Preface: Memoirs of a Commodity Fetishist

Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of masses.
—WALTER BENJAMIN, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Thirty-seven years ago, when I was a freshman history major at the University of Wisconsin, consumerism, the mass media, and the commercial culture more generally were not yet included within the liberal arts curricula of most colleges and universities. Though these institutions had been leaving tractor marks across the American social landscape for over a century, few historians saw advertising, consumerism, or the apparatus of mass impression as subjects worthy of serious inquiry. Quite the contrary. For many in academia, ignorance about such matters was regarded as a litmus test of intelligence.

This scholastic blind spot posed a problem for me. I was, after all, a child of post–World War II America, a time and place where economic prosperity and television were turning citizens into consumers, living rooms into salesrooms, and advertising into the prevailing vernacular of public address. As a participant-observer at the postwar barbecue, I was both assailed and seduced by a burgeoning visual culture, intimately aware of the ways that it was reshaping the topography of aesthetics and desire. I had seen it firsthand. I grew up in a middle-class suburban family in a town where competitive consumption was elevated to an art form. Finding a social identity, being "popular" in a peer group determined in large part by Papagallo™ shoes and Impala convertibles, was an often anxiety-ridden right of passage. I had, and still have, a love-hate relationship with consumption.

From early on, even before college, I had an interest in learning about the history that stood behind the emergence of this now familiar new world.

Writers for decades had criticized and bemoaned the unsettling invasions of commercial culture, but nothing that I learned in school provided me with a tangible interpretation of how twentieth-century consumer culture had come into being.

My historical interest in media, consumer culture, and the shadowy arts of persuasion, then, was not the outcome of formal learning. If anything, it was the result of visceral experience. Though—like many of my generation—my social panorama was framed by television, comics, rock and roll, and by the overheated commercialism of the fifties, the sensibilities and aspirations of my parents and grandparents derived from different origins.

Immigrants from Poland and Latvia, my grandparents never fully relinquished their village mentality. They simply relocated it in New York City. Despite their tenacious bonds with an older world, however, the boil of modernity touched their lives. The last time I saw my mother's father, when I was four, he was working as an usher and ticket taker in an old movie theater. Though scarcely a modern man, he drew his last paychecks from a decidedly modern job. My paternal grandmother never discarded her commitment to the old world—I could smell it when I entered her apartment—but my other grandmother, Anna Scott, was a big movie fan, able to recite the intimate details of Robert Taylor's life from movie magazines that she had read. Still, they were, all of them, grounded in the old neighborhood, in a world of familiars.

My parents, the children of these immigrants, worked hard and successfully to escape their working-class roots. Both went to college, and both, throughout my childhood, repeatedly declared their scornful aversion to popular culture. My cultural interests, such as they were, were foreign to them and a disappointment. Given their efforts to assume the attributes of middle-class culture, they couldn't help but be mortified by a son whose cultural tastes seemed to have regressed, who watched television, listened to loud music, and seemed perfectly satisfied paging through magazines looking at comely sirens, two-tone cars, and other commercial attractions. Whatever ambivalence I might have been developing amidst all of this "time wasting," wherever I might be going with my fascinations, it appeared to them—and to the only grandmother who survived into my teenage years—that I was lost, swallowed up by something awful.

Even before I began to think critically about it, the generational dynamics of my family indicated that the world I was born into, the allurements that seized my attention, had not always been. Arriving at college in 1963, I encountered little in the classroom that offered me details of how the modern mass culture had come into being.

The years in Madison, however, were a time of awakening. In and out of the classroom I encountered new ideas and a world stirred by social activism. History, as a subject, had never really interested me before. At Wisconsin, however, radiant teachers like George Mosse, Harvey Goldberg, and William Appleman Williams showed me, along with a whole generation of galvanized students, that the past was more than the names and dates of dead presidents.

Studying history provided me with an opportunity to identify and interpret the forces at play within the world, even those that may not be readily discernible at ground zero. I learned about the power of money, and of global capital, in the making of modern life. I also learned how the lives of ordinary people, though often invisible in the historical record, have played a powerful role in social movements and in the dynamics of great and horrifying social changes. I studied the power of ideology, of systems of belief so compelling, so all-encompassing, that for people under their sway they constitute reality. I learned of the political consequences of the cultural realm, of the irrational, and the ways that myths and images may assert a power so great that people, against all reason, may revel in human destruction.

Beyond the classroom, the politics of everyday life were becoming an issue as well. Mobilized by an expanding civil rights movement, and later by the war in Vietnam, I was becoming an activist. After leaving college to work for a year as an organizer with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi, I returned to Madison in 1965 with a growing sense that commercial culture, and the mass media that trumpet its values, served as a foundation for an increasingly undemocratic political system. In Mississippi, where the people I worked with lived in shacks, television, with its redundant portrayals of the good life, offered an eloquent picture of the stark contradictions that mired the "American Century."

Back in Wisconsin, as U.S. involvement in Vietnam was escalating, the ideological bent of the commercial media and their role as instruments of

consent became more and more palpable. The media, I came to believe, needed to become an arena of contestation. I became involved in alternative journalism, publishing an underground newspaper, *Connections*, in which the critique of consumer culture and the renunciation of spectatorship were defining themes. On its masthead was the phrase "dedicated to remaining underground rather than being buried above ground," affirming the conviction that the "spectacular commodity society," as Guy DuBord termed it, was a seductive barrier to participatory democracy. Reading Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, which dissected the ways that corporate capitalism infused every aspect of daily life, down to the language we speak, only invigorated this view. In my activities as a New Left pamphleteer, and in my ongoing study of history, these were the issues that shaped my intellectual development.

At the same time, however, there was something about Marcuse and the Frankfurt School that disturbed me. Despite their profound critique of American mass culture, there was a decidedly European and elitist quality to their writings. While many of my history student friends at Wisconsin connected to the world of Marcuse and his peers by pursuing advanced degrees in European intellectual history, I was committed to engaging the American experience more directly. As I began graduate school at the University of Rochester, American history and the history of American consumer culture became my passion.

Two teachers very different in outlook informed my work. One was Herbert Gutman, an avuncular social historian who, in his studies of working people in slavery and freedom, saw ordinary people as the authors of their own lives. Though he found my perspective on the ways that corporate ideology leavened the popular imagination to be misguided, his insistence that society is a battleground, not an iron cage, has stayed with me. Gutman also introduced me to E. P. Thompson's "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," a brilliant essay that highlighted the extent to which nineteenth-century capitalism, more than an economic system, encompassed a new perceptual universe that sought to eradicate earlier ways of seeing. This essay left a deep mark on me, and I continue to assign it to my own graduate students.

The other was Loren Baritz, whose interest in the history of American elites supported my research into the ideas of the men and women who

pioneered in the creation of a twentieth-century merchandising culture. Tips from Baritz led me to *Printers' Ink*, the advertising trade journal, and to the writings of Edward Bernays, as well as many other sources that still haunt the bibliographies of my writings.

Baritz encouraged me to reject many of the rules that shaped graduate studies in history at the time and, to a large extent, continue to do so. One was the "fifty-year rule," which advised historians against approaching contemporary subjects. Another was the directive that graduate students write "small" doctoral dissertations, narrowly focused monographs that began with a review of existing literature and then made an original, if usually minor, contribution to the history of a preexisting field. Big books were for senior historians, scholars who had earned their stripes. A third injunction was against popularizing, understood to mean writing for a general audience. Academic history, at its best, should be of interest primarily to other historians. Most important, Baritz was enthusiastic about my interest in studying the history of mass consumption and advertising, fields that did not yet exist. My approach—to question the ruling faiths of American society and explore advertising as an instrument of power—was connected to issues he had written about in his book *Servants of Power*.

For his research seminar in 1969 I wrote a paper entitled "Advertising as Social Production," which delved into the ways that a number of early-twentieth-century businessmen—forward-thinking capitalists like Edward Filene, along with architects of modern advertising—looked to consumptionism, as the business strategist Christine Frederick termed it, as the salve that would tranquilize working-class militancy while at the same time expanding the prosperity of business. This paper eventually became the first part of *Captains of Consciousness*.

Many of the professors in the history department thought I was smart but loony—a perception fortified by my involvement in a guerrilla theater stunt wherein General Maxwell Taylor of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was presented with a pig's head—but I was energized by the enthusiastic response of fellow graduate students. The paper caused a stir because of its novel subject matter and its critical approach. It was being read beyond Rochester, and soon it was published, then anthologized. I was twenty-four and, with the help of my most influential teacher, Elizabeth Ewen, I was ready to write, not a typical

dissertation but a book about a subject that, at least outside the academy, was of undeniable interest.

Doing research in Harvard's Widener Library and Baker Business Library, I felt like a spy, following a mass consumer culture and the commercial propaganda machinery that propelled it. What blew me away, what still blows me away, was the extent to which the people I was uncovering, who never expected their words to be scrutinized except by their peers, were remarkably candid about their thoughts and intentions. As innovators formulating ideas and inventing practices that in time would become routine, many were also exceptionally conscious of their moment in history and their objectives in relation to history. Writing from the vantage point of the early 1970s, when psychologically charged advertising was an unequivocal fact of life, one needed to look backward, to a period of origination, in order to better understand the present.

Oddly, given the ubiquity of its subject matter, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, published in 1976, became the first scholarly history to critically evaluate advertising and consumer culture as defining forces in American life. In three sections, the book examines the roots of modern advertising in the early twentieth century and explored the social, intellectual, and economic forces that propelled its development. Rather than looking at advertisements one by one as individual attempts to sell a product or service, I approached advertising overall as a widely iterated commentary on issues of want and desire, a novel philosophical system, a pivotal medium by which a new, consumerist way of life was shaped, depicted, communicated, and sold.

Captains of Consciousness also looks at advertising as the embodiment of more expansive business goals, as an instrument by which American corporations responded to, adjusted to, and exploited the social conditions, economic consequences, and new ways of seeing that emerged with the rise of a mass production system. Mass production required mass consumption, and a growing number of businessmen, I found, were beginning to speak of the ways that human instinct needed to be mobilized to turn consumption into an inner compulsion. The extent to which mass consumption and advertising were seen as a business response to the perceived threat of socialism was also explored.

Advertising, moreover, provided a fascinating window through which one could see capitalism shifting, over the course of the twentieth century, from an economy defined primarily by production to one defined by consumption. The virtual disappearance of the factory from corporate imagery, and the conscious cultivation of emotional links between corporate goods and the personal lives of consumers, provided a clairvoyant snapshot of the world to come. The book also posed questions about the ways that advertising helped to establish prevailing models of the self, the family, and the good life in American consumer society. I also probed the role of advertising in altering customary notions of truth and public expression was also probed. Though research for the book focused mainly on the period 1900–1930, its thesis, and my conscious intent, was to explore the dream life of the twentieth century. Unlike much historical writing, *Captains* was audacious, impassioned, overtly political—and unfinished, pointing me in directions I would need to go in future research and writing. It also quickly gathered an audience.

Attacked by editorials and articles in *Advertising Age*, the book was widely reviewed and became an academic best-seller. Cutting across disciplines, it was adopted as a required text in classes ranging from history to sociology, communications and marketing. As people in the visual arts became increasingly aware of—and uneasy about—advertising as the preeminent public art form, art and art history programs also assigned the book.

From the time it was published, *Captains of Consciousness* attracted both notice and controversy. It was praised in *Newsweek* and other prominent newspapers and magazines, but it was also widely denounced. *Library Journal* savaged it in one issue, only to turn around a few issues later and give it an award as a "Best Business Book" of the year. It was named an "Outstanding Academic Book" by *Choice* magazine, while others questioned its objectivity and cited its "Marxist" disposition as grounds for immediate dismissal. Marshall McLuhan sent passages to Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau, while a reviewer in the *Birmingham News* declared the book "mostly junk."

Captains clearly resonated for many people. Though a book about history, it was recognizable, offering a look at some of the ideas and actions that had given rise to a world that they knew. Though I did not expect this

book, written while I was in my twenties, to install me as a founder of the field, I was not completely shocked by people's interest. In spite of inbred academic evasions, consumer culture was a conspicuous subject in need of a history. At a moment when the prevailing structures of American power were widely being questioned, and sacred cows were on the dinner menu of a generation, its combative sensibility was faithful to its time.

In staking out an academic subject matter of wide interest, and offering a critical perspective about a subject that people tend to have strong feelings about, *Captains of Consciousness* had the salutary effect of countenancing a generation of young—and a few older—scholars to address the questions that it had opened. In universities, and other public venues, advertising and the paradigms of consumer ideology were becoming central to the ways that American society was being interpreted and understood. Fortuitously, *Captains* was among the first books to bring these issues to the stage of intellectual life, something that has often made it an underpinning, or a target, for subsequent work.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a body of historical and sociological writing on advertising and consumer culture began to appear. Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements*, first published in 1978 in Britain, used semiotics to explore the construction of meaning in contemporary advertising. In 1983 *The Making of Modern Advertising*, by Daniel Pope, offered a more detailed picture of the industry than I had drawn. An anthology, *The Culture of Consumption*, edited by Richard Fox and Jackson Lears, also appeared in 1983. Throughout the 1980s the literature on advertising grew. Roland Marchand's excellent *Advertising the American Dream*, Bill Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally's *Social Communication in Advertising*, and Michael Schudson's *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion* all appeared between 1984 and 1986. All cited *Captains*, but Schudson's book was a rancorous counterattack. Arguing that *Captains* was "naive" and "without . . . historical foundation," Schudson offered up a syrupy polemic on behalf of advertising and at the same time an assertion that advertising has had little influence on American society. The public differences between us constituted one of the first academic debates over the role of advertising in American life.

Less venomous than Schudson's assault, Lears's opening essay in *The Culture of Consumption*, subtitled "Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots

of the Consumer Culture," may have appropriated its cadence from *Captains'* subtitle but also took time to elevate itself above the wrongheadedness that I and Daniel Boorstin, in his book *The Image*, brought to the subject of advertising:

> The few historians who have addressed the subject in recent years tend to fall into two opposing camps, best represented by Daniel Boorstin and Stuart Ewen. Boorstin thoughtfully sketches some moral and emotional dilemmas in the culture of consumption, but he ignores power relations. . . . Ewen, on the other hand, can see nothing but power relations. To him the consumer is the product of a conspiracy hatched by corporate executives in the bowels of the Ministry of Truth, then imposed with diabolical cleverness on a passive population. Neither Ewen nor Boorstin grasps the complex relationship between power relations and changes in values—or between advertisers' changing strategies and the cultural confusion at the turn of the century.

When one looks beneath such protests, much of Lears's work on advertising has been an offshoot my own, but his characterization of *Captains* as conspiracy theory, an accusation that has been reiterated by some others, merits a brief response. I am not one to assume that conspiracies have played no role in history, or that propagandists have never been involved in them, but what I presented in *Captains of Consciousness* was not the story of a conspiracy. Rather, it was a review of business thinking during the time that mass production was taking hold and modern advertising was being developed, and it revealed the extent to which a broad number of business leaders were harboring similar thoughts. This is not conspiracy; it is the history of ideas. The book recorded the evolving consciousness of a number of American business people, in different quarters, during a period of social, economic, and strategic transition. That their conceits dovetailed is not because they were plotted in some Ministry of Truth. It indicates only that they faced common problems and that, using

available tools, they were conceiving congruous responses to their world. The innovations of individuals seldom occur in a vacuum.

That their inventions were spontaneously "imposed . . . on a passive population" was never my argument, and the overtly political disposition of my book, and of my later writings, assumes that the population is not only capable of resisting but must resist the miasma of commercialism when it threatens to stifle other ways of seeing and imagining. It also assumes that, at times, people are capable of being persuaded, or seduced, even against their own best interests.

Captains of Consciousness was, without question, a spiritual child of the sixties. The passionate responses it evoked cannot be divorced from the fervent feelings that are still inspired by that time. This intrinsic connection to arguments that continue to define American social, cultural, and political life may explain why it has remained of interest to readers. In an age where the shelf life of books is most often brief, this endurance is gratifying, but it is also a testament to the fact that the book's subject matter has become an increasingly pervasive and, for many, problematic element of modern life.

While my interest in commercial culture and the dynamics of power perseveres, I've undergone a number of intellectual changes since *Captains* first appeared. In terms of research and writing, I have become more and more interested in the problem of visual eloquence—how images, even in silence, converse with people. *Channels of Desire* (1982; 2nd ed., 1992), a book of essays written with my running mate, Liz Ewen, took us beyond advertising and into people's encounters with a range of visual media—movies, fashion, even labels on cans of evaporated milk—to better understand the social and psychological meaning of consumption. *All Consuming Images* (1988; 2nd ed., 1999) investigated architecture, corporate logos, industrial design, product packaging, and body ideals as historical focal points where complex issues of social power—in different ways in different times—take on the apparent simplicity of beauty. In *PR! A Social History of Spin* I revisited some concerns addressed in my first book and focused on the rise of public relations, which is closely connected to advertising.

Some of what I learned in researching *PR!* would have made *Captains of Consciousness* a more complete and, perhaps to its detriment, much longer book. My readings into the rise of social psychology, commencing with

Gustave LeBon's *The Crowd*, would have provided me with a more penetrating picture of what advertising people of the 1920s meant when they spoke of their desire to organize the instincts. Research into the Committee on Public Information, the federal propaganda bureau established during the First World War, would have explained how a national persuasion industry was jump-started and why advertising specialists of the 1920s were so at ease with the idea of molding other people's minds. My investigations of the National Association of Manufacturers' "American Way" campaign and the 1939 World's Fair would have added strength and depth to my section on the political ideology of consumption.

Since the mid-1970s, when *Captains* was published, the global reach of American commercial culture has only accelerated. In the 1980s commercialism mushroomed into a vehement global religion. Where advertising once inhabited circumscribed arenas—television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards—today nearly every moment of human attention is being converted into an occasion for a sales pitch, while notions of the public interest and noncommercial arenas of expression are under assault.

In the wake of these developments it is encouraging that a growing number of people in many different fields are making various aspects of media and popular culture the object of study. While much in the fields of media and cultural studies fails to address the dynamics of corporate power in the modern world, students today are more likely than in the past to be learning about the social history of the mass media and the elements of cultural experience, commercial and otherwise, that mark life at the onset of the twenty-first century. Within such inquiries, issues such as the consolidation of media ownership, the powerful role of perception management in today's society, and the steady commercialization of nearly every human experience will increasingly, by force of circumstance, come to the fore.

These developments, corresponding to my experiences as a teacher, have had a deep effect on how I think about the work I do and about the issues and politics of culture. If in the 1970s the critical exegesis of consumer society seemed an appropriate response to the world, from the early 1980s onward I have become concerned with the pivotal importance of reinvigorating the

public sphere, moving beyond the boosterism of a business-driven culture and deepening the possibility of meaningful public discussion.

I am convinced that for us, the critical study of media and society needs to be integrated with strategies for enriching and broadening the quality of public expression. In many ways this fusion is a descendant of objectives that have been central to the rise of democratic movements over the past two centuries: universal literacy and public education.

Historically, links between literacy and democracy are inseparable from the notion of an informed populace conversant with the issues that touch on their lives and enabled with tools that allow them to participate actively in public deliberation and social change. Nineteenth-century struggles for literacy and education were never limited to the ability to read. They were also about learning to write, and thus about expanding the number and variety of voices heard in published interchanges and debates. Literacy was about crossing the lines that had historically separated men of ideas from ordinary people, about the social enfranchisement of those who had been excluded from the compensations of citizenship.

This connection is palpable in the life of Frederick Douglass, who repeatedly recounted a childhood incident in which the mistress of the plantation where he was a slave began teaching him to read. When her husband discovered this indiscretion, he severely reprimanded her. She had, as Douglass explained it, violated "the true philosophy of slavery, and the peculiar rules necessary to be observed by masters and mistresses, in the management of their human chattels." This episode unraveled a "painful mystery" for Douglass by explaining how enforced illiteracy buttressed "the white man's power to perpetuate the enslavement of the black man." Douglass took this lesson with him when he ran away from slavery to freedom in the North, where he became not only a reader but, more importantly, a writer, the leading black abolitionist. The written word was the primary tool of public knowledge, and in the nineteenth century literacy was essential for the voices of African Americans to become part of the antislavery debate.

Today literacy remains an issue, yet its terrain has significantly changed. Those of us engaged in media education need to take the lead in rethinking and regenerating the demand for universal literacy. In the final chapter of

PR!, "The Public and Its Problems: Some Notes for the New Millennium," I addressed this concern directly:

> In a society where instrumental images are employed to petition our affections at every turn—often without a word—educational curricula must . . . encourage the development of tools for critically analyzing images. Going back some time, the language of images has been well known to people working in the field of opinion management. For democracy to prevail, image making as a communicative activity must be understood by ordinary citizens as well. The aesthetic realm—and the enigmatic ties linking aesthetic, social, economic, political, and ethical values—must be brought down to earth as a subject of study. The development of curricula in media and visual literacy will not only sharpen people's ability to decipher their world, but it will also contribute to a broadening of the public sphere. Literacy is never just about reading; it is also about writing. Just as early campaigns for universal print literacy were concerned with democratizing the tools of public expression—the written word—upcoming struggles for media literacy must strive to empower people with contemporary implements of public discourse: video, graphic arts, photography, computer-assisted journalism and layout, and performance. More customary mainstays of public expression—expository writing and public speaking—must be resuscitated as well. Media literacy cannot simply be seen as a vaccination against PR or other familiar strains of institutionalized guile. It must be understood in an education in techniques that can democratize the realm of public expression and will magnify the possibility of meaningful public interactions. Distinctions between publicist and citizen, author and audience, need to be broken down. Education can facilitate this process. It can enlarge the circle of who is permitted—and who will be able—to interpret and make sense of the world.

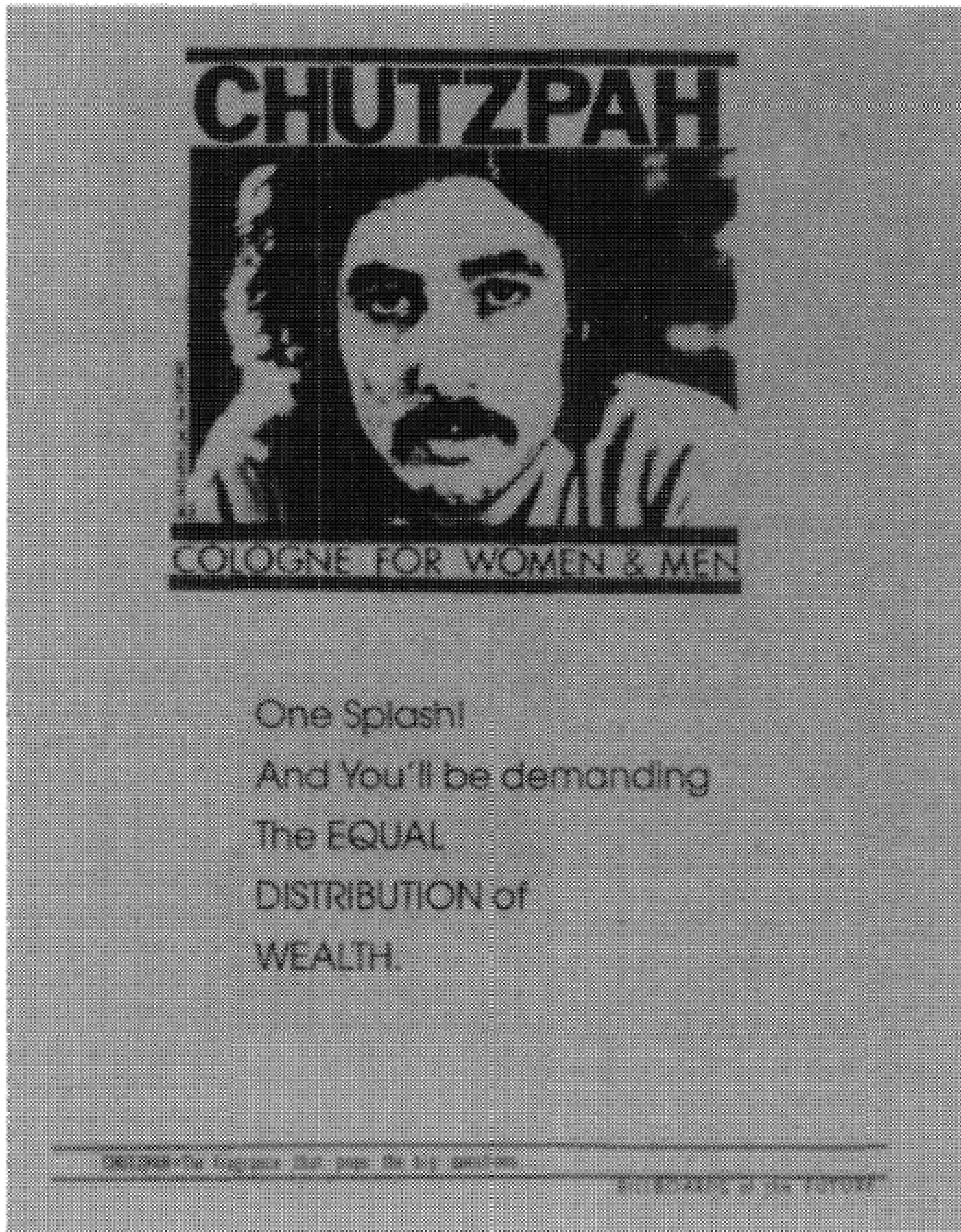
Practically, such concerns have become central to my creative work and teaching over the past twenty years. As a child, and even into my twenties, I passed a good deal of time making pictures. It was something we did in my family. In the mid-1960s my belief in the need to experiment with visual form affected the look and feel of the underground newspaper *Connections*. In my graduate work, however, and in my early years as a teacher, I put this part of me aside, focusing instead on critical writing and research and on preparing new courses.

By the early 1980s, however, I felt compelled to return to a multimedia approach to expression. Partly it was therapeutic. I found, and find, image making, and the creative blending of word and image, more pleasurable than the austere activity of writing. But the shift was also a result of my first decade of teaching, where I observed the ways that critical analysis, in the absence of alternative media making, often left students feeling cynical and voiceless.

On a personal level, I dreamed up an alter ego, Archie Bishop, whose work as a graphic artist, photographer, pamphleteer, multimedia prankster, and political situationist has occupied a good part of my life since 1980. It began with an individual political art project called Billboards of the Future, weekly photocopied fliers that I handed out on the street, posted on walls, and distributed by mail offering visual commentary on the mental and political afflictions of Reaganism.

Archie Bishop, "Statue of Liberty,"
Billboards of the Future, 1981.

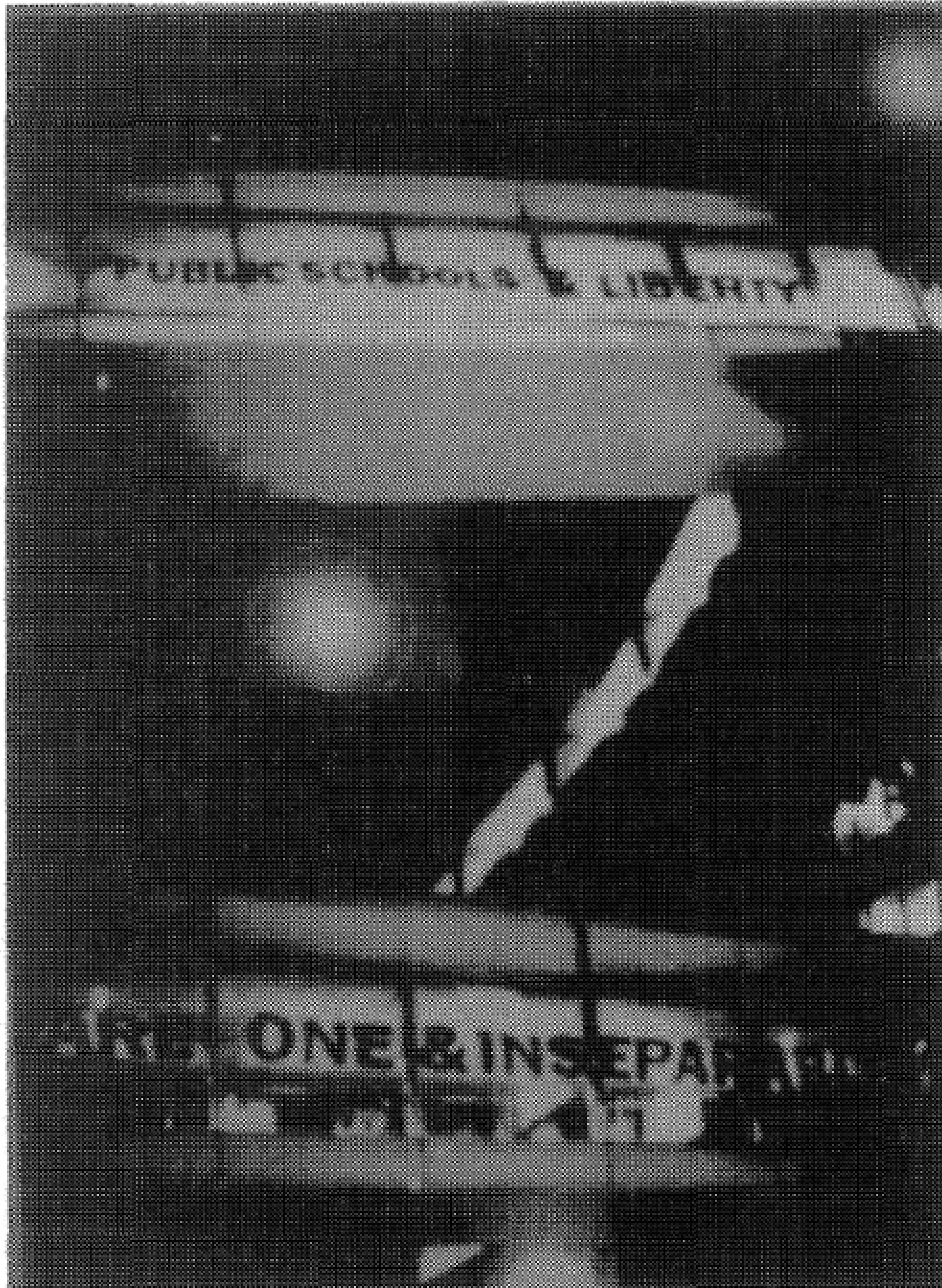
My penchant for visual recreation carried over to bookwriting as well. Starting with *All Consuming Images*, my books have included a number of Archie's visual pieces, though within their pages I never acknowledged the extent to which he and I were related. A book project that I am currently working on with Liz Ewen, a three-century history of stereotypes, to be entitled *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*, will be even more visual in nature.



Archie Bishop, "The Fragrance That Pops the Big Questions," Billboards of the Future, 1981.

By the mid-1990s Billboards of the Future became more collective, and together with students and friends I began organizing large-scale street installations, about one a year, beginning with "Gravestones for Democracy" in 1995. That exhibit turned a city block into a spooky visual springboard for

a month and a half of demonstrations against budget cuts that were hitting the City University of New York (Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center), where I teach. For me, the line separating classroom from society, interpretation from activity, needs to be broken down. Media study, if conducted in the armchair or the ivory tower, can be a frustrating and aimless journey meandering for the most part along two roads. Along one, a fixation on the power and seduction of the commercial media system inflames a sense of impotence and paranoia. Along the other, which eulogizes the pleasures and routines of media reception, a way of seeing has emerged that confuses individual interpretations of media “texts” with the exercise of creative freedom. At day’s end, both roads retreat from the notion of informed public discussion as a fundamental democratic objective.



"Public Schools and Liberty Are One and Inseparable, "part of Billboards for Democracy, a 1996 art installation, Hunter College, City University of New York. Bridges over Lexington Avenue at 68th Street in Manhattan, seen at night.

My intellectual and creative ventures, as well as my concerns with contemporary media scholarship, are mirrored in my undergraduate and graduate teaching. In both arenas I work to couple thoughtful social analysis with assignments designed to hone students' capacity to communicate ideas eloquently and publicly using a variety of media. This is little more than a small-scale attempt to educate twenty-first-century pamphleteers, people who are conscious of the issues of their time, committed to enlivening public awareness, and pragmatically familiar with the contemporary tools of public address.

Although the preceding narrative has taken the form of an abbreviated intellectual autobiography, it should not be understood as simply a personal story. I was part of the first generation of students who felt urgency around the need to face the media question. Our intellectual and creative choices reflected the social facts of the second half of the twentieth century and the fateful challenges posed for those who, in a world where more and more people are touched by the media yet fewer and fewer control the pipelines of persuasion, ponder the fate of democracy. That the issues of advertising and consumer culture, along with the politics and economics of modern media systems, have become so paramount as subjects of study is an unavoidable consequence of our time. How we continue to respond to these issues, critically and through social action, provides a compelling agenda for the future.