

**OUR  
MASTER'S  
VOICE**

ADVERTISING

**BY JAMES RORTY**

THE JOHN DAY COMPANY

New York

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# CHAPTER 11

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## BEAUTY AND THE AD-MAN

WE HAVE seen that, since advertising is essentially a traffic in belief, the profession habitually takes the name of Truth, though usually in vain. But since Beauty is Truth, Truth, Beauty, the profession is also forever rendering vain oblations at the shrine of Beauty.

This worship has two major phases. The first is the manufacture, by advertising, of successive exploitable concepts of feminine beauty, of beauty in clothes, houses, furniture, automobiles, kitchens, everything. The second phase of this worship has to do with the ad-man's view of his own craft, and would appear to represent, in part at least, a perversion of the normal human instinct of workmanship.

From some reason it is thought necessary for the ad-man, not merely to sell the idea of beauty for profit, but to sell beauty beautifully. Why? Is there not something excessive and pathological about advertising's will-to-be-beautiful?

It is contended that an attractively designed advertisement of an allegedly beautiful toilet seat is more effective than an ugly advertisement of the same object. But this has never been proved conclusively. On the contrary, there are many examples of very ugly advertising which have been exceptionally effective. Yet the desire for beauty in advertising is inextinguishable and has more or less had its way. Fifteen years ago the well-designed newspaper or magazine advertisement was the exception; today it is the rule. Has the ef-



fectiveness of advertising increased proportionately? On the contrary, it has decreased, and one of the factors in this decline is undoubtedly the increased cost of producing this economically superfluous beauty in advertising. In any case, beauty of design or text is only one of the many variable, more or less unknown and unpredictable factors in the selling relationship established by the advertisement. And finally, it would be easy to show that even in 1929, when artists were often paid \$2,000 for a single painting, photographers \$500 for a single print and typographers equally fancy prices—even in the heyday of art-in-advertising, cheap and ugly advertisements frequently sold goods just as well or better. And today, what could be uglier than the inane, story-in-pictures advertisements which sell Lux, Fleischmann's Yeast, Lifebuoy Soap, and other products with demonstrated effectiveness?

There is, of course, a recognized and demonstrated commercial justification for using expensive "art" and expensive typography in the advertising of certain luxury products such as perfumes, de luxe motor cars and the like. The principle is that of "conspicuous waste," used to create an ambience, a prestige for the product, which will lift it above the rational level of pride competition. The familiar snob appeal, applied to such prosaic commodities as fifteen-cent cigarettes and twenty-five-cent collars, also accounts for a good deal of conspicuous expenditure in advertising "art," and up to a certain point, this is commercially justifiable. Yet it remains true, as many hard-boiled professionals have pointed out, that beauty has been permitted to run hog-wild in contemporary advertising practice. Carroll Rheinstrom, Advertising Manager of *Liberty*, was recently quoted in *Advertising and Selling* as believing that 90% of current advertising is waste because of the ad-man's pre-occupation with his own techniques, to the exclusion of practical economic considerations.

No, the logical economic explanations don't make sense. Advertising today, while anything but efficient, is far better designed and written than it needs to be; obviously it costs far, far more to produce than it ought to cost. Part of the explanation, I think, lies in a private impurity of the advertising craftsman; he is more interested in beauty than he is in selling. For him the advertisement is a thing-in-itself. Highly developed craftsmanship in the graphic arts and in writing, enormous expenditures of mechanical skill, are deposited at the shrine not of Mammon but of Beauty. And all pretty much in vain. The art isn't really art. The writing isn't really writing. And frequently the worst "art" and the worst "writing" sell products better than the best art and the best writing.

Yes, the explanation of this curious phenomenon may well be that advertising, since it doesn't make sense in economic, social or human terms, jumps right through the Looking-Glass and becomes a thing-in-itself!

It takes a naïve eye to see this. I had to have it pointed out to me by a poet friend who makes his living writing prose for a very expensive magazine. He picked up a copy of the publication and pointed to a Camel cigarette advertisement in color. How much did that cost, he asked? I estimated rapidly: \$1,000 for the drawing, add \$200 for the time of the art director and an assistant, \$400 for the color plates, \$100 for typography, \$100 more for miscellaneous mechanical charges, \$100 for copy, \$300 pro-rated for executive and management charges. Total for one advertisement, not counting the cost of the space, about \$2,300.

"Well," commented my poet friend, "that's the end-result, isn't it? That's why Kentucky planters go bankrupt growing tobacco, why negro and white share croppers sweat, starve and revolt, why millions of men and women diligently smoke billions of cigarettes—all so that this magnificent advertisement might be born and live its little hour."



My friend was treating himself to a little poetic license, of course. But the more I stared at the phenomenon, the more I became convinced that it made just as much sense upside down as right side up. And the more I reflected upon the rôle of the "creative worker" in advertising, the more I came to suspect skullduggery of an obscure, unconscious sort. Ostensibly these craftsmen are employed to write words and draw lines that will persuade their fellow man to buy certain branded cigarettes, soaps, toothpastes, gadgets, etc. But do these fellows really give a whoop about these gadgets and gargles or whether people buy them or not? Did I, when I was a member in good standing of the profession?

Never a whoop nor a whisper. What I cared about was my craft, and that is what every genuine craftsman cares about—that and nothing else. Each piece of copy was a thing-in-itself. I did a workmanlike job, not for dear old Heinz, or Himmelschlüssel, or Rockefeller, or whomsoever I was serving indirectly, but for myself; because it was pleasant to do a competent job and unpleasant to do a slovenly job. I was aware, of course, that Mr. Rockefeller, via the agency, was paying me, and I tried not to get fired. But I never worried about my duty to Mr. Rockefeller and to his oils and gadgets. The prospect, the customer? I was a bit sorry for the customer, and tried to let him off with as little bamboozlement as possible. But my real loyalty was to the Word, to the materials of my craft. Loyalty to the Word—writing a competent advertisement—sometimes meant being pretty rough and mendacious with the customer. I couldn't help that. I was carried away by the fury of composition, just as a good Turkish swordsman becomes carried away in his professional dealings with the Armenians.

But chiefly, I think, my indomitable instinct of workmanship was hard on my employer. Unconsciously I sabotaged his interests continuously. I wrote clean, lucid prose, when the illiterate scree that the advertiser wanted to print would



probably have sold more goods. When my immediate superior plaintively objected that what I wrote was too good for the audience to which it was addressed, I was indignant and recalcitrant. Ordered to rewrite the advertisement, I seized the opportunity to bring it closer to my standard of craftsmanship, which had nothing to do with commerce. If the client objected, I bullied him if possible, and otherwise made a minimum of grudging concessions.

A percentage of the copy writers in advertising agencies are craftsmen. I have known scores of them. They felt as I felt, and consciously or unconsciously, they did what I did. The artists were even more obsessed and obstreperous. As I knew them, their disinterestedness in the profits of Mr. Rockefeller was extreme. They were interested in drawing pretty pictures. They drew them as well as they could, regardless of whom and of what? Regardless of the advertiser and what he had asked them to draw. Naturally, the picture had to convey a sales message, and they chattered a great deal about "putting a selling punch" into their pictures. But I noticed that the best of them became so interested in the design and the drawing that they frequently left no room for the copy or even for the trade-mark of the manufacturer. (This last I suspect was a trick of the Freudian unconscious; the trade-mark was resented because it was the signature of the advertiser.) When account executives and advertisers repined at such extravagant oblations at the shrine of Beauty, the artists were haughtier even than the copy writers. And since the average American business man has a puzzled and diffident reverence for art, coupled with an enormous ignorance of the nature of artists, their motivations and techniques, these so-called "commercial" artists did then and still do get away with an astonishing amount of sheer mayhem and murder. The writers, too, though to a less degree, because most advertisers can read and write. The technique is less strange and the technician correspondingly less formidable. All ac-

count executives in agencies, and worse still, all advertisers, have an obscene itch to write themselves. Consequently the copy writer must sternly and vigilantly keep these vulgarians in their places. I always considered it to be my duty to stand on my dignity as a "genius"—the word still goes big in the world of commerce, especially on the West Coast—and *epater* these bourgeois, partly as a matter of self-respect, and partly as a practical measure of professional and personal aggrandizement.

Commercial artists and writers indeed! Art for art's sake was our motto, and to hell with the advertiser. I can remember not one, but half a dozen times when an advertisement was written, illustrated, set up in exquisite type, and deposited in proof form on the account executive's desk almost ninety-nine and three-quarters per cent pure. True, the text had more or less to do with the product which we were supposed to be advertising, but the advertiser's "message" was merely a point of departure for the copy writer's lovingly executed exercise in pure design, and the typography was a study in black on white which made no concessions whatever to readability. The advertiser's trade-mark and signature were either carefully concealed or left out entirely. Usually, of course, these pure triumphs, these pious oblations at the shrine of Beauty, caused the account executive to yell bloody murder. He was right and we knew he was right. We had gone too far. We would therefore execute a careful retreat from such tactical excesses, grumbling dourly for the sake of the record that the account executive was obviously an ignoramus, and that his precious client was a misbegotten idiot whom we would like to kill and stuff with his own Cheery Oats, or whatever it was he sold; that, however, as loyal employees of dear old Kidder, Bidder & Bunkstein we would gladly give him what he wanted and hoped it choked him.

We never did, of course, for that would have been to concede too much. So that the client was kept in a constant,



salutary state of baffled rage, alarm and hope; and every now and then an unhappy account executive would have a nervous breakdown. We never had nervous breakdowns.

Does this seem exaggerated? But how can the honest chronicler record fantasy except in the terms of fantasy? And the vast accumulation of advertising during the post-war decade was fantastic in the extreme. It is still fantastic. Look at it in the pages of any commercial magazine. Does it make sense in terms of the sober, profit-motivated business that advertising is supposed to be? Recently the investigators of the Psychological Corporation discovered that the variation as between advertisements of lowest and highest effectiveness runs as high as 1,000 per cent. An automobile assembly line is considered poor if it permits a quality variation of more than 30 per cent. Is it sensible to believe that a production technique which frequently shows 3,000 per cent variation in the quality of the product is really aimed at its avowed objective, namely the sale of products and services to customers? Well, if I were out duck shooting and missed my duck by 1,000 per cent, I should consider it open to question whether or not I was really trying to hit that duck.

No. To understand this phenomenon we must employ a far subtler analysis, giving all the factors their due weight, no matter how fantastic these factors are, and no matter how seemingly irrational the conclusion to which we are led.

Again, Veblen furnishes us with the essential clue. In the *Theory of Business Enterprise* and elsewhere in the whole body of his work, Veblen notes that advertising is one element of the "conscientious sabotage" by which business keeps the endlessly procreative force of science-in-industry from breaking the chains of the profit system. In this view the business man figures as an art-for-art's-saker. His art is the making of money, which has nothing to do with the use of the productive forces by which a society gains its livelihood. The art of making money is perhaps the purest, the most irrational

art we know, and its practitioners are utterly intransigent. Today these artists in money making are prepared to starve millions of people, to plunge the planet in war, to destroy civilization itself rather than compromise the purity of their art.

Veblen saw all this clearly, and Stuart Chase has employed the Veblenian apposition of business and industry in a sequence of useful books. But one might well go further and assert that the contradictions of capitalism persist even within the mental gears and pistons of its exploitative functionaries.

Business sabotages industry by means of advertising. True. But we, as advertising craftsmen, consciously or unconsciously motivated not by a desire to make money but by an obsessed delight in the materials of our craft—we in turn sabotaged advertising. We were and are parasites and unconscious saboteurs. During the whole postwar decade we gathered strength, inflated our prestige, consolidated our power. More and more the "creative worker" became the dominant force in agency practice, and advertising consequently became more and more "pure." The shrine of Beauty was buried under the fruits and flowers placed there by devout artists and writers in advertising. We were no humble starvelings. We caused the salaries and fees paid advertising artists and artists to become notorious. Even I, who was always more or less aware of what I was doing, and who was indifferent to money for its own sake—even I, without particularly trying, because I never could keep more than a fraction of my mind concentrated on the absurd business, managed to triple my salary during the postwar decade. Agency production costs hit the ceiling, broke through and sailed off into the empyrean. We developed an esthetic of advertising art and copy, a philosophy, a variety of equally fantastic creeds—a whole rich literature of rationalization which should interest the psychiatrists greatly if they ever get around to examining it.

I say "we" with poetic license. I speak for the profession,



but I speak out of turn, and I shall doubtless be roundly repudiated and contemned by the menagerie of Cheshire Cats, March Hares, Mad Hatters and Red Queens who still roam the scant pastures on the other side, the *right* side of the Advertising Looking-Glass. As a matter of fact I contributed nothing to this literature of rationalization. I was too busy making a living, trying to keep sane and do a little serious work on the side, and wondering just how soon that beautiful iridescent bubble would break, leaving us "creative workers" with nothing much in our hands and a lot of soap in our eyes.

It broke. Came Black Thursday, and a chill wind blew through the advertising rookeries of the Grand Central District. Advertising appropriations were cut. That exquisite First Article of the Ad-Man's Credo: "When business is good it pays to advertise; when business is bad you've got to advertise," was invoked with less and less effect. As the months and years passed the whole structure of the industry began to sideslip and sway. *And advertising became less pure.* That beautiful, haughty odalisque had to hustle down into the market place and drag in the customers. She had to speak of price. She became dowdy and blatant and vulgar. The primitive techniques of Hogarth in the eighteenth century were resurrected via the tabloids, and the moronic sales talk issued in ugly balloons from the mouths of ugly moronic figures. Photography was cheaper than drawings and worked as well or better. Testimonials were cheap and worked best of all.

Desperately, advertising began to step out of its part and tell the truth a little. The customer got an occasional break. But advertising lost her name, the poor girl. And it got worse. Every time car loadings hit a new low, another big advertiser would go buckeye with testimonials and other loathsome practices, and she would lose her name again. Alarmed, the reformers of advertising started another vice crusade, and their activities will be described elsewhere. They haven't ac-

complished much, despite General Johnson's benediction pronounced on the "good" advertising that will be needed more and more under the New Deal. Their voices become ever fainter and more faint.

Quite evidently the religion of Beauty-in-Advertising has entered upon a period of decadence. The advertisers, being only one jump ahead of the sheriff, or more often two jumps behind, are obliged to cut each other's throats without benefit of Beauty. In fact many of them, having learned wisdom from the tabloids, are openly blasphemous and vengeful with respect to the art-for-art's-sakers. Pursued by their unforgiving maledictions, the Priests of Beauty have fled to Majorca or Vermont, where they nurse their wounds and wait. Not all of them, however. In 1932 and 1933, a few stalwarts attempted a counter-offensive against the sansculottes who had laid waste the pleasant fields of advertising. The more or less recognized leader of this gallant Lacædemonian band is Mr. Rene Clarke, President of the firm of Calkins & Holden, Inc., one of the oldest, most ethical, and most respected advertising agencies in America. Mr. Clarke is a genuinely gifted designer whose worship of Beauty is without flaw or compromise. Among his many triumphs is that of so glorifying Wesson Oil that millions of American housewives consume tons of it, under the impression, doubtless, that it is a kind of champagne.

When the evil days came, Mr. Clarke had no pleasure in them, and no sympathy for the panic-stricken advertisers who with more or less success were trying to lift themselves out of the spreading sea of red ink by the balloon technique borrowed from the tabloids. Hence, after the slaughter of the morons had proceeded without benefit of Beauty for three depression years, Mr. Clarke, in 1932, published in *Advertising and Selling* the pronunciamento which is here quoted in full:



## Challenge

*Bring me Idealism:* I'm tired of things that look like things as they are. Have you buried your hearts like pots of gold in the earth? You who are entrusted with the responsibility of showing others what they cannot see for themselves. If your eyes see only what is seen by others, from where will the vision come? You who have been so disdainful of the ordinary, will you stand aside now and let the ordinary lead you back to the paths that stretch up to the heights?

You claimed to be the leaders, the gifted, sensitive few, who discerned and brought into being the beauty that is truth. The quality of leadership is tested by adversity. Because we have adversity, do you renounce your leadership and hoard your visions against that time when some one else has made a market for your talent?

Is your sense of beauty so delicate that it cannot be exposed to the frost? Will you come out again like house flies at the first warm touch of prosperity's spring?

*Bring me Courage:* I'm tired of conformity that hides behind the general use. It is indeed a low level that parallels the taste of the throng. If we all conform, wherein will the crowd find guidance away from the common level? You say it narrows your market. Nothing of worth has been created with one eye on one's market. One needs both eyes and yet more to see into one's heart, and it is from there that truth is born.

Courage walks alone, even in the market places. The crowd must follow where the trail is blazed. Look at your idols. Did they hesitate because no one had been that way before? Did they wait for acceptance before they advertised their principles?

*Bring me Imagination:* I'm tired of today and want to see tomorrow.

I need an image, not of what I am, but of what I hope to be. Put away the mirror; set up the telescope. Was it not yesterday you boasted that your souls had wings, that you could penetrate rare atmospheres where the rest of us could not exist? Fly now, and bring us down a measure of that ozone.

Bring us back from those excursions of the mind, which are the responsibility of your guild, a portion of wine to wash down our

dry daily fare—wine from the vineyards of romance and imagination.

If you bring us only bread, you become mere housewives serving the needs of the body, and we recede step by step from that estate which breeds the very license of your occupation.

Have you no contacts with the gods that you only recite the conversations of the world? What binds you to this circling round and round? Can you not stretch your tether ever so little that the next circle would be trod on untrampled ground?

Do you listen to those who counsel return to something which we had but have lost. That is the creed of those who lack imagination or courage and the refuge of those without plan. What we had we have not now. It belongs to yesterday, not today nor tomorrow. Others may lean on and borrow from the past, but you may not. Yours is the responsibility to create the new, the fresh, the vital vision of tomorrow, what we hope to be.

Obviously Mr. Clarke has gone dada, and I trust no person in this audience will be so ungracious as to ask what he is talking about. In the old days, when, in the heat of copy and art conferences, advertisers voiced such impertinent questions, we always boxed their ears and told them to mind their own business, if any. Often there was little enough by the time we got through with them.

I regard Mr. Clarke's manifesto as a classic of its kind, and not without its historic interest; for Mr. Clarke himself is perhaps the last of the art-for-art's-sakers in advertising. His manifesto is illustrated by a most artistic photographic study of the artist himself, standing with one hand resting on his hip, the other hand lifted and placed upon a pillar of the temple of advertising, the clear, unsubdued eyes gazing into the distance. The pose is suggestive, even ominous. What does this Samson of Art-in-Advertising mean to do? Shorn of his prestige, will he gird his loins once more, and bring the whole temple roaring down upon the heads of the Philistines? It would be a fitting end.



Let us turn now to a consideration of the primary phase of the Ad-Man's worship of Beauty: the manufacture by advertising of successive exploitable concepts of feminine beauty, of beauty in clothes, houses, furniture, automobiles, kitchens, everything. One notes three major points: first, that these concepts must be as rapidly obsolescent as possible; second, that the connotation of beauty with expensiveness is rigorously enforced; third, that beauty is conceived of as functional with respect to profitable sales, rather than with respect to satisfying beautifully and economically the living and working needs of the population.

Most exploitation of the idea of beauty reduces in practical terms to a promotion of sales and profits through the fostering of obsolescence. This is most apparent in the field of women's fashions. Here the exploitative apparatus includes not only advertising in the narrow sense of the word, but also the editorial propaganda of the style magazines, plus a more or less collusive hook-up with the rotogravure supplements of the newspapers, with stage and motion picture actresses, and with Junior League debutantes. This complex promotion apparatus is utilized to achieve, first, the fundamentally false identification of beauty and fashion. The acceleration of fashion changes during the postwar period is an index of the textile industry's rapid emergence into the "surplus economy" phase of capitalism, with its entailed crisis. The life-span of a successful style was roughly about a year in 1920. Today, according to the testimony of well-known stylists, this life-span has dropped to less than six months. The mortality of the candidates for fashion's favor has correspondingly increased.

Winifred Raushenbush, in an article in the *New Freeman*, described the dilemma of the dress manufacturer who knows that nine out of every ten designs are doomed to "take a bath," to use the trade jargon. This mortality is about equally high throughout the fashion industry, whether in hats,

dresses or cloaks, and whether the manufacturer is serving the high, medium or low style markets. Snobbism is, of course, the major instrument of the promotion technique. The exquisite hauteur with which both the advertisers in *Vogue* and the editor of *Vogue* lecture their nouveaux riche readers is matched only by the slightly burlesqued imitation of this manner to which indigent stenographers are subjected when they look for bargains on Fourteenth Street. The diffusion of a fashion change, both as to geography, and as between the high, medium and low style levels has become almost instantaneous. Emulative pressures are invoked all down the line. Women dress today not merely for men, but for women as a form of social competition. So potent is the style-terror that even during the depression the majority of women would rather starve than risk the shame of non-conformity. They save and scrimp, skip lunches, buy the latest mode, and four months later are obliged to buy again—this time an "ensemble," so that the manufacturers of handbags and even cosmetics may also share in the profits of style-obsolence.

Deterioration of function fostered by advertising is especially conspicuous in the field of fashion. Even in expensive high-style apparel, the materials tend increasingly to be shoddy. And the crowning joke is that for about fifty per cent of American women, the dress, cloak and hat manufacturers do not produce, do not even attempt to produce, clothes which have any relation to the physical type of the women who are asked to buy them! This, at least, is the testimony of Miss Raushenbush in another *New Freeman* article entitled "15,000,000 Women Can't go Nude." They don't go nude, of course. They accept the ruthless prescription of the current fashion, which is usually appropriate for the young flapper type. It looks and fits like the devil on the mature woman, the short woman, the tall woman, the "hippy" woman. There are at least five major feminine types of these



"forgotten women" the existence of whom the fashion industry has barely deigned to notice, let alone serve adequately.

In recent years the attempt has been made to extend the sway of fashion, *i. e.*, profit-motivated obsolescence, into every conceivable field of human purchase and use. Invariably this fashion offensive wears the masque of beauty. Almost invariably, the net result is to increase the tonnage of shoddy make-believe. One must say this at the same time that one acknowledges in fairness that the industrial designers who have both promoted and profited by this offensive, have tried to introduce some slight measure of the substance and function of beauty, and in some cases have measurably succeeded.

The motivation of this crusade is acknowledged in the title of an article contributed by Earnest Elmo Calkins to *Advertising and Selling*: "The Dividends of Beauty." One readily acknowledges that nothing, whether beautiful or ugly, can be made under a profit system unless it does pay dividends. The point is that under a profit system both the guiding esthetic and its expression by a profit-motivated industry are severely limited and distorted, so that the net product of beauty is likely to be meagre indeed. Says Mr. Calkins:

The place of art in industry is becoming firmly established. A restaurant arranges common vegetables in patterns in its windows, taking full advantage of the different greens of peas, asparagus, cauliflower and artichoke, and adds eye-appeal to appetite appeal. A railroad landscapes its stations with grass plots and climbing roses and transforms an unsightly utility into an attractive eye-catcher, builds local goodwill, adds an esthetic touch to mere ordinary travel, and creates a new sales argument.

Much has been accomplished in this new field, but the list is long of manufactured articles waiting for that beautifying touch which costs but little and adds so much to acceptance. The initial shape and color of most machine-made articles are ugly. Why, I don't know. Nature does not err that way. All her products are artistic

and harmonious with each other. Some appeal to several senses. An ear of corn is pleasant to sight and touch. . . . Nothing but man with his filling stations, hot-dog stands and automobile cemeteries strikes a discordant note. . . . A forest grows unhelped and is forever beautiful. A town grows as it will and looks like hell hit with a club. Beauty in man-made articles must be the result of conscious thinking. . . .

Mr. Calkins, a veteran of the advertising profession, admits that he doesn't know why most machine-made articles are ugly. By and large, the writer must admit a similar ignorance. The glib radical answer would run to the effect that it is not the machine, but the application of machine technology to the making of profits that results in this ugliness. But this answer doesn't cover all the facts by any means. Some machine-made articles, even some machine-made consumer's goods, made for profit and sold at Woolworth's, *are* beautiful. Many hand-made articles are ugly—Elbert Hubbard's de luxe editions for example, and much of the present flood of sweatshop toys, china, etc., coming out of Japan and Germany; also the neo-Mayan design in pottery and textiles which results when the primitive social-economic pattern of a Mexican village is shattered and the native craftsmen are Taylorized by a capitalist entrepreneur. Yet the burial urns and other art objects turned out in quantity during some of the best Chinese periods, trade-marked, and exported for profit to Persia, were and are extremely beautiful. Production for use does not necessarily result in beauty, nor does production for profit necessarily result in ugliness. Estheticians and sociologists have striven vainly to discover the rationale of beauty in the social context of production, sale and use. The best that the writer can offer is a tentative observation to the effect that the American genius, operating under the conditions of modern industrial capitalism burns brightest, and gives the largest product of beauty in the field of producer's goods: the machines them-



selves, turbines, electric cranes, modern factory architecture and the product of these factories for strict use seen in bridges, viaducts, etc. On the other hand the American blind spot is in the field of economic and social organization; hence we are likely to find that a machine product, designed for sale to the ultimate consumer usually, though not always betrays the disorder, the insanity, the ugliness of our decadent capitalist economy and our chaotic distributive system. In general I think it may be said that where the salesman and advertiser, rather than the craftsman and producer, are in the saddle, what the consumer gets is likely to be ugliness. In a fragmented civilization such as ours, art and the artist tend to be tossed off to the periphery of a system which no longer is organic. Mr. Calkins would like to bring the artist back to the center of the system, where, as industrial designer, he can contribute "that beautifying which costs but little and adds so much to acceptance." The attempt is in fact being made on a considerable scale, but without much success, and for very good reasons.

A very good industrial designer—there are a number of highly talented Americans at work in this field—can control some but not all of the factors which determine whether a product is to be beautiful or ugly. He can't control the profit-motive and that is precisely where he falls down. As a matter of fact, who is it calls in the industrial designer? The advertising agency, usually, or the sales manager of the manufacturer. Why do they call him in? To make the product a beautiful object? Incidentally, perhaps, but primarily to make the product a *salable* object. The designer hence must work not as an artist, but as a showman, a salesman. If he were working as an artist, he would make the form of the object express the truth of its function, not merely in mechanical but also in economic and social terms, and it would be beautiful. But his is perforce a one-dimensional art. Working as he must, as a showman, he usually gives the object a novel flip

of line or color—he “styles” it in terms of the showman, not of the artist. As a designer he finds himself frustrated and stultified by the false and anti-social production relationships which condition his labor. The same thing is true, of course, of the engineer, the educator, the doctor, the architect, indeed of all creative workers in an acquisitive society. Recently one of the best known and most highly paid industrial designers in America came to me and asked what chance he would have of doing serious work in Russia. He was fed up with the rootless frivolities that sales managers had asked him to turn out.

It is in the field of package design that the artist has greatest freedom and has scored his maximum of seeming successes. It is true that simple, bold lettering, clear colors and good design produce more sightly packages and that customers are attracted by such packages. It is also true that these packages are likely to contain the same overpriced, overadvertised and sub-standard content that they always held. This package “beauty” is therefore skin deep, and its creation the proper concern of business men and commercial dilettantes, not of artists who have any conception of the social function of art. If these packageers had any such conception they would probably feel obliged to ask first, in three cases out of five, whether the product really ought to be packaged at all.

It occurs to me that in discussing the rôle of the craftsman in advertising I may have given the impression that his “conscientious sabotage,” his interest in the materials of the craft rather than in selling, his attempts to convert advertising into a thing-in-itself, represent a genuine release of creative capacity. No such impression was intended. If any genuine creation goes on in advertising agencies I have never seen it. I have seen the sort of thing described: the crippled, grotesque, make-believe of more or less competent craftsmen who played with the materials of their craft but could never use them systematically for any creative purpose. By and large there is

no such thing as art in advertising any more than there is such a thing as an advertising literature.

The best of us, certainly, had more sense than to make any such pretensions. I suppose that in some twelve years of advertising practice I must have written some millions of words of what is called "advertising copy," much of it for very eminent and respectable advertisers. It was all anonymous, thank heaven, and I shall never claim a line of it. True, half-true and false, the advertiser signed it, the newspapers and magazines printed it, the radio announcer blatted it, and the wind has blown it away. It was all quite without any human dignity or meaning, let alone beauty, and it cannot be too soon forgotten.

No, we knew what we were. On the door of the art department of an agency where I worked, a friend of mine, one of the ablest and most prolific commercial artists in the business, once tacked a sign. It read: "Fetid Hell-Hole of Lost Souls."

There are many hundreds of these "fetid hell-holes" in the major cities of America. The inmates are, of course, dedicated to beauty, beauty in advertising. Whether they knew it or not they are, as artists, so many squeaking, tortured eunuchs. The Sultans of business pay them well or not so well. They have made sure that they do not fertilize the body of the culture with the dangerous seed of art.