

## **Chapter Seven: Pleasure at Work: the Gender Ambivalences of Work-based Sociability**

In March 1999, Arena, the men's lifestyle magazine, in one of its regular feature articles, set out to explore the cultures of work prevalent within the newer parts of the media and cultural industries. The article focused in on a new social type, the 'flexecutive', whom its author, Richard Benson, saw as embodying the distinctive orientations to work of practitioners within this sector. To this end, he emphasized both the stylistic self-consciousness of these 'flexecutives' and the importance to them of a work-based lifestyle that put a high premium on forms of socializing lubricated by drinking, drugs and a consumption-based ethic of enjoyment. Thus, he described them - or 'him' - as follows:

I first saw him in a loft in the fashionable London area of Old Street, attending an unfancy dress party to which everyone appeared to have come as the same person. There were about a hundred there, all aged between 27 and 38, and most affecting a slight over-confidence, toning down their accents, and dressed in high maintenance connoisseur sports and work wear. The basics were familiar - combat trousers, fleeces and all-terrain trainers - but the labels were conspicuously flash [...] The cropped haircuts (slightly greying, slightly balding) and goatee beards (compulsory) looked as though they were tended at upwards of £25 a time, and the drugs (Absolut and Cranberry, high grade grass, cocaine) up market. It was a typical 1990s contradiction; clothes and accessories from youth culture that could be afforded only by people whose age and income were not 'youth' at all (Arena, March 1999:88).

In codifying this social type, Benson's article drew upon a well-established genre of style-based journalism in which an attention to the phantasmagoria of contemporary metropolitan (usually, London) life loomed large. Through a detailing of both specific districts of the city and the dress codes and argot of its inhabitants, this journalism offered a particular mapping of urban life and its dramatis personae. His account of the flexecutive, however, also rehearsed an argument about the nature of work in the

‘creative industries’ that had a wider currency beyond the pages of the style press. This emphasized how employment in these sectors was distinguished by its blurring of established divisions between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ in the way job was organized and performed. Angela McRobbie has done most to draw attention to this apparently hybrid character of ‘creative work’ and, in particular, to the influence of the whole panoply of jargon, clothes and music derived from club culture to the organization of these worlds of creative employment. As she polemically puts it, ‘the intoxicating pleasures of leisure culture have... for a sector of the under-35s [working in the cultural industries] provided a template for managing an identity in the world of work’ (McRobbie, 2002; see also Scase & Davis, 2000; Leadbeater, 1999).

This emphasis on the hybrid nature of these kinds of creative employment identified by Benson and McRobbie – the difficulty of fitting them into some of our conventional assumptions about work and leisure – reveals an important, if ultimately, a partial truth. I want to take this observation, however, as the starting point for exploring the place of work-based and work-related forms of sociability within the informal cultures inhabited by the men I interviewed. What interests me in this chapter is the way the kinds of understandings of creative work deployed by Benson and McRobbie surfaced within the creative cultures of advertising itself. An image of creative jobs as precisely ‘enjoyable’, ‘fun’ and allowing access to a world of glamour and style had considerable currency amongst creative people and would-be creatives themselves. As we will see, for the young practitioners that I interviewed, it was clear that they were often initially drawn to the job because of this perception. Their experiences of working as creatives, however,

were more contradictory. Whilst the job did allow them access to these forms of sociability, it was not without its costs. More than that, the very centrality of hedonism to the representation of their jobs provoked anxieties about the occupational standing of the work they performed. In exploring the feelings of ambivalence that they expressed, I centrally want to reflect on what this tells us about the gender subjectivities of these men. For their accounts suggest both an investment in particular hedonistic, consumerist forms of masculinity, whilst at the same time revealing a deep-seated gender anxiety about the status and standing of their jobs.

In the first part of the chapter, I turn to the choices made by creatives in how they dressed and presented themselves at work. Their sartorial decisions are important because claims about the hybrid nature of 'creative work', as we have seen, often homed in on the informal dress codes apparently championed by creative people. Given the additional significance of dress in marking out gender identity, the way these practitioners dressed also tells us much about their masculinity. In fact, it is this interweaving of gendered and occupational meanings through their self-presentation that I want to highlight. In doing so, I compare my group of practitioners with other men working in agencies and associated fields and briefly reflect on the way female creatives dressed for work.

In part two, I turn to the social rituals and forms of sociability participated in by the practitioners. I set their testimonies within a wider account of the social rituals of the London-based advertising industry. In doing so, I further suggest that the participation of creative people within these forms of work-based and work-related sociability needs to be set in a longer history of metropolitan consumption by subaltern social actors. Specifically, the practitioners I interviewed shared much in common with their historical

precursors - what Gareth Stedman-Jones has called 'those socially indeterminate young men' working in the service industries - who were increasingly visible in London from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Stedman-Jones, 1989:289-90). The participation of creative people within contemporary patterns of urban consumption and entertainment also brought them into contact with other participants within these metropolitan leisure cultures and how the men I interviewed rubbed up against and negotiated their relationships with these other users of London's spaces of entertainment represents a further focus of part two.

Finally, in part three, I reflect on some of the tensions associated for my practitioners with these social rituals and, in so doing, push at the partial nature of recent claims about the hybrid nature of creative work. Looming large here was their handling of the more negative consequences that flowed from the public image of the job as 'fun' and its associations with a stylish and glamorous world. Some of the men I interviewed were certainly troubled by the perception held by other practitioners and by a wider public of the job they did. This was recurrently expressed as an anxiety over the gender status of their jobs.

### **1. Dressing up or down**

'If you're a creative you have to look casual in your Levis or your Paul Smith, a smart shirt without a tie, a jacket and trousers. It says you're a certain type of person' (Robin Wight, *Esquire*, Feb 1993:66).

Robin Wight's advice to the prototypical advertising creative, cited above, was, with modifications, well taken by the majority of art directors and copywriters whom I interviewed. Combinations of casual shirts, sweatshirts, t-shirts, sportswear inspired zip-

up tops, jeans and trainers confronted me throughout the interviews. Steve Goode, a copywriter at Direct Arts, for example, wore an anonymous dark sweatshirt and jeans, with short, styled hair. His creative partner, Mike Walker, loafed in a crumpled, casual olive-green checked shirt and jeans, and was unshaven with longer, less styled hair. At Knight & Stewart, Chris Bradshaw, an established art director, wore a navy blue crew necked t-shirt under a navy, pale-blue and white zip-up top, dark blue jeans and trainers. He was shaven-headed and sported a closely cropped moustache and short beard restricted to his chin. His partner, Steve Dempsey, had short hair, the beginnings of a goatee beard and wore a grey t-shirt with a surfing logo on it and white jeans. Andy Hanby, the young creative director at Paul & Rogers, wore a smartly pressed blue Nike sweatshirt over a white crew neck t-shirt and jeans, while his counterpart at Serendipity, Paul Cantelo, wore a Ben Sherman short sleeved checked shirt, jeans and Reef surf wear sandals. Cantelo was clean-shaven, having shaved off his goatee beard, and sported a severe crew cut.

These stylistic choices were far from unique. Not only were they repeated across the interviews, but also evidence from the advertising trade press suggested the wide currency of these casual styles of self-presentation. Thus, the panel of young, though established, art directors and copywriters who formed the 1996 jury for the annual trade award hosted by the advertising Creative Circle and who featured in a Campaign supplement, displayed a similar preference for sportswear brands, plain casual shirts or t-shirts worn under either a suit jacket or leather jacket and cropped and sometimes dyed hair. [Fig 2] Generic industry representations similarly foregrounded these same stylistic choices, with Creative Review's survey of the lifestyles and tastes of creative

practitioners, for example, depicting them wearing sportswear brands and funky eyewear. (Creative Review, August 1996:29-31)(1).

A closer look at the stylistic choices of the creatives I talked to, however, reveals some subtle differences between them. Murray Wright, a freelance copywriter at Direct Arts, for instance, cultivated a bookish, slightly academic style in casual, if slightly dowdy knitted jumper and jeans. On the other hand, the studied informality of men like Cantelo, Hanby and Bradshaw evidenced a level of stylistic competence and self-consciousness which was at some remove from Wright and the scruffier, more avowedly down-market dress sense of Goode and Walker. While they were not quite in the same rarefied league as the 'flexexecutives' described by Benson, Cantelo et al nonetheless combined name-label items with high streets clothes in a carefully produced version of dressing down. Further glimpses of the stylistic self-consciousness that informed these men's relationship to clothes was revealed by the most senior of the group of creatives I talked to, Mark Stephenson. When I interviewed him he was wearing a crisp white shirt open at the neck and Armani jeans. Elsewhere, however, he talked at length about the importance to him of clothes and revealed a good deal about what he liked. His preference was for the designer menswear produced by Yohji Yamamoto and Comme des Garcons. Explaining this predilection he said, 'beyond the job, its an aesthetic thing. I like my clothes to be aesthetically pleasing, just as I like my house to be aesthetically pleasing. I'm willing to pay for people like Yamamoto and Kawakubo [Comme des Garcons' designer] to improve the way I feel. You could hang some of their suits on a wall, they're so well conceived. Given the choice between looking average and looking good, I'd rather look good' (2).

The choice of clothes made by these men was shaped in relation to the wider developments in menswear that had been consolidated through the 1990s and by the broader cultural languages associated with men's style (see, for example, GQ, May 1991:135-7; 'Leave the Office in Style') Looming large here was not only the continuing importance of the designer menswear market - particularly in suits and outerwear - but also (as Richard Benson's comments at the top of this chapter make clear) the proliferation of sportswear and work wear influenced brands (3). The development of these latter forms of apparel was important in extending the casual or informal wardrobe available to young and youngish men. The rise to near ubiquity of these casual styles in the area of leisurewear was matched by a relaxation of certain elements of more formal styles of menswear. Men's suits - particularly under the influence of Giorgio Armani - softened in their outlines and fit and become less structured (see Esquire, May 1991:114-121). The introduction of lightweight materials and slimmer fits also transformed the look and feel of men's suits.

These developments in the design and 'look' of menswear contributed to a partial loosening of men's dress codes in the areas of professional and white-collar work. The widespread introduction of so-called 'Dress Down Friday' within the City of London amongst financial services companies - in which workers are able to wear casual clothes to work - represented one extreme manifestation of this trend of informalization (Independent on Sunday, 6/10/96:25; Independent 19/6/00:8). More importantly, whilst tight dress codes persisted within these areas of employment outside licensed or permitted relaxation, a small space nonetheless emerged for individual expression. The

fields of law and financial services - including banking, insurance and accountancy - serve as a good illustration in this sense. GQ, the men's style magazine, interviewed a group of young professionals working in these fields at the turn of the decade. Their comments gave some insight into the unwritten rules that structured dress codes in these occupations. Thus, Andy Cain, a 26-year old insurance analyst, revealed the following story: 'working in the City you are expected to maintain certain standards. The old guard tends to favour rigid, Saville-Row style suits, while the younger generation go for a softer, more Italian look. You can express yourself through shirts, ties and braces - it's the clash between the formal exterior and what's beneath that exemplifies the new City style' (ibid). Yuri Kookland, a 27-year old trader at the Swiss Bank, echoed this emphasis on individuality within the restrictions set by accepted dress codes. He noted, 'The City still has extraordinarily strict dress codes. I can get away with a formal Paul Smith suit, and it makes me feel good to know there's something subtly different about it - maybe the lapels are more curved, or the pin stripes further apart. After that it's the ties that do the work. The tie is a small item, but it can speak volumes' (GQ May 1991:135-7).

Despite the concessions to greater fashionability and individuality evidenced here and the stylistic self-consciousness associated with it, the dress codes described by these men remained markedly different from the relaxed, casual styles chosen by the young art directors and copywriters I talked to. In fact, much of the distinctiveness of their self-presentation - that of the art directors and copywriters - stemmed from its conspicuous distance from the male attire of adjacent professions. This was a differentiation reproduced within the advertising industry itself. The dress codes of the male creatives I

interviewed marked them apart from male colleagues who worked in other core advertising jobs. The strongest contrast was with account handlers, the practitioners involved with overseeing particular client accounts and liaising with clients. Popularly known as 'the suits', account handlers, as the epithet suggests, typically dressed in sober suits and were closer in attire to those male workers in the legal and financial services sectors than they were to advertising creatives. Commenting on this distinction in an article in *Esquire* magazine that featured advertising people amongst other white-collar professionals, Peter Meed, Joint Chairman of AMV BBDO, noted that 'most account executives [handlers] would wear a suit. It's very rare that you'd see a waistcoat, a pinstripe suit or a severe double-breasted jacket. [...] It's more informal than it was before. The creatives call the account executives 'suits', but I regard that as a very affectionate remark. The creatives are the ones who lay the golden eggs, the account executives are the ones who have to go out and sell them. So they have to dress with a certain smartness. After all, why wear outlandish clothes and run the risk of distraction attention from the project you are selling' (*Esquire*, Feb, 1993:73). Seniority and rank also played its part in differentiating male practitioners in terms of dress. Creative directors typically wore suits or smarter casual wear given their dealings with clients, though, as Robin Wight noted, these suits needed to be contemporary and stylish. As he suggested, 'if [a creative director] presents to a client wearing a third-rate suit then you're not really supporting what you're offering [...] The creative [director's] suit should be original because [...] when you're selling creativity the whole presentation should reflect it' (*Esquire*, Feb, 1993:67).

The adoption of relaxed and informal dress codes was not the exclusive preserve of young male creatives. Their female counterparts also presented themselves through combinations of casual clothing and some more formal attire. In fact, the small group of young women creatives I interviewed revealed two distinct ways of dressing. Samantha Jones and Miranda Harris, a creative team at Direct Arts, for example, presented themselves in a feminized version of the informal style worn by many of the men I interviewed. Thus, they were both casually stylish in jeans and a black-roll necked sweater (Miranda) or cropped jersey top (Samantha). Teresa Walsh, an older art director at CTRL, on the other hand, was dressed more smartly in a dark trouser suit. In Walsh's case this was a toned down version of how she had previously tended to dress. She confessed that she 'loved dressing up. I have got boxes and suitcases of stuff, pink feather boas, hats, bows and glass shoes. If I'm dressed in a black A line skirt and a black top I feel miserable, so it does effect the way I work...I always buy things that don't go together and wear them together, I like a mish mash. I deliberately don't follow fashion. I don't want to be the same as everyone else'. This commitment to individualism, particularly in Walsh's case, linked these three women with the male creatives we have heard from. Unlike the men, however, there is a suggestion in their sartorial choices that women creatives choice of dress was partly determined by the demands of working in a male dominated workplace and by the enduring problem for 'professional' women of distancing themselves from secretarial staff (Entwistle, 1996). Certainly, the boyish style of Jones and Harris represented a way of fitting into the established young male culture of their department, while Walsh clearly used the formality of a suit to establish her authority in a similarly male dominated setting.

It was notable that the sartorial choices made by the men that I interviewed, and the occupational and gender distinctions with which they worked, had, for them, a deeply taken for granted quality. A number of them, however, spoke more explicitly about the importance of being able to wear casual clothes to work. Certainly, a large part of the allure of the job seemed to stem from the freedom it offered from the tyranny of sober suits. Andy Hanby, the 28 year old creative director at Paul & Rogers, for example, described how he had been attracted to advertising by the experience of meeting a friend from home who was working in the industry. Hanby was impressed by the fact that his mate was - as he put it - 'laagered up and wearing posh kit'. Wesley King, a copywriter at RHIP, on the other hand, remembered how his interest in working in advertising had been stirred by watching a television programme. He recalled, 'In this programme they showed this room with these creative guys sitting around having mad ideas and I thought, 'Oh, that sounds like fun'...That's a job that seems a bit unusual. You know its not your typical 9-5...I quite liked the idea of enjoying work. And I remember in this programme all these people seemed to be quite well paid, but they could dress in whatever way they liked. I thought it seemed a bit more like me, not having to wear a suit everyday'. What was almost certainly the same programme (BBC2's Def II's Rough Guide to Careers) also had a big impact on Marcus Lawson at Smith & Mighty and for almost identical reasons. As he said, 'I'd always liked writing but I'd never seen it as anything other than a hobby, something I did to kill time. And here was a very lively working environment, and there were people who weren't wearing suits, feet on the desks, they were earning vast amounts of money and they were being creative'.

Whilst these testimonies point to other reasons for the appeal of creative jobs - notably the perceived financial awards - it is striking how their antipathy towards workaday suits figures so strongly. Behind this aversion, and the actual stylistic choices made by these men, was a larger issue to do with the gendered meanings carried by men's dress. The desire of these men not to wear a suit to work was closely bound up with how they positioned themselves in relation to competing versions of masculinity. As a number of authors have noted, the iconography of the business suit carries powerful meanings about gender, status and authority (Breward, 1999:54-96; Collier, 1999; Roper, 1991:195). It is typically seen to downplay the individual identity of its wearer and to promote corporate loyalty. It emphasises sobriety and a general lack of display. And it establishes the authority and status of its wearer as business-like and efficient. Not least, the business suit helps to demarcate the domains of work and leisure. For the creatives I interviewed, these meanings and the style of conventional masculinity typically produced through them was what they precisely wanted to refuse. Setting themselves against what WCRS chairman Robin Wight called 'all those poor sods who have to wear boring suits all day' (Esquire, Feb 1993:66), the creatives emphasized their youthfulness, their lack of responsibility and a greater openness to display and individuality in the way they dressed. More than that, they signified the fluid boundaries between work and leisure in their sartorial choices. Being a creative was for them, then, strongly bound up, with the exceptions that I have already noted, with these styles of self-representation and the relaxed and highly contemporary codes of masculinity associated with them.

## 2. 'A World of Glamour and Excess'

If dressing in a certain way was important to how the creatives I interviewed lived out particular versions of masculinity in the work they did, then other aspects of their accounts of both the initial allure of the job and their experience of it revealed more about the kind of men they were. Looming large here was their investment in the forms of socializing that constituted a large part of the daily life of agencies and of the wider social calendar of the industry. Opening up this aspect of their testimonies requires a reflection on the social spaces and rituals of the London-based advertising industry. Unlike the not dissimilar world of financial services concentrated in the City of London, the London-based advertising industry lacked the kind of large-scale, corporate provision of leisure and recreational facilities for its key workers (McDowell, 1997). The leisure and entertainment culture associated with the industry had a far more informal character and was generally serviced by a plethora of commercial restaurants, bars and clubs. At the heart of this recreational culture was the liberal consumption of alcohol. Many of the larger agencies supported this activity by running their own bars (see, for example, Campaign, 21/4/00:30-1). Others put agency money into subsidizing drinking, as well as underwriting day and sometimes weekend excursions for staff in which alcohol figured prominently. One of the creative directors whom I interviewed, for example, described the following activities that he fostered:

'Last year and the year before that, I took the entire Department [40 people] to the Kinsale Advertising Festival which is, basically, just 48 hours on the piss, with a few ads thrown in. It is just a stunningly good crack...I'm probably organizing a department go-kart evening. I organize piss ups from time to time. Whenever there is reason for a party, I'll always put a couple of hundred quid behind the bar'.

The industry's main social events, including the prestigious annual creative awards ceremonies hosted by D&AD, the Advertising Creative Circle and the international advertising festival in Cannes, were celebrated for the drinking that took place. Drinking with colleagues after work in the local pub on Friday nights, as well as frequently in the week, formed a more regular social ritual. For more senior agency staff - notably creative directors and other agency managers - dining out at restaurants or enjoying the benefits of socializing at one of a number of private clubs was also an important part of their professional lives. Access to these clubs was determined by rank and seniority and they were generally well beyond the means of my group of practitioners.

Perhaps the most striking feature of much of this industry related social activity – and one that was most readily noted upon by a range of commentators – was its strong concentration within one particular quarter of London – Soho (Campaign, 29/4/89:55-6; 13/12/91:22-3; Creative Review, August 1997:29-31; Mort, 1996:170-182). Certainly those establishments that were heavily used by advertising people and most associated with the industry were geographically concentrated in this area of London's West End. The Ivy (West Street, WC2, off Long Acre), Coast (Albermarle Street, W1), Soho House (Greek Street, W1), The Groucho Club (Dean Street, W1) and The Union (W1) were all within shouting distance of each other in and around Soho. There were notable exceptions to this picture. The prestigious advertising clubs were found in the more rarified atmosphere of Clariges (The 30 Club of London), The Dorchester (The Solus Club) and The Savoy (WACL) (On these clubs see Campaign, 27/5/94:26-8). This spatial differentiation was not without its significance. These clubs formed part of the industry's inner court and were a place where the social elite of British advertising mixed with other

business leaders and politicians. Modeled on gentlemen's clubs, they were within or adjacent to the networks of established business and political culture, and were notably distanced from the more polymorphous space of Soho. It was this feature of Soho that was important in shaping the character of the industry's more informal social rituals. As Frank Mort has argued, Soho has a long history as the recipient of avant garde and bohemian culture. It is this history, laid down in the fabric of the district, which has helped to shape its continuing association with transgressive and bohemian social scripts. The more recent influx of social actors, including advertising and media people, whilst transforming the area through their economic and social presence, continued to draw on and be formed in relation to this sedimented history (see Mort, 1996:170-182). For advertising practitioners – including those central to my project – these associations were often expressed through a valorization of Soho as a centre of cultural provision and innovation, a place of stimulating energy. Paul Davenport, a creative at Klein & Hart, for example, was enthusiastic about the industry life centred upon the district. Reflecting on the nature of his working life at Klein & Hart, which was based in London Docklands, at the eastern edges of the city, he suggested,

'Soho is where the industry is really based. We miss it big time...massively. Mind you, the distractions are immense in Soho. You do get a lot more work done here, because there's bugger all else to do. There's an energy in Soho...because you've got everything there. You've got cinemas, you've got libraries, you've got restaurants, you've got odd little things, you've got Foyles'

Ben Langdon, Managing Director of CDP, was also reverential towards Soho. In an interview in Campaign he gushed about the pleasure of returning to work in the district. CDP had long been exiled on the Euston Road and for Langdon returning to Soho produced in him a state of near reverie. As he put it, 'we did miss the stimulation of Soho

and are delighted to be back. It has made us feel vibrant again' (Campaign/8/95:26-7). Even those agencies that had taken the positive decision to relocate from Soho in the mid-late 1990s - in large part because of the limited availability of suitable office accommodation - acknowledged its symbolic power. Thus, Steve Gatfield, Chief Executive of Leo Burnett, an agency which had moved to Kensington, spoke of the wrench of moving from Soho and the pull of its 'buzz', while Lance Smith, Director of UK operations of DMB&B, which had moved to Victoria, confessed to the 'strong emotional' appeal of the district (ibid). These comments hint at a strong sense of ownership of the district and of feeling centred through an assertion that the advertising industry was now a part of the heritage of Soho. As another of the young creatives I talked to earnestly put it, 'Soho is the spiritual centre of the industry'.

The location of so much of the informal work-based and work-related entertainment and recreation participated in by advertising people in and around Soho gave these forms of sociability a strongly metropolitan character. Precisely what this meant for these practitioners and how the group of men I interviewed, in particular, inhabited these social relations is very difficult to gauge. At issue here is the complex cultural heritage of Soho that I noted earlier and the contemporary diversity of social actors that populated its social spaces. As Frank Mort has argued, the expansion of legitimate commercial developments in Soho through the 1980s and 1990s (including the increasing presence of media companies and advertising agencies) interacted in complex ways with the bohemian and avant-garde culture formed in Soho over preceding century. One form this took was the updating of older forms of bohemianism into contemporary style culture by

some of the newer commercial arrivistes. *Midweek*, the free magazine for office workers, for example, celebrated this new vision of Soho bohemianism:

‘Cosmopolitan, bohemian and wildly trendy [...] the land of the brasserie lunch and the after-hours watering hole, the land of accessories and attitude, where fashion relentlessly struggles to become style and image is simply everything; the glittering heart of medialand where the worlds of art, journalism, film, advertising and theatre blend into one glamorous heady cocktail’ (*Midweek*, 20/2/92, quoted in Mort, 1996:157-8).

The relations between old and new habitués of Soho were not always smooth, however.

The journalist Jeffrey Barnard, himself a member of a post-war circle of artists, actors and literary types (including the artist Francis Bacon) who frequented the famous Colony Room in Dean Street, was scathing about the new media interlopers. Clearly feeling his version of Soho bohemianism was under threat, he railed against the new inhabitants of Soho. Writing in the early 1980s, he melodramatically claimed that, ‘Soho is dead. Massive injections of advertising executives with pocket beepers and a taste for cheap wine [...] have finally killed off what was just about the best part of London for anyone who never saw virtue in work for its own sake’ (Taki & Bernard, 1981:16, quoted in Mort, 1996:162). Elsewhere he castigated these new players as ‘tight assessed nancy boys’ and offered a withering parody of the dispositions of advertising creatives in his diatribe against these interlopers: ‘The TV commercial boys sat there plucking there croissants and saying ‘Yes, I know love, but if we cut it then – bang, bang – like that, we wouldn’t have to hold the long shot coming down those stairs [...] Let’s face it, loves, we’re basically trying to sell wretched stuff’ [...] By this time my coffee was cold and my mouth locked in open-jawed disbelief’ (Taki & Bernard, 1981:23).

Soho's history had also been shaped by a long tradition of tolerance to sexual dissidence and transgression, including both a long tradition of male homosexual culture (itself increasingly visible and expanded through the 1980s and 90s) but also the licensed sex industry of cinemas, bars and clubs (Mort, 1996:157-182). The relationship between advertising people and these other Soho constituents is hard to unpack. Certainly – Barnard's insinuations notwithstanding – the relations with gay male culture were particularly difficult to read and the accounts generated by the advertising trade press and by my interviewees were notable for occluding these relationships in their valorization of Soho life. It is possible, however, to get some clues as to the character of the informal cultures participated in by advertising people. Campaign, in its limited coverage of the industry's social life, certainly gave tantalizing glimpses of the place, most notably, of an entrenched masculine culture of excess within the industry's social rituals. For example, in December 1991, the paper reported the drama of that year's D&AD award ceremony held not in Soho, but in the more rarified setting of the Grovesnor House hotel in Park Lane, Mayfair. The event had been marred by what Campaign described as an 'outbreak of drunken vandalism' in which thousands of pounds of damage was done to the hotel (Campaign, 20/12/91:7) Detailing the event, the paper claimed that 'a bunch of cretinous creatives high on booze and drugs left a trail of destruction' (ibid). Campaign also reported how in August 1996, staff from the agency APL, had caused considerable damage to a hotel by squashing food and drink into the venues carpet and indulged in playing games such as pouring water over each other' (Campaign, 16/8/96:11). In March of the preceding year, the paper's regular diary page further documented the emergence of a new game practiced in nightclubs by a group of enterprising young admen. Known

as 'hotlegging', it involved urinating down the leg of a colleague if you caught them 'chatting up a girl' (Campaign, 24/3/95:backpage) (3).

The gendered character of these social rituals was also a feature of the more routine forms of sociability engaged in by advertising creatives. This much was certainly evident in the testimonies of the women creatives I interviewed. For the older and more established women, in particular, there was no doubting the conventionally masculine character of much of the informal industry socializing. Their accounts revealed a familiar story of negotiating what felt to them like a 'man's world' of drinking and the dilemmas this generated. Reflecting on this Liz Sheldon, executive creative director at Petersons recalled,

'It's [the classic problem] do you join the blokes in the pub. I've never had any truck with that, can't stand pubs, not in London anyway, I can't see after 5 minutes because of the smoke and I don't like drinking that filthy wine they have. And that can be difficult if you don't join in'.

In Sheldon's case it was evident that her early career success and subsequent seniority and standing allowed her to avoid what she clearly, if rather haughtily, depicts as the blokish cultures of drinking. Katy Smith, creative director at Henry Brown, confirmed this sense of the social character of these forms of sociability. In doing so, she echoed Sheldon's experience that industry recognition and rank allowed her to step outside these cultures. She recalled,

'I'm not into drinking, I don't go to pubs. I did try when I started out, but I haven't for many, many years now. And I don't play pool and I don't watch football and all those things everyone else is interested in. I just don't join in. It was like that at other agencies. Some women get by either having a relationship with someone in the department or by being one of the lads if you're a young creative. Which is what I did. I got very good at darts. And did go to the pub in the early days and become one of the lads. But since I've been a bit truer to myself, I've simply been an outsider.'

Other women I talked to negotiated these cultures in different ways. Samantha Jones and Miranda Harris, for instance, were more comfortable inside these forms of sociability. As Samantha Jones revealed, 'It used to be [that we went drinking] every single Friday at the Crown, and it got to a point where there were actually quite a few nights during the week to the extent that we had to knock it on the head because we were drinking too much'. Miranda Harris continued: 'if you're not careful, when you're agency's going through a period of having a good social life, you find you're having several [drinks] every night, maybe more' (4).

Teresa Walsh also confessed to youthful excesses. She recalled:

'I used to drink a lot. I remember one year I went to an industry event – and I used to wear the most ridiculous clothes like a tutu and things like that to work. And I remember once going to the creative ball and dancing on the table in my tutu and the table collapsing. And next morning I was so embarrassed. The following year, they ran an ad for the event and there I am stood on the table going 'agaaah'. I was a bit of a wild one in those days'.

Walsh's former antics belonged within a distinct tradition of feminine excess associated with what Mort has described as the 'unattached female hedonist' (Mort, 1996: 173) and formed part of a flamboyant public persona in which, as we have seen, she dressed in spectacular ways. A large part of this was willful exhibitionism and helped her to gain a high profile within the industry. She was certainly adept at using these displays of wild behaviour to promote herself aggressively in the trade press. Her self-presentation, however, also stemmed from, again, a fundamental problem for women creatives concerning how they should behave in the strongly masculine worlds they were forced to inhabit. In Walsh's case, being as wild as the men represented one way of holding her own in this context. Jones and Harris took a rather different root and, just as Katy Smith had done before them, they became 'one of the lads'. They were, in fact, explicit about appropriating these codes of masculinity. Reflecting on their departure from an previous agency they suggested, 'we were the wrong type of women...The creative director liked

young, quiet, very pretty, tall women, and we didn't fit into that category. We were a bit loud and brash and rude, a bit laddish'. When I quizzed them on what they meant by that they confessed, 'Well, we swear, and burp and fart and muck about and we have a good sense of humour' (5).

For the men I interviewed, their accounts of the industry social life in which they participated pointed to a smoother, less self-conscious passage into work related cultures of drinking. In fact, for some of the men, gaining access to this world was a central part of the declared appeal of the job. Both Steve Dempsey and his partner Chris Bradshaw, creatives at Knight & Stewart, for example, became very animated when recalling the levels of social drinking that opened up to them during summer placements in an advertising agency when they were students.

For Steve Dempsey, in particular, access to subsidized drinking stood as a defining feature of his experience of the placement and set it apart from his experience in the adjacent field of graphic design. He recalled,

'I spent a couple of weeks at Michael Peters and Partners, and they had tea and cakes in the afternoon, which was very 'nice'. There was one girl there who was very 'nice', and she spent three weeks drawing a little sheaf of corn, and she drew it about fifty times, in different ways. And for me, it was a sheaf of corn when I arrived, and it was a sheaf of corn when I left [...] On the last day, we went down the pub. And I had a pint and everyone else had halves. And as soon as the drinks were drunk, people went. And then we went to the ad agency, and I think pretty much the first day we were there, they won a new piece of business and at 4'O clock in the afternoon, it was 'right, everyone downstairs', to this big room, and there was basically beer and Champaign and we got hammered'.

Dempsey's commentary is noteworthy in terms of the way he dramatizes the appeal of agency life next to a denigration of graphic design work. Thus, he conjures an image of graphic design as a quaint and genteel world, with its rituals of afternoon tea and quiet

civility and a careful, almost studious approach to work. Against this he sets up his identification with the more exuberant culture of the ad agency, with heavy drinking spilling over into the hours of the working day and extending beyond it.

Its association with memories of youthful hedonism undoubtedly heightened the drama of Dempsey's account and, as we'll see later, he was keen elsewhere in his comments to demarcate the excesses of life as a junior from the more serious and sober character of his contemporary working life. Nonetheless, as he relives the excitement of the placement, he reveals his investment in conventionally gendered forms of socializing and definitions of enjoyment. A similar identification with these masculine scripts was also evident in the comments of other practitioners I interviewed when they too reflected on the initial appeal of the job. For Dave Cantelo and Jack Chantler, however, it was not so much the possibility of heavy drinking that they emphasized, but rather the access to a world of glamour and style. Dave Cantelo recalled,

'My Dad used to have a restaurant, and a lot of advertising people used to go and eat there...And I remember, I was probably 14, I remember seeing all these really good looking blokes coming in, surrounded by good looking, beautiful women, driving these amazing cars, and they'd park them on the pavement, and then just chuck the waiter the keys, and say 'when the warden comes round, just move it'. And I thought, fucking hell, that looks good'.

Cantelo's testimony is shot through with desire for the kind of social confidence and glamour embodied by the ad people who were customers in his Dad's restaurant. It conjures an evocative image of a lower middle class boy dreaming of access to a world of privilege beyond his current social horizon; a world of glamour that gave you access to style and beautiful women.

Jack Chantler's comments revealed the same subaltern aspirations. Recalling the placements he went on as an aspiring creative, he said,

'I just loved sitting in the foyer at BBH and JWT and just thinking 'Wow!' All the receptionists are really beautiful and glamorous and everyone was so confident. We sat out here [at Serendipity] and a stream of gorgeous girls came in and out and we were like 'Ah [breathless]. And we were just as scruffy as this really.'

There is a strong line of self-deprecation in Chantler's comments, together, perhaps, with an overplaying of his ordinariness. Nonetheless, like the comments of Dempsey and Cantelo, they suggest a similar formation of heterosexual masculinity, one shaped through specific forms of heterosociability and ideas of what constitutes the good life.

We might profitably suggest, in fact, that these men - particularly Chantler and Cantelo - exhibited an investment in what Peter Bailey has described as 'parasexuality', the form of 'framed liminality' that he associates with 'glamour' and the development of modern sexualized consumerism in the mid-nineteenth century. Parasexuality for Bailey, which he explores through the venerable figure of the Victorian barmaid, represented a distinctive kind of display marked by the incitement but careful containment of sexuality. Moreover, it is also a regime characterized by gendered divisions between the feminine object of glamour and its desiring masculine subject (Bailey, 1999). One might provocatively suggest that we should understand the 'framed liminality' associated with these desires for a world of glamour as itself the product of a form of banal social fantasy; a social fantasy that in turn tells us much about the subaltern status of those individuals - like the men I interviewed - who identified with it. In fact, there is good reason for attempting to socially place the forms of heterosociability with which these men I identified. The relationship that they had to the metropolitan leisure culture that so

attracted them placed them squarely within a tradition of social longing pursued by subaltern migrants to the metropolis. Their historical precursors have been well documented by both Gareth Stedman-Jones and Peter Bailey. These were the ‘socially indeterminate single young men’, the ‘linen drapers assistants’, ‘counter-jumpers’, ‘city clerks’ or ‘penniless swells’ who became the principle audience for the London music halls of the late nineteenth century and who found their own ‘sham genteel patterns of conspicuous consumption’ celebrated by music hall figures like Champaign Charlie (Stedman-Jones, 1989:289-90; Bailey, 1999). The overwhelming majority of the men I interviewed were from provincial backgrounds, and often from lower-middle class provincial or suburban backgrounds to boot (6). As such they shared similar social fantasies about the delights of metropolitan culture as their historical precursors, those earlier provincial parvenus. Their provincial and subaltern origins were certainly evident to practitioners from more securely middle-class and established metropolitan backgrounds. Ian Harding, for example, a creative director at XYZ, who came from what he described as an ‘intellectual bohemian background’ in London - he had grown up in Earls Court and Putney before being dispatched to a minor public school – suggested that he was constantly surprised by the frenetic embrace of the delights of metropolitan life by the young creatives he worked with and by their desire to be part of a more established metropolitan culture. He suggested, ‘I’m a Londoner. Not many of us our. Born and bred Londoner, so this is my patch. Simon, my ex-creative partner, came from Belfast and his life, because he’d up sticks, centred much more around the creative business. My life was up and running and in fine shape before I came anywhere near advertising. So I have a separate social life. Agencies have always been much more a place to work for me’.

Testimonies of this sort suggest important differences between the social aspirations expressed by the men I interviewed and that of differently constituted practitioners.

### **3. Ambivalent Pleasures**

‘To people outside advertising (and even within other departments within the agency), it seems that creative staff start work at 10.30am, spend all day messing about or reading magazines, knock-off early and are allowed to look as scruffy as they like. To us, the job is obsessive, taking up 23-hours a day (We’re allowed an hours sleep). The thing is ideas can hit you at anytime, so you always have to be ready for them. And what looks like messing around is actually an attempt to relax and free the mind after you’ve assimilated the available facts’ (Anonymous copywriter, Association of Graduate Information, 1992, AA 4/2a)

‘We were toiling away and they were having a frigging good time’ (Account handler reflecting on the creatives he worked with).

The gender and class-specific pattern of social longing evidenced in the testimonies of the practitioners that I interviewed coexisted with other kinds of subjective investment in the world of work they inhabited. These revolved around a more negative sense of the status and standing of their jobs that sprung from its ‘fun’ and hedonistic public image. Certainly for the more senior of the men I talked to, reliving the appeal of the industry in the early stages of their career sat alongside an attempt to mark their distance from their youthful investment in the glamorous image of creative jobs. It emerged strongly in their accounts through what we might call a coming of age story and was based upon the limitations and contradictions of the world of glamour and excess that had appeared so seductive to their younger selves. Steve Dempsey and Chris Bradshaw were perhaps most keen to draw out their distance as senior creatives from the superficial glamour of the industry. When I pressed them about the social life in the agency, they responded as follows:

CB: 'Because we're getting on now, you know, mid-30s, and we used to go down the bar, down the pub, and we do it less and less. I think we don't like bars, we really don't like that kind of advertising scene, go to Groucho's, you know, take a load of cocaine...

SD: And say what a great time you had in the morning, when you didn't really.

CB: And probably not be very talented either, because a lot of those people, they like the lifestyle and wearing the Gaultier jacket, but we're the opposite of that, we actually like doing the work, and trying to do something good. And if we go anywhere, we like go down the pub with some close friends, but we're both quite intimidated by this kind of Goucho's...it's nice once in a while to go to these places and maybe see Kylie Minogue or someone like that and it can be quite exciting'.

As they consolidate a common position in this exchange, we can see them distancing themselves from precisely those forms of sociability that were so appealing to their younger selves and emphasizing their seniority and integrity in relation to both the job they did and the relationships they forged around work.

Taking up a critical distance from the 'glamour' of the industry also surfaced in Mark Stephenson's comments. When I asked him about the industry social life, he said,

'My wife works for the Holborn Art Gallery. She has a lot of social stuff around that, and I'm quite involved in that, I enjoy it...there's noone in advertising there. The last thing I wanna do, is go to Grouchos and talk about advertising. So I do that, or I stay up and watch football, or I go out and have a drink'.

Stephenson's distance from the social relations of 'adland' was also bound up with an anxiety about the standing of his chosen career. More so even than Dempsey and Bradshaw, he was at pains to foreground his commitment to the work of being a creative and to distance himself from perceptions that the work was easy and involved large amounts of socializing. Against this he emphasized the hardness and strenuous nature of the work he did. Thus, describing how he got his first job as a copywriter in the late 1980s, he recalled,

'I got in at quite an interesting time, the real sort of money/glamour time for advertising, and I found this really curious thing that we were just working our butts off. I mean we didn't go out to lunch for 2 years. And all this stuff you hear from the outside like 'oh, let's do lunch', and its all very glamorous and noone works very hard, you only work in the morning and then you're out for three hours, and noone gives a shit. And we were just going, 'this is bloody like being in a coal mine!' And it was ...you'd get there, work like shit, you'd have 10 minutes for lunch, you'd work like shit, you'd go home at 10 o'clock, you'd get up, you'd be in at 8.30 [am]'

What is so interesting in Stephenson's comments in the lengths he goes to in order to emphasize how tough and demanding the job was; lengths designed to counter perceptions of the job as glamorous and dominated by high levels of socializing. Thus, it is first, the hyperbole of being effectively chained to the office desk for two years and unable to take a proper lunch break and then the use of the metaphor of working in a coal mine and the repetition of the length of the working day that function to present the job as incredibly tough and hard. A similar emphasis was clear in other comments he made:

'I still get...not angry, but slightly miffed at people's perception of what advertising is. People still perceive it as being a slightly airy-fairy industry where, really, people don't work hard do they. It's all about getting on with people...and having long lunches. Believe me, it ain't! It's about, you know, 14 hours work a day'.

Both these passages tell us something about Stephenson's masculinity. They reveal his subscription to an established gendered hierarchy of work in which manual labour stands as the most manly of forms of endeavor. In attempting to align his job with hard, assertively manly work, his aim is clearly to resist the connotations of creative jobs in advertising as complacent and effete, as 'airy -fairy'.

Mike Walker also made a similar move. Like Stephenson, he too expressed ambivalence about the public image of creative jobs and was anxious not to be swept up by the fantasy

of 'adland'. Cautioning against the tendency of young creatives to attempt to live out the stereotypical hedonistic advertising life, he piously suggested, 'we still need to remember that we are labourers, you know, we do a trade'. Steve Message, a young creative director at CTP, was another practitioner who attempted to distance himself from those he saw as being seduced by the public image of advertising. Again, like Hastings, he emphasized the demanding nature of creative work and was concerned to contest the perception of advertising as an industry in which people were over-paid for doing very little. In doing so, he conjured a conflictual scenario in which bright young men like him had to take on and displace an older generation that had grown too comfortable. As he put it,

'I think that there are a lot of lunchy old gits out there who are drawing salaries and doing nothing. And they are essentially keeping bright, young enthusiastic people out of the business. I don't think anybody deserves to draw a big salary and have an easy life if they're not contributing much'.

Later in the interview, in underlying his distaste for these representatives of complacency in advertising, he sought to distance himself from them by suggesting that he and his partner had never turned into 'Soho luvvies'. Behind Message's comments lay not only hostility to what he elsewhere called 'dandies at the court of advertising', but clearly an anxiety that he too would be drawn into this effete world. His aggression was as much self-directed as it was aimed at the 'lurvies' and 'dandies'.

## **Conclusion**

Message's comments, like those of some of the other men I interviewed, suggested a strongly gendered anxiety about the nature of creative jobs. His comments reveal, as we've seen, a desire to challenge, in particular, perceptions of the work as easy and

relaxed and devoid of any hard graft. Like Stephenson and Walker, he revealed an investment in a hierarchy of masculine jobs that placed manual labour at the top of a scale of value as embodying the most manly form of work. The perception that creative jobs blurred the established distinctions between work and leisure was especially troubling for all three men and they needed to refute these associations by asserting the hardness of the job and its overall demanding character. Taken together their responses bear some comparison with the way other groups of white-collar and professional men have also tended to emphasize the strenuousness nature of their work and its parallels with manual labour when faced with perceptions that 'desk jobs' were easy and even feminized. Certainly, in Mike Roper's study of a group of senior managers in the post-war UK manufacturing industry, there is a recurrent emphasis amongst these men of the tough and demanding nature of their managerial work (Roper, 1994:105-131). The men I interviewed were a very different group of men in terms of social background and age from those discussed by Roper, and they lacked the daily confrontation with the culture of the shop floor and its proletarian forms of masculinity that prompted Roper's managers to emphasize that they were not the 'soft' men manual workers often castigated them for being. Nonetheless, their embrace of a gender hierarchy of labour was equally strong, though more clearly related to their handling of the cultural associations of creative work and advertising's standing as a sector. It was also undoubtedly the case that their perceptions of me as an academic researcher with a potentially critical view of the pernicious and superficial commercial world in which they worked acted as an important stimulus for these responses. The irony, of course, is that the anecdotal evidence would suggest that academic men are also plagued by similar gender anxieties about the life of

ease they live. Like Thomas Carlyle, we might suggest that scholars are haunted by the 'strenuous idleness' of their jobs (Clarke, 1991).

The social standing and character of their jobs, however, did not only play out in negative ways for the advertising creatives. We have also seen how some of the men revealed a simultaneous investment in the forms of work-based leisure associated with the job. In doing so, their testimonies tell us more about the kind of men they were. At the heart of this was their identification with hedonism and a consumption-based ethic of enjoyment that shaped both the appeal and performance of the job. These forms of enjoyment were generally bound up with conventional forms of heterosexual masculinity, though they also indicated the importance of display and an embrace of the most contemporary signs of maleness through their choice of dress amongst these men. These sartorial choices signaled a highly self-conscious sense of masculinity that was ordered through the ongoing processes of self-fashioning and self-reflection that consumerist models of identity recurrently rely upon. The tensions between these competing ways of relating to their job suggested that their sense of themselves as men at work was organized around these competing identifications and the ambivalent feelings that flowed from this.