

Branding the Agency Emotionally

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Introduction

Advertising, creativity, and emotion

This article is drawn from data gathered as part of an on-going interview based research project on work in the creative industries. Descriptively, the creative industries refers to businesses which are concerned with the production of textual products, such as broadcasting, film, publishing, and British advertising, which we use as our case study¹. The creative industries are viewed as important economic sectors and key source areas of present and future growth as well as export earnings (Garnham 2005). The research also explores processes of creativity in advertising.

The term creativity appears across a broad range of fields, for example; the arts, in psychoanalytic aesthetic theory, clinical therapeutic fields and advertising. Creativity in relation to art has a long history, usually associated with the imaginative processes of the individual artist. More recently, the idea has emerged as a discursive term found across a range of policy developments concerned with managing the impact of technological change, on post-industrial employment for example (Pope 2005). We will return to this below in our discussion of advertising and the contemporary labour market. This paper is not primarily a discursive or ideological analysis; however we draw attention to creativity as an example of one of a small number of terms that function predominantly as ‘foundational ideological concepts’ (Price 2013). This refers to creativity as a concept which is almost always positive in its inflection; associated with potential growth, fulfilment, well-being and therapeutic benefits. This is significant as we are interested in the inner responses of individuals to discursive encounters. As we show in our case study, creative processes involve intense emotional work for individuals and also groups.

¹ See DCMS <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=11136366> for an official descriptive account of this sector. See also UK government’s recent marketing campaign ‘Creative Britain’ www.uktl.gov.uk.

Advertising is striking because it is implicated in the production of the representational raw material for a range of potentially affective, generative discourses and representations, associated with what has been called the affective turn. Helen Powell has shown that advertisers have played a significant role in the emotionalisation of culture. The everyday processes of advertising production take account of the inner world and the relationships between the product and its potential contribution to emotional life (2009: 97). Products can us feel good. The strategic work associated with this production is the creation of brand identities for products, services and institutions and the manufacture of communication campaigns to promote both new and established brands to potential customers. Branding is associated with generating positive connotations and feelings which turn into affective attachments to a product. Hence emotion and creativity are consciously linked as strategies in advertising production. Competing advertising agencies are also conscious of their own brand images, hence the title of this article that alludes to one agency's strategic employment of a discourse of emotion, in this case fear, to articulate and brand the company's distinctive creative approach. In this digital advertising agency to which we have given the pseudonym *TROPE*, finished products are emphatically not artworks produced by individual artists, but the result of a division of labour amongst a group who create to make money for the agency and for the client.

Through the example of one employee, Peter, we explore how fear is reworked into a discourse of creative work for its employees. We acknowledge the social construction of identities, in the context of 'settings, practices, relations and biographies' whilst recognizing the interplay between 'intrapsychic, intrasubjective, and discursive processes' (Hollway 2008: 141). In the case of *TROPE* the study examines the emotional impact that fear has on the experience of individual workers as they navigate the space between the group and the agency. This study draws on post-Kleinian object relations theories to understand the tensions, affective responses and unconscious processes experienced by individuals and groups in this specific creative context. Before moving onto our case study it is necessary to outline the challenges advertising faces in the contemporary labour market and the impact of technological change in the digital networked era.

Flexible Labour in the Creative Industries: advertising

In recent years interest has grown in the nature and effects of work in the creative industries. The common perception of work in such industries is one that is essentially positive. Work is often seen as vocational and generally appealing as it holds out the possibility of ‘good work’; work that is fulfilling, well-paid and with a degree of autonomy, and of course, greater possibilities for creativity than other forms of employment (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011). (We would support this anecdotally from our experience of teaching media studies to undergraduates whose perception is that work in advertising and the media is a well paid fulfilling career). Despite positive indications, a range of recent studies paint a different picture associated with the negative features of flexible capitalism in this sector (Ursell 1998, 2000). This includes the casualisation of labour and the discourse of ultra flexibility; which in real terms, means long hours, de-skilling, low pay and temporary contracts. For many employees this indicates a range of unpleasant personal consequences and difficulties accompanied by high levels of stress and low self-esteem.

Mark Deuze assigns the term ‘liquid lives’ to the new conditions of work in contemporary media industries (2007: 233-42). Networking is one of the main features of this liquid life; where professionals have conventional allegiances to their company and/or clients, but crucially they must also be plugged into wider professional communities via networks. The transitory, flexible and liquid employment conditions are unlikely to change for most professionals in this sector. The constant reinvention of the self associated with flexible labour market discourse has been found to represent a shift from company to career in advertising (Nixon 2003: 90). These developments also suggest a challenge to the agency in terms of harnessing the loyalty of key creative players and monopolizing their creative energies in order to make the experience of their work for the agency satisfying. The aim, therefore, is to forestall creative personnel drawing on networked connections with competitors or freelanced groups who can always, potentially, make them a better offer. It is essential that agencies maintain a core talent pool whose input permeates all levels of the creative process and particularly the work of specialist teams and groups that are common in advertising. That is why it is timely for us to explore how the processes of group creativity are managed intuitively, and experienced individually, in the commercial context.

To some degree *TROPE* epitomises the ‘good work’ discourse we have described. Employees

say that they enjoy their work, have excellent working conditions and they are well-paid. However, this article argues that the use of fear as a brand ethos is symptomatic of an attempt to manage the unconscious anxieties of the employees who are not immune to the wider negative trends associated with the flexible labour market outlined in sociological accounts. This alerts us to the need for a psychosocial understanding of the discursive and the intimate relations between individuals and groups.

Method and Data

The project began serendipitously as we were able to use an existing relationship we had with the agency who agreed to let us have access as researchers. The pilot study consisted of five interviews with middle managers in various roles. Free Association Narrative Interviewing was adopted with the aim of generating narratives that are factual and also offer access to the emotional significance for the interviewee (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). We avoided 'why' questions and enquired about projects that had been successful and worked well and those that had not, as we anticipated these questions would generate narratives about emotionally significant work experiences. We also asked employees to '...tell us about fear' in the company.

Data analysis is based on the idea that interviews are intersubjective and the data generated emerges from the subjectivities of researcher and researched. Therefore, attention was also paid to the responses of the interviewers. We borrowed ideas from what can colloquially be called the 'Dubrovnik method'² or more formally from the in-depth hermeneutic European critical theory tradition known as 'the interpretation group method' (see Hollway & Volmerg 2010, Bereswill, Morgenroth & Redman 2010). This method was developed for analysis of qualitative empirical interview data texts and is particularly useful at the early stages of data interpretation for emergent themes, categories, concepts and to help identify potential theoretical tools to help understand the data. This approach is sensitive to unconscious processes, such as countertransference, through a systematic analysis of manifest and latent

² This method has been brought to an Anglophone audience very recently through the Special Edition of *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* (2010) on the work of Alfred Lorenzer. However the method is practiced each year as a major practical component of the annual conference of the International Group for Psychosocietal Research which is held in Dubrovnik and both authors are member of this group.

meanings.³ The method involves listening to the interviews and reading transcripts in-depth and also being aware of our own responses and other associations. Affective and emotional responses are used as component parts of the overall evidence. Attention is drawn to those parts of the data which provoke a strong reaction in the researcher, potentially forms of knowledge gained from emotional experience as described by Wilfred Bion (1962).

In summary our prevailing sense was one of discomfort about the seemingly contradictory feeling of sadness generated by an interview with Peter, on which we focus here. We also found that the emotional *tone* associated with the utopian view of the agency, evident in most of the interviews, was at odds with what the interviewee was saying and it is this contradiction that we focus on. We contend that this contradiction illuminates something of the complex experiences associated with negotiating individuality and adaptation to the group.

Our analytical approach is informed by theoretical perspectives drawn from psychoanalysis, which explain organizational behaviour in terms of ‘... what is going on in the psyche of each individual’ (De Board 1978: 24). Throughout life, the individual psyche faces the challenge of adaptation to the various groups in which it finds itself a member. Individuals must make contact with the mores and customs of the group and also the group’s conscious and unconscious *emotional* life (Bion 1961). This is relevant as *TROPE* must continually balance individuality and group identity and as we show, this creates unconscious tensions. Bion would argue that individual/ group tensions are one of the main causes of unconscious anxiety in groups. In phantasy the group threatens individual distinctiveness; in turn an individual member can threaten the group through their individuality (Bion 1961: 141). Methodologically, to allow us to grasp this tension, we adopted an approach that works from the individual to the group.

This article does not make wide-ranging or generalisable claims about either creativity or work. However distinctive groups do not exist in isolation, therefore, we contend that a study of the tensions faced by a specific group contributes to understanding some of the emotional

³ Usually the method involves an interpretation ‘panel’ to work intensively on a small piece of data (see Hollway & Volmerg 2010) We are grateful to colleagues in the International Group for Psychosocietal Research for work on our interview data in interpretation panels.

experiences of work in contemporary neo-liberal labour market. Debate also exists about the relationship between use of a small part of the data and the ability to grasp the whole which we cannot resolve here. However, our reason for choosing this interviewee's particular extract was in part due to our strong affective responses to the interview. Peter's biography is unique and at the same time it depicts a fascinating trajectory commonly found in advertising employment, which is that of changing direction from an 'art' career (artists and writers for instance) to the creative industries. This is of interest, as creativity in this industry is directly related to the wishes of the client and the commercial demands of the agency who, as we were told firmly want to 'make money and not art'.

***TROPE* and Fear**

Sociologically, this company is characterised most strikingly by the youth and gender of its employees; the majority of the creative and technology team members are young men. The senior management are also males in their late 30s and early 40s and some have been with the company since its inception. Overall, it would be pertinent to state that the *TROPE* brand is gendered. This can be described as a hybrid masculine identity formed out of versions of contemporary masculinity including: the 'new man', the 'new lad', the 'corporate' and the 'casual' (Edwards 1997). The *TROPE* man can talk business at the highest corporate levels, he is comfortable and highly proficient with new technologies and is 'down with the lads'. We plan further articles which specifically address the gendered nature of work in this agency as it is not possible here to do justice to what is clearly a complex set of gendered formations. Whilst this is not our central focus, we note that contemporary versions of masculinity are media created and media driven constructions which advertising is heavily involved in producing (Edwards 1997). We recognise that there are always subjective processes in play in relation to the construction of identities through representation. We would argue that advertisers' involvement in such constructions creates definite tensions for male advertising agents in terms of both living forms of masculinity like a brand, and being self consciously aware of the nature of its construction. It has been noted that psychosocially the experience of masculinity in contemporary culture is uneasy and uncertain. The demands of the liquid

existence and a work culture that discursively demands fearlessness together set up a curious set of emotional tensions for young men working in this agency.⁴

Ethnographically the office can be described as open plan and this spatial openness is linked to the formation of designated ‘soft spaces’, designed for informal communication and play. *TROPE*’S philosophy incorporates a form of experiential learning, as employees are encouraged to draw on their emotional and life experiences to inform their work. The philosophy was summarised by one interviewee as: ‘if you want to understand how to sell football shoes you have to go and play football with arsey teenagers’. The management ethos is one of openness. It is democratic in the sense that anyone at any level of the company can have an idea and in theory, it will be valued and considered by the creative and management teams. Forums are held for employees to share ideas and discuss problems. All of this suggests good management practice and a healthy business environment.

Our interest in this company began when one of its executives, we have called ‘Ed’, came to give a talk to our students. He presented a show reel, which is also shown to prospective clients and below we have recreated the opening slide.



⁴Beynon (2002) has shown that successful masculinity is associated with a sophisticated level of technological competence and usage. Bainbridge and Yates (2007) have also explored the use of media technologies to manage the fantasies and traumas associated with unmourned masculinity as a feature of the contemporary ‘crisis’ of masculinity.

Ed went on to explain that the agency aims to be ‘the best at all times’. This is achieved he claims, because of their approach to creativity. Ed asserted that it is only possible to be ‘*creative in the presence of fear*’. He explained that fear meant ‘not being the best’ and being ‘beaten’ by another agency, and for *TROPE* being beaten was not an option. This idea of creativity in the presence of fear shocked us as it seemed aggressive, particularly when promoted to potential clients and also counter-intuitive. It is easy to imagine that it might be difficult to be creative if one is under pressure and fearful.

Some studies of individual creative processes in art highlight anxiety and ambivalence (Carabine forthcoming). Psychoanalytic aesthetic theories generally point to the art work as a reflection of the inner world of the individual. For instance a Freudian approach would view art works as a gateway to the neuroses and repressed wishes and desires of the individual. Donald Winnicott (1971, 1963/1990) and Christopher Bollas (1992, 1995) have focussed on the importance of living creatively as a necessary feature of a healthy and fulfilled self. A large amount of literature exists that theorises the therapeutic aspects of creativity in groups. However, few accounts exist that can explain the relationship between fear and processes of creativity in contemporary advertising, marked as it is by a division of labour and a dynamic relationship with digital technologies.

The initial set of data produced some striking but puzzling contradictions around ‘fear’, creativity and the agency which we will explore further in our research. The first series of interviews was replete with statements and narratives about working at the agency which were almost utopian. Interviewees used expressions like ‘delightful’, ‘the best’, ‘really nice’, ‘fun’ and they described their client base as ‘really cool’. Work relationships are described as ‘intense friendships’ and the company is democratic and egalitarian. Ostensibly, the commercial success of the company could be seen as indicative of a healthy well-functioning company. On the other hand our initial interviews showed risk and fear is also present in the *experience* of individual employees. Employees described anxiety and fear associated with work in the following terms: ‘risky’, ‘scary’, ‘risk aversion’, ‘fear motivates’, ‘fear of not doing good work’, ‘fear of not being the best’, ‘will I be replaced?’, ‘we work crazy hours

and crazy deadlines'⁵. We will argue that this 'fear' is different, but also inextricably linked, to the fear articulated by the agency in its public persona.

Artist to Adman

Scenically, Peter's biography evokes the idea of the struggling artist. Peter's entry into the digital realm of advertising typifies the culture of learning through experience out of a playful engagement with new interactive technologies and at a time when careers in digital media had no formal training or entry routes.

I did a degree in fine arts and painting. And this was never really a career option that was on my radar. So when I left college I was struggling as a young artist in London, trying to make a living. And actually a family member set up an internet company in the early 90s and they were desperate for help, and I knew a bit of how to do computer design so I started working for them for a day or two a week. And then I learnt a bit about animation and erm ... that gradually led into me and where I am now. So it was a bit of a change from my artistic practice, to a commercial job but it's been brilliant. So I haven't looked back. ... I kind of grew up with the [new] software and programme. If I look back now ten years later I would be terrified of it. But I was lucky to kind of grow up at that point.

The theme of 'growing up' appears here in Peter's biographical narrative and we propose that this involves a set of processes of change and development associated with the reality of the group. It also points to his awareness of the commercial reality which precipitates the letting go of a more individuated form of creative practice.

This connection is explored further through Peter's responses to our questions about 'fear' as presented explicitly by the company and working at *TROPE*. Peter explains:

⁵ As we have noted there are clearly some complex processes associated with masculinity which we cannot do justice to in this paper. We note here for instance that fear and risk can also be seen as attractive and desired by men and experiencing fear often forms part of gender specific rites of passage initiation.

It's [fear] not written down as a company manifesto but there's something about risk. [] What I always love [about *TROPE*] and what one of the first things someone said was, it is hard in this industry or as a creative agency, because you are only as good as your last job, your last piece of work and I've been to places where they see that as a real problem. This isn't a business model we (other agencies) can use. But someone here said we really relish that and that drives us every time. We ARE only as good as our last piece of work and you've GOT TO motivate yourself every time and I really like that attitude. So there is a kind of fear in that, thinking, worried, about long term strategies.

The gendered identity of the agency has been highlighted. There is a sense in the extract that this is a young guns masculine approach to business, which might account in part for the adoption of the apparent counter-intuitive strategy of aligning the agency's brand ethos with a negative emotion. Concerning the agency's business model this does seem to run counter to how most agencies develop their brand equity over time; typically through emphasising long standing relationships with important clients, association with leading creative practitioners and the winning of industry awards. Yet running counter to accepted wisdom and intuition seems to have paid off for the agency, in terms of its reputation, growth, and its commercial successes. Psychosocially, we are interested in what might be involved in managing the group in the light of this seeming paradox and how it is experienced by individuals.

Following on from the idea about only being as good as your last job, a principle that Peter said he really appreciated, the interviewer asked Peter about a job he enjoyed and was proud of. Rather than going back to his *last* job, Peter told her about his *first* job at the company when the company was involved in designing a game to promote a film. Here he was also introduced to the company mentality.

That [first job] was an indoctrination by fire. We had some quite crazy time lines and I had to get a whole team to work together and it was the only way we could deliver the launch date and the specific events this thing had to be ready for. [Project detail] It's a shame it [the game] is not living anymore and [lived] only for a while. It got taken down. But we achieved team cohesion.

We were drawn to Peter's terminology as indoctrination points to the processes of inculcation into the company mentality. Here he also learnt something about the group; that only by

working as a team could they meet the demands of the project. The emotional tone was melancholic when Peter talked about his sadness when this project was ‘taken down’.

This feeling of loss in relation to objects, in particular games and apps the team had designed, was found in other interviews. When the interviewer then asked about a job that was difficult and *didn't* work well Peter chose to discuss the *same* project and this inconsistency at the level of the narrative suggested some ambivalence and disappointment in relation to the object/game:

It's one of those things where you are trying to be a bit like a swan what you are trying to display to people at the front is very simple and smooth and graceful and under the hood there is a lot of technology involved, a lot of points, connection points, and where there is the potential for things to go wrong. It [project] was one of those things I look back and it was like doing a marathon. You feel pleased when it's done. Maybe it's the nature of the company, as I 'm getting on in years. There's always the potential for risk or problems to arise [] you could say not enough people got to see it or play the game because it was a large body of work and not everyone buys it. So although technically and all the rest of it works but the size of the project was hard to get people involved as much as we would have liked. We didn't have enough time to market it. Things didn't pan out. It was like leading a horse to water. Some who played it enjoyed it but there are so many games out there.

This campaign was recognised by the industry but there was a lack of enthusiasm amongst the public, due to the fact it did not stand out. The extracts also point to the ephemeral nature of the objects produced. It is not difficult to imagine why someone who had planned to be a fine artist may have some attachment to the created object and a wish for it to be recognised and to live on. In traditional views of art there is a sense of the artist's oeuvre and development over time with emphasis placed on preservation of the object. In sharp contrast, the agency because of commercial demands is only interested in the moment and discourages attachment to particular campaign products. With age and experience Peter also sees the limitation and risks associated with constantly pushing boundaries and making such processes look graceful and easy.

Despite Peter's training as a fine artist, something that suggests individual creativity, his job at *TROPE* is in fact as a 'bridge' between those who work purely on creative ideas and those whose job it is to realise those ideas technologically. Peter explains:

When I started my career I was far more interested in the quality of the work it was all about making sure whatever the project the coding and design were perfect and *I wasn't interested in all the rest of it, or the people I was working with.* And that's what has kind of changed and now I'm more focussed on people in the team than the work and I am maybe in a better relationship. The really interesting projects aren't things you can do on your own. I went through a phase as a benevolent dictator you really want them to do it the way *you* want to do it. And now I am more just setting up playgrounds and areas.

As Peter looks back on his job at *TROPE*, the major change was the shift from working as an individual, to one who is primarily concerned with the group. In the extract we think Peter's description of himself as a 'benevolent dictator', who wanted things his own way, is an indication of a form of omnipotence associated with individual art production. This is also indicated in his exclusive focus on the object. Over time, faced with the realities of the group and a creative division of labour he relinquishes the object and significantly, comes to believe that the *most* important work can only be done collaboratively.

Discussion

Individuals

The following sections offer some preliminary thoughts on relevant theoretical and conceptual tools that can be used to understand Peter's experience and explore questions of creativity, individual and group processes and the branding of fear in this agency. Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion describe processes associated with orientation to reality, the former in relation to individuals and the latter in groups. In Kleinian approaches, the appearance of omnipotence suggests illusion, which is associated with regression and the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein 1946, Bion 1961). In contrast, Winnicott does not view this as regressive but as a benign form of illusion that is necessary for the infant to orientate to reality (1971:91). In infancy, this concerns the move from subjective-object relationships, of which omnipotence is a feature, to relationships with objects, objectively perceived i.e. not under the infant's magical control. This move occurs only when an adequate or facilitating

environmental provision is provided and occurs in a 'third' or 'intermittent' space, which is between inner and outer worlds (Winnicott 1971: 90). He states, 'adaptation to the reality principle arises naturally out of the experience of omnipotence' and the relationship to 'subjective objects' within the third area (Winnicott 1971: 91). Winnicott argues that the ability to shift from subjective objects to those objectively perceived is 'jogged along less effectually by satisfactions' and he points to the importance of the mother's role to gently frustrate the infant (Winnicott 1963: 181). In the case of this commercial company frustration is necessarily more rapid, intense and psychological, experienced as 'indoctrination', rather than a baptism, by fire. This might suggest that the particular stresses of Peter's new situation in a high profile pressured industry would understandably precipitate some primitive defensive responses. Peter needed to change his relationship with the object which in turn demanded a new form of creativity and adaptation of the creative impulse to the new environment (Winnicott 1971: 92). Also, this process of 'growing up', not only includes relinquishing the omnipotence of the child/artist, but also involves development and maturity as Peter becomes one who is able to 'parent' and facilitate 'playgrounds' for others. This view of work relationships, combined with the relinquishing of more individuated forms of artistic practice, suggests a move into the more realistic and ambivalent depressive position (Klein 1945, 1946).

Groups

Traditional theories about groups which utilise psychoanalysis suggest that successful management acts rather like the ego, mediating between the inner world of desires and phantasies and the outer world of reality, which must be apprehended (DeBoard 1978). We have described the open management style at *TROPE* and think that in Winnicottian terms, *TROPE* could be said to provide a facilitating environment. The organisation is set up in such a way that, like the mother, it creates potential spaces where individuals can be creative. Conversely, commercial and technological demands, along with the reality of the client's demands, mean that the company also recognises that it cannot tolerate individual omnipotence.

Bion (1961) assumes that unconscious factors are ever present and impact on the group in various ways. He describes two mental states which affect the way groups operate and their capacity to achieve its purpose or goal: basic assumption and work groups. Features of basic assumption groups include; difficulty tolerating frustration, an inability to acknowledge the

psychic realities associated with a task and a poor and unrealistic relationship to time (e.g. difficulty meeting deadlines). In work group mentality, a mental state is found that is in contact with reality, able to tolerate frustration (from clients for instance in this case) and control emotion in a similar way to the ego in the individual (Stokes 1994). Crucially, these groups are aware of the 'reality' of other people which Bion (1961) states is the 'really important reality' for humans.

For Bion only one group mentality dominates at any particular moment and this can be for short or long periods. More recently, French and Simpson (2010) have directed our attention to the complex interplay between the two mentalities. Rather than only one of the mentalities operating at any given moment, they suggest that both can be in operation simultaneously. We would also suggest, following Bion (1961) that it is possible for groups to use aspects of basic assumption functioning in a sophisticated way. Good management, in Bion's terms, is one that is able to contain fears, anxieties and frustrations. This is similar to the way that the mother contains, mollifies and detoxifies difficult feelings before returning them back to the infant, through projective mechanisms, in a form that the infant can tolerate. In basic assumption mentality there is a covering up or avoidance of difficult emotions experienced as real by the group. Often regressive, unproductive and defensive behaviours, such as omnipotence, may emerge in response to this. In sophisticated basic assumption functioning, a difficult emotion or primitive defence mechanism can be mobilised to help the group achieve its primary task and goal. Stokes (1994) takes up Bion's idea of the specialist work group. He offers the example of an army, which utilises a form of basic assumption functioning in the form of 'flight/flight' to keep the army alert and in readiness for battle without disabling consideration for personal safety (1994: 25). Here, a kind of anxiety is *encouraged* as it ultimately serves a purpose in response to the demands of reality of the task. If we think of advertising as a specialist work group we can potentially see the production of fear as a sophisticated attempt to use basic assumption mentality within *TROPE*.⁶ Fear is recognised, and there is an attempt to utilise this to meet the commercial demands of the industry, suggesting the orientation to reality of work group mentality.

French and Simpson (2010) have argued that it is possible for both work group and basic assumption mentality to co-exist in a more complex way than Bion proposed. They argue that

⁶ We are grateful to Chris Scanlon for suggestions regarding the specialist work group.

work group and basic assumption modes of functioning can operate simultaneously and we propose this occurs at *TROPE*. In basic assumption mentality Bion noted a ‘lack of reflexive awareness’ (cited French & Simpson 2010: 1863) where the group are *unaware* of the difficult emotion they are avoiding and in turn how this works against group purpose. All thinking and activity may be based on this, but ‘the group as a whole remains unaware of the emotional state being avoided’ (ibid). Basic assumption mentality resists new insights that arise from exposure to truth or reality which, as we have found at *TROPE*, comes in the form of the ‘client’, who rejects their creations. We were told when things go wrong it is ‘usually the subjectivity of the client’ who they perceive as ‘not understanding’ what they are trying to create for instance. When the group is able to tolerate difficult feelings and sensations associated with truth, and becomes open to new thoughts, akin to alpha functioning in Bion’s terms (see Sandler 2005) then a developmental achievement takes place.

The work group mentality ‘gains its particular resonance from engagement with truth; that is the readiness and the capacity to face the psychic realities of the group purpose and group membership and the tension between shared intention and individual differences’ (French and Simpson 2010: 1867). This can be observed in Peter’s move from the omnipotence of his benevolent dictatorship and his unwillingness to relinquish the object to a place where he is able to tolerate frustration, ambivalence and the reality of the demands of other people in the group. It would seem then that *TROPE* has found a successful model creating a space that facilitates forms of artistic, craft-based and technological creativity. It also has structures in place, (which will be investigated further in the process of our research), that can manage the difficulties and frustrations associated with the tensions between individuals and the group, in this case an employee with a particular attachment to forms of individuated creativity. The company is able to contain these frustrations and allow individuals to successfully orientate to reality and the group as Peter’s journey suggests. Evidence suggests the dominance of work group mentality, however if we return to the externalisation of fear at the agency it is possible to see more complex processes in place.

Branding Fear

A key aspect of this externalization is the conscious branding of ‘fear’ by *TROPE* in their client communications. That is, they have applied their branding expertise to construct an identity for the agency that gives them distinctiveness in a competitive market place. It is worth reflecting here on critical explanations of modern (i.e. 20th century) advertising that

have sought to account for the advertising industry's systematic effects in transforming products and services into brands by creating and promoting commodity aesthetics that objectify and ultimately anthropomorphise commodities and corporations (Haug 1986, Wernick 1991). Advertising played its part in the strategic framing of goods at various stages in the evolution of modern consumer culture firstly in abstracting goods from the context of production; then by focussing on brand symbolisations that were both iconic and also imbued with desirous and subjective values. The next phase saw the personalisation of branded goods in advertising scenarios followed by the fuller integration of the brand into lifestyle scenarios (Wernick 1991, Leiss et al 2005). So it is reasonable to conceptualise brands as both products and beings that are created by the advertising agency and constantly attended to in order to maintain the equity of the brand (which in the process is always inflated in the sense of its potential to be omnipotent in the marketplace).

TROPE's adoption of fear as its key brand characteristic would seem to be more relevant to the genre of public information and charity campaigns than to mainstream commercial branding communications, which are typically imbued with positive characteristics such as success, pleasure, joy and erotic appeal. But in characteristically innovative style, *TROPE* turns the tables and celebrates their embrace of fear as a driver for success for their clients. So, instead of internalising fear (fear of only being as good as your last job for instance) - they recognise it, externalise it and brand it for clients as well as communicating it as a central ethos for the company.

The omnipotence of the *TROPE* brand ('we are invincible') is experienced collectively as a phantasy and it seems to work. On an individual level the company demands identification with the group ideal and in return this collective phantasy provides a degree (albeit unstable) of ontological security and protection. In spite of this, individuals in the company clearly articulate fears about being replaced, failure and not being able to create. This fear contrasts sharply with *TROPE*'s invincible and omnipotent branded fear. At this stage this suggests some of the complex processes emerging from simultaneous work group and sophisticated basic assumption functioning, which we would add, is also associated with specialist work groups. If the work group is one that is more in touch with reality and the emotional life of the group, then *TROPE*'S attempts to utilise and preserve an evacuative and regressive omnipotent phantasy as a defence mechanism is risky, as it is potentially unstable. This raises questions for future research into anxieties and defence mechanisms that are specific to

certain industries, also suggesting new possibilities for research into the concept of the specialist work group.

On the surface *TROPE*'s employees enjoy secure employment, however the business plan of 'you're only as good as your last job' generates a range of primitive anxieties and defensive responses as it repeats and re-enacts the fears of failure and being replaced with each new job. The pressures Peter describes make each job feel like an emotional 'marathon'. There is a sense of achievement associated with this strenuous task. However, human beings are not able to continually undertake marathons with all the emotional and physical demands associated with this. Clearly this has implications for processes of creativity, work-life balance and physical health. Continually approaching each new project as if it were like running a marathon points to a form of activity which might colloquially be said to be a 'young man's game'.

TROPE remains on the cutting edge and the company clearly believes it has a successful model that will evolve, as the company is expanding internationally. However, it is no longer the only company producing innovative digital advertising. The general field of advertising now represents a more competitive field and as part of our research we plan a longitudinal component to assess changes and developments in these digital start-up agencies. Peter therefore, like others interviewed so far, represents someone who has 'grown up' in the industry. The company's successful model of experiential, playful learning was strongly linked to identification with their young, technologically savvy client base with whom they share similar sociological characteristics. This raised an important question about age and career trajectory: what happens when executives reach middle-age and they are no longer cool enough to play football with 'arsey teenagers' or understand fully the demands of the young, particularly male audience, that they have successfully engaged so far? This in itself creates particular anxieties, disappointments and fears. It remains to be seen how this develops in terms of employment, organisational structure and questions of individual and group creativity in contemporary capitalism and the digitalised world.

Conclusion

This article emphasises a psychosocial approach to creativity in the commercial context. Advertising as a profitable sector of the creative industries and British economy has been

taken as a case study for examining the specific effects and tensions associated with work in post-industrial and neo-liberal flexible labour markets. This study pointed to some of the discursive and ideological functions associated with creativity and looked at the tensions specific to digital advertising. TROPE's unique use of brand building, self-consciously links their creative success to the presence of the powerful emotion of fear. Creativity in this company is inextricably linked to profit generation and the success of this hinges on the ability of the company to harness rather nebulous and not fully codifiable intuitive processes of creativity in a group situation. There is a dynamic interplay between social discourse and the economic demands of the client and unconscious emotional processes for the individual and the group. The preliminary research has also generated a range of pertinent questions around age and gender that will be addressed as the research progresses.

Aspects of an individual's biography were used to illuminate individual loss and disappointment around processes of commercial creativity. We contend that consideration of relationships between inner and outer worlds is missing from sociological accounts of work. We have argued that creativity is associated with adaptation (by individuals/subjects) to the emotional reality of the group, the client and commercial milieu. This creates particular anxieties for the group which results at *TROPE*, in a defensive foregrounding of a difficult emotion, fear, as unconsciously experienced by the group. This does not placate the fears and anxieties of individuals in the company, as it is a form of basic assumption mentality which cannot fully acknowledge the nature of fear as experienced by employees, as this might potentially prevent the group working to task. This also threatens the organisation's (unconscious) attempts, through the use of fear in its branding, to manage the emotional life of the group.

The omnipotent phantasy of TROPE as invincible is unstable and it contradicts the subjective and lived experience of fear felt by employees. Whilst this seems irrational and regressive we explored the idea of this as a sophisticated use of basic assumption, found in specialist work groups, which enables the group to 'work', productively and survive psychologically. This is not achieved without emotional costs, therefore suggesting processes of simultaneous basic and work group assumption functioning. The complex set of tensions associated with this specific work environment suggest that Bion's theories of groups can be developed and revised in the light of social, cultural and economic change to consider advertising as a specialist work group with idiosyncratic sets of anxieties and defensive responses.

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