became a staple of early Australian life, with its availability growing alongside the strength of the economy and the sophistication of the population. With the emergence and then familiarity of the local grocery store, which ensured a steady supply of basic foodstuffs, tea was, from around the early 1800s, far from rare or novel. It was, then, perfectly suited to the peculiar logic of brand marketing: branding releases the most ordinary and everyday item (like tea) from its ordinariness, and extends its meanings beyond questions of utility and quality. By the time the Bushells brand had arrived, so to speak, branding had already transformed Australia's consumer landscape, and signalled its burgeoning alignment with international trends.

As discussed in the Literature Survey, the concept of branding is often positioned within discussions of modern industry and consumer capitalism. Ironically, though, it had its origins in the seals and hallmarks of the artisan era; the signature of the marker represented a product's quality, integrity and distinction. However, these markers of differentiation became even more important, and elusive, with the nineteenth-century expansion of the factory system. As Naomi Klein explains in *No Logo* (2000), the factory system basically flooded the market with mass-produced products that were, for all intents and purposes, virtually identical. In such an environment, competitive branding became 'a necessity of the machine-age – within a context of manufactured

sameness, image-based difference had to be manufactured along with the product.'[133] In this way, branding ties products to any number of emotions and ideals; one brand of tea, for example, may conjure images of convenience and efficiency, while another brand of seemingly indistinguishable tea is wrapped up in notions of patriotism and tradition. In other words, brand marketing can invoke a consumer's sense of identity, as he or she gravitates to whichever brand of tea complements his or her values regime – or, at the very least, this is how most marketing literature posits this scenario.

Whatever one may think of this approach, it is clear that Australian consumers were, by the mid nineteenth century, dealing with the assumptions and language of brand logic. Moreover, the fact that these campaigns addressed consumers directly, rather than the grocer, denotes a range of underlying processes that enabled and encouraged this development. In short, the local grocery store was implicated in the massive industrial developments to which Australia became increasingly responsive to throughout the nineteenth century. As such, Australians' knowledge and experience of the tea market changed radically in second half of the 1800s, as grocery stores became more attuned to the commercial impulses of the modern era.

The history of tea in Australia from the late 1800s chronicles the gradual shift towards competitive branding. Alongside flour, sugar and salt, tea was one of this period's everyday commodities. Dramatic changes in the marketing and subsequent consumption of tea effectively relocated the shopping habits of everyday Australians, and signalled a widespread reorientation of general consumer cues. As Peter Cuffley argues in *Chandeliers and Billy Tea* (1984), the way local grocers packaged, marketed and sold tea was a succinct commercial yardstick, and inadvertently reflected the strength and direction of the nation's marketplace. Initially, grocers held bulk tea supplies in chests, whereupon portions would be weighed out for individual requests. In time, though, grocers divided this supply between various canisters. These canisters were adorned with large numerals, representing either particular blends, or specific types of tea, such as Orange Pekoe or Hyson Skin. Alternatively, grocers sometimes had their own specially printed tea packets, which may have featured the proprietor's name and address, details of the blend, claims to purity, and sometimes even a pastoral Chinese scene (until the 1880s, most of the tea imported into New South

Wales came from China). In terms of packaging tea for consumers, then, grocers enjoyed a degree of control. Eventually, though, grocers' efforts were undercut by the tide of tea companies that were maximising new opportunities in the production, distribution and advertising of branded goods. Inevitably, their economies of scale were profitably exploited, well beyond the grocers' modest efforts. Cuffley writes:

> [A]s printing on tin became more widely used there was an ever more colourful range of tea brands, all competing for the customer's eye. The brands were made particularly familiar by the signs around the store and by the outdoor advertising which included signs on walls and roofs, and enamel signs now much sought after.[134]

The introduction of branded tea had a huge and irreversible effect on consumers' understanding of the product. Instead of receiving informative advice through the grocer, whose knowledge may have ranged from the broadly generic to the more nuanced, consumers became directly cognisant of competing options. In turn, Australians' tea vocabulary stretched to include names like Rasawatte, Edwards, Ensign, Robur, Griffiths, and more. Henceforth, consumers assumed more control of judging brands' relative merits, and manufacturers, for their part, made increasingly ingenious interventions in this decision-making process. Certainly, behavioural patterns changed slowly: until the late 1800s, grocers continued to relay basic details of availability and price, whilst advertising comprised of similarly straightforward information regarding the latest shipments from abroad and so on. Standing orders and home deliveries also remained very common, well into the first few decades of the twentieth century. All the same, from the late nineteenth century consumer habits began to reflect the interests and inclinations of the industrialised world. The cultural climate became a lot more hospitable to the rhetorical appeals of merchants and manufacturers, the perfect context for brand marketing.

Conspicuous Consumers

Writing from Melbourne in 1883, Richard Twopenny suggested that tea 'may fairly claim to be the national beverage'.[135] For Twopenny, tea earned this honour with his observation that most Australians consumed it at most meals. It was during this period that Australian consumers became identified and targeted by a growing corps of tea

merchants. As a variety of tea brands emerged and vied for the customer's favour, they effectively ushered' in a new era in Australia's consumer history. This period coincided with the transformative processes of consumerism in the industrialised centres of the world. From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new patterns of consumption were altering the urban middle and working classes in cities such as London, Paris, Glasgow, New York, Chicago and Berlin. With the construction of new department stores in the city centres, and the ancillary development of trams, trolley buses and railways, a new sensibility was being cultivated and finessed. As Robert Bocock argues, the new department stores helped both house and endorse the fruits of the industrial age. They were:

> [S]ites for the purchase and display of a variety of commodities – groceries, furniture, clothing, crockery, kitchen utensils, and new electrical equipment as these were developed and mass produced in the course of the twentieth century – all under one roof.[136]

In the world's burgeoning metropolises, matters of style, fashion and taste assumed unprecedented significance: the idea that consumption could be used to communicate a sense of belonging and purpose took hold. For George Simmel (1858-1918) and Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), both writing around this time, the element of conspicuousness was particularly important; that is, the way that consumption was being used as either a marker of distinction, or a shield against the knowing stares of fellow urbanites. According to Simmel, for example, fashion functioned much like armour, and ensured that its follower was 'protected against those unpleasant reflections which the individual otherwise experiences when he or she becomes the object of attention.'[137] Similarly, Veblen wrote of the 'canon of reputability', and the need to be seen consuming the right commodities, with a heightened sense of class and breeding. For Veblen, consumption was both a product and indication of social standing: 'High-bred manners and ways of living are items of conformity to the norm of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption.'[138]

What was being described, then, was a particular cultural disposition regarding commodities, with consumption seen as both an extension of the self, as well as the reflection of a stratified society. From the 1850s, this sensibility was discernible in Sydney. With the economic ripples of the gold rushes (to be discussed more in the

next chapter) and the growth in wool exports, consumers could emulate the shopping trends of their counterparts oversees. In just a few decades, Sydney's infrastructure became suitably amenable to the logistical demands of a modern retail hub: gas lighting was introduced in 1841, the first passenger train journey from Sydney to Parramatta was made in 1855, and electricity was introduced in the 1890s. When Joseph Farmer installed Sydney's first glass plate window in 1854, he effectively inaugurated window-shopping in the city. Before the close of the century, Sydney shoppers could enjoy the boutique glamour of the Sydney Arcade (1881), the Strand Arcade (1892) and the Queen Victoria Building (1898).

As urban populations around the world adopted consumer commodities as social signifiers, manufacturers and marketers could confidently exploit the opportunities afforded by new technologies. Department stores became virtual shrines to conspicuous consumption, and their beautiful displays and streamlined organisation optimised every opportunity for leisurely strolling. In turn, as industrial capitalism refined techniques of mass production, promoters busily refined what Raymond Williams dubbed 'a highly organised and professional system of magical inducements.'[139] Herein is the significance of branded tea in Australia: its arrival introduced ordinary consumers to the spectacularly elastic world of branding, whereby the most pedestrian product (like tea) can be enhanced with any number of ideals and associations. Magical or otherwise, the inducements Williams refers to could be said to have had at least two main purposes. Firstly, to further the salience of the particular brand, and stress whatever visual and verbal props helped potential buyers to remember it favourably. Secondly, to differentiate the brand from its competitors, in the hope that consumers would sense a stronger response to its differentiating features, and then consummate this response with a purchase.

Conclusion

The story of tea in Australia thus parallels significant turns in the nation's development. This suggests that the cultural biography of a seemingly minor commodity, or at least minor in terms of conventional academic recognition, can in fact elucidate a rich and complex history. As the colony matured economically, from penal drudgery to urban vigour, the place of tea in everyday Australian culture shifted

accordingly. The taste for tea did not waver, but rather the ways Australians accessed and understood the product did. As it has been argued in this chapter, the tea market was introduced by a constellation of interests and forces, each of which helped shape and cushion this enduring aspect of Australia's early cultural history. The next chapter will consider how this market evolved in ways conducive to the likes of Alfred Bushells, and numerous other marketers that sought to harness Australians' blossoming sophistication.

Notes to Chapter Three on pp. 258-260.