a homosocial world? masculinity, creative and creative jobs

Pick a career. Any career. Make it progressive, forward thinking, fluid. Fill it with people with an anti-establishment attitude. Make them radical, creative, equality-minded. What would you call it? Advertising, maybe? An industry, surely, with all the above qualities and one where, of course, men and women get on in equal measure (Belinda Archer, *Guardian*, 13/9/99: 4).

The London-based advertising industry was, as many industry-insiders were fond of repeating through the 1990s, one in which women were highly visible and constituted half of all those employed. It was also an industry, it was claimed, that was open and meritocratic, which sought out the brightest and the best people and where ability and drive were rewarded regardless of age, gender or social background (Baxter, 1990). Wasn't it, as Belinda Archer's rhetorical questions suggested, a progressive industry in which 'men and women got on in equal measure'? An industry, moreover, in the words of Marilyn Baxter, author of a report on the position of women in advertising, which was 'short on prejudice and tradition and long on risk taking' (Baxter, 1990: 10). Despite the currency of these themes in the industry's self-imaginings, the answer was, as Belinda Archer and Marilyn Baxter both forcefully acknowledged, 'well, no, not really'.

Peeling back the public image of the industry revealed some uncomfortable truths. We have already seen that the industry was a youthful one, with 80 per cent of those employed being under 40 years of age and 50 per cent below 30 (see Chapter 3). While this helped to support the industry's image as a contemporary and vibrant sector, it also suggested that advertising was not a sympathetic place to work for those over forty years of age or seeking a long and sustainable career. Evidence of the industry's racial and ethnic mix also challenged its progressive profile. While the IPA's annual census did not officially record the number of individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who worked in advertising, it estimated that they represented less than 1 per cent of the workforce (*Guardian*, 4/12/00: 8).[1] It was the figures for the gender composition of the industry, however,

which, for industry insiders, did most to trouble and disturb the progressive image of advertising. These pointed to a strong pattern of both vertical and horizontal gender segregation in advertising employment. At the highest levels of the industry men remained the visible social actors. Only 22 per cent of board directors were women, while among the most senior agency staff (managing directors, chairman and chief executives) only 9 per cent were women (Klein, 2000: 9). This placed advertising close to famously conservative sectors like the law and medicine in which women occupied 17 per cent and 14 per cent of senior positions, respectively (ibid: 26).

Unsurprisingly, at the other end of the occupational spectrum, women were over-represented among secretarial, clerical and junior administrative staff, with nearly 100 per cent of secretaries being women and 60 per cent of finance and administrative work also being performed by women. Within the core areas of advertising employment – the jobs of account handler, account planner, media buyer/planner and creative – the picture was more complicated. 54 per cent of account handlers were female, up from 33 per cent at the start of the 1990s. Among media buyers/planners, the figures showed a more or less stable picture through the 1990s with 44 per cent of practitioners being women. And in account planning there was a similarly stable picture, with figures pointing to the job being split equally in terms of its gender composition (Baxter, 1990; Klein, 2000). These figures led some credence to the image of advertising as a women-friendly occupation. However, there was one area of advertising employment that remained striking in terms of its gender mix and which did most to disrupt the progressive image of the industry: employment in creative jobs. Only 18 per cent of those performing this job were women and through the decade the percentage actually declined. Thus, whether it was a large creative department like Saatchi & Saatchi's with 100 employees or a small one like CDP's with just 12, the gender mix remained more or less consistently skewed (*Campaign*, 9/2/96: 31). This gender bias had consequences in turn for the numbers of women acting as creative directors (effectively the heads of creative departments), and only 2 women occupied this position in top twenty agencies (Klein, 2000: 30). Given, as we've seen earlier, the privileged position of creative jobs in agencies and their symbolic centrality to the business of advertising, these were significant figures.

The gender bias in creative jobs, and the apparently intractable nature of this problem, generated much soul-searching within the industry. In fact, between the publication of the first IPA report on the position of women in advertising in 1990 and its follow-up report in 2000, the industry returned again and again to this issue and it moved centre-stage in the concerns, in particular, of the IPA and D&AD.[2] While public pronouncements within the industry on this matter were informed by the longer established debate

within the business world on gender equality (especially at senior levels),[3] the continuing urgency of the industry's reflection on gender employment in creative jobs owed much to those processes of modernisation that I discussed in Chapter 2. Certainly there was the felt sense, often only tacitly expressed by industry folk, that the bias in the composition of creative jobs cut across agencies'attempts to present themselves as modern and businesslike to clients. This was especially pertinent given the numbers of women holding the position of marketing manger in client companies. This had risen to approximately 50 per cent by the end of the 1990s (Klein, 2000: 41). This meant that the client – or at least their immediate face – was as likely to be a woman as it was a man. Agencies were clearly concerned that the bias in creative departments risked being seen as anachronistic and conservative by clients.[4]

The debate about creative jobs and gender within the industry was instructive in other ways. It revealed the currency of a circumscribed, but none the less sustained gender critique within the industry and the presence of a formation of practitioners and associated trade journalists concerned to improve the position of women in creative jobs. This grouping was notable for the terms in which they pitched their critique. From Marilyn Baxter's report onwards, journalist and practitioners sought to downplay the political or moral motivations behind the calls for greater gender equality at work.[5] Sensitive to being cast as feminists and the association of social engineering that went with that, practitioners tended to foreground the commercial or human resources problems of continuing gender bias. Marilyn Baxter, for example, in the *Women in Advertising* report that acted as an important spur for this debate, had argued that the industry needed to make better use of the under-exploited talent of its female employees. Others, such as journalist Susannah Richmond and IPA author Debbie Klein, emphasised the commercial advantages of bringing more women into creative jobs by citing figures suggesting that 70 per cent of television advertising was targeted at women and that they accounted for 80 per cent of total consumer expenditure (Klein, 2000; *Campaign*, 11/9/92: 27). Noting the level of complaints received by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), the industry regulator, concerning portrayals of women in advertising, both women contended that breaking down the 'bastions of male prejudice' that were creative departments would allow agencies to produce advertising that avoided the twin pitfalls of either alienating or patronising this key market (*Campaign*, 11/9/92: 27; *Independent*, 15/6/99: 11; *Guardian*, 13/9/99: 4; Klein, 2000).

As the tone of some of these comments suggests, despite their carefully weighted arguments industry critics were robust in making public the scale of the problem they felt the industry faced and in seeking solutions to it. In

doing so, they repeatedly circled around the link between the informal cultures that developed within creative departments and the limited headway women had made in creative jobs. Debbie Klein was typical of the critics as whole when she contended that (what she called) the 'laddish behaviour' that predominated in creative departments represented a fundamental barrier to women's entry into and progress within creative jobs. She cited evidence that suggested that it was perfectly acceptable in many agencies to make lewd remarks to female creatives and that football talk and going drinking as a group was commonplace among male creatives (Klein, 2000: 32). Other evidence revealed the strongly, and at times, wildly excessive masculine cultures within creative departments and a series of individual horror stories from women creatives that conveyed the deep-rooted misogyny of many creative directors. In a *Campaign* article on what it called the 'stone-age attitudes' to gender equality within creative departments, two female creatives recalled that their current creative director called them 'the birds' and that he was apparently embarrassed to offer robust comments on their work in case they burst into tears. Such treatment, however, seemed benign when compared to the initiation rite they were subjected to at another agency. When they arrived for work on their first day, the two women found their entire office covered in sanitary towels as a greeting (*Campaign*, 9/2/96: 30). The agency, *DMB&B*, held the 'Always' sanitary towel account and their male colleagues clearly thought that such an exercise was an appropriate form of welcome. Juvenile initiation rites of this order were not unique to these two young women. In the same article, journalist Emma Hall described how an anonymous male creative director liked to drop his trousers and press his genitals against a glass wall as an initiation ceremony for creatives. Andrea Smith told an even more striking tale in a letter to *Campaign* that followed up this article. While she was particularly direct and her experiences especially troubling, Smith was not untypical when she offered a revealing commentary on what life could be like for a young women in a creative department. She claimed,

> I left advertising 18 months ago after eight years because I no longer wanted to have to deal with childish chauvinism in the creative department. I was routinely humiliated in front of colleagues and had to endure endless criticism and insults . . . I know from fellow female creatives that my experiences aren't unique, and that the successful women in your article are more likely to be the exception than the rule. Is it surprising, then, that some women choose not to subject themselves to abuse? . . . Until creative directors even consider educating themselves and change their Neanderthal attitudes, there is little hope for women creatives (Andrea Smith, letter to *Campaign*, 1/3/96: 24)

It is these workplace cultures associated with creative jobs and the links, more broadly, between gender and creative jobs that this chapter sets out to explore. In particular, picking up on the views of trade commentators like Klein, I am concerned to reflect on the ways the culture of creative departments helped to not only shape the way this work was experienced, but also to colour the image of creative jobs within the industry as strongly, if not unambiguously, masculine forms of endeavour. My focus in doing so is on the creative departments in which my group of practitioners worked. While agencies often made much of the distinctive cultures of their departments, I foreground in what follows the strong continuities that existed across these departments in terms of how creative jobs were thought about and creative people managed. Drawing on the testimonies of the practitioners central to this book, as well as those of the creative directors who ran the departments in which they worked, I explore the ways in which these departments were infused with a set of diffuse, but none the less strikingly gendered representations of the creative person. These representations drew on wider cultural repertoires in which the links between creativity and masculinity were forged. In particular, they owed much to the distinctively masculine set of attributes associated with the figure of the artist, which had deep roots within the cultural milieu of advertising and beyond. To begin with, I explore these conceptions of the creative person active within creative departments and the cultural scripts upon which they drew. Then, I move on to consider the forms of management deployed within these departments and reflect on the way they helped to reproduce the links between creative jobs and particular styles of gendered conduct. Not only did male creative directors often condone excessive behaviour perpetrated by male creatives when it arose, but relations between creative directors and (typically) younger male creatives formed a central dynamic of life in these departments. These relationships were often characterised by both identification and rivalry between older and younger men, and it is the structuring of these homosocial relations that gave the departments, in many instances, their particular character as robustly masculine domains.

creative people   In 1997, D&AD published a booklet to accompany its annual series of Advertising Workshops (D&AD, 1997). Sponsored by the specialist creative headhunters Canna Kendall, the booklet detailed the up and coming programme for the year ahead. Alongside practical matters relating to the workshops, the booklet contained short pieces written by established creatives offering advice on how to succeed at getting into the industry. Among these was a piece by the art director Tiger Savage. Her

advice took the form of a cartoon representing the essential attributes of the successful creative [see figure 5.1]. Identifying various dispositions through reference to parts of the body, Savage's cartoon detailed the importance, for example, of 'eyes – to see things differently', 'gut instinct', pointing to the abdomen, and 'thick skin'. Most striking of all, however, was the depiction of male genitals on her generic creative and the pithy description 'balls (and that goes for the girls too)' at the end of the line pointing to the genitals. The inclusion of these physical characteristics and the subjective dispositions that Savage derived from them suggested an ironic – one might say tongue-in-cheek – reference to the bias in the social make-up of creative jobs within the industry. We might read her cartoon as a wry commentary on the state of gender equality in relation to creative jobs. In another sense, Savage's representation of the generic creative as male appeared to confirm the link between the attributes of the creative person and maleness. Even aspiring female creatives, she seemed to be saying, had to imagine themselves acquiring culturally, if not biologically, the attributes of assertive masculinity.

The link that Savage drew between masculinity and the make-up of the creative person was not unique to her. Her comments drew upon well-established cultural precepts with a currency both within the advertising industry and beyond. Looming large in these cultural repertoires was the long historical shadow cast by the decisive linking, from the eighteenth century onwards, of creativity with the fine arts and, in particular, the positioning of the artist as the privileged possessor of the faculty of creativity. It is around the figure of the artist as a distinct category of person that gendered meanings have most strongly accrued. Parker and Pollock have argued that by the mid-nineteenth century a set of exclusively masculine attributes had accumulated around the artist as a creative individual, throwing up in turn distinctively masculine persona, most notably the bohemian and the pioneer (Parker and Pollock, 1981; Orton and Pollock, 1996). They also show how the gendering of the artist was not without its ambiguities. The attributes of the creative artist – dependent, insecure, expressive, over-emotional and prone to infantile egotism – placed him at odds with more upstanding versions of masculinity. This ensemble of attributes gained much of its power by also being set simultaneously against representations of femininity that suggested that women could at best express taste, rather than true artistic genius. From assumptions that their association with biological reproduction precluded them from the possibility of profound cultural creativity to assertions that the social responsibility of mothering cut against the form of 'passionate discontent' necessary to drive creativity, femininity was understood as incompatible with the full acquisition of the attributes of the creative person. Women could only express creative impulses within such circumscribed domains as the decorative arts.
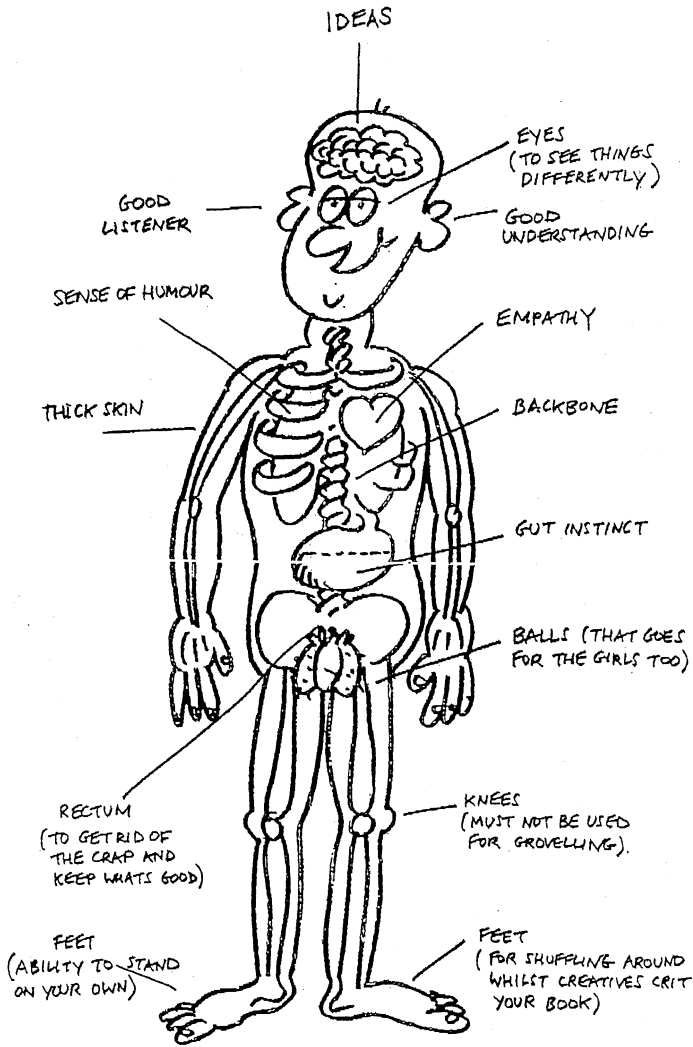
Figure 5.1

A cartoon representing the essential attributes of

the successful creative

(D&AD Worshops 1997)

Pollock and Parker suggest that some of these conceptions of artistic genius were contested through the twentieth century – most notably by conceptual and abstract art – but that the romantic conception of the artist, with its baggage of gendered attributes, has persisted within advertising. It was certainly evident in the public personae of leading advertising creatives at the time when the practitioners I interviewed were starting and establishing their careers. Perhaps the two most noteworthy were Tony Kaye and Paul Arden. Kaye was one of the most sought after commercial directors and was best known for his work for Dunlop, Intercity and Volvo. He had formerly been art director at CDP. Arden was also a freelance director having resigned from his job as creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi in 1993 in order to pursue directing work. Both men cultivated the attributes of the difficult artist and troubled social outsider. In Kaye's case, this included smashing cameras and being generally difficult to work with. Eccentric, wilful and petulant, he described himself at various times as an 'emotional cripple' and 'a fucking alien'.[6] Arden, on the other hand, had a reputation as the account handler's worst nightmare – derived in part from his preparedness to destroy work on the brink of deadlines if he felt it wasn't good enough – and was known for what Graham Fink deftly described as his 'whim of iron' (Fink, 1996).

The flamboyant public profiles of these two men did not go uncontested and competing scripts of the advertising creative served to complexify the links between masculinity and creativity. One alternative version – exemplified in the public persona of consummate ad men like John Hegarty and David Abbott – was that of the creative as aesthete and man of taste. Urbane, sophisticated and thoughtful, Hegarty and Abbott both cut quiet but none the less authoritative figures within the 'creative community' and were without the vanities and maverick individualism of men like Kaye and Arden.[7]

While this script offered an antidote to that of the creative as artist, it tended, however, to reproduce the same link between masculinity and creative jobs. The force of this linkage was underlined by the fact that trade commentators often had difficulty in representing female creatives in anything like an elaborated way. In *Campaign*'s profiles, most notably, these women often appeared anonymous and underdeveloped figures. Alternatively, they occupied wildly eccentric public personas or else appropriated the dominant cultural tropes of masculinity. Tiger Savage herself was a case in point. The assumed name and the flamboyant dress sense for which she was known hinted at more than a dash of eccentricity in her self-presentation.[8] We'll see later how the female creatives I interviewed handled this dominant conception of the creative person in advertising.

The association between masculinity and creativity signalled by Tiger Savage in her D&AD piece recurred within the fabric of the departments in which the group of men central to this book worked. This was despite the formal ambition of these agencies to open up creative jobs and their often strident claims that they were concerned to recruit the best people regardless of gender. Certainly the creative directors who ran the departments in which the practitioners worked – and who were primarily responsible for recruiting them – strongly held to the view that creative recruitment was especially open and based upon conspicuous talent. As one of the creative directors I interviewed angrily and defensively argued, in response to a question that there did not seem to be very many women in the department that he ran, 'I'd hire a dog with a spanner up its arse if the work was good enough'. Another creative director, again underlining the way they had been sensitised to the question of gender bias by the contemporary trade debate, claimed – in response to a question about the qualities he sought in a potential employee – that what he looked for in the candidate was 'that they were a woman'.

This assertive tone was often coupled with claims that they (creative directors) saw very few women among those applying for jobs in creative departments and, hence, were not to blame for the bias. There was some truth in this claim. Certainly the available evidence suggested that women were under-represented on the more specialist training routes into creative jobs and among the body of practitioners signed up with headhunters and within the placement system. Figures from 1996 for the intake on the well-known postgraduate course in art direction and copywriting run by West Herts College, for example, revealed a gender split of 8 women to 27 men (*Campaign*, 9/2/96: 31). This bias was confirmed by the headhunters Canna Kendall who revealed that only 24 of the 108 practitioners they had on their books in 1992 were women (22 per cent), while Andrew Cracknell, a senior creative director, claimed that only one eighth of those who applied for creative placements were women (Dougary, 1994: 25). However, among those students taking degrees in subject areas that were important feeders for employment in creative jobs, the figures suggested no obvious pattern of gender bias. UCAS figures for the period 1995-9, showed that those undergraduates accepted onto courses within the subject field of design studies were split 45 per cent male and 55 per cent female.[9] This headline figure did obscure potential differences in the gender composition of particular degree programmes. The UCAS subject field of design studies certainly included subject areas with rather different traditions of recruitment. Fashion and textiles, for example, had long been a female-dominated enclave (McRobbie, 1998), while industrial and product design were overwhelmingly male-dominated with only 2 per cent of students being female. Graphic design was

an area that was, anecdotally at least, split 50/50 in terms of gender, although graphic design degrees that taught illustration tended to have more women students (David Crowley, per comm.).

While we need to treat these figures with caution, they do suggest that women graduates were not choosing to move into the recruitment process for creative jobs, despite being qualified in the appropriate degrees. While there is no available evidence to fully explain this situation, we might speculate that the reputation of creative departments as 'bastions of male prejudice' (to invoke Susannah Richmond's description) and the more general dominance of men in creative jobs combined to discourage women from applying for this kind of work.

Despite their formal commitment to recruit more women, the creative directors I interviewed, were also complicit in reinforcing the link between masculinity and creative jobs. Their commentaries revealed that the subjective attributes they looked for in creatives were far from neutral. In fact, throughout the interviews I conducted, some strikingly consistent understandings of what made a good creative emerged. These were not all, by any means, exclusively bound up with gender, but it was clear that a set of gender assumptions ran through some of the attributes they were looking for in a prospective art director or copywriter. Perhaps the most significant related to an oft-repeated concern that good creatives should have the capacity to be open and able to see things differently, to be unencumbered by convention and dogma. David French, executive creative director at French Harris Smith, for example, suggested:

> what you're looking for is an openness and an ability to engage other people . . . because you're trying to convince people of perhaps a different point of view and only by being able to disarm them can you inform them. . . . And that skill, that ability comes from an openness and a kind of *naïveté* in the creative person in that they're prepared to try all sorts of things and then articulate it in such a way that it captures the imagination of the person you're talking to.

Later in the interview he elaborated a little further:

> I think good creative people have a sense of fun and *mischief* about them . . . and irreverence . . . and what irreverence breeds is a kind of preparedness to try something which hasn't been tried before (my emphases).

French's attention to the ability of a good creative to approach a brief from a fresh angle and to have the necessary naïveté to try something different was re-iterated by Ian Harding creative director at XYZ. He contended that a creative required, 'egotism, the artistic reflect, the ability to take

something and put a spin on it, without losing the plot. It is the person who can take the brief, spin it around and do something completely odd and yet it is also instantaneously entirely logical, but just done in such an odd way which is, I think, probably art'.

The 'egotism' of creatives was key, for Harding, in underpinning this capacity of creatives to approach problems with fresh insights and not to be swayed from that by others involved in the creative development process. Reflecting on the importance of this 'egotism' he saw it as linked to what he called 'unreasonableness'. He tellingly cited Paul Arden as an exemplar. Arden was the one brilliant creative in London, Harding claimed, and his 'trick is his ability to remain effectively 12 years old': to be childishly unreasonable and uncompromising.

Paul Holt, executive creative director at Klein & Hart, emphasised the childishness and juvenility of good creatives. Alongside detailing the importance of curiosity, he contended,

> The very best creative people, you want them to have their minds in a state of arrested development. When you can see and think like a child, then you tend to produce stunning advertising. If you think of the most famous beer campaigns of the last 10 years, they're little fairy stories with George the bear [for Hofmeister lager]. This is Paddington bear, this is the stuff of a five year old, of bedtime stories and yet it turned John Webster, the creator of these characters, into a multi-millionaire.

A senior colleague of one of the creative directors I interviewed underlined the currency of this idea. He suggested that the creative director in question, an urbane and sophisticated man credited with a good business brain, also had the ability to remain in some small way 'a child at heart'. This recurrent attention to the capacity of good creatives to approach advertising problems through the 'eyes of a child', to be unreasonable, irreverent and awkward, appeared, on first inspection, to have little to do with masculinity. Pushing further at the testimonies of the creative directors revealed how these capacities were linked, in many instances, to deep-rooted ideas about gender that they held. Paul Holt, for example, made it clear in his comments that the attributes that he had described as essential to creativity were primarily to be found in men. Reflecting on his ambition to bring more women into Klein & Hart's creative department, he claimed that he had to strike a balance between 'hiring pretty feisty sassy women' and the need to keep young male creatives in a 'child-like state'. The implication of his comments was that 'feisty' women threatened to force the young male creatives to grow up and thus erode the essential juvenility that was crucial to performing the roles of art director and copywriter. In Holt's comments, then, women appeared as a supplement to the core creative role that was necessarily

performed by young men who possessed the appropriate irreverence, naoveti and unreasonableness to create effective advertising. This link between inventiveness, irreverence and masculinity was more explicitly stated and elaborated upon by David French. Understandably cautious about voicing his views, French nonetheless offered a sustained argument about the links between masculinity and the attributes of a good creative:

> I think within the nature of men is the ability to think inventively more so than in women. Women are about preserving things and keeping the home and . . . you know that all sounds terribly chauvinistic and I don't mean it to but, you know, actually women are from Venus and men are from Mars – it isn't to say that one is better than the other . . . maybe its that [imaginative] leaps are made by, by this irreverence, by breaking things down. Women's attitude is about homemaking, creating security. Men are about breaking boundaries down, that's where great creativity comes from. Maybe it's all to do with the absolute individualism that is required and that is less a trait of women than of men. It seems to me that the male species is able to focus on one thing and not care about anything else and that's what you want. You want that total absorption in trying to resolve the problem. Yes, being open to other things around you, but not trying to always assuage them.

French's analysis offered a powerful sense of the essential links between masculinity and the dispositions required by the effective creative. His contentions drew much of their authority from wider cultural scripts about gender and about creativity. On the one hand, his arguments were informed by popular ideas about sex and gender derived from socio-biology.[10] On the other, they owed much to those longer established cultural repertoires that I have already noted. Such conceptions certainly informed the way the creative directors I interviewed most clearly thought about the ideal creative. These gendered meanings were explicitly present in French's and Holt's comments and were implicitly invoked in Ian Harding's emphasis on the unreasonableness and quirky insights of creatives.

It was not only in the approach to recruitment pursued by creative directors that these representations of the creative person surfaced in departments. They were also active in the cultures that developed within creative departments. Certainly there appeared to be some descriptive fit between the attributes of the ideal creative and the culture of masculine immaturity and juvenility given free rein within creative departments. We have already seen that the trade debate on gender bias in creative jobs had pointed up the privileging of laddish forms of masculinity. The experience of the practitioners I interviewed reaffirmed this. Teresa Walsh, for example, an art director at CTRL, complained about the juvenile behaviour of the men she worked with. She suggested, 'this department's very laddy. When they're

on their own they're really nice, but when they're together they don't even speak to me. . . . It's like they're 16 [the men were in their 30s] and they have things like a Barbie doll tied up by her arms and legs on the office door. And I used to make cakes . . . I made a cake for everyone when it was one of their birthdays – and one of them shouted, 'what's in this, nipple milk!'

Two other young women creatives at Direct Arts, Samantha Jones and Miranda Harris, while they were more phlegmatic about this kind of culture, revealed that they were known in their department by the derogatory titles of the 'tampon twins' or, alternatively, 'Beaver' and 'Pussy'. Paul Holt also complained about the manifestation of this laddishness. As he suggested, 'when I arrived here the atmosphere was unbelievably boysy and macho, and the manifestations of that culture were not terribly pleasant. . . . For example, the Christmas tree was hung with tampax and condoms'.

Evidence of this kind pointed to a certain dovetailing of the attributes of the creative person sought by creative directors and these particular forms of masculine culture. Not that these cultures of masculinity were reducible to the conceptions of the creative as juvenile and irascible that we have looked at. Clearly, the forms of masculinity privileged within these departments were shaped by other factors. In particular, the young male creatives were able to draw on wider cultural resources in living out their gender identity at work and these cultural scripts – particularly that associated with the cult of laddishness within popular culture – were not reducible to ideas about the creative person. None the less, there was a degree of assonance or fit between these forms of subjectivity. Understanding this linkage, however, means reflecting further on the internal life of creative departments. Why was it that 'laddishness' was able to flourish? Why did these forms of masculinity become dominant? Why were the cultures of departments gendered as masculine in this specific way? Answering these questions means looking at the role of creative directors in the management of departments and opening up their contribution to the cultures that developed.

managing creative people

You have to flatter their egos. Its an enormous process of charming them, persuading them, treating them a bit like naughty schoolchildren (Tim Bell, in Fletcher, 1990: 67).

Because outstanding creative ability is so rare, the creative manager who finds and employs talented people must learn to live with their whims and tantrums (Winston Fletcher, in Fletcher, 1990: 32).

> Creativity isn't a science. It's an art. It's blood sweat and tears. It's about throwing expensive televisions through plate glass windows. Its about doing nothing for two weeks and then drinking unfeasible amounts of vodka before coming up with a brilliant idea two minutes ahead of the client meeting, and expressing it in a crayon drawing on the back of a bank statement. You can't distill that. You can't 'manage' that. You just have to find brilliant people and let it happen (*Campaign* 'Creative Conference' advert, 2/3/01: 19).

How creative departments ought to be managed and how creative directors should get the best out of creative people were central preoccupations for the advertising industry. They had even generated a small literature of their own.[11] Approaches to these problems were typically bound up with those conceptions of the creative person that I discussed in the previous section. As the quotes from Tim Bell, Winston Fletcher and the *Campaign* advert suggest, there was a collective wisdom within the industry that a good creative director had to somehow create the conditions within which the temperamental, irrational, childishness of creatives could flourish. We have already got a sense from Chapter 2 what this tended to mean in organisational terms. Many agencies created a protected space within the structure of the business where creative teams were partly shielded from the commercial and bureaucratic logics that drove the organisation. Free – in the words of Martin Smith – to make the necessary imaginative leaps to bring clients' briefs to life, creatives often existed within a sequestered space within the internal structure of the agency. This didn't mean that they were totally outside organisational logics and creative directors played an important role in linking creative departments to the wider demands of agency business. More than that, the generally loose organisational structure of agencies and their weakly bureaucratised processes gave creative directors particular influence and authority over the departments they ran. Like many other so-called 'creative businesses', the main constraints upon the running of agencies tended to be set by the external demands of clients. Moreover, the management of work, as Scase and Goffeee have suggested, was shaped by project deadlines rather than by highly bureaucratised work routines (Scase and Goffee, 1995: 36). The role of creative directors, then, involved not so much bureaucratic control over the creative labour process, so much as inspiring and stimulating creatives and overseeing the quality of their work. As such it rested upon a form of charismatic rather than bureaucratic authority. For the creative directors I interviewed, a central part of this role was to protect and reinforce the separateness of the creative department from the rest of the agency. Geoff Rowlands, creative director at Rowlands and Partners, expressed this view particularly forcefully. He suggested,

> It is part of my nature to put the creative department against the rest of the agency. And protect them. I'm always shouting at account people or planners. I never have a go at creative people. I am their champion. At another agency, I put up a sign next to the creative department which stated 'Us- this way', Them – that way'. My soul is in the creative department. Spiritually I'm part of that.

Steve Buckland, creative director at Jones Walters, also emphasised the physical and symbolic separation of the creative department he ran. The department was based in a suite of offices around an open central area and demarcated from other parts of the agency, notably the adjacent account planners, by a large heavy door. Buckland joked as we walked through it before I interviewed him that it should have a sign on it addressed to other agency folk stating 'Abandon all hope ye who enter here'. His reference to the sign reinforced the idea of a boundary around the creative department and he underscored this by describing it as a 'community'. Pointing to the open area enclosed by the offices and replete with apple Macintosh computers, he suggested, 'this is the village green'.

Buckland's oddly quaint, bucolic conception of the creative department was rendered in more contemporary terms by David French. For French, the creative department was less a 'village community', more a club:

> I think the creative department is like a club, its like a place you come to have a good time. It's a place you come to relax, to talk about the things you would like to talk about. So by a club I mean a place where you go not to necessarily work but to be inspired . . . I am a great believer that if you're enjoying something you're doing it better. It is about how to get to the real you . . . how you get to that self. If I can create an atmosphere which allows that to happen, then I'm well down the road of making this a good place to be.

French's conception of the department as a club suggested that it was a space, on the one hand, defined by common, shared interests and bonds, but was also, on the other, an exclusive space with definite barriers to entry. Like both Rowlands' and Buckland's views of the creative department, French sought to emphasise both the strength of the internal relations of the department and its separation from the rest of the agency. French's approach to the department he ran was significant in other ways. It revealed a more general feature of the way departments were run that was not evident in the comments of Rowlands or Buckland but was in practice widely subscribed to. This was the emphasis on fun and relaxation as essential elements in the organisation of creative departments. French is clear in his comments on the rationale for this. It was bound up with getting

the best work out of creative people. However, it is worth reflecting on how this conception of creative departments as 'fun spaces' was realised. At French Harris Smith, where French worked, it took the form, among other things, of providing pool tables, soft chairs and an encouragement of forms of 'play'. Steve Dempsey, one of the men I interviewed who had worked at French Harris Smith, recalled that the department was often brought to life by people strumming guitars. Such a scenario was far from unique. Katy Smith, creative director at Henry Brown, described the creative department as being 'filled with a pool table, some chairs, a Nintendo and a television'. It was a familiar picture of what a creative department looked like. Marcus Lawson, who had worked at Hepworth Rowe, even recalled that the young creatives were allowed to play football down the office corridors of the creative department. What is notable about these 'relaxed' cultures is the way they connected to established forms of masculine culture. In other words, creative directors, in many instances, encouraged creatives to express themselves in the workplace through activities derived from young male culture outside of work. The over-exuberant manifestations of this – such as that evidenced by Teresa Walsh and Paul Holt, for example – were generally condoned since what creative directors were looking for was an environment in which these practitioners could create great work. Other rituals of office life directly orchestrated by creative directors in order to strengthen the social bonds of the department also tended to draw, tangentially at least, on the stock of young male culture. Weekly or monthly department meetings, for example, were lubricated by beer and pizza.

There were other features of the way departments were run that were even more important in helping to shape the culture of masculinity that developed across creative departments. These were the management practices that formed the corollary to the emphasis on relaxation that I have just described. In setting out to motivate their charges, the creative directors I interviewed also recurrently emphasised the role of intense competition as integral to how they built the necessary pressure on teams to get them to produce good work. This emphasis on competition was allied to robust styles of management. Andy Hanby, creative director at Paul and Rogers, was more explicit than most in elaborating on how he motivated teams. He remarked that:

> creative people are generally incredibly lazy up until the last three days before the work is needed. And then they work like idiots. And I try and create this last three-day culture – which is basically, everyone is given a chance to work on a brief. I will go round each team, look through the work. Teams get eliminated as the process goes on. So, if one team cracks the brief, I leave two teams out in the cold. [They] will fight

it out amongst themselves to try and be better than the one team who've cracked it. I will take them off it, which is a kind of psychological trick to say 'you're work isn't good enough'. That will generally make the teams stay behind later and see if they can get something better. And it works on some occasions.

This ruthless system of competition over briefs was given added piquancy by the fact that Hanby and his partner were also involved in the competition. Explaining the reason for this, Hanby argued,

The creative department consists of 5 teams (including myself). That's one of my philosophies. . . . If the creative director isn't seen to be producing work that everyone else wants to have done, then there's no sense of competition. The department becomes terribly lethargic. I want them to get my job. I want them to beat me!

Mark Stephenson, though he ran a slightly larger department consisting of eight teams, placed similar emphasis to Hanby on competition over briefs and used the fear of losing out on a brief in order to motivate teams. The aim, as he succinctly put it, was to 'get them staying an extra two hours at work' in the hope of coming up with the goods. Geoff Rowlands again developed a similar approach. He felt strongly that creative people needed competition and recalled one of the forms he had used in the past to foster this:

We (GR and another creative director) oversaw between 12 and 20 teams. And we set them against each other. We hot-housed them. It was called the 'playpen'. Part of me thought it was cruel and a very negative system. But they didn't. Every Christmas they used to take me and Mark out. You know, it was a bit like Uriah Heep. It was hard in that it expunged people who . . . were not as good. But I found it really enjoyable, working with them in that hothouse atmosphere. So I feel creatives need competition. They tend to need competition. They manifestly need competition. The people that are the [foot] soldiers, the writers and the art directors, will tend to compete and will be very aware of what the others are doing . . . I've even had fights. Creatives literally fighting over briefs. It's like school.

This emphasis on competition and robust styles of management was also evident in the comments from Steve Buckland.

I'm not convinced that the right way to run a creative department is to have a nicesy-nicesy department, where everyone gets on and its all lovey-dovey and flower-power. Some competitive edge and a little bit of angst going round – 'this bloody person got

that brief'- is absolutely vital and I think that if this place has a fault its that we do get slightly cosy over time and we need to stir ourselves up and be a bit more competitive, be a bit more aggressive. I worry that I haven't made it all a bit too orderly and even. There's not a great deal of horseplay that goes on. The wildest thing that we've got is the table football table. At CDP we used to have 2 snooker tables in the creative department and people would play in the afternoons.

Taken together these testimonies tell us much about how the management of creative teams worked to create the conditions in which assertiveness and the ruthless pursuit of self-interest became the attributes most required by teams to succeed. What creative directors were aiming for was the generation of the necessary levels of creative angst and tension between teams to forge good advertising. While this emphasis appeared to pull in a different direction from the emphasis on informality that we encountered earlier, it is clear that both the more directive interventions of managers and the encouragement of 'fun' and 'play' were complimentary strategies. 'Freeing up' creatives to help them generate ideas and then applying the appropriate pressure to crystallise out these ideas were integral elements in the management of creative teams. Both worked to cultivate an atmosphere that not only encouraged creatives to develop thick skins (as Savage had suggested) and hard hearts, but also made tension-releasing rituals an important part of the informal life of the departments. As the creative directors themselves recognised, with so much at stake for teams in the competition over briefs, handling not only the pressure of coming up with good ideas, but also the associated feelings of hostility and envy towards others, required various means of letting off steam. While there was nothing inevitable about the linkage, it is possible to see why laddish exuberance and juvenility might have been resources that enabled the young men to handle these conditions with some degree of comfort and success and why creative directors were prepared to condone this behaviour.

The accounts given by Hanby et al are striking in other ways. They reveal the closeness of the relations between creative directors and the teams they managed and the intensity of feelings this generated. This was typically expressed through both identification with the teams and a sense of rivalry with them. Both elements were clearly closely related. Rivalry sprung from the sense that both parties (the creative director and the team) were in competition for the same prize (the brief and beyond that recognition) and shared similar motivations and ambitions. Both Hanby and Rowlands, for example, reveal this dual intensity of the management relationship very clearly. In Hanby's case it is expressed through the challenge of teams to beat him, whereas for Rowlands it is evident in the enjoyment of working

closely with teams in the 'hot-house' atmosphere of the creative department. These intense relations with (usually) younger men did not only encourage generally positive feelings of closeness. Steve Buckland's comments – and particularly his drift into auto-analysis – are particularly interesting in this regard. What surfaces towards the end of the passage I quoted earlier, is a great anxiety about his standing as man and manager. Perhaps, he wonders, he was becoming a bit soft and complacent. The department he ran, taking its cue from him, had become 'too orderly'. Mark Stephenson also expressed this anxiety about becoming soft and complacement. In his account it was combined with the identification with certain young male teams. Reflecting on why he liked hiring young placement teams he revealed:

> I get a big buzz out if it because they're scary these guys [the placements]. And that's very stimulating for me. You know, it keeps my eye on the ball. If I get too, you know [stuck in my ways]. . . . I have to keep thinking freshly about things otherwise these guys are gonna get ahead of me. I like to be a bit scared. I also get genuine pleasure out of taking people on and seeing them do well.

The closeness of the relations between male creative directors and younger male creatives evidenced here raises questions about how these men (the creative directors) managed women creatives. Getting at these relationships was extremely difficult in the interviews. The creative directors were generally reluctant to be drawn on this issue or else were insensitive to how women might cope within the departments they ran. Andy Hanby, for example, in characterising his department, suggested, 'ours tends to be terribly lager loutish and football-based. If you're a woman in that environment, you'd have to, I'd imagine, fit in'. However, occasionally a creative director would let down his guard and reveal something about these relations. Steve Message was a case in point:

> I have to walk down here [the corridor where the creatives were based] every so often and scream at teams about something that's happened. I have to know I can tell them off. In the past – we have a few all girl teams here – I've had tears in the toilet. And men (sic) don't know how to deal with that. I think people (sic) have a problem disciplining women. In the way that men turn round to each other and tell each other to 'fuck off'.

The passage is telling in the way Message switches from the personal to the collective (from 'I' to 'men' and 'people') in order to distance himself in the telling of the account from the difficulties he clearly had in managing women. More than that, however, it reveals the way management relations

were, in Message's case, highly gendered. This was further underlined by the way Liz Sheldon, one of the female creative directors I interviewed, described her approach to management. While she shared some of the ruthlessness of her male peers, she set out to demonstrate to me her deployment of distinctively feminine management skills:

> I think that male creative directors are generally rather heavy handed. And I think women are different. My view of how to get great work out of creative people is to treat them as toddlers. . . . If a toddler's learning to walk, if it's surrounded by loving adults who, every time it falls down, pick it up, kiss it better and say 'you can do it', they learn to walk. If on the other hand, every time they fall over the adults said, 'you're a fucking idiot', they'd never learn to walk. . . . So my view is, you support people, you pick them up, you say 'you can do it'. After a bit, if they can't do it, then they have to go.

Sheldon's comments, like those of the male creative directors, reveal how deeply a set of gendered assumptions informed the approach to the management of creative people. For the men who formed the overwhelming majority of creative directors, their relationships with typically younger men were structured by both identification and rivalry with them. Both dynamics revealed the intensity of relations between men within these social relations. It suggested – as Steve Message's comments made explicit – that creative directors might have difficulties managing women, particularly if they failed to fit into the robust masculine cultures that they fostered. Taken together, what these accounts reveal is how management techniques within creative departments set some of the conditions for assertive forms of masculinity to become institutionalised. The actions of creative directors were integral to the creation of spaces of work in which 'shrinking violets' – whether male or female – had little chance of flourishing.

conclusion   I have ended by reflecting on the role played by management practices in shaping the cultures associated with creative jobs and have suggested that the accounts given by creative directors reveal one of the ways in which the link between masculinity and creative jobs was reproduced within the industry. This linkage was also forged by those deeper understandings of creativity and the creative person that were active within departments. Taken together, they suggest that the jobs of art director and copywriter were understood – implicitly and often explicitly – as masculine forms of endeavour; in short, as men's jobs. This explains why, even though

they claimed to want to recruit more women creatives and sometimes publicly criticised the juvenility of the young men they worked with, creative directors were locked into a way of thinking about creative jobs that was shot through with gendered understandings of the creative person in advertising. These understandings were underscored by the forms of identification that linked creative directors with the male creatives they managed, and intensified by the sense of separateness and difference from the rest of the agency that characterised the creative departments that I have discussed. Creatives were seen as a special case and creative departments were seen to fall outside many of the normal organisational rules that guided the internal life of agencies. By extension this 'exceptionalism' and the peculiarities of the job constituted further blocks to opening up creative jobs to gender equality.

It is clear why these characteristics of creative departments and their general recidivism regarding gender equality so exercised other practitioners, especially those armed with an elaborated gender critique. In fact, it is possible to see in the way these department were viewed by other agency folk, a division within the gender culture that existed within agencies. Planners loomed large amongst the critics of gender inequality in creative jobs and these practitioners tended to be those with the most socially progressive attitudes in advertising – certainly if an industry survey is to be believed (Campaign Report, 22/11/96: 3–6). The debate about gender and creative jobs that I began this chapter with hints at this disjuncture and the existence of differently constituted gender cultures within and across agencies associated with different formations of practitioners.

The robust gender cultures of creative departments raise a number of other questions. How did the young creatives themselves negotiate these cultures? To what extent did they bring to the job dispositions and cultural resources that helped to shape these cultures as robustly masculine? How did the performance of such strongly gendered jobs shape their subjective identities as men? And how did women creatives find a place and an identity for themselves within this culture? It is these questions that I will turn to in the next two chapters.