

Opening the Autoethnographic I of Opportunity

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Autobiography, ethnography and autoethnography genres include intimate reflections, and personal narratives about the relationship of self, other, culture and communication. These methodologies use oral, written, and material ephemera in their development, and they are legitimate qualitative research methodologies described in Denzin and Lincoln's seminal publication Handbook of Qualitative Research. Increasingly weighty arguments applaud the use of performative methodologies in both teaching and industry and this paper offers teaching and advertising industry examples of these enduring and endearing creative methodologies.

The advertising industry introduced research as a strategy tool in the early 20th Century (Higgins, 1965; Ries, 2004). Questionnaires, surveys and interviews became part of the industrial norm. Ideas, thus gleaned from the research findings, that promised to increase an ad's success and contribute to the company's bottom line were tried. Novelty, and surprise, along with mnemonic devices, sensory contrivances and other attention-getting techniques broke through the tradition of one-dimensional, and formulaic methods -some lasted longer than others but all reinforced the value of doing advertising research as a way to reach consumers in their pockets. As brand/product competition grew, the methods varied; samples, coupons, focus groups, among others, were added to the research milieu. In the 21st century, amid global competition and brand explosion, competitive creativity is more in demand than ever, and at the forefront of this new approach is the concept of participatory advertising, ethnography and autoethnography. Employing these methods not only involves the consumer as actor, but the entertainment level and sustainability of many of these ads is so strong that consumers distribute them liberally and for free via poster art, email, youtube, and a myriad of internet venues. Despite their success, the transition of autoethnography and participatory methods from ad think tanks to the collegiate classroom has not kept pace.

Most advertising research classes focus on quantitative methods, and relegate their qualitative discussions to the usual mediums of focus groups, interviews, observations, case studies and surveys among others. But the professional reality is that more and more agencies are using creative ethnography and autoethnography for research and for the stimulation of creativity (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). Qualitative ethnography and more lately autoethnography, already a darling of anthropology, cultural studies, literary theory, folklore, women's studies, sociology, and psychology (Hammersley, 1992; Denzin, 1986; Lincoln and Denzin, 2003) have been providing much of the creative impulse behind such innovative advertising as the New York-based McCann-Erickson Worldwide's "Write Out Loud" campaign developed for Sharpie®¹ and other "tell us your story" campaigns burgeoning on the forefront of the new advertising. These two rich qualitative methods allow the message to be more directly targeted and individually focused. It is all part of creating for advertising what Carey (1989) called journalism 'the conversation that society has with itself'. This shift from ad think tank or controlled storytelling to individuals contributing their own stories reflects a major change in ad strategy thinking.

As a result industry practitioners driven by sales' successes have incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in their research. As a critical, personal research tool, "Public ethnography values writing moves the public to meaningful judgment and meaningful action" (Charity, 1995, p. 123). With this kind of endorsement from the commercial side of advertising, it would seem natural that teaching advertising and creativity, using these methods, would follow (Ellis and Bochner, 1992; Ulmer, 1989). But some advertising curricula have been slow to endorse what might be considered radical or overly humanistic approaches, and even

¹ The lead spot, "Videotape," features the Sharpie Metallic silver marker, the first Sharpie that can write on dark surfaces, in a humorous tale of male contemplation. Nick, a relatively harmless twenty-something husband sees an upcoming "must record" program on television. He frantically shuffles around to find a videotape to record the show, but the only one available is labeled "Our Wedding" in Sharpie Metallic silver marker. When Nick considers his plan for the tape, the writing morphs to his wife's face as she sternly warns - "Don't even think about it." The spot finishes with the loving couple watching their wedding video together.

slower to countenance serious practice of some qualitative methods as autobiography and autoethnography among their junior faculty. This reticence has led to a lag between industry and education. Not everyone is uncomfortable with this new research, but a significant few of those on tenure committees have been slow to credit its practice as legitimate research.²

Making the consumer part of the process is not a new concept. Among others, sports' heroes sell Wheaties and society matrons have been selling soap for over one hundred years. Ordinary consumers who look like us talk to tidy bowl icons and Madge, the quintessential manicurist, called us honey as she soaked our nails in Palmolive (Appendix A). What is new and fast becoming a creative trend is the use of autoethnography, also called mystory. A narrative methodology, autoethnography, is performance that links the personal to the cultural (Dyson, 2007; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Evolution from the method of participant observation to the observation of participation in advertising has followed a natural progression as advertisers have begun to see each viewer of each ad as an individual and fixed, but also intersubjective and embodied, social and processual (Tedlock, 2000). They have also recognized that individual situations are unique yet at the same time universal. In other words, they are relatable but individual. Leo Burnett, a non-linear thinker and one of the most successful and revolutionary practitioners of his time, urged each copy writer to work with a picture of one consumer on his desk so as not to lose focus when writing copy (Ewan, 2007). Not many of us can say that we ever backed over a roommate's cat, but the anguish in the apologetic message slipped under the door, while personal, is universally inclusive (Appendix B).

Storytelling is inherent in mystory and autoethnography, and there is a long tradition of story telling in advertising (Halliday, 1998; Howard, 2006). From early icons like Phoebe Snow touting travel on the Lackawanna to the cowboy who sold cigarettes, many of these stories were designed to have heroes/heroines who would become the ideal or the model for social behavior. Many of these early ad stories were more remote, voyeuristic and hardly socially inclusive, but today's increasing demand for direct customer contact and creativity, combined with a consumer's demand to see him/herself reflected in ads and new media choices, has spawned a new generation of storytelling techniques. Major brands like Coke, Pepsi and McDonald have created emotional bonds between brand and consumer by surrounding themselves with consumer fantasy and dreams (Randazzo, 1993). In the 70s Coke urged the world to sing and created a fantasy world that would bring people together. In 2007 another advertising giant, Pepsi, is preparing for a future generation of soda drinkers by using design to turn packaging into personal, consumer-powered media. Self-expression is a hallmark of the millennials and their mantra has exploded into a series of 16 unique cans created for the "custom experience" (Pepsi's New Set of Cans, 2007). The first of these cans which sport an interactive website is called This is the Beginning. It allows drinkers world wide to gather in real time to design collectively the next Times Square billboard (pepsigallery n.d) Pepsi recognizes its consumers as individuals and is using the commonality of their soda of choice to link drinkers by providing individual profiles on the web (Pepsi-blogspot n.p.) This custom experience in a world-wide campaign employs autoethnography which will then be articulated on a three-dimensional format (Pepsi's New Set of Cans, 2007). The message, spread via the worldwide web, encourages individual participation and intercultural bonding.

² This crisis of legitimacy surrounding autoethnography was addressed at the 3rd International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2007 under a panel headed by Laurel Richardson, Norman Denzin, Ron Pelias and others.

Autobiographical texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis & Bochner 2000). They involve highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture, and in the case of advertising, it is experience sharing that shows the unique aspects of an individual user's product usage. Autoethnography provides a perfect frame for a new type of advertising appeal---personal and identifiable. Autoethnographers may vary in their emphasis on graphy (i.e., the research process), ethnos (i.e., culture), or auto (i.e., self) (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Whatever the specific focus, authors use their own experiences in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions; again a perfect framework and new way to look at product/patron use and interaction. Teaching advertising industry hopefuls to think inside, as well as outside, themselves, to name the individual consumer they are aiming for and to flesh him/her out with character flaws and strengths, even giving characters a personal history will lead to a more complete story frame that consumers will be able to identify with.

The movement toward personalized advertising messages reflects calls to place greater emphasis on the ways in which the ad interacts with its audience. We still have to "sell it in the first frame" (Ogilvy, 1965), but the first frame is also, in many cases, the only place to catch consumers: when they can picture themselves in their fantasy lives, they are caught. Autoethnography is an action research method that cogenerates knowledge. That is, where input from a variety of participants is put forth collaboratively it aims at solving real life problems from a context-centered position. Its greater purpose is to seek out and engage a broader audience, and thereby to open the discussion up to other disciplines, students and the community outside the academy. Its goal is to be reachable, less elitest, engaging, clarifying, and open-ended; rather than seeking closure, finality, or conclusion, it seeks implications, insights, questions, and openings to further study (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The kind of insight it provides is more suggestive than conclusive, seeking to open up conversations and analysis, rather than close down with conclusions (C. Poulos, personal communication April 1, 2007). Above all it is inclusive, allowing for long-silenced voices to be heard (Denzin, lecture, 2000). And Richardson (2000) explains that "qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading" (p.324), paving the way for performance ethnography and autoethnography in the social world. Advertising is nothing if not the performance of culture. Teaching advertising is preparation for the performance of it.

Breaking with tradition by bringing the "I" into this piece of academic writing, my ownership of this essay needs to be asserted and the reader informed of my "motive." I teach creativity in advertising, in designing advertising, in developing creative strategy and in writing copy. I use autobiographical and autoethnographic methodologies in the teaching of these creative functions of advertising. I also hone my own skills by using this methodology in my research.

Experience and interpersonal interactions provide the framework of our lives and therefore provide the fuel for the creative mind. We pour these creative experiences into our work of all kinds, but more emphatically we pour it into our lives as creative advertising professionals. We dig, as Blezsinski, (2007, p. 10) says, "into the dark recesses of the brain searching for ideas." And the outcome is creative ads with which people can identify.

The activity of soul searching and rethinking our lives allows us the opportunity to employ creativity and to uncover the wonder of discovery within ourselves—self or autodiscovery can lead to seeking out what is compelling in our own stories that will allow us to sell our creative concepts to the universal experience. This is the value and the essence of autoethnography and ethnography. That summer afternoon in the heat of the Midwest when we caught fireflies in a bottle and watched sparklers compete with the stars gave us a glimpse into what is a unique yet shared experience triggering emotion, memory and the commonality of humanness and metaphor. These collective glimpses give us insight into our consumers. As David Droga of Droga5 (2007) said in a recent interview, “All I am trying to do is surround myself with doers who can operate in any space; doers who are creative through and through, but have an understanding of how to link that to a brand.” The industry is crying out for creativity.

We can no longer talk about the demographics of a product being enough—we now need to flesh out the statistics with real people. Where do we dig them up? Out of ourselves— out of our past experiences and out of the public memory of urban folklore using autoethnography - and out of our ethnographic research.

Industry Example 1

Katie Mickey, (personal interview, March 30, 2007) Senior Art Director at Jupiter Images, applauds the teaching of new methodology to encourage creativity and explains how the Jupiter Images’ most recent internal ad campaign is autoethnographically grounded. “We began our campaign with the following ad: (Appendix B)

It sparked so much interest that the art department decided to expand the idea to its website and invite customers to participate.” (K Mickey, personal interview, March 30, 2007)

“Had a tough life? Ever been humiliated? Jilted? Parents move and not tell you where? Maybe that tough life will pay off. Lead a charmed life filled with adulation and glory? Well you’ll have to make something up then. And it better be good because you could get published in Creativity magazine and maybe even win one of three 2007 Volkswagen Eos convertibles. Life may be tough, but your job doesn't have to be.”
(<http://www.jupiterimages.com/universal.aspx?ul=eos>, 2007)

The result is a working sample of industry autoethnography asking participants to reach deep into their experience and splinter off a story to share. “This, according to Mickey, “allows us to make the consumer part of the selling experience.” (Mickey, personal communication, March 30, 2007).

Industry Example 2

In the early 90s ad giant Young and Rubicam was losing ground in positioning Sears against WalMart. Y &R decided to get a glimpse into reality marketing by hiring a researcher to follow a typical Sears shopper throughout her day, recording thoughts, routines, ideas and insight. The response gleaned from that experience led to the following insights:

- 1) The public perception of Sears was that it is a male-oriented, appliance-driven lower-quality, and cheaper-priced.
- 2) There is a niche for child-friendly service and merchandize.
- 3) The primary customer for Sears is a woman 25-54 with moderate household income, family and home.

Y & R then built a campaign on the invitation to Come See the Softer Side of Sears by illustrating that Sears has more than appliances and tires; it has the right apparel, good brands and fashionable goods, for her, the customer. The original Softer Side campaign created new ads, and three 30-second spots that premiered during the Emmy Awards. The first print ads appeared in October issues of women's general interest publications and fashion magazines to increase public awareness.³ This very successful campaign was the turning point, as Sears publicly stated. Through the ethnography of customer research Sears was meeting its target with the right message and completely revamped product placement. Post-campaign research recorded a perception change and a resulting 4.9% increase in sales (Sears Builds on Success, 1998 np).

Industry Example 3

Mitt Romney's recent presidential campaign has also taken on the personal create-your-own ad. Yahoo and Jumpcut.com compete as writers vie for the opportunity to spread the word about their enthusiasm for the Republican presidential hopeful. His advertising professionals used the contest itself as an advertisement of Romney's commitment "to using unique and democratizing online tools." (Teinowitz, 8/30/07). Though other campaigners have used contests for promotion purposes, Hillary Clinton's campaign song contest for example, Romney is the first candidate to pay for the privilege (<http://www.jumpcut.com/>). This is the ad that keeps on publicizing with paid and unpaid publicity. The news value of its novelty, the news value of its currency and the news value of its timeliness and proximity guarantee its continued discussion for the duration of the campaign for free in the media—publicity few candidates could ever afford. Many ad writing campaigns offer money and or product but the profit is mutual and the profits, depending on the product range from samples to cash to the personal satisfaction of publicity and the knowledge of having made a difference in the outcome of a product, service or person.

Industry Example 4

Autoethnographic writing can span mediums from print to electronic. For example, in a ploy reminiscent of the old television drama *Quantum Leap*, the UK Levi's commercial pictures a young girl dressed in 19th-century work wear nervously waiting for her lover. He knocks and is invited in, and the couple proceed to undress. As they pull off their shirts and jeans both reveal more updated versions of themselves - he cleaner cut with different hair and clothing, she similarly transformed. The spot is backed by the haunting strains of the Little Annie tune *Strange Love*. The provocatively handsome couple are launching toward a physical intimacy as they start to peel off clothing—but a twist—they are supplanted by the same actors with different outfits, and hairstyles. They transform into hippies, disco dancers, preppies and whatever was popular in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s to Levi's 2007 collection. In a calculated eye blink, 60 seconds of video, they have a space-time continuum sex scene that incorporates the collective memories of those bygone decades. How does the agency really know about these eras? They did some

³ Hitting both their reading and viewing demographic simultaneously

autoethnography, reflecting their combined personal experiences and relationships to their Levis to develop a situational ad that would transcend generations. The combination of music, costume and energy without words captures the 60 second attention span of several generations.

Industry Example 5

The bland character of a woman sits on a stool at a kitchen counter. She has a cup of coffee in front of her that is half full. She is plain, but pleasant looking in terms of traditional western advertising beauty. Her hairstyle is bangs with a ponytail. Her kitchen is every woman's, it is unremarkable and even cluttered. Next to her sits Peter Graves, actor. Geico in this remarkable ad series, (which by the way, is developed by a super star agency not located in NYC, yet still giving the NYC agencies a run for their money) is using an ordinary woman—her story and the drama and delivery of a traditional Hollywood type. The interesting thing about this tiny little agency is that they are all about autoethnography.

If you're a fan of Geico's caveman series of commercials checkout the Caveman's Crib viral site. This flash site is well done and extremely interactive; make sure you click on every image. The site was created in-house by Geico's marketing and communications department as a character background extension of the highly popular "caveman" ads that were created by the Richmond, VA based The Martin Agency. Each of the characters in the skit was developed into a persona based on the three idea men. Agency President Hughes said the agency came up with the idea of a talking gecko because through their research, they learned that people had trouble remembering the name GEICO, which stands for the Government Employees Insurance Corporation. The agency's creative people thought GEICO sounded like gecko and went from there. It has worked. GEICO's revenue is soaring and so is the popularity of using ethnographic research (Tichener, 2007).

Industry Example 6

The woman on the screen lathers up her face—the foamy creamy soap demonstrates its viscosity leading to the conclusion that such a product will clean and cream the face. Not unusual? Not until you look further at the woman—she is not a paper thin model with a perfect complexion—she is an ordinary woman next door—the American mom who is slightly overweight and her face shows an average amount of wear. Dove has recognized the value of using ordinary women to sell soap—this is a huge transition from the time when Helen Resor tacked celebrity onto the face value of Palmolive. (Young, 2007) They ask real people to participate in a natural setting performing a natural act, reflecting their inner beauty, but without their outer wear.

Industry Example 7

Dorito joined the autoethnographic mix when it asked consumers to write their own commercial for the Super Bowl. Thousands of eager consumers wrote scripts and submitted them to the Dorito website. Online competition included amateur videographers, and semi-professional and probably a few professional entries. But the creativity demonstrated showed an inordinate amount of product knowledge, thought and insight into how the product is perceived, used and shared. They involve humor, dark and light, and demonstrate the wide variety of feelings associated with snack food favorites. The cashier ringing up product with progressive

provocaity that ends with a call to “clean up on aisle 12” resonates with youthful encounters and middle-aged fantasies alike. What is creativity? It is the ability to look deep inside yourself and relate to others—how do you develop creative strategy?—strategy is the child of research, of looking at the lives of consumers and deep within yourself ⁴(<http://doritos.com>, 2007).

Application to the Advertising Curriculum

In this era of “reality TV,” reality advertising is actively promoting using the same tools of ethnography and autoethnography. So it makes sense to incorporate it into teaching. A first important step is to help students recognize that they are both the subjects and the objects of the research, and that their experiences and interaction with the product impact the product. It is a legitimate way of knowing (Pentland, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The agency business lives and dies on creative ideas - and strategic insights.

Allowing students to explore autoethnography permits them to own their research, reveal themselves in the writing and participate in the venture Ellis, Malin and others suggest that researchers (students) are discouraged from writing with the I on one hand, but they are encouraged to write in active voice on the other (Ellis and Bocher, 2000; Malin, 1999). This contradiction is a difficult one to digest.

“By not insisting on some sort of personal accountability, our academic publications reinforce third person, passive voice as the standard, which gives more weight to abstract and categorical knowledge than to the direct testimony of personal narrative and the first person voice (Ellis and Bocher, 2000 p. 734).

There are countless thoughts about the origins of creativity, whether it is encouraged by nurture or produced by nature and whether or not it can be taught and if it is allocated to a select few (Gibbons, 2005); (Baer, 2003) (Heaton, 2002). But regardless of its origins, the components of creativity include some semblance of research, reflection, rediscovering, nurturing and elbow grease, according to Frank Baer (Baer 2003), and there are other creativity formulae which echo these sentiments like that of Daniel Heaton who studied Baer’s website then developed his own acronym using the letters of the word CREATE—a formula that translates well to curriculum.

Collect—gather information from a variety of sources.

Reflect—generate many ideas, questions, responses from the information.

Embrace—select which idea (s) to focus on and expand.

Amend—work with an idea until it begins to take shape.

Toil—become obsessed with a project until it is complete.

Exhibit—find a venue for displaying the creative project.

(Heaton, 2002) Applying the Heaton CREATE formula to a creative assignment could be one way to evaluate its outcome in real product delivery or advertising.

Using reflexive ethnography⁵, for example, allows students the chance to look more deeply at self-other interaction (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). As a creative message format, it conveys message in a unique and singular fashion, and it teaches students to look at their own

⁴ See the video *Crash the Superbowl*

⁵ Where the ethnographer is not separate from the object of investigating

usage in relation to the world around them. An assignment using reflexive autoethnography as described below uses Heaton's CREATE formula completely (Heaton, 2002).

Assignment #1

You may select any product you like and you need not spend a great deal of money on it. Because every one of us spends money every day, you might well complete the exercise with something you are going to buy anyway. Make the purchase some kind of toiletry, shampoo, cosmetic item, or personal hygiene product.

Once you select the purchase you are going to focus on, you must notice every aspect of the purchase and use process, even if the whole thing takes only a few minutes. Ask yourself:

What thoughts, feelings or history do I bring with this experience?

What are my expectations?

What do I notice about the store I am purchasing the product in?

What things run through my mind as I make my selection?

What do I notice about the packaging and the product itself?

What about paying for it?

How does my interaction with any salesperson affect my feelings about my purchase?

What about actually using it?

How did that make me feel? What was I thinking?

This assignment allows for self-growth and it figures out creative ways to work within the realm of professional advertising. This is organized creativity that follows process yet remains creative (Heaton, 2002).

Assignment #2

Likewise, performance ethnography⁶ assignments give students an opportunity to see the blurred lines between advertising and medium and medium and consumer. (Denzin, 2000) (Appendix C). They too follow the CREATE formula (Heaton, 2002) and discover synergies between product and consumer.

1. Choose an advertisement that targets a very specific (ethnic, minority or niche consumer) target market. Explain the target market with regard to demographics and psychographics. Interview members of your target market—widen your knowledge base.
- 2.
3. What did you learn?
4. What is the underlying drama of the ad—the narrative—the story?
5. Why is it specific for this group or is it? Use proofs of your own discovery.

⁶ Based on the premise that we inhabit a performance based dramaturgical society.

6. Discuss at least two elements of the ad that illustrate how the marketer understands the target consumer. In other words, what stimuli in the ad speak directly to the target group? What aspects of the ad are attention getting and relevant for this consumer? Explain why.
7. What is the purpose of the communication (create awareness (inform), aid in comprehension, develop conviction (persuade), or remind and encourage a purchase)?
8. Create your own target market ad. Include a strategy and test it on a member of that target. The ad you create doesn't have to be an ethnic target, just a niche target. Don't identify it as a targeted piece to the person you interview and record what the response was. Can the person relate to the experience?

Assignment #3

An assignment using this might look like this *Eavesdropping* conversation.

Go to a public place that is crowded. Take your notebook with you and write down several vignettes.

- This can be an overheard conversation.
- It can be an incident.
- It can be an inspiration.
- Write down the circumstances of the eavesdropping episode (like: I overheard this conversation while I was waiting in line at the grocery, combing my hair in the lavatory, doing my wash at the Laundromat etc. eating my Big Mac in a booth. Pay special attention to audio details and incorporate them into the ad. These details are pertinent to scene setting.
- Find a conversation that will work with a radio commercial.
- Create two ads.
 - One using dialog as its primary tool
 - One using jingle as its primary tool
- Create an environment using SFX so that we know where we are (a crowded coffee shop, the clinking of glasses and murmurs of a busy place, I want to smell the coffee by your description)

Assignment # 4

Looking for cultural myths in advertising. Why? Because there is much discussion about whether or not culture creates myth or does myth create culture? Does advertising create culture, reinforce culture or merely mirror it? Assignments that examine myths represented in advertising such as the Pied Piper myth in AT&T's farmer leading sheep through the world being followed by multi-national disciples, or Capital One's tooth fairy, dragon slayer and princess kissing toad ads can help students to see the power of symbolic location. Autoethnographically writing about myths and the part they play in the student's life can be an eye opening experience and can allow the student to see how other generational/cultural myths play a role in society—such as how the spending habits of each generation are guided by their myths and beliefs.

Spurring on and encouraging creativity is paramount to a successful career in the advertising field. By giving self-reflective writing⁷ assignments we offer our students an enriching opportunity to investigate how they construct the world, themselves and others (Richardson, 2000, Fiske, 1990, Ulmer, 1989, Heaton, 2002). It has the potential of adding new insight and depth to student writing. Richardson maintains that she writes because she wants to find something out instead of writing what she thought she wanted to say (Richardson, 2000). By using writing as a method of inquiry we can avoid static writing, the kind of writing that Richardson says suffer from chronic passivity (Richardson, 2000). Taking students on a guided imagery tour to a galaxy far, far away then having them describe the trip and write an advertising platform to sell their trip allows them to reach into the depths of their own metaphor world in an attempt to find descriptors that will allow others to share the adventure. A bonus of this assignment is to allow students to exchange platforms and to try to design ads based on someone else's trip.

Robert Frost once said that the shortest emotional distance between two points—the speaker and the reader “is the poem” (Richardson, 2000). Assignments that use Haiku for rhythm and feeling collapsed into a few lines of copy selling a product teaches students the power of well chosen words. It also makes the text both accessible, and relatable; creating the beauty of metaphorical art (Stern, 1988b; Leiss, Kline, Jhally, 1986 p.241).

A research project that involves a family recipe can allow students to relate in a personal way to the cultural association and significance of food. The ad writing becomes narrative and talks about the feelings and emotion attached to this food and the opportunity of sharing these stories within the classroom allows students to know about each other and themselves. Their singular experiences can be universally relatable.

Conclusions:

The world of advertising and the world of language, like the world we live in, is in constant flux. New strategies and new methods of selling are steadily being tested. With a long and storied history in anthropology, cultural studies, folklore and communication practices, ethnography and autoethnography are quickly becoming enmeshed in the new advertising industry that sees the consumer as part of the process of selling. It is an ethical act of inclusion rather than dictation. By interacting with people in their everyday lives through these methods, advertisers can reach a better understanding of their consumers. Students can gain insights into their own and others' behaviors and above all, creativity can be encouraged by allowing students to reach into and beyond themselves for experience and depth of understanding. The agency business lives and dies on creative ideas - and strategic insights. This is certainly not news. Therefore I encourage my students to “summon their inner kid when their creativity needs a kick in the ass.” (Blezinski, 2007). We, in academia, are told to take the “I” out of our writing; at the same time we are enjoined to greater reflexivity and ethical responsibility (Richardson, 1997). We are controlled in large part and limited in creativity by the kind of cultural stories available to us, yet we are told to be original. How do we adjust to these contrary messages? By experimenting with textual form, voice and frame, we allow students to show not tell their creativity. Using alternative forms of representation we share stories and open up the realm of new possibilities.

⁷ Based on the premise that writing and fieldwork inform each other.

We are a nation of storytellers. And we love a story, we love to gossip, to speculate, emulate and create. We watch soap operas, we watch serials, we watch reality TV and we watch commercials. We are addicted to drama and most ads have drama—sometimes it is the drama of a drain clog being fixed, the drama of bad breath at a kissing moment or the drama of showing the Maytag repairman fixing a computer in his spare time, but they all ooze drama in varying amounts. We need to teach students to hunker back to Leo Burnett’s old advertising trick of mounting a picture of the consumer on the computer so that you never lose track of this consumer as the quintessential consumer of that product, so you don’t lose her humanness or his vitality and uniqueness. I teach students to eavesdrop on conversations to pick up vernacular used by consumers, to watch for slang, pauses, dialects and idiomatic speech patterns—we turn those into real person ads complete with patois and rhythm, but more than that we turn them into insight into the humanness of people. I teach them to look for stories within themselves and in others, and to write accordingly. The result is not always genius. Sometimes it results in what Marcus calls *messy text* (Marcus, 1994). But within the messy text there is order. An order, as suggested by Heaton that is grounded in academic history, culturally varied and that explores political and cultural performance (Heaton, 2002). Writing messy text is preparation for their futures in advertising and in life. By experimenting in the classroom with a variety of writing-creativity stimulating performances students can discover that there are “other ways of knowing, other ways of feeling our way into the experiences of self and other. (Denzin, 1997 p. xviii)

Appendix A

“Madge! You’re softening my hands in a dishwashing liquid?”

“Now, relax! It’s Palmolive!”

“You mean—it’s really mild?”

“Oh, Palmolive® Dishwashing Liquid is a lot more than just mild. When I wash dishes, it gives me luds that last as long as I need them. And, it softens hands while you do the dishes.”

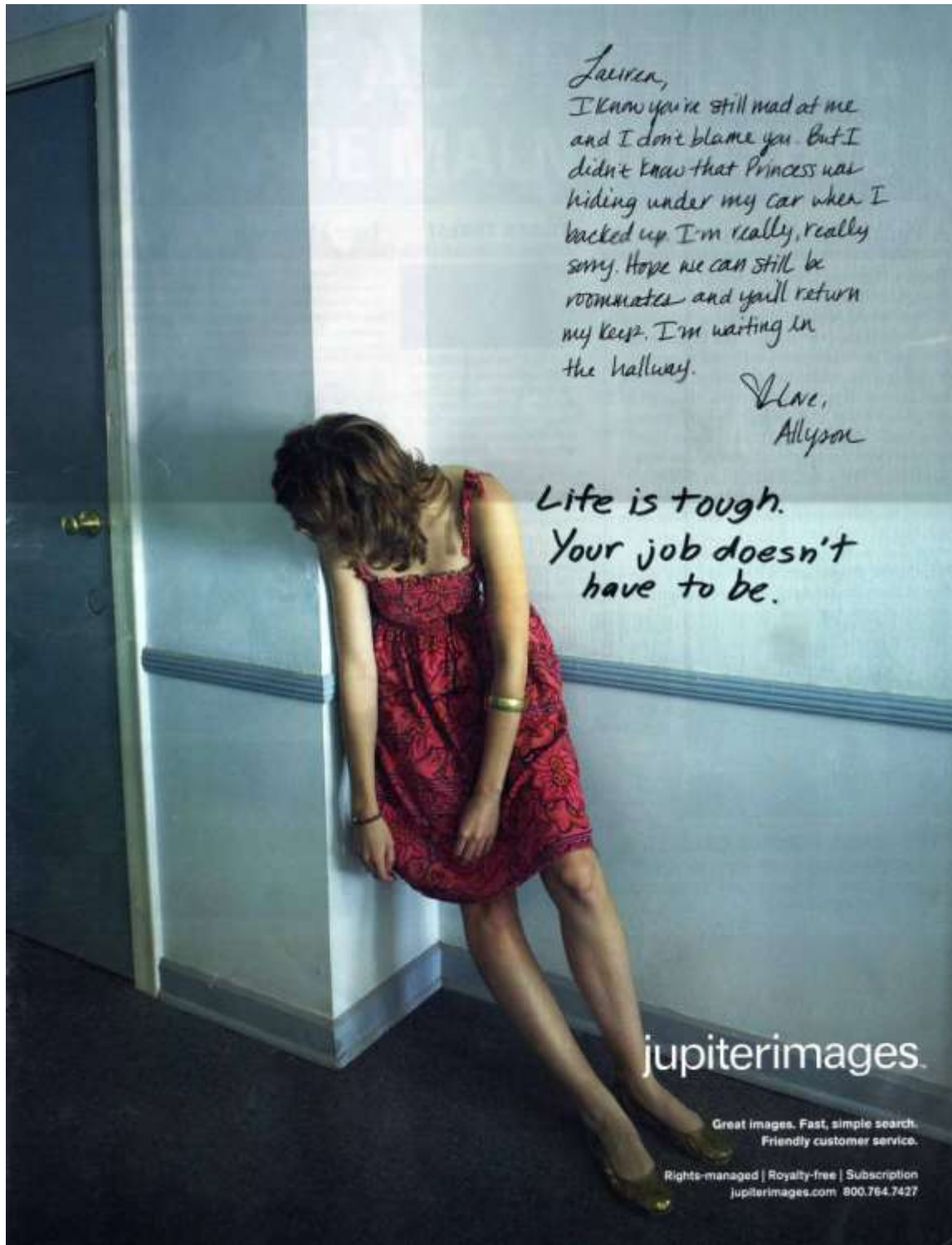
Don't just do dishes...
Softem your hands!

Madge

PALMOLIVE

PALMOLIVE

The advertisement features two women in a kitchen setting. On the left, a woman with a white towel on her head and a colorful patterned shirt looks concerned. On the right, a woman named Madge, wearing a blue shirt with her name on it, smiles and explains the benefits of Palmolive Dishwashing Liquid. A large bottle of Palmolive is on the counter, and a smaller bottle is in the foreground. A sign on the counter reads 'Don't just do dishes... Softem your hands!'.



Lauren,
I know you're still mad at me
and I don't blame you. But I
didn't know that Princess was
hiding under my car when I
backed up. I'm really, really
sorry. Hope we can still be
roommates and you'll return
my keys. I'm waiting in
the hallway.
Love,
Allyson

Life is tough.
Your job doesn't
have to be.

jupiterimages.

Great images. Fast, simple search.
Friendly customer service.

Rights-managed | Royalty-free | Subscription
jupiterimages.com 800.764.7427

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