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ANNE M. CRONIN

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Advertising, Commercial Spaces and the Urban

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1

Introducing Commercial Spaces

Any encounter with television, the internet, or urban streetscapes would suggest that we are living in the age of advertising. But the ubiquity of advertising in the west has been the focus of comment for centuries and many have claimed theirs as the ultimate era of advertising. In 1758, Samuel Johnson reputedly said that ‘ads are now so numerous that they are negligently perused’, and that ‘the trade of advertising is now so near to perfection that it is not easy to propose any improvement’ (cited in Williams 1980: 172). Notwithstanding the hyperbole surrounding its power and scope certain characteristics of advertising can be identified, one of which is its long association with cities (see Wischermann and Shore 2000). Lewis Mumford (1945: 228) noted the significance of the growth of bureaucracy for urban development such that ‘a new trinity dominated the metropolitan scene: finance, insurance, advertising’. Indeed, cities have been understood as agglomerations of people and commerce, and as sites of the centralisation of power as Mumford describes. But urban life was also thought to offer up city populations to the devices of the mass media, of which advertising was considered the most pernicious. Wirth (1964) describes how the changes to community wrought by urban capitalism resulted in the increasing significance of the media: ‘it follows, too, that the masses of men in the city are subject to manipulation by symbols and stereotypes managed by individuals working from afar or operating invisibly behind the scenes through their control of the instruments of communication’ (Wirth 1964: 82).

In parallel to such claims about advertising and its urban foothold, many argue that today is the age of commercialisation. But how should commercialisation be defined? Some have focused on privatisation, arguing that we are witnessing the emergence of a new spatial order in which public and private interests are becoming blurred (Zukin 1991, 1995). Another related focus is the growth of entrepreneurialism and the birth of the neo-liberal 'entrepreneurial city' with its stress on competitiveness, public–private partnerships and the development of local economics based on service industries such as tourism and leisure (Harvey 1989). One element of this is place marketing, or the promotion of cities, but this in itself is not a new phenomenon. Mumford (1945: 230) remarked on the significance of 'the metropolis as advertisement' which aims 'to give the stamp of authenticity and value to the style of life that emanates from the metropolis'. But in a new context of neo-liberal entrepreneurialism, cities must compete with one another for investment and tourist revenue (Hall and Hubbard 1998; Judd and Fainstein 1999; Kearns and Philo 1993). Western cities have become more centred on leisure and consumption (Miles and Miles 2004; Stevenson 2003), and branding and architecture interface to produce 'brandscapes' (Klingmann 2007).

In the context of these debates, advertising's economic and ideological role comes into sharp focus and, equally, the visual aspect of cities takes on a new significance (Cronin and Hetherington 2008). Seen as one of the 'creative industries', advertising plays an important role in global, national, and urban economies (Hartley 2005; Lash and Urry 1994; Scott 2000). It is understood to be part of the 'knowledge economy', and as an economic, social, and spatial form it is seen as part of the clustering of assets, knowledge base, sources of innovation and cultural production that together form the contemporary western city (Amin 2000).

This book offers a micro-study of one aspect of the commercial character of contemporary cities: the outdoor advertising industry and the impact of its products on urban space. Drawing on an ethnographic study of the industry and photographic studies of advertising in cities in the UK and the USA, this book explores the nature of 'the commercial'. It analyses the relationship between commercial practices in the industry, especially research and promotion practices, and the production of urban space. And it explores the interface between the visual, the material, the spatial and the temporal, and reconceptualises advertising's role of mediation.

Advertising and the city

Several important studies have explored the history of outdoor advertising, some of which focus on its relationship to nineteenth century urban space. Accounts analyse how Euro-American cities have long been centres for consumption, discourses around commodities, and ideologies of the market. In eighteenth-century Europe, trade cards, shops signs and a more general emphasis on commodity display functioned as important forerunners of outdoor advertising (Berg and Clifford 1998; Coquery 2004; Scott 2004). And in the nineteenth century, outdoor advertising became a significant factor in creating a public space built around words and images (Henkin 1998). With the development of new printing technologies in the nineteenth century, advertising posters could be mass-produced at little cost, and by 1885, 522 billposter firms were operating in 447 British towns (Fraser 1981).

Advertising posters covered much of the available space in cities and new posters were pasted directly over the old ones creating a thick layer of peeling adverts on the sides of buildings (Fraser 1981). Indeed, outdoor urban advertising was a site for developing new promotional techniques for the industry as a whole, with London and Paris seen as the models for advertising innovation (Haas 2000). In Paris, large illuminated billboards were placed on top of buildings, generating much fascinated commentary at the time. In 1920s' Germany there was a commercial struggle for the distribution of illuminated city advertising space in which competing advertising companies carried out 'lightfests' at night consisting of grand displays of illuminated advertising (Segal 2000). This illumination of city space at night was an interesting new organisation of space and time, lighting up the evening sky with symbols of daytime consumption.[1]

But advertising also organised city space in other, more mundane ways. In nineteenth-century Paris, advertising subsidised public facilities, for example, companies constructed public urinals which were liberally covered in advertisements (Segal 2000). Buses were plastered in adverts and the streets were teeming with sandwich-board men and people distributing handbills. Advertisements were even projected onto public buildings by magic lanterns (Elliott 1962; Nevett 1982). Thus, for many years advertising has played a key role in the urban economy and in orienting the visual aspect of Euro-American cities. And despite major technological developments in many areas of the media and promotion during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, advertising posters still remain central to outdoor advertising's repertoire of formats.

But this interest in the relationship between nineteenth-century outdoor advertising and urban space has not been carried through into studies of contemporary cities. The urban studies literature on today's cities takes account of consumption, but little work focuses on advertising. More generally, there appears to be a division in the urban literature between those studies which explore the political economy of cities and those which explore the representational aspects. Political and political economy studies focus on various forms of governance, globalisation, and international divisions of labour (e.g. Harvey 2001; Sassen 2001, 2006). And those studies which make any reference to advertising do so as part of a wider analysis of the economic impact of the culture or creative industries (Hartley 2005; Scott 2000).

Advertising's relationship to cities has more often been addressed in representational or cultural accounts, although most studies offer only a passing reference to it or subsume it within a general account of the visual culture of urban space. Walter Benjamin, for instance, remarks only briefly on the architectural quality and striking scale of urban advertising billboards, 'where toothpaste and cosmetics lie handy for giants' (1979: 89). In more recent urban studies, the visual aspect of cities has been the focus of considerable attention. Kevin Lynch's (1960) classic study highlighted the significance of individuals' mental imaging of urban space in their orientation around cities. This account of 'the image of the city' did not address the significance of advertising but placed an emphasis on visuality that was echoed in later studies, most notably that of Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (1972). This account encouraged architects and urban theorists alike to learn from the architecture of the commercial and to appreciate the complex interplay between the architecture of shops, hotels and casinos, and the illuminated signs and advertising billboards which lined the routes to and around these sites. The aim was to understand Las Vegas as 'a communication system' in which signs and symbols interface with buildings such that 'the graphic sign in space has become the architecture of this landscape' (Venturi et al. 1972: 9). In this new understanding of commercial urban spaces, illuminated signs and advertising billboards create the very fabric of place: 'if you take the signs away, there is no place' (Venturi et al. 1972: 12).

Later studies developed these insights into 'urban semiotics' with the aim of creating understandings of city spaces as sign systems (e.g. Gottdiener and Lagopoulos 1986). Like de Certeau's (1998) readings of cities and spaces, such accounts frame the urban as a kind of text which can be decoded or excavated to reveal the character of the city: 'the metropolis therefore lends itself to serve in textual terms as an object of research. It constitutes a series of spatial images – hieroglyphics – which can be deciphered in order to provide access to deeper underlying questions about society' (Leach 2002: 2). In this mode, some accounts developed Venturi et al.'s (1972) approach to buildings *as* advertisements (e.g. Crilley 1993). Here, architecture functions as a material–symbolic form oriented towards promoting particular policy strategies around private funding, aiding cities in their attempts to attract inward investment. In this context, 'buildings themselves are designed to "read" as gigantic outdoor advertisements' (Crilley 1993: 236).

Other accounts reject a strictly textual account in which the city dweller or, more often, the social analyst can interpret the city by reading its signs. Studies explore how 'the urban' intertwines with cultural forms such as cinema, producing particular ways of seeing and thinking (e.g. AlSayyad 2006; Clarke 1997; Donald 1999). Others attend to the visuality of urban spaces through the medium of photography, exploring how space is produced and is always in process (Liggett 2003). Some accounts explore how cities are constituted by flows of desires, dreams, ideas and advertising texts which form the material for the urban dream-work in which people engage (Pile 2005). In many of these analyses there is surprisingly little focus on outdoor advertising in cities. And when advertising is addressed, its impact tends to be seen as negative, or it is associated with the less wholesome aspects of cities. Borden, for instance, casts billboards as an urban scourge: 'not really buildings, not really here, they are simply a temporary covering, a mask across the face of the city at its most leprous. They hide a multitude of sins' (2000: 104). More generally, accounts of the representational or cultural aspects of the city attempt to link the sensory and the imaginative to the material; there is an insistence on the importance of the figuration of the urban in shaping people's material experience of cities (see Highmore 2005).

The analytic division of labour enacted by representational and political economy accounts of the city is not absolute. Sharon Zukin's analyses of cities attempt to draw together a political economy approach with an attention to the symbolic, the visual and the representational. Zukin (1991, 1995) argues that western cities now capitalise on culture in unprecedented ways using it explicitly as an economic base. In this trend, the 'symbolic economy' plays a significant role alongside the 'political economy' (centred on land, labour and capital). The symbolic economy is divided into two parallel productions systems: (1) the production of space ('with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings') and (2) the production of symbols (which 'constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity') (Zukin 1995: 24). Zukin's studies show how cities can foster and channel cultural and symbolic resources in order to create more robust urban economies. But she also notes how that the visual or symbolic is significant in terms other than the strictly economic. She argues that cities form 'a visual repertoire of culture' which she sees as a 'public language' or vernacular (1995: 264). This is a suggestive point, but Zukin does not develop it fully or explore the specificities of different aspects of such a public language. She also seems to imply a distinction between the economic co-option of the visual (where urban cultural resources are mined for economic gain) and the public, civic function of an urban visual culture (through which people make sense of urban life).

My analysis will explore the ways in which the commercial, economic aspects of advertising and cities are not distinct from the production of visual vernaculars. I will argue that 'the commercial' and 'the representational' are far more nuanced and their interface far more complex and open-ended than most urban analyses suggest. Equally, I argue that advertising can be seen as a medium or as a mediator only if we expand the scope of what such mediation may mean. Some studies analyse the form and function of advertising in a particular medium – such as television or cinema – and assess advertising's impact on the development of that medium (Gurevitch 2008; Williams 2003). More often, advertising itself is understood as a medium that acts to translate and disseminate capitalist ideals. In this mode, advertising is seen as active and ideologically powerful (Goldman 1992; Goldman and Papson 1996, 2006). It is imagined to mediate social ideals through a commercial lens, offering 'solutions' to the very 'problems' it sets up (Williamson 2000). Or it is seen as a medium that creates its own (powerful) public language, an 'institutionalised system of commercial information' which constitutes a 'major form of social communication' (Williams 1980: 170, 185).

In terms of form and economic impact, advertising appears to stand between the commercial or economic (as a commercial stimulation of consumption) and the cultural (as a producer of images, ideas, dreams). Advertising might thus be imagined to mediate between 'culture' and 'economy'. But the analysis of my ethnographic material suggests no simple categorical separation between the cultural and the economic. Nor does it suggest a straightforward mingling of distinct 'cultural' and 'economic' aspects (see Amin and Thrift 2004). If we are to argue that advertising affects forms of mediation, more care needs to be taken in identifying such mediations and assessing their significance.

One way into exploring these diverse aspects of advertising practice and form is a close attention to the *stories* that are involved in advertising production and advertising products. One such line of analysis sees advertising as a mode of social communication (see Leiss, Kline, Jhally and Botterill 2005; Williams 1980). Describing advertising, Sut Jhally argues that, 'this commercial discourse is the *ground* on which we live, the *space* in which we learn to think, the *lens* through which we come to understand the world that surrounds us' (2009: 418, emphasis in the original). Jhally argues that we must focus on the cultural role of advertising, paying attention to the values it shapes and the stories it tells. Analysing advertising's stories will tell us much about society: 'if human beings are essentially a story-telling species, then to study advertising is to examine the central story-telling mechanism of our society' (Jhally 2009: 218). The story-making character of advertising has been explored elsewhere, for instance in my analysis of how understandings of advertising, and advertising texts themselves, animate the relationship between people and things (Cronin 2004a).

But stories are complicated formations and their relationship to fiction and truth is not straightforward. In his 1963 analysis of the image culture of America, Daniel Boorstin cautioned against a simplistic denunciation of advertising as false and manipulative. Boorstin argued that advertising embodied a wider trend in US culture which placed the emphasis on 'credibility' rather than 'truth'. Advertising was the 'art of invention' which created neither seductive lies nor truth, but *verisimilitude*. Boorstin understood both advertising practitioners' and the general public's approach to advertising as 'less interested in whether something is a fact than in whether it is convenient that it should be believed' (1963: 215). Following this logic, Boorstin argued, we should redirect our attention from what people see as the 'peculiar lies' of advertising to its true power – the 'peculiar truths' that it circulates (Boorstin 1963: 216). These are stories about the shape of society and our relationship to goods and services – a strand of analysis taken up by Schudson (1993) in his account of advertising as 'capitalist realism' which trains people in the art of living in a capitalist mode.

This focus on story-telling reframes questions about advertising. It does not ask if advertisements truthfully represent society or consumer goods. An emphasis on story-making considers representation not as a (successful or deceptive) mirroring, but as a production, a process, and an ordering. Making a story involves creating a narrative order. But as John Law argues, 'representations are not just a necessary part of ordering. Rather, they are *ordering processes in their own right*' (1994: 26, emphasis in the original). This expanded sense of representation points to how advertising, and its relationship to urban space, might be said to represent (a particular moment in) capitalism. But advertising does not straightforwardly represent or signify the ideological power of capitalism; advertising is not a set of signs from which capitalism's form and trajectory can be 'read off'. Advertising represents capitalism in the sense that it is part of the wider processes of ordering, articulation, story-making and money-making. Together these constitute capitalism not as a structure, but a network of practices in which 'capitalism is "instantiated"' (Thrift 2005: 1).

As a story-making and representational practice, advertising performs one aspect of the market relations that in turn helps to form capitalism. These performances rework relationships, facilitate modes of articulation or visibility, and construct possibilities. I discuss how industry practitioners also tell stories about advertising, about their research practices, about target markets and urban spaces, and about research data. These are representations that order their commercial world – they act to structure and stabilise market relations between media owners, media agencies and clients and in this way facilitate profitable relationships. These stories are neither empirically verifiable nor simple fictions; they are 'peculiar truths' that open up the commercial world in surprising ways (see Chapters 2–4). I also examine the forms of story-making that advertising and its spatiality make available to people through perceptual practices and 'fabulation' (see Chapters 5–7). This is a form of embodied, practical, perceptual engagement that sees 'life', animation and openness in the social and natural world. It is a kind of representational activity, but one which extends beyond conventional understandings of textuality or signification. It creates an urban visual vernacular but not in the sense of a shared language.

These stories and story-making practices are now taking on a new significance with shifts in the form of capitalism and market relations. Markets are increasingly being understood as performed or practised rather than as given structures within which practices take place (Callon 1998; MacKenzie 2006; MacKenzie and Millo 2003; MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu 2007). And flows or exchanges of knowledge are thought to organise these performative processes (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002b). There is a parallel interest in examining how constituent elements of those markets are also practised or performed: analyses of financial markets explore 'how "abstract" or "virtual" assets are brought into being and made tradable' (MacKenzie 2007: 357).

These developments should be seen in the context of a new 'soft capitalism' (Thrift 2005: 11). This is a capitalism based on circulation, especially of forms of knowledge (LiPuma and Lee 2004). The circulation of these knowledges acts in a performative way to conjure capitalism into existence (Thrift 2005). It is a form of capitalism that involves 'a continual struggle to release new forms of representation that can capture how the world is ... and new forms of surface that can define how space and time should turn up in that world' (Thrift 2005: 13). This capitalism is contingent and adaptive, and corporations need to 'surf the right side of the constant change that results' or risk failure (Thrift 2005: 3). The global financial crisis of 2007 onward shows the vulnerability of financial and market performances to radical meltdown. In the recent literature, markets and market relations are considered to be multilayered, flexible and fragile. And while market exchange can be said to be centrally important in capitalist societies, no one society is entirely organised around one form of that market exchange (Slater and Tonkiss 2001). Indeed, the nature and significance of markets is not self-evident: 'even if markets in some sense dominate, they do not themselves represent a single and homogeneous principle' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001: 199). What is being exchanged, and the nature of this exchange, may be shifting.

The story-making character of the circulation of knowledges in soft capitalism has implications for space and cities. There are important consonances between the characterisation of both this new capitalism and spatiality. Doreen Massey (2005) argues that space is processual, the product of interrelations and of heterogeneity. Space is the 'dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey 2005: 24). In this context, new ways of apprehending and producing spatialities are emerging. Thrift (2004b: 584) argues that an intensification and proliferation of modes of thinking involving calculation, including the exercise of qualitative judgements and 'working with ambiguity', produces new forms of spaces. This calculativity may form a 'space-time background through an array of new co-ordinate systems' which may allow new forms of movement (Thrift 2004b: 596). These metrics and ways of mobilising them may create a new '"movement-space" which is relative rather than absolute – but which ... relies on an absolute space for its existence' (Thrift 2004b: 597).

I explore how the metrics and practices of the outdoor advertising industry are meshed together into shifting story-making processes that perform market relationships. They hold those relationships together through time as a (fairly) stable, (partially) predictable and (often) profitable web of commercial relations. But these practices also perform urban spaces and I analyse what forms of spatiality, or 'stories-so-far', this enables. If the advertising industry and its textual products can be seen as ideological forms that shape ideas, dreams and spaces, then they do so in this expanded sense of representation and in the new context of soft capitalism.

Researching the outdoor advertising industry and urban space

A more detailed outline of the UK advertising industry is presented in Chapter 2. My concern here is to introduce some of the industry's key characteristics and reflect upon my processes of researching the industry's relationship to urban space. Outdoor or 'out of home' advertising chiefly comprises roadside billboards, panels in pedestrian zones, advertisements on buses, in train and underground stations, and on taxis (taxis covered in 'liveries', or 'wrapped' taxis, and on panels inside taxis). Such advertising sites are all oriented towards speaking to the largest number of potential consumers possible. And as the greatest density of people can be found in cities, this is where the vast majority of advertising panels are located.

As part of the 'knowledge economy', the outdoor advertising industry trades in spaces, ideas, research metrics, signs and images. The industry's key actors comprise media owning companies[2] (such as JCDecaux which owns advertising structures and rents out space on them), media agencies (which mediate between media owners and clients), and clients who wish to advertise. In order to sell advertising space, media owners research potential consumers (their spending power, consumption profiles, patterns of movement around cities) and city spaces (density of people, visually prominent locations, flows of movement). Media owners use this data to pitch their particular company's portfolio of sites to potential clients and also to promote outdoor as an advertising sector (which is in competition with larger sectors such as television). So while advertisements attempt to sell products and services to consumers, outdoor advertising companies attempt to sell urban spaces, routes and knowledge about potential consumers to companies wishing to advertise.

There are many forms of publicity in cities that do not originate from the mainstream advertising industry but nevertheless form part of the visual cityscape. Figure 1.1 shows an 'artisanal' ad for a music release that is created from plastic bags tied to railings.

This is a free form of advertising which uses the principles of 'buzz' marketing – creating word-of-mouth publicity and excitement – and whose cryptic text can be followed up on the internet. The same strategies may sometimes be used by the mainstream advertising industry to

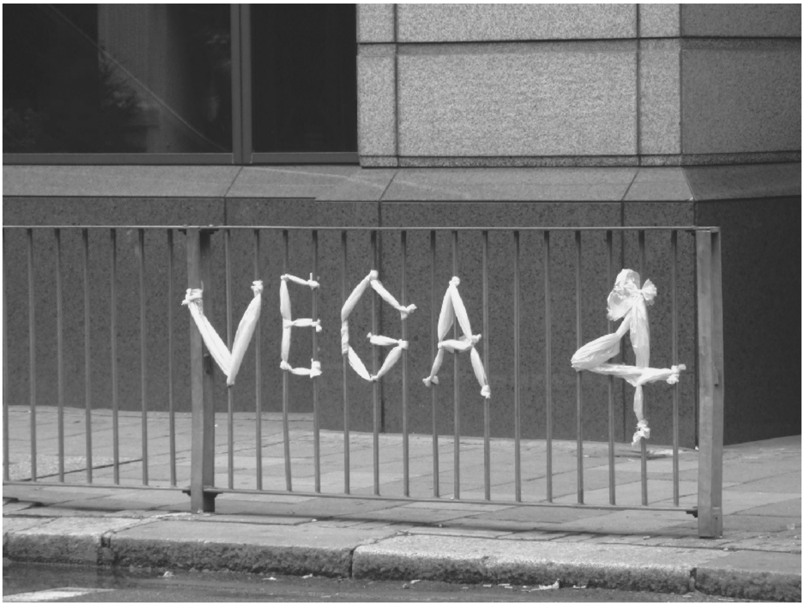

Figure 1.1 An 'artisanal' street advertisement in London (author's photograph)

create an edgy, 'street' feel to particular advertising campaigns. I elected to research the products and practices of the industry rather than these marginal forms as I wished to explore ethnographically the industry's commercial and spatial practices in the context of shifts in capitalism. But non-standard advertisements and graffitied or 're-purposed' advertisements on billboards did form part of the context in which I explored outdoor adverts in the photographic element of the project.

The project comprised two parts: an ethnographic exploration of the UK outdoor advertising industry and a photographic study of two cities, Manchester (UK) and Detroit (USA). The ethnographic section involved spending time at the London central office of a major media owner specialising in transport advertising (on buses and in the London Underground) as well as special promotional events (e.g. promotional activities in parks). During this phase of the research I was given excellent access to the company's activities and I observed a wide range of everyday practices. These included: directors' strategy meetings (planning the next month's activities and considering challenges from competitors); group staff meetings to outline weekly activity plans; staff training sessions (e.g. training in how to present research data to media agencies and clients); meetings of a specialist research strategy team; meetings and discussions of the marketing team; brainstorming sessions of teams working on 'pitches' derived from briefs sent by potential clients; production of promotional pitches (for media agencies and for clients); accompanying direct sales representatives 'cold calling' on potential clients; accompanying media sales representatives pitching to media agencies; attending pitches from media agencies and research companies. In addition to observation, I conducted a range of in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 45–90 minutes with members of staff at the main ethnographic site. These interviews followed up on themes I saw emerging from my observation, such as the relationship between media agencies and clients. I also collected a large amount of electronic and print material from the company, particularly from its 'Knowledge Bank'. This included results of commissioned research projects and was used by practitioners as a resource when they put together pitches.

Alongside this detailed focus on one media owning company, I conducted a range of interviews with several other rival media owning companies. I also collected data and conducted in-depth interviews at media agencies, specialist poster companies, research companies that were used by the key media owning company in my study, and industry trade bodies. These industry bodies were the Outdoor Advertising Association, the Institute for Practitioners in Advertising (with a specialist Outdoor section), the Advertising Standards Authority (the regulatory body) and POSTAR (an industry body that produces data on the number of people passing every advertising panel in the country, and which grades the visibility of those panels according to a range of criteria). This range of ethnographic practices produced rich data. It enabled me to track the circulation of industry research data and analyse how the relationships between the different organisations impacted upon the production of understandings of space and potential consumers.

The photographic section of the project comprised studies of Manchester and Detroit which explored the visual and material character of advertising texts and their physical structures (e.g. billboard panels, advertising kiosks). I paid attention to how advertisements and their structures interfaced with their urban surroundings. I attempted to cover all areas of the city where advertisements appeared but did not want to restrict myself to a rigid mapping of space. Instead, I remained open to what I found and adjusted my analytic emphasis as the photographic studies progressed. During this process, I noticed that I was taking, and later using, the photographs in a range of ways. They acted as documentary evidence – *this* advertisement, on *this* type of panel, appeared in *this* location. The shots I selected also functioned as exemplars – of a particular theme, of specific locations, of certain structures. Sometimes the shots focused on a specific textual content, sometimes on striking juxtapositions of advertising text, location or material form. Sometimes my practices were oriented more by a creative urge to capture a 'great shot' with striking aesthetics that I thought spoke of advertising or of the city in particular ways. I saw this as my own conversation with urban space as I was coming to understand it.

As the project progressed I gradually became aware of the interdependence of these different photographic practices. The photographic process and my analysis of the resulting archive of photographs became a way of representing advertising and representing the city – I used my photographic practices to do the work of connecting, relating, and performing meanings. In her photographic study of urban spaces, Helen Liggett suggests that 'when used to make connections to the city, the camera is not an instrument of representation; it is a way of making space and attracting meanings' (2003: 120). This active, processual character of engaging with and performing spaces was certainly evident in my own practices. But my study also aimed to connect and articulate the photographic element with the ethnographic data about the industry. The process of thinking these different elements and producing academic narratives about them was far from neat. The writer Georges Perec describes his thinking and writing process as one of classification, but a form of classification that refuses to stabilise or 'make sense' in any coherent way:

> My problem with classifications is that they don't last; hardly have I finished putting things into an order before that order is obsolete.... The outcome of all this leads to some truly strange categories. A folder full of miscellaneous papers, for example, on which is written 'to be classified'; or a drawer labelled 'Urgent 1' with nothing in it (in the drawer labelled 'Urgent 2' there are a few old photographs, in 'Urgent 3' some new exercise-books). In short, I muddle along. (Perec 1999: 196)

This may offer an accurate view of the sense-making activities of many a qualitative research project, although the contingent character of these practices is generally rendered invisible in the final narrative. Perec's account also offers insights into the *material* practices of thinking and writing, and points to how ordering is a central, if fluid, part of these processes.

In the practices of analysing my various forms of material there emerged a range of stories. What also emerged was the significance of representation and story-making practices in the industry and in advertising's relationship to the urban. These were spatial practices that oriented around an expanded sense of 'representation'. I came to understand how the industry's commercial practices of research and promotion folded data about 'consumers' and spatial practices back into the location of advertising panels and the text of advertisements. As I describe in the chapter outline below, this shifted the analysis away from a strictly 'textual' assessment of the content of advertisements to an analysis that paid attention to relationalities, connections, tensions and performances.

The structure of the book

The first half of the book explores the commercial practices of the outdoor advertising industry in the UK, drawing on the data gathered in my ethnographic research. Chapter 2 situates the industry's commercial knowledge production and marketing practices within debates about the 'new knowledge economy'. This is understood as design-intensive, centring on the production of signs and the trade in information (Lash and Urry 1994; Leadbetter 1999). Creativity, commodities and innovation are central to this knowledge economy, or what Thrift calls 'the cultural circuit of capitalism' (2005: 6). The chapter uses these debates on the performative nature of contemporary capitalism to frame my analysis of how cities are calculated and performed by commercial knowledge practices. These practices not only map but actively enact city spaces while marking them with images, brands and material structures. I analyse how practitioners imagine their research practices, the resultant research data, and market relationships between media owners, media agencies and clients as flexible and full of 'commercial energy'. These vital, calculative understandings are folded back into practices of locating and selling advertising space, and act to animate urban space. These spatialities are temporalised in complex ways as the industry attempts to work into and capture commercial futures.

Chapter 3 expands this emphasis on knowledge practices by examining a key focus the industry's research – mobility (of people, transport systems, and of urban spaces themselves). It begins by outlining the long-standing academic interest in movement, mobility and city space. This includes classic analyses such as those of Simmel (1995), Benjamin (1979, 1999), Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1968 [1925]), and more recent analyses such as those of Sennett (1992, 1994), Appleyard, Lynch and Myer (1966), and Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (1977). The chapter contrasts these academic understandings with the forms of understanding produced by the industry's market research. These conceive urban space *as movement*. They do not imagine the city as a bounded geographic entity, but as moments of potential visual encounter between consumers and advertising sites. Companies' research project design emphasizes mobility as a 'new segmentation' that supplements conventional marketing classifications such as socio-economic class. Some projects conceive of an urban 'mobile mindset' which predisposes people to search out new products and be open to spontaneous purchasing; in other projects people's movement in urban space is refined to an idea of *mobility as attention*. These conceptualisations are used as promotional tools to persuade potential clients to use outdoor rather than broadcast or press advertising. They operate in performative feedback loops, folding ideas back into practices and spaces. This creates a commercial ontology of the city based on mobility, as well as a commercial aesthetics of mobility that orients the size and style of advertising structures and their textual content.

In Chapters 2 and 3, therefore, the commercial relationships between elements of the industry are analysed in relation to their research practices. But these relationships have some unexpected outcomes: the industry's knowledge practices create possibilities for those who move through urban space to know that space differently. Chapter 4 further explores both the generative power of industry practices and the unintended possibilities they open up. It focuses on a particular set of urban movements that are created by the industry's practices – commercial or commodity rhythms. There has been a recent intensification of interest in Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 1992) concept of urban rhythms and what accounts of cities a 'rhythmanalysis' can offer. But no attention has been paid to the commercial rhythms of outdoor advertising that mark urban space in subtle and ambiguous ways. The chapter analyses the multiple ways in which advertising institutes urban rhythms. It assesses how the practices of posting new advertising in standard 2-week cycles creates commercial rhythms that naturalise consumer capitalism's cycle of innovation and promotion. I explore how a 'commercial rhythmanalysis' can offer a novel framework for analysing the visual and commercial economies of cities. I analyse how the industry establishes a time–space of 'commodity rhythms' that attunes people to the rhythms of commercial innovation and promotion, and links peoples' embodied, biographical movements in the city with the 'biographies' of commodities. This highlights how