Tending to the “flower of capitalism:”
Consuming, producing and censoring advertising
in South Korea of the '00s

by

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Department of East Asian Studies
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Abstract

My dissertation examines discourses and practices that surrounded consumption and production of advertising in South Korea in the first decade of the 21st century. In its approach, my study breaks away from works that assume that advertising performs the same role universally and that local advertising industries should follow the uniform path of development, in terms of both creative content and industry structures. Treating advertising as an integral part of social reality, I embed my analysis in Korea's idiosyncratic social, cultural, political, and economic contexts to interrogate non-marketing functions of advertising. My dissertation investigates multiple projects that advertising mediates in contemporary South Korea, from challenging social norms and renegotiating cultural meanings, to contesting capitalist control over mass media and articulating fantasies of humanist capitalism. I explore how advertising consumers (including advertising censors) and advertising producers channel, shape, enable or block the flows of advertising messages and revenues. My conclusion is that, in South Korea, the marketing instrumentality of advertising is subordinated to the ethos of public interest, and both advertising consumers and producers strive for advertising that promotes humanist values and realizes democratic ideals, even if it jeopardizes the commercial interests of advertisers.

Theoretically, this study builds on critical theory and anthropology of media while drawing on Korean Studies scholarship to grasp interconnections between the practices of advertising
production and consumption, on the one hand, and, on the other, the modern entanglements of capitalism and democracy. Methodologically, I combine a discourse analysis of advertising-related public texts—popular advertising campaigns, responses to them in mass media and the blogosphere as well as the exhibits of the Advertising Museum in Seoul—with ethnographic fieldwork at two sites, an advertising agency and a quasi-government advertising review board, both in Seoul.
Acknowledgments

This project was realized thanks to support of many people.

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Note on translation, transliteration, Korean names and pseudonyms

Korean words are transliterated according to the McCune-Reischauer system, except when common usage differs.

Korean names are given with the surname preceding their first name, unless the author in question resides and publishes primarily outside of Korea. Whenever possible, I attempted to use the transliterations of people’s names that they chose for themselves. For authors who write in both English and Korean, I used the transliteration used in their English-language publications and provided a McCune-Reischauer transliteration of their names in brackets.

Unless otherwise noted, for Korean organizations, I used their preferred rendering of their names in English, as indicated in their publications or on their websites.

Most of my informants were not concerned about me using their real names or the names of their organizations. Yet I am using pseudonyms to avoid any unexpected consequences, except for those people who clearly, directly and repeatedly indicated that they wanted to appear under their real names.

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Introduction. Advertising, the “flower of capitalism”

Advertising is called the flower of capitalism. Advertising is as common in our surroundings as air or water. After the industrial revolution in the United States, automobiles became mass-produced, and the advertising industry developed greatly. The financial support that private newspapers and private broadcasters receive is also precisely from advertising. Apart from numerous advertisements for products and companies, there are advertisements which are used for the purposes of public interest (kong’ik jögin mokchògùro). I am reminded of a particular advertisement when May comes. This was corporate advertising for Ssangyong Group, which came out on May 15, 1984, the Teacher’s Day. The words (copy) of the advertisement were written by Kim T’ae-mun, and, in the advertisement, there is not a single line that promotes the company or its products. The advertisement was made from a story of a teacher who in difficult times always brought two lunch boxes (tosirak) to give one to hungry students for sharing, but one day gave both of his lunch boxes to his students and filled his stomach with cold water. Made in grateful longing for the teacher, this “Lunch box” advertisement was estimated as a good advertisement in which the hundred-year history of Korean advertising culminated.


“Flower of capitalism” (chabonchuüi üi kkot) is a common metaphor for advertising in South Korea. Like Korea is “the land of the morning calm,” South Korean advertising is the “flower of capitalism.” The metaphor sneaks into articles about advertising, and it is virtually unavoidable in blurbs for books about advertising, whereas floral patterns are common on advertising-related publications and particularly conference brochures. As any metaphor, the “flower of capitalism” captures and reproduces attitudes towards the phenomenon it describes. It comes with resolutely positive connotations: The expression “flower of” is often used in Korean to celebrate the crucial part of a particular phenomenon, where its key features culminate, just like flowering could be seen as a culmination in a life of a plant. “Elections are the flower of democracy,” starts a political commentary about the push to amend the election law in popular news service PRESSian, for example. The “flower of capitalism” foregrounds certain features of advertising and conceals others, thus sanctioning particular expectations and actions on advertising and advertisers. My epigraph, a quote form an article by professor Pak Hyo-sin of prestigious Yonsei University, illustrates the orientation that the “flower of capitalism”

designates invites. Published in a children's edition of national daily the Dong-A Ilbo, Pak's piece is quite representative of public discourse about advertising in South Korea of the '00s.

What is striking about Pak's article is that, despite framing advertising as the “flower of capitalism” in the title, it resolutely negates advertising's capitalist functions. Even though the writer mentions the industrial revolution and transition to mass production, nothing is said about how advertising is created and circulated to sell commodities. “Ads for products and companies” are mentioned in passing, but the epitome of advertising is “the advertisements that are used for the purposes of public interest” (emphasis added). The exemplar of all advertising is an advertisement that contains “not a single line that promotes the company or its products” and, for all practical purposes, blends with public service announcements—not an advertisement that results in the highest revenues for the advertiser, for example. The “flower of capitalism” thus disavows that advertising is a commercially driven medium, whose raison d'être is to advance the interests of advertisers. Media's dependence on advertising is presented as a public service that advertising performs, not as a for-profit use of media to promote advertised brands and commodities. In this light, the comparison with air and water, which opens the article, while naturalizing advertising and removing the specificity of its historical relation to capitalism, also frames advertising as a public resource that benefits everyone—like air and water. In other words, when advertising is called the “flower of capitalism,” what is disavowed is precisely the relation of advertising to capitalism, if capitalism is understood as a politico-economic system based, among other things, on production of goods and services for profit. Downplaying the intrinsic link between commercial advertising and capitalism, the “flower of capitalism” frames advertising as a wholesome creative medium driven by commitment to public interest.

Pak's article might create an impression that advertising in South Korea is fundamentally different from advertising elsewhere, that South Korean advertisers run media campaigns not to advance their private profits but to articulate noble ideals and sponsor democratic mass media. This is not the case. The majority of South Korean advertisements are every bit as base as advertisements in other capitalist societies: they manipulate sensuality, rely on insecurities and exploit vanity to enhance the appeal of commodities and suggest that ever-increasing consumption is a worthy pursuit. The “public-interest” commercial advertisements, like the “Lunch box,” are few (though they are widely celebrated by advertising critics and general publics). Likewise, South Korean advertisers are not shy to use their advertising budgets to gag critical mass media and shape political agenda, as I show in chapter 1.
The “flower of capitalism” rhetoric might then appear as a crude propaganda for the advertising industry, a clumsy attempt to produce consumers susceptible to advertising messages. Indeed, Pak’s article is a peculiar way to educate children about advertising. Rather than enhancing their media literacy and inculcating a questioning attitude towards commercial messages, it invites appreciation for advertising and unconditionally celebrates the alleged benefits that advertising brings to society.

Yet, I argue, Pak’s piece is not unsubtle brainwashing either. As I became convinced in the course of my research, and as I argue in the dissertation, such unreserved celebrations of advertising—also to be found in the Advertising Museum (chapter 5) and in countless educational and journalistic publications—rather than producing docile consumers, enable claims on advertising that keep it in the realm of public life and prevent its foreclosure as a commercial space controlled exclusively by advertisers. It is such critical, proactive, demanding engagements with advertising, the opportunities they open and the limits they face, that are the focus of my dissertation.

This dissertation investigates how parameters of advertising as a locally embedded social institution and a media genre are reproduced, challenged and negotiated in South Korea of the ’00s. I show how, in South Korea, advertising—a realm that in many other places is virtually completely commercial—has been governed by the ethos that subordinates advertising’s commercial imperatives to public service. This ethos commits advertising, both its texts and its revenues, to advancing the perceived interests of society as a whole—which might or might not coincide with the commercial interests of advertisers. My central argument is that this configuration of advertising keeps it a domain of public life and enables claims that enlist commercial advertising as a public cultural, social and political resource, something more than just a tool for private enrichment of the advertiser. I thus investigate how institutionalized and informal discourses and practices of advertising consumers, censors and producers draw advertising into the public domain: how advertising is lent to politics of representation and how it mediates contestations over mass media control. The following chapters offer a multi-sited ethnography of advertising in South Korea of the ’00s, exploring how this orientation towards public interest played out at different sites—in the social movements for political freedom first against authoritarianism and then against conservative hegemony (chapter 1), in everyday interactions with advertising (chapter 2), at a media censorship board (chapter 3), at an advertising agency (chapter 4) and at the Advertising Museum (chapter 5). To make a case that evocations of public interest are capable of transforming advertising into a site of politicization, I privilege the instances when advertisers' commercial interests or advertisers' discretion over
their advertising were challenged with greater or lesser success. Nevertheless, I emphasize how maintaining advertising within the public domain is an ongoing struggle against powerful forces, and especially how the neoliberal discourses, strong in post-democratization South Korea, undermine public claims on advertising by valorizing liberal freedoms, including the freedom of enterprise and the freedom of expression. It is those contestations over the regime of advertising that are the focus of my ethnographic attention, and I show how contestations about particular advertisements are also contestations about advertising’s proper role in society.

Pak's article thus describes neither the actuality of advertising nor advertisers' hype; it reflects a fantastic ideal that is held up for South Korean advertising: “the “flower of capitalism.”” The “flower of capitalism” frames advertising as an influential public text and privileges advertising's potential for positive societal interventions, for promoting desirable values and supporting democratic mass media. As Pak's article alludes, it is public service announcements—commonly known as public-interest advertising (kong'ik kwanggo) in South Korea—that commercial advertising is expected to look up to, and indeed advertisements like the “Lunch box” come very close to that ideal. Tellingly, the Korean word for advertising, kwanggo, does not automatically bring to mind commercial advertising and is shared not only with public service announcements, but also with classifieds (saenghwal kwanggo) and even notices of condolence (aedo kwanggo). In other words, in the eyes of advertising consumers, the capitalist functions of commercial advertising do not define it exhaustively and its instrumental purposes do not entirely separate it from other public texts. An advertisement in Korea is a public notice and a cultural text at least as much as it is a commercial message. Of course, in many cases, this ideal of advertising rhymes well with advertising's marketing goals, and possibly even amplifies them. However, what I wish to underscore is that, whether or not the “flower of capitalism” ethos problematizes advertising commercial instrumentality, it has allowed for keeping advertising a matter of public scrutiny and answerable to popular demands.

Overall, this dissertation aims at a double intervention. First, I am concerned with advertising

3 I intentionally use “advertising” in a non-specific way, without privileging advertising transmitted via a particular medium. My rationale is that many commonsense beliefs about advertising are formulated about advertising in general—like in “advertising, the flower of capitalism”—and it is this commonsense understanding of advertising, as well as the engagements that they enable, that I investigate.

4 In the course of my fieldwork, I solicited advertising diaries from some of my informants, intentionally providing vague directions as to what I wanted them to write about. Essentially I said that as long as they wrote about advertising, anything would be great. I was quite surprised that on quite a few occasions I received entries about public interest advertising—which in my mind was classified as public service announcement and therefore outside the scope of my research. This vision reverses the commonsensical in North America view that assumes advertising to be primarily a means of commercial communication and treats opinion advertisements, political advertising as fringe aberrations or hybrids with other media texts.
as a peculiar medium and as an institution that mediates between the economic and cultural realms. Advertising is a ubiquitous, seemingly obvious part of everyday life, but considering it in the South Korean context allows me to make familiar strange and to question the commonsense understanding of what advertising does and could do. I show how the “flower of capitalism” approach to advertising—which might appear counterintuitive and problematic to those outside of South Korea, as it did to me when I started my research—does make sense when considered in its context and in fact opens ways for politicizing advertising, which have been foreclosed in many other places. That said, even as I commend the attempts to keep advertising as a site and a matter of public debate in South Korea, I accentuate the limits of even the most critical interventions mediated by the most socially minded advertising: advertising is an intrinsically capitalist solution for facilitating commodity sales and, in the final count, serves capital first, so designating advertising as a means towards a change necessarily implies an acquiescence to capitalist fundamentals and prevents radically transformative demands.

Second, via advertising, I analyze the conjuncture in South Korea of the ‘00s, where the democratization of the late 1980s opened doors to a neoliberal turn. I draw attention to how the contestations about advertising were never just about economic and political interests of advertisers, but rather about what constitutes democracy and public interest. In that sense, my dissertation is also about how societal ideals are established and negotiated in post-democratization South Korea, and contestations about advertising are a venue to explore these issues. (To clarify, my research does not assume advertising texts to be a mirror of society to read social reality from; rather than interpreting advertisements, I prioritize real-life engagements with advertising and question how they are shaped by local sensibilities and struggles. Consequently, a systematic content analysis of South Korean advertising, either in its contemporary state or in its historical development, is outside of my project.)

The rest of the introduction presents my theoretical and methodological tools and also provides the context on advertising and capitalist development in South Korea. In the next section, I discuss Michael Warner’s concept of media publics and argue for its applicability to South Korean advertising consumers, whom I frame as advertising publics. To draw out the characteristics of South Korean advertising publics and to further explicate the “flower of capitalism” vision of advertising, I turn to the so-called humanist advertising, which, as I argue, realizes the public-interest ethos of South Korean advertising. The following two sections detail the structural limitations of the “flower of capitalism” project, drawing on Wolfgang Haug’s theorizations of commodity aesthetics and applying Slavoj Žižek’s work on ideology to theorize
advertising. I point out that the critiques of private profit-seeking voiced via advertising do indeed identify real problems—alienations of work and everyday life, subordination of human needs to capitalist profits, etc.—yet the remedy they call for—cultivating humanism among individuals and corporations—does little to address the capitalist structures that engendered those problems in the first place. Further, to historicize the “flower of capitalism” vision, I read it against the ideologies of capitalism in Korea from the late 19th century and sketch the trajectory of the development of the advertising industry in Korea, drawing attention to the lasting institutional structures that materialized societal beliefs about advertising. Next, I position my project within scholarly literature on advertising and draw on the anthropology of media to explain the rationale for my research methods. Finally, I describe the process of my fieldwork and introduce my research sites.

**Advancing the “flower of capitalism” vision**

**Advertising publics**

Michael Warner (2002) defines a media public as a self-organized virtual entity that comes into being in relation to a circulating media text. A mere act of paying attention to the media discourse recruits one as a member of its public, inserts one into a relation with strangers who are imagined as also addressed by the discourse, and commits one to the “world-making” project effected through the discourse.

The capacity for poetic world-making is a key promise of a public for Warner. He stresses how public discourse is a performative, “subjunctive-creative project” (114):

> Public discourse says not only “Let a public exist” but “Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world this way.” It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success—success being further attempts to cite, circulate and realize the world understanding it articulates. (114)

In other words, a circulating media text realizes not only a public that it addresses but also its social imaginaries in the real world.

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5 To provide more detailed definition, for Warner, a public is performative and autotelic, coming into existence “by virtue of being addressed” by a text, understood widely (67); a public is “a relation among strangers,” who are identified primarily by their participation in the discourse (74); public address must be simultaneously personal and impersonal, an one must be addressed individually but at the same time as a stranger (76-77); “a public is constituted by mere attention” (87); “public discourse must be circulated, not just emitted in one direction” (100); and, finally, “a public is a poetic world-making” (114), meaning that the discourses circulated by the public have real effects in the world. Warner points to the chicken-and-egg circularity of public formation: on the one hand, public comes into existence by virtue of being addressed as a public and, on the other hand, the act of addressing a public presupposes a public as already existing (67-68). "A public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself"(67).
As a discourse about desirable commodities, attractive lifestyles, praised norms and societal ideals, advertising characterizes the world in which it seeks to circulate and attempts to conjure that world into being by addressing it as such. An advertising public is constituted and realized the moment someone responds to this address with attention (100-102), and to follow Warner's argument, by becoming a member of the advertising public, one effectively acquiesces to the discourses circulated through advertising and to the visions of the world they imply.

Similar to other public-forming discourses, advertising is not a single text, but rather “an ongoing space of encounter for discourse” (90), as advertisements are intertextual in relation to other advertisements and with other media texts. As a public discourse, advertising circulates not simply by being transmitted via commercial media but also spontaneously in the everyday when it enters people's conversations. Advertising is commonly consumed as another cultural product, and an advertising public is conjured up when advertising meaningfully engages with pertinent social issues (chapter 2).

As with other media discourses and their publics, advertising publics and advertising are mutually constitutive. Even without any kind of intentional engagement with the advertising discourse, advertising consumers determine it passively, by being willing or unwilling subjects of marketing research and also by voting with their wallets for particular brands. An advertising public is truly realized when its members take an active stance in shaping advertising discourse. Concerned parents, vigilant citizens, citizens organizations and government institutions (staffed with members of advertising publics) interfere with advertising they see objectionable and discipline the advertising industry into circulating discourses that match their world-making aspirations. While an advertising public might be constituted by minimal attention to advertising, my focus is primarily on these active engagements that seek to harness the poetic powers of advertising to conjure up the world it portrays.

Warner stresses the multiplicity and heterogeneity of communities that emerge as media publics, and he valorizes counterpublics as spaces from where alternative world-making

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6 Brian Moeran, for example, argues that there is a system of advertised commodities and changes in the image of one of them triggers readjustment in the image of the others (Moeran 1996: 286).

7 Thinking of advertising in terms of publics is complicated by the fact that advertising is not a medium in the sense in which print or television or the internet are. Rather than being a communication technology in the most direct sense, advertising is a particular genre (MacRury 2009) within ecologies of various media (Foulger 2006). In a sense, advertising colonizes communication technologies to exploit the fact that the media discourse has brought a public to existence. On the other hand, advertising is a medium in a sense that it mediates the relation between people and commodities (Leiss et al. 2005; see Eisenlohr 2011 on various meanings of medium that exceed communication technologies) and, on occasion, it realizes its own advertising publics (for example, “Ad-eaters night” festivals organized for lay audiences within advertising festivals or the Super Bowl advertising in the U.S.).
projects might arise. Advertising, too, appeals to increasingly diverse and fragmented consumer niches and indeed might sometimes succeed in fostering communities of consumption or in latching onto existing communities mapped onto peculiar market niches. Advertising (and marketing in general) equipped counter-cultural movements with recognizable insignia, which, however, often led to subverting their anti-establishment impulse and transforming a counterculture into a lifestyle (Klein 2000, Lasn 1999). Despite the marketers’ obsession with segmentation in the post-Fordist order (cf. Lukács 2010), advertising publics are formed across consumer niches and are often based not on the loyalty to a particular brand but rather on the interest in particular aesthetics or advertising-carrying medium. (I develop this argument in chapter 2).

Importantly, self-organized advertising publics neither necessarily include those target consumers whom the advertiser wishes to address nor exclude those people with limited purchasing power or uninterested in the advertised commodity or service. Advertising publics do not coincide with marketing niches but include anyone who actually responds to advertising, regardless of the relevance or accessibility of the commodity advertised. Advertising interpellates individuals who are imagined as potential consumers, yet anyone who interprets the advertisement as a relevant discourse responds. Not everyone may be partaking in the joys of consumption, yet most are interpellated into an advertising public by virtue of being exposed to advertising—on TV, in the internet, on the streets. Advertising publics also comprise those who are professionally engaged with advertising—advertising makers, advertising reviewers, advertising students and media activists. In their daily lives, they too are consumers of advertising, and their professional activities make them the most appreciative connoisseurs and the harshest critics of it.

In the case of nation-wide advertising campaigns transmitted through mainstream media, advertising publics coincide with the “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson 2006), they become “the public,” a social totality of people organized as a national polity (Warner 2002: 65-66; 116-117). Advertising mediates a sense of belonging to national community when it draws on the shared cultural repertoire but also adds to it with new puns, clever slogans or resonant characters. Moreover, advertising articulates societal ideals about good life and endorses behaviours, which become normative, or at least acceptable, in everyday life after appearing in national advertising.8 In so far as advertising is accepted as an authoritative

8 In South Korea, advertising’s role in shaping public morals was visible when a 2009 coffee commercial featured a kissing scene for the first time in the history of Korean advertising; the campaign inspired not only many copycats among advertisers, but also some young couples in the streets of Seoul, effectively shattering a taboo for expressing affection in public. During my fieldwork, advertising with kissing scenes
discourse on good life, normative values and societal ideals, advertising itself becomes enlisted as a technology of nation-building and a tool for shaping proper national subjects. It is these presumed poetic powers of advertising that invite multiple interventions with advertising discourse and make it political.

Admittedly, most segments of advertising publics are apolitical and engage with media discourses for diverse purposes, from obtaining amusement to demonstrating cultural competency. As Joshua Barker (2008) argues, framing publics pointedly in terms of a political agency excludes publics that engage with media discourses for other purposes, such as experimentation with mediated sociality. This correction is useful for thinking about advertising and its publics, since most often advertisements are noticed and responded to because of enjoyment they provide. Thus conjured advertising publics engage with advertising for their own purposes, such as online sociality. (Such a public, mostly concerned with demonstrating cultural prowess via a clever repartee online, was conjured up by a commercial for a designated driver service which employed a cartoon dinosaur Dooly as a celebrity endorser, to be considered in chapter 2). Nevertheless, while advertising publics are not overtly political, they retain a political potentiality, which erupts as critical social commentary about advertising campaigns and is harnessed by citizens’ organizations, which engage with advertising as a world-making discourse. It is those engaged, critical advertising publics and their politics that are my primary concern in the dissertation.

More generally, the refusal of advertising publics to dismiss advertising as unworthy of serious engagement is in itself political because it keeps advertising publicly accountable. In

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9 Abu-Lughod (2005) makes a comparable argument about television in Egypt, positioning her ethnography of television as an ethnography of the nation. My stress is not so much on the kinds of subjects advertising shapes but on advertising itself and its contested role in South Korean society.

10 Warner’s theorizations of media publics link back to the Habermasian ideas on public sphere, a space where a society by means of rational debates can come to a common mind on issues of common importance and, because debates are supposed to be rational and non-partisan, the public opinion thus formed becomes normative for the power (Taylor 2004: 87-91). The concept of public sphere was justly critiqued for assuming a self-conscious rational subject and for ignoring how differently positioned groups have different access to participation in public debates (e.g. Fraser 1990; Dean 2002). Jodi Dean argues that the idea of a public denies antagonisms in society and advances of a fantasy of a possibility of social unity; she critiques the public sphere ideal for encouraging circulation of diverse opinions as an end in itself, replacing political action with practices of media consumption and production (2002: 9). Dean insists that pluralizing the public into publics perpetuates the ideal of the singular, official, all-inclusive public sphere and confusingly gives equal significance to social groups of very different weight (2002: 36). While recognizing these limitations of the concept, I nevertheless find media publics a useful tool for thinking about how advertising is shaped by those who choose to engage with it. As I draw attention to the collective agency of advertising publics, I emphasize the effects of their activism that go beyond circulation of opinions and link up to local political struggles.
Advertising on trial, Inger Stole (2006) chronicles how this battle over public claims on advertising was lost in the United States in the 1930s. She describes the “ferocious political opposition” to advertising from consumer groups that saw advertising as “business propaganda that undermined consumers’ ability to make wise choices in the market and citizens’ ability to live in a healthy industrial and civic environment” (viii) in the late 1920s and 1930s, only to show how the advertising industry squelched the attempts to regulate advertising. Stole laments that the role and nature of advertising are currently removed from the mainstream political debate and the demands advanced by the consumer movement of the 1930s are unthinkable even to the harshest critics of advertising in the U.S. today. Stole writes,

To the extent that advertising is analyzed, discussions tend to focus on its excesses (its ability to project a certain set of images and values) and not its shortcomings (its inability, for example, to provide consumers with facts and information or, despite all its flag-waving patriotism, to serve as a truly democratizing force).” (Stole 2006: vii-viii)

No doubt, similar stories could be told about other locales, where advertising has won its status as a natural, given social institution to be entrusted to advertisers’ corporate ethics and thus closed off to political debate (e.g. Cronin 2004). In South Korea, this has not happened; advertising remains a matter of politics and is expected to use its publicity not only for commercial goals but also for public interest. As I show in chapter 2, South Korean media publics, for once, are unwilling to grant advertisers a greater leeway with the content they circulated merely because advertisers bought media space/time to promote their commodities. Nor do obvious commercial motives of advertising prevent media publics from consuming particular advertising campaigns for inspiration, melodramatic pleasures and a refill of humanist values—and demanding that commercial advertising should be consumable in those ways. While I indicate historical and political reasons behind this configuration, I emphasize the role of engaged advertising publics, whose members' mundane interactions with advertising keep it within public domain and claim advertising as a part of Korea’s democratic culture.

Approaching advertising through advertising publics, a self-organized social grouping with a collective agency and political potentiality, links advertising to the politics of civil society and social movements specific to post-democratization Korea. As political scientist and public intellectual Choi Jang Jip (2005) points out, the notion of civil society (simin sahoe) carries very different connotations in South Korea than in Euro-American societies, where it originated. In South Korea, the ideals of civil society spread with the democratization movement in the 1980s; the notion of civil society was used to “define the democracy movement
as a civil rights movement” (250) and to capture “the social base of the democratization struggles” (Ibid.). Steeped in the legacy of pro-democratization and anti-authoritarian activism, the notion of civil society in Korea, rather than evoking liberalism and prioritizing the protection of the private sphere from interference from the state, is intimately linked to the issues of popular democracy and public interest:

. . . civil society in Korea acquired meaning as a mass movement space where the universal rights of the citizenry in general, or the public interest, were pursued. In this movement space, the individual is understood as an “active citizen” pursuing the public interest. This created a very negative perception of the expression of private interests and any organized activities based on such interests in Korea. In short, the concept of civil society in the Korean context, unlike in its original context, acquired meaning as a public sphere created by “active citizens.” (Ibid.)

Because of how advertising is understood in South Korea—as the “flower of capitalism,” an influential public text itself and as a means for financing mass media—advertising invites interventions from these “active citizens.” As they pursue their visions of public interest, they engage in contestations over norms and ideas found in advertising; their interventions with advertising are usually a means to an end, to enforce gender equality, buttress social norms, facilitate democratic mass media. Still, while they pursue their projects via advertising, they also make advertising itself a site of politicization by asserting the primacy of public interest over advertisers' private ownership.

The rhetoric of public interest is crucial here. As I observed, in South Korea of the '00s, “public interest” was one of the few persisting tropes that still allowed for challenging the neoliberal freedoms, sanctified in the wake of democratization and particularly after the 1997 Asian financial crisis (known as the IMF Crisis in Korea). As sociologist Seungsook Moon (2010) notes, in South Korea of the '00s, “public interest” was evoked pointedly to appeal to perceived universal interests of the society as a whole, as opposed to particular interests of different groups. Some of Moon’s interlocutors, participants of voluntary citizens' organizations, emphatically equated public interest with championing the interests of the “ordinary people”

11 Admittedly, the local meaning of civil society that Choi emphasizes does blend with the Euro-American concept and invites simplistic parallels, especially when South Korea’s democratization is narrated, resulting in analyses that undermine the interconnections between civil society and the state, on the one hand, and, on the other, downplay the differences in the positions of different groups within the grand pro-democracy coalition. South Korea’s current issues and the unrealized promises of democratization—failures to achieve social and economic justice despite achievement of the procedural democracy, continuing business-state collusion, politics dominated by regionalism—are often presented as the results of stifled opportunities for public debate and popular participation in policy-making. (Citizens’ organization Onsoju to be considered in chapter 1 provides a fair example of how this logic goes.) Without subscribing to this analytic paradigm, I speak to the issues “civil society” stands for—the problems of cultural hegemony and political mobilization.
against the interests of politically influential moneyed elites (2010: 487), thus acknowledging the antagonism at the core of South Korean society. Needless to say, owners and managers of advertiser companies are representatives par excellence of those privileged whose priorities are recognized as diverging from public interest. It is thus understood public interest—the universal interest of society as a whole—that is upheld for advertising to aspire to, and when pushed to its limit, it allows for critiques of the advertising that failed to prioritize its public-interest mandate over the advertiser’s private commercial interests.

By bringing advertising publics to the forefront, I emphasize how advertising, while appearing a monolithic, monologic voice of capital, is nevertheless a site of contestations. I stress that it is advertising publics in South Korea that keep advertising a part of public life in such a way that they can demand a certain accountability and lay claims on advertising as a resource for realizing their social imaginaries and for pursuing their visions of public interest. I stress the agency of the advertising publics in regards to the parameters of advertising as a social institution—the agency of individual consumers of advertising, but particularly their collective agency as a public. To sketch the social imaginary that advertising publics commit advertising to, I introduce the so-called "humanist advertising," the expression par excellence of the “flower of capitalism” vision.

**Humanist advertising**

The 1984 “Lunch box” advertisement, which Pak’s article praised as “a good advertisement in which the hundred-year history of Korean advertising culminated,” stands as a favourite example of what a publication by South Korea’s Public Information Office (*Kongboch’ö*) categorized as “public-interest commercial advertising” (*kong’iksŏng sang’op kwanggo*)—advertising that, while paid for by commercial companies, serves public interest (Kyŏng et al. 1997: 382). The authors explain that, similar to public service announcements (thereafter “public-interest advertisements,” to be faithful to the Korean name, *kongik kwanggo*), such advertisements had been on the rise since 1981, when state-sponsored public-interest advertising officially started in Korea. They elaborate,

> Especially recently, when the situation of our society has become so that we need to cure such evils as inhumane crimes, deviations (*il’tal haengwi*) and environmental issues, there has been a tendency for public-interest advertising (*kong’iksŏng*

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12 Pak is not alone in his praises for the 1984 “Lunch box.” As advertising critic Mha Joung-Mee (Ma Chŏng-mi) wrote, “This advertisement has shown that one advertisement can move people’s hearts more than a poem or a novel” (2004: 142), and advertising historian Shin In Sup (Sin In-sŏp) compared the “Lunch box” with famous poem “Azaleas” by Kim So-wŏl in its popular appeal (1992: 40).
kwanggo), by businesses and by public organizations, to increase. (Ibid.)

The commercial advertising that pursued public interest was also described as “social responsibility advertising” (sahoi ch’egim kwanggo) (e.g. Cho and Kim 2005; Ahn 2011), and this term linked such advertising to the discourses of corporate social responsibility that proliferated in South Korea after the 1997 IMF Crisis. Advertising publics, in the mass media and blogosphere, often referred to such advertisements as humanist advertising (hyumônijüm kwanggo) or emotionally moving advertising (kamdong kwanggo). Such advertisements were described as “advertising that spreads humanism” in a collection of consumer letters about advertising, solicited and published by the Korea Advertisers Association (KAA 1992).

References to humanism (hyumônijüm or in’ganjuï) as an ideal for advertising were recurring in my conversations with advertising regulators, advertising professionals and adults unrelated to advertising in their professional life. It is from an advertising maker at the advertising agency where I did my fieldwork that I borrow the term. “Humanist advertising” (in’ganjuïjök kwanggo) was the expression he used to describe the kind of advertising he aspired to produce.

These diverse descriptors—public interest, social responsibility, humanism and strong emotion—collectively point to the ethos of advertising in South Korea, and their thrust was well captured by the title of an exhibition in the Gyeonggido Modern Art Museum held in the summer 2011, “Kind advertising, best advertising” (ch’akhano kwanggo, yittüm kwanggo, the official translation was “Good advertising, best advertising”). It is this ethos of advertising that spreads humanism and goodness while moving emotions that invokes an advertising public and instills faith in the powers of advertising for the betterment of society.

In the ‘00s, such public-interest commercial advertisements were epitomized by “Towards people (saram ül hyang’hamnida) campaign for SK Telecom, the biggest mobile telephony carrier and one of the biggest advertisers in Korea. The concept of the campaign was “digital humanism,” and the SK advertisements celebrated regular people in the midst of the everyday, while provoking reflection on modern life and praising humanism. Early seasons (the campaign has been running since 2005) featured slideshows of black-and-white photos, to the

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13 Ch’akhada in Korean does not neatly overlap with kind in English and tend to connote broader goodness and consideration for others. For example, a cheap price could be described as ch’akhán kap (kind price), and the physique that is not prone to gaining weight easily as ch’akhán kap (kind body). For a detailed discussion on the meanings of ch’akhada, see Ablemann 2003: 63-70.

14 The slogan saram ül hyang’hamnida is difficult to translate into English literally. The word saram is a Korean word that corresponds to the Sino-Korean in (人) for “human, person,” the root word in “humanism” (in’ganchüï). “Hyang’hamnida” can be translated as “facing” as well. My version strives for clarity, while inevitably missing some intertextual intricacies. Advertising critic and creative director Kim Hong-tack translated this slogan as “Focusing on people” (2007: 226-227).
accompaniment of an instrumental rendition of The Beatles' *Let it be*. The award-winning “Hero” edition, for example, extolled mundane heroism: a black-and-white photograph of a smiling man on whose arms two young children are hanging is captioned “Supeman;” a mother holding a newborn is a “Wonder Woman;” a boy helping a girl cross a busy street is “Captain Atom;” and so on. In the last photograph, people on the subway platform push up one side of the train, in reference to a real accident, when someone was saved after having fallen on the subway tracks by other passengers lifting the subway car. “We all are a hero for someone,” stated the last caption. The “Parting and meeting again” edition addressed separation as a part of human experience, referencing scenes of separation and meeting again among friends and colleagues, and culminating in reunions of separated relatives from North and South Korea. Another episode asserted worthiness of every person by awarding achievement prizes to regular people: “Korea’s best comedian” to a grandfather entertaining children with a clown nose, “Korea’s best dressers” to youths in dirty clothing after they have cleaned up a neighbourhood, and the “best supporting actor” prize for a street sweeper. Just as the “Lunch box” advertisement, “Towards people” campaign did not contain a single line or image which would hint at the nature of SK Telecom’s business, except for the name of the company itself. Just like with the “Lunch box,” should the logo be removed, the advertisement could easily pass for a public interest message.

Figure 1. A still from “Hero,” “Towards people” (TBWA Korea, 2009). (“Superman”)

Rather than read such advertisements cynically, as some observers might be inclined, media publics in South Korea tended to celebrate such advertising, just as the admiring description of
the “Lunch box” advertisement in the opening article suggested. Such advertisements inspired identification with the sentimental, humanist messages. They also provoked admiration for people responsible for those moving campaigns, both advertising makers and the advertiser company.

The praise for advertising was most striking when it came from informal sources. For example, a blogger wrote about the “Hero” commercial,

Of course I like funny advertisements, but because I think that advertising is one of the methods to move people’s hearts, I tremendously like advertisements that shake me up emotionally (kamsŏng ūl t’ok’t’ok kŏndŭryŏ jumŭn kwanggo) [like ‘Towards people’ advertisements]” (emphasis in original).

Similar to Pak’s description of the 1984 “Lunch box” advertisement, the “Towards people” campaign was appreciated for the relevant, pathos-ridden content of its message and the commercial underpinnings of the message did not get in the way of enjoying the strong emotion the advertisement provided. In its content and overall pathos, humanist advertising comes closest to public service announcements, and many of the humanist advertising campaigns were praised for being indistinguishable from non-for-profit public-service advertisements.

Humanist advertising is a manifestation of how public-interest ethos drives South Korean advertising outside of the realm where advertising primarily serves interests of advertisers. Exemplified by "Towards people" and "Lunch box," such advertisements, while celebrating humanism and other admirable social values, depart from glorifying the advertised commodity, to the point that the commodity itself does not appear in the advertisement and it remains up to the advertising consumer whether and how to imagine its attractions. Humanist advertising, while still capitalist advertising in its form, in its content becomes another cultural text, its commercial goals largely irrelevant for its consumption. In order to resonate as humanist advertising, such campaigns pick up on topics that speak to social problems and articulate common concerns (such as lack of humanism in the everyday), which do not obviously translate into consumption of the advertised brand. Humanist advertising illustrates how, when advertising’s public-interest ethos is pushed to its limit, advertising becomes an unlikely site from which commercial private interest can be questioned and critiqued.

To emphasize once again, advertising in South Korea is not qualitatively different from advertising everywhere else. Certainly not all South Korean advertisements fit the public-interest ethos...
interest humanist endeavour. If national advertising is visualized as a multi-dimensional spectrum, its central regions in South Korea are populated by advertisements that are all too familiar: They tantalize with “sex appeal” strategies, prey on fears and manipulate human needs. Advertising in South Korea is a variety of the same species found in all advanced capitalist societies. Moreover, advertisements like “Towards people” or “Lunch box” are on the same continuum as vulgar advertisements that use sex appeal of young celebrities to sell soju (an alcoholic drink), for example; they also are driven by the commercial imperatives, whereas vulgar soju advertisements can also be created to realize the ideal of a better society (see discussion of advertising campaign for “Cool” soju in chapter 4). What I underscore is that South Korean advertising is expected not simply to abide by social norms (as advertising is expected to do everywhere), but that it is compelled to take a proactive role in shaping desirable social norms and to use its persuasive powers to advance public interest. While still advertising, it moves closer to political art and propaganda.

**Factoring in the capitalist imperatives of commercial advertising**

While exploring to the idiosyncrasies of the social institution of advertising in South Korea and emphasizing the public scrutiny of the advertising industry, it is important to keep extra-economic uses of advertising within the same analytic frame as its instrumental roles within capitalist societies, not to exaggerate the implications of unintended uses of advertising by advertising publics and not to misrepresent advertising in its humanist incarnation as posing a tangible threat to capitalism. However humanist advertising messages are, the fundamental objective of advertising is to serve advertisers, to have their commodities sold and profits realized. Advertising is a capitalist institution, and no matter how deeply its makers and consumers are concerned with public interest, advertising, in the final count, serves capital first. This is not to reverse my argument about the public-interest ethos of South Korean advertising but rather to qualify the structural limitations within which this ethos is pursued and to account for systemic obstacles that advertising publics encounter when pursuing public interest via advertising.

**Commodity aesthetics and media control**

As Marxist philosopher Wolfgang Haug (1986) explains, advertising, first of all, mediates interactions between commodity sellers and commodity buyers. Advertising exaggerates the use-value of a commodity by making it appear more pleasing to senses and therefore more desirable. Haug refers to this intentional enhancement of the appearance of commodities as *commodity aesthetics*, "a beauty developed in the service of the realization of exchange value,
whereby commodities are designed to stimulate in the onlooker the desire to possess and the impulse to buy” (1986: 8). According to Haug, the transaction where commodities are exchanged for money are fundamentally unequal: sellers know the exchange value they wish to receive for their commodity at the time of transaction, while buyers cannot know what utility they will derive from a commodity till the very moment of consumption, which usually takes place after the transaction has been completed. Therefore, when entering an exchange transaction, the buyer has no choice but to guess the utility of the commodity from its appearance, and advertising is one of the ways through which the seller inflates the presumed use-value of the commodity. Thus, Haug argues, advertising subordinates the needs of commodity buyers to the needs of commodity sellers, it subordinates human needs to the needs of capital. As he summarizes, the ideal of commodity aesthetics is “to deliver the absolute minimum of use value, disguised and staged by a maximum of seductive illusion” (Haug 1986: 54). Importantly, Haug emphasizes (arguing against Vance Packard’s *Hidden Persuaders* (1957)) that commodity aesthetics is not just a tactic employed by certain unscrupulous advertisers. Rather obsession with commodity aesthetics is a logical outcome of capitalist development: companies must maximize capital accumulation or go bankrupt, and staying in business means that they must sell the produced commodities and inflating the appearance of the commodity’s use-value is overdetermined.  

A “Swimming pool” commercial (2009) for the advertising campaign for Georgia coffee, for example, shows an overwhelmed male office worker, swarmed with papers and simultaneously talking on multiple phones. When someone dumps another pile of papers on his desk, the protagonist looks away in frustration and suddenly spots a coffee vending machine. As he presses the button to release a coffee can, he is transported into a stereotypical tropical paradise. A young woman walks out of the turquoise water and hands him a can of Georgia coffee, which was attached to the side of her swimming suit. The protagonist takes a sip, and the next shot shows him in a beach chair surrounded by five bikini-clad beauties. The commercial enhances the appeal of canned coffee by associating it with an exotic location and attractive foreign women. It says nothing whatsoever about the actual use-value of the drink. Rather, it

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16 It might be objected that Haug’s account projects a somewhat exaggerated picture of the actual ability of advertising to achieve results the advertiser desires in every given case; after all, advertising’s track record of sales is not as successful as outsiders tend to believe. As Michael Schudson writes in *Advertising, the uneasy persuasion*, “advertising agencies are stabbing in the dark much more than they are practicing precision microsurgery on the public consciousness” (Schudson 1984: xiii), and this observation is supported by statistics that as many as 98 percent of newly introduced goods fail despite the promotional efforts, which shows that consumers are rather immune to marketing efforts (Leiss et al. 2005: 13). Haug's emphasis, however, is on the long-term effects of advertising and other tactics of “commodity aesthetics,” which he sees as a historical process of moulding human sensuality to adapt it to the needs of capital.

17 For a discussion of the gender and racial politics of this commercial, see James Turnbull, “Korean
grossly exaggerates the utility and satisfactions one is to receive from its consumption and, to put in Haug’s vocabulary, tantalizes the viewers’ sensuality. It is such fantastic associations that advertising claims for the advertised commodities that led Raymond Williams to call it “a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions” (Williams 2000 (1960): 40).

Moreover, the project of committing advertising to public service emerges as limited and compromised, if money flows that advertising mediates are considered. Advertising plays an important role in securing the existing hegemony because mass media’s dependence on advertising revenues results in a systematic gagging of critical voices that could shake the status quo and prevents mass media from realizing the public sphere ideal of an open, inclusive, equal and rational debate. To be attractive to advertisers, advertising-reliant media favour affluent media consumers, they gear their content towards entertainment and repress messages that might be deemed not conducive to consumption (Murdock and Golding 1977; Hackett and Carroll 2006; Curran and Seaton 2009). The economic power of advertisers to keep media afloat and make them go bankrupt prompts Curran and Seaton to describe advertising as “a de facto licensing power” (2009: 29). Regardless of its own content, advertising systematically precludes mass media from being a space of meaningful public debate and transforms into a mouthpiece for advertisers. As Inger Stole (2006) showed in the case of the United States, it is

the media dependence on advertising revenues that removes advertising itself from the political agenda. By fostering collusive relations among advertisers, mass media and political elites, advertising as a social institution systematically obstructs the attempts to advance interests that do not coincide with those of advertisers.

Haug and critical media theorists thus offer a useful reminder that, no matter how progressive advertising messages are, they, first of all, strive to advance the interests of advertisers, not of advertising publics. No matter how emancipatory the content of an advertising message might be, in the final count advertising is a tool of capitalist reproduction and drawing it into politics of representation or committing it to praising humanism does little to disturb that.

While advertising publics in South Korea have succeeded in making advertising a realm of public life and, on many occasions, in committing it to serving public interest, concerns for public interest could be incorporated in advertising only in so far as they do not interfere with advertisers' profit-seeking. It is necessarily within these constraints that advertising publics shape the flows of advertising messages and advertising money to realize their vision of a better society. Advertising texts articulate the worldviews that are conducive to advertisers' profit orientation, so they do not “organically” represent the interests of advertising consumers. Advertisements thus can be seen as an instance of “subaltern” culture produced for the dominated by the dominating, following Gramsci's argument that inequality and subordination are reproduced because the dominated are unable to initiate a transformation by formulating a coherent worldview to challenge the hegemonic accounts of the world, which keep them subordinated (Crehan 2002: 104-113). Because advertising publics are brought into existence by advertising, their capacities and characteristics are necessarily shaped by advertising. In other words, as long as advertising publics remain advertising publics, their world-making projects—no matter how critical of advertising’s commercialism, no matter how committed to public interest—in the end reproduce the social organization of which advertising is a part. They do little to disrupt the structures that privilege profit-seeking interests of commodity sellers over human needs of commodity buyers; rather, advertising publics are implicated in the reproduction of those structures, in so far as they accept advertising as a valid mediator of buying and selling.

**Advertising in the capitalist economy of enjoyment**

Advertising might be accommodating to the social imaginaries of advertising publics, but at a fundamental level it articulates an ideological fantasy that supports the capitalist economy of enjoyment. Enlisting advertising to support humanism or progressive causes does little to
disrupt this. As Slavoj Žižek argues, ideologies reproduce relations of domination by organizing enjoyment (Lacanian jouissance). Enjoyment is necessarily experienced as always-already lost, stolen or barred by the subject, who, within a psychoanalytic framework, is defined by this lack of enjoyment, which ultimately stands for the split that is an ontological condition of subjectivity (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008: 260; Dean 2006: 4-6). Žižek applies the idea of the constitutive split to society as a whole, which he sees as ruptured by the antagonism of class struggle (Žižek 2000: 95-97), proposing to understand ideological formations—socialist, capitalist, fascist—as economies of enjoyment, which promise to bridge the split and recapture the lost/impossible enjoyment in a particular way (Žižek 1999b). Economies of enjoyment are thus supported by fantastic explanation of what stands between the subject and full enjoyment, between the society and its perfect fullness. These ideologies get hold of a subject by attaching themselves to the subject's enjoyment, not simply by interpellating the subject and enlisting her to perform practices, in which the ideology is externalized. For an ideology to keep the subject locked in the relations and hierarchies that it organizes, compliance with the ideological injunctions must in itself be enjoyable, whereas the fantasy support of the ideology must promise a compelling way towards obtaining the impossible fullness (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008: 261-262; Dean 2006: 8-19).

Advertising stages a fantasy support for the capitalist economy of enjoyment. Advertising habitually explains the lack in a subject, and in society in general, by lack of consumption and asserts consuming, and by extension participating in the capitalist economy, as a way to recover the impossible enjoyment. Most immediately, in an attempt to enhance the commodity's appeal, advertising asserts fantastic satisfactions to be enjoyed from the consumption of the advertised commodity, as in the Georgia coffee commercial. More generally, advertising as a genre promotes consumption as a way towards fulfillment, even though consumption of commodities can satisfy only a limited number of the human needs (Leiss 1976; Jhally 1987) and thus completeness through consumption is impossible. Moreover, the fantasy that advertising advances disavows that even if completeness through consumption were possible, satisfaction of human needs is not the purpose of capitalist economies, which are driven by pursuit of surplus value. In other words, advertising contributes to capitalist reproduction by channelling the subject's quest for lost enjoyment into pursuing commodities, thus synchronizing the subjects' desire for ever-increasing consumption with the capital's drive for indefinite expansion and ever-increasing production of commodities (Debord 1977: #21).

This fantastic vision that advertising advances resonates because advertising speaks to a real lack. In order to motivate a purchase, advertising identifies an unsatisfied need in everyday life
and then suggests that consumption of the suggested commodity would fulfill it. Advertising messages are made to promote a particular product or brand; however, in congruence with the marketing’s philosophy of "selling the sizzle, not the sausage," (David Ogilvy in Brierley 2004: 29), the needs that are identified by advertising are not specific, material needs for a particular commodity but general, socially agreed-upon needs for living a satisfying life, such as a need for happiness, recognition and self-realization.\footnote{In the case of the North American advertising industry, this tendency to focus on non-material needs rather than products has been identifiable at least since the 1920-30s, when the style of advertising transformed from emphasizing the utility of the product to suggesting symbolic meanings to the product that go beyond its immediate utility (in the 1930-40s), to establishing a link between a product and human personality (in the 1950-60s) or lifestyle (in the 1970-80s) (Leiss et al. 2005: Chap 6). Since the 1990s, advertising concerns itself not so much with the product advertised but rather with brand image, while the commodities are shown as “props for the self-construction of changing scenes and life-scripts” (Ibid.: 22). In South Korea, these tendencies are noticeable from the 1970s, but they truly blossom after the 1997 IMF Crisis (Kim Hong-tack 2007).} By repeatedly stating that those needs remain unsatisfied in everyday life, advertisements inadvertently expose the failure of the society that is consistently unable to satisfy those needs.

In Henri Lefebvre's vocabulary, advertising provides a critique of everyday life (Lefebvre 1971, 1991). This critique is similar to the critique of the everyday provided by the surrealist art: it does not lead to an actual transformation of the everyday but rather advocates an escape from its drudgery, into the fantastic world of make-belief (cf. Lefebvre 1991: 119). While praising the surrealist for an attempt, Lefebvre nevertheless condemns the “criticism of the real by the surreal” (1991: 29, italics in original) as reactionary and ineffectual because rather than transforming the quotidian, the surrealist art ultimately demoted the everyday and fostered a belief that there is an outside of it. This diagnosis holds true for advertising as well.

Advertising operates as an ideological fantasy because, while promoting concrete commodities,
advertising promises nothing short of jouissance. Advertising gets hold of the subject also because complying with its injunction, to consume, is enjoyable in itself, regardless of whether consumption of particular commodities brings one any closer to the impossible full enjoyment. In the case of Georgia coffee, the identified lack is not a lack of caffeine. Rather the commercial speaks to a desire for a fulfilling, meaningful and rationally organized work (and, in a sense, provides a critique of contemporary workplaces). Even though any relief that consumption of Georgia coffee might bring is a momentary fragment and does little to address the fundamental need the commercial speaks to, it is nevertheless enjoyable. In the case of the Georgia coffee advertisement, the solution to alienation of work is in the consumption of a can of coffee, and by extension a consumption of a tropical vacation by a swimming pool. Obviously, both of those solutions are not solutions but rather a temporary relief.

This might appear as a rendition of the “false consciousness” argument, but it is not. What matters is not advertising consumers’ knowledge or lack thereof in regards to advertising and the fantastic dimensions of its promises, but their actions. Belief in advertising is externalized in material practices and institutions, so that advertising consumers do not actually have to believe in it. As Jodi Dean explains,

The Žižekian concept of ideology draws attention to the persistence of these actions that fly in the face of what one knows. If we know that we are 'just going through the motions' or 'just doing something for the sake of appearances,' we are still acting. This acting, moreover, materializes a set of beliefs. It reproduces not only the belief that appearances matter, say, but also the very appearances that matter, the appearances in which we believe. This materialized set of beliefs is ideology. So, in Žižek’s account of ideology, action and belief go together. They stand apart from knowledge. Action manifest an underlying belief that persists, regardless of what one knows. (Dean 2002: 5)

It is precisely by disidentification that ideology works. As Žižek notes, “Ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich human person beneath it” (Žižek 1999b: 98). As long as the subject who adopts a critical distance towards advertising continues to pursue commodities as if she believed advertising messages, the subject is within the hold of the advertising fantasies. In other words, the institution of advertising is materialization of belief in advertising and its practices believe in advertising for all those advertising consumers, who are thus provided with a critical distance from which to see themselves as detached from the ideologies advertising supplies, even when acting in accordance to them. Thus advertising consumers know full well
that advertising exaggerates the attraction of commodities and that pursuit of commodities will not bring happiness, nevertheless they act as if they didn't have this knowledge. Knowing full well, we get impressed with commodities and advertisements, even if we know that they exaggerate. This is what makes the practice of advertising persist (and arguably advertisers fall for the same ideology as well, because their investments in advertising hinge on the belief that others believe in advertising).

Advertising thus works by disidentification. It depends on advertising consumes having a critical distance towards its messages and overlooking inconsistencies between the promises of advertising and actual satisfactions of the advertised commodity. Few get disappointed when fantastic scenarios from advertising do not realize literally. Only a fool would expect that buying Georgia coffee would teleport them to a tropical island and conjure up six beauties in bikinis, but it is this absurdity that Georgia coffee commercial in fact suggests, if taken literally. Because advertising consumers adopt a cynical distance towards advertising, advertisers can get away with such preposterous messages.

Conversely, what subverts an ideology is a complete, taken to absurdity identification with its supporting fantasy because such identification inevitably reveals the gaps and inconsistencies of the ideological formation. What would be subversive in relation to advertising is to expect the literal materialization of the advertising promise, to act disappointed if it did not happen and then to call the advertiser and demand one's money back because the commodity failed to live up to the expectations the advertising set up. To disrupt the fantasy that Georgia coffee advances would take to swarm the office of the manufacturer with the demands for a tropical vacation, six models in bikinis included.19

On a more general level, in addition to whichever commodity advertising sells, advertising also sells capitalism itself. Advertising derealizes the ugly sides of capitalism and celebrates an

19 The insight about the crucial role of critical distance in binding subjects to an ideological fantasy has been provocatively applied to studying workplace resistance, to point out that employees' minor non-compliance with rules, irony and sarcasm about corporate values seldom prevent those employees from trying to succeed in the organizations they mock, so that in the end cynical employees end up reproducing the system they are so critical about (Fleming and Spicer 2003; Contu 2007). Contu defines this dynamic as “decaf resistance”: “Decaf, because it threatens and hurts nobody. It is resistance without a cost” (Contu 2007: 370); it is “a resistance without the acid that can destroy the machine of power” (Contu 2007: 374). Instead of shaking the existing order, decaf resistance reproduces it by allowing a space for disidentification, so that resisting subjects can maintain a fantasy of themselves being “liberal, free, and self-relating human beings to whom multiple choices are open and all can be accommodated” (Contu 2007: 370), which ultimately allows them to participate in the practices they are so critical about. In other words, far from causing a disturbance, a cynical distance between individual convictions and what is perceived as official ideology ultimately enables the subject to participate in the practices in which the ideology is externalized.
imaginary capitalism devoid of contradictions and subordinated to fulfilling human needs. Highlighting the aesthetic resemblance between socialist realist art and national consumer advertising, Michael Schudson (1984) suggests an affinity of their political-economic functions, framing advertising as “capitalist realism.” Similar to socialist realism, advertising “simplifies and typifies,” “it does not claim to picture reality as it is but rather reality as it should be—life and lives worth emulating” (Schudson 1984: 215).

Writing about socialist realism, E. Dobrenko (2007) contends that socialism existed only in socialist realism art and the function of socialist realism was precisely to materialize this socialism which was impossible in the mundane reality of the “really existing socialism.” To mirror Dobrenko’s argument, advertising as capitalist realism creates a parallel reality where contradictions of capitalism can be, and are, overcome. Capitalist realism advances a vision of fulfilled harmonious society where individual issues can all be resolved by consuming commodities—which in this fantastic vision are available to everyone when needed, just as in the socialist realism imaginary. In other words, advertising articulates a fantasy of “capitalism without capitalism,” a fantasy of capitalism without antagonisms or contradictions (Žižek 1993: 200, Dean 2006: 62), which supports the economy of enjoyment of the “really existing” capitalism.

**Advertising and ideologies of capitalism in Korea**

Within the South Korean context, the fantasies of “capitalism without capitalism” that advertising conjures need to be understood against the tremendous social and economic transformations, the “compressed modernity” (Abelmann 2003) that Korea went through at a dizzying pace throughout the 20th century. Scholars have detailed how the imposed terms and conflicting forms of the changes—the experience of the Japanese colonization, civil war, a succession of authoritarian military dictatorships and neocolonial relations with the U.S.—left ambivalence in their wake. Laura Nelson (2000) showed how, in 1990s Korea, “excessive” consumption was simultaneously a threat to national economy and at the same time a way to partake in the triumphs of economic growth. Nancy Abelmann (2003) demonstrated how middle-aged women, who lived through the turbulent years of the developmental state, while celebrating their economic successes, nevertheless were ambivalent about the riches, often linking accumulation of wealth to improper means. Laurel Kendall traced a similar tension

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20 The "official art of capitalism" metaphor in relation to advertising was suggested in passing by Raymond Williams in "Advertising the magic system" (2000 (1960)), where Williams argues that we need advertising because we are not content to use objects just for their utility and need to endow them with special meanings. This function was earlier performed by magic rites and now is inherited by advertising. Acknowledging Williams's insight, Schudson develops this argument further.
between the simultaneous desire and derision for new wealth and what it afforded in the interactions of Korean shamans with their gods and clients in the 1990s and ’00s (2009, chap. 6). In a broad sense, my project applies this argument to the sphere of advertising, treating it as another stage where “dramas of ambivalence” (Kendall 2009: 176) about the “compressed modernity” are acted out.

In addition to the persistent ambivalence about modernity and its attributes, I link cultural logics of advertising to contradictory ideologies of capitalism in Korea. From the late Chosŏn dynasty and throughout the colonial period, Korean “enlightenment intellectuals” strove to make capitalist cornerstones—private property, capitalist mode of production—compatible with Neo-Confucian ethics (Lee 2000; McNamara 1999: 57-62; Moon 2005: 19-21). Capitalism was envisioned as a path towards protecting Korea’s independence after the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 and restoring Korea’s sovereignty after Korea’s annexation by Japan in 1905—towards claiming nationhood and sovereignty in the imperialist world (Schmid 2002). Capitalism was thus infused with the ideas of modernization, which in itself was subordinated to the nationalist imaginary of powerful, prosperous and independent Korea of the future. McNamara glosses this doctrine as "benign capitalism" and shows how Korean intellectuals filtered capitalism through Neo-Confucian concerns with common good, social responsibility and morality.21

This imaginary of "benign capitalism" pursued for the sake of the nation left few legitimate justifications for seeking private profit and individual enrichment. As Carter Eckert shows, Korea’s capitalist class has been permanently on the defensive since its emergence under the Japanese colonial rule, having to legitimize its capitalist activities in terms of communitarian values and nationalism (1991; 1993). The rhetoric was taken up during the developmental state years to mobilize both the capitalist class and general population for economic development and win popular consent for immediate sacrifices for the sake of the future (Nelson 2000: 10-12; 112-114). Laura Nelson quotes a speech by Park Chung Hee:

21 McNamara writes: “Arguments for the legitimacy of benefits of Korean capitalism have continued now for more than a century among intellectuals and local business leaders on the peninsular. Korean state and capital have joined in promoting an ideology of benefits or 'benign capitalism' to allay fears of individualist excess. The market and private enterprise, they tell us, promote the wider interests of the nation, the strength of the state, and the prosperity of the citizens where market dynamics stroke a balance between the public (kong) and private (sa) interests. An interplay of state (kwan) and society (min) has been closely linked with ideas of a competitive and ultimately benevolent capitalism Indeed, advocates point not only to common benefits, but also distinguish the appropriate roles of state and private enterprise in the agrarian economy at the close of the Chosun Dynasty (1976-1910), or in the commercial and industrial economies of colonial and post-colonial South Korea” (1999: 55). As McNamara notes, for Korean enlightenment intellectuals, "the purpose of capitalist endeavour was national prosperity or the common good, rather than individual benefit" (1999: 61). He supports this point by fleshing out their vision of how moral constraints were envisioned to mediate the realm of the private, linking private property to social responsibility. (“The moral dimension of private property included not only concern for public good, but even the Confucian emphasis on frugality and avoidance of luxury” (60)).
our total effort put into achieving the historic task of modernization of our fatherland is not for the benefit of certain individuals, not of certain groups. It is for the benefit and glory of the present as well as our posterity. . . . In this sense, I urge you to think of the society and the nation before temporary excessive profits or the profit of “my company” or “my factory.” . . . You must be aware at all times of the fact that those who pursue immediate gains in complete disregard of our current task of building self-sufficient economy will be judged by the public as they deserve. (Nelson 2000: 113)

South Korean industrialists continued to present their activity in terms of benefiting the nation well into the 1980s (Kim 1992; Janelli and Janelli 1993), and from the 1990s the vestiges of the old rhetoric of “benign capitalism” were recognizable in the popular discourses about corporate social responsibility, the harbinger of the neoliberal hegemony that the democratization of the late 1980s paved the way for. The discourse about patriotic corporations committed to the common good naturally found its way into advertising, the means of corporate communication with the broader public. It was particularly vivid in corporate image advertising, which developed from the 1970s, as Korean business conglomerates (chaebol) grew and sought to develop their brands. Even as the developmental-state era discourses were replaced by the narratives of neoliberal freedom to enterprise and to be regulated by market mechanisms, corporate advertising continued to hold on to the broadly resonating ideals of public interest and humanism. In the 1990s, the fad for consumer-centred marketing further fuelled this trend, resulting in the campaigns like the above-mentioned “Towards people.”

Commenting on the “Towards people” campaign to discuss the popularity of such “consumer-focused” advertisements after the 1997 IMF Crisis, creative director and advertising commentator Kim Hong-tack asserted its appropriateness for the times:

The commercial, which was not a public service advertisement but communicated a message that was typical of one, was produced by a company selling a service. It did not, however, communicate a commercial message but an ethical one. This results from the direct as well as the indirect influence of the social atmosphere after the economic crisis, which stressed corporate transparency and ethical integrity. . . . A corporation today is evaluated based not only on the quality of its products, but also its commitment to CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), or the scope of a company’s social contributions. Against this backdrop, it is appropriate for a company to fully establish a corporate image based on themes that promote public interest. (Kim 2007: 226-227)
Indeed, in the wake of the crisis many in South Korea held big business responsible for Korea’s woes and public-interest commercial advertising was a reactive strategy to remedy damaged corporate image, and perhaps sweeten the bitter pill of layoffs and flexibilization of labour pursued as a part of the neoliberal restructuring. Nevertheless, rather than being an entirely new thing, the strategy of “finding a resolution in the hearts of the consumers rather than in the product” (Ibid.: 223) was noticeable much earlier (albeit predominantly in corporate image advertisement). The Advertising Museum, the focus of chapter 5, testifies that corporate advertisements attempted to speak to humanist values and popular aspirations from at least the late 1970s.

In a history of Korean advertising addressed to non-Korean readers, Shin In Sup and Shin Kie Hyuk note moralistic inclinations of Korean advertising and explain them by the lingering legacy of Confucianism in Korea (Shin and Shin 2004: 152-155). “Social mores present an opportunity, too” (155) they write, and discuss a few characteristic campaigns built on invocations of the Confucian principles of filial piety and harmony (including the aforementioned “Lunch box” (157-158)). While Confucian values certainly might be identified in humanist advertisements, I wish to stress how the parameters of South Korean advertising are shaped by the historical path of capitalism in Korea at least as much as by the lingering cultural predisposition. Overall, I privilege historical and social reasons for the appeal of particular ideas about advertising and related practices. The following section traces the trajectory of the Korean advertising industry, highlighting its linkages to South Korea’s political economy.

Writing about how North American advertising techniques were exported all over the world, Armand Mattelart (1991) notes, “In the alchemy of relations between economic and cultural forces, the transplant of modernity by means of new [American] sales techniques has often produced contradictory processes [in national advertising industries] where adherence and connivance are mixed up with both rejection and mimetic behaviour, and the more or less critical appropriation of external contributions” (Mattelart 1991: 38). He calls attention to the “difficult gestation of both universalizing modernity [of advertising] and territorial singularity, this permanent dance of unequal exchange” (Mattelart 1991: 38). I interpret the advertising’s ambiguous designation as a “flower of capitalism” in South Korea as a symptom of this unequal exchange, which, while accepting the form of advertising, absorbed values, sensibilities and allegiances that sprouted from the experience of Korean modernity and opened up advertising

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22 As anthropologists have shown, in modern Korea the “traditional” Confucian ethics have twisted and turned to promote opposing agendas and, when advantageous, abandoned in favour of the equally “traditional” egalitarian principles that governed village life (Brandt 1971; Janelli and Janelli 1993).
as a social practice to local projects which go beyond, and sometimes conflict with, advertising's commercial instrumentality.

**The advertising industry in South Korea: An overview**

The first known modern advertisement in Korea dates back to 1886, but the South Korean advertising industry truly picked up during the 1960s, as South Korea embarked on the aggressive program of the economic development initiated under Park Chung Hee's regime (1961-1979) and as commercial television and radio took off. Shin In Sup chooses 1968 as "a milestone in the development of Korean advertising" (Shin and Shin 2004: 57) as in that year Coca-Cola and Pepsi entered the Korean market and, for the first time, Koreans witnessed a modern advertising campaign, which was conducted by an advertising agency (Shin 1989: 23). It was around that time that advertising agencies emerged. Some of them were short-lived, and those that remained were affiliated with, or established by, one of Korea's business conglomerates (*chaebol*). Throughout the 1970s, the advertising industry was dominated by three agencies—Samsung-affiliated Cheil Communications (established in 1973); Union Advertising (established in 1974 and owned by then private broadcaster MBC) and Oricom (established in 1969 and connected to Doosan Group).

Advertising regulation also developed from the 1960s, propelled by the 1963 decision for the government-run KBS channel to start accepting commercial advertising (Shin 2011: 271). In the late 1970s, advertising was enlisted for ventriloquizing government propaganda: It was advised that all advertisements insert one of the recommended slogans, which praised thrift and saving consistently with Park's policies (e.g. “Each happy family is a thrifty family” or “When mommy and daddy are thrifty with things, the household is strong and the country is strong” (Shin 2011: 363, 365)). The attitude towards advertising is well illustrated by the first provision of the “Resolution on review standards for advertising for realizing wholesome living” (*kŏnjŏn saenghwal hwa rŭl wihan kwanggo pansongsŏnmul simŭi kijun kyŏlchŏng*) of 1979:

> Commodity advertising is based on the cultivation of people's sense of public duty and ethos of wholesome life, so its main content must express an announcement about the actuality of the commodity and information for everyday life; content that encourages luxury, waste and exaggeration is not allowed.” (quoted in Shin 2011: 363)

I was surprised to discover that in 1979, out of all advertisements rejected by the broadcast advertising review board, 9 percent, or 64 cases, were rejected because they contained “expressions that stimulate propensity to consume” (Shin 2011: 364). The very possibility of

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23 Laura Nelson provides an insightful discussion of the politics of thrift and consumption in South Korea (Nelson 2000, particularly ch. 4).
such a category testifies that advertising was positioned as a public-service medium for communication about commodities, not so much a sales tool in the contemporary sense.

On the other hand, under Park's regime, advertising was put on the radar as an important sponsor of democratic media and an enabler of public debate by the Dong-A “white pages” incident of the 1974-75, when the government attempted to tame a critical newspaper by putting pressure on its advertisers and thus cutting its advertising revenues. As I am arguing in chapter 1, this episode marked an important moment when advertising was claimed as a resource to enable and influence media discourses but also itself as a space of public discussion.

Under South Korea's next military dictator Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988), the official discourses that stressed the public duties of advertising proliferated. They were materialized and institutionalized with the establishment of Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation (KOBACO) in 1981. KOBACO was designated as the exclusive seller of advertising time for all terrestrial broadcasters, collecting a commission from all broadcast advertising sales into a public fund to be used for advertising-related research and production of public service announcements. KOBACO also pre-screened TV and radio advertising and monitored print advertising. The official purpose of KOBACO's monopoly on broadcast advertising sales was to protect the public nature of broadcasting and to prevent undue influence by advertisers on media content. It was formulated in terms of mitigating negative impacts of advertising (KOBACO 1988: 24). However, its most immediate effect was that it gave the military regime a financial leverage over the broadcasting industry, rewarding complicit media organizations and starving the rebellious ones.

KOBACO also licensed advertising agencies, and in the 1980s only chaebol were able to meet its stringent requirements. Moreover, the commission that KOBACO charged for its media representation services was higher for independent agencies than for in-house agencies (Shin and Shin 2004: 66). As a result, small independent agencies disappeared, whereas chaebol went on to establish in-house agencies to meet their growing demand for advertising services. Throughout the 1980s, most chaebol-affiliated agencies established partnerships with international advertising agencies, but without granting equity share as foreign investment in South Korean advertising industry was forbidden till 1988.

The late 1980s was the watershed moment for South Korea's advertising industry. The victory of the pro-democracy movement in 1987 resulted in mushrooming of media outlets, which not only increased opportunities for placing advertisements, but also empowered advertisers vis-a-
vis the media, many of smaller media outlets scrambling for advertising income. The rules for licensing agencies were loosened and commissions equalized. Under the U.S. pressure, South Korea’s advertising market was fully liberalized in 1991.\footnote{The history of market liberalization is discusses in Kim 1996: 130-133.}

KOBACO, however, remained the exclusive seller for all terrestrial broadcasters till December 2011. The practices of advertising censorship and review continued, albeit delegated to different organizations and dispersed among industry boards and media watchdogs. At the same time, the democratic transition was followed by the rise of citizens’ organizations (Shin 2006), many of which made policing advertising their business.

From the late 1990s and into the mid '00s, South Korea was the world's 10\textsuperscript{th} largest advertising market, sliding to the 14\textsuperscript{th} position in 2010.\footnote{Kim Mi-ju, Mark Paterson, “GroupM promises success in Korean market,” \textit{JoongAng Ilbo} (online edition), August 12, 2011, accessed March 14, 2012, \url{http://koreajoongangdaily.joinmsn.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=2940110}.} In terms of its volume, South Korea's advertising industry peaked in 2007, advertising expenditures reaching 7,990 billion won, or 0.82 percent of South Korea’s GDP.\footnote{These numbers represent the amounts of money that go through advertising agencies, not the revenues of advertising agencies themselves. The lion’s share of advertising expenditures goes to pay for the use of media space/time and advertising agencies receive a commission from the billings.} (In most advanced capitalist countries, advertising expenditures account to about 0.7-1.3 percent of GDP.) The advertising expenditures dropped in 2008 and 2009 (to 7,7971 billion won and 7,256 billion won respectively) due to the global financial crisis, but recovered by 2010, reaching 8,450 billion won (0.72 percent of GDP).\footnote{Statistics by Cheil Worldwide quoted in “Ad Market Forecast to Rebound,” \textit{The Chosun Ilbo}, February 25, 2010, accessed March 13, 2012, \url{http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/02/25/2010022500481.html}; Yonhap News Agency, “Ad spending in S. Korea hits all-time high last year,” \textit{Yonhap News}, February 27, 2012, accessed March 13, 2012, \url{http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2012/02/27/0502000000AEN20120227003000320.html}.}

In the '00s, South Korean advertising industry remained dominated by a few local chaeból-affiliated, full-service in-house agencies and was quite concentrated. For advertising via terrestrial broadcasting channels, for example, the 10 largest agencies accounted for 56.1 percent of the total advertising expenditures in 2007 (Cheil kihwek 2008). Samsung-affiliated Cheil Worldwide held the largest share of the market. The in-house agencies handle both inside and outside accounts, but their affiliation with chaeból provides them a stable income to fall back on during rough times, like in 2009, when I began my fieldwork and the 2008 financial crisis was felt in Korea. With the exception of Samsung-affiliated Cheil Worldwide, South Korean agencies are small by international standards, and their international spread is limited to the key exporting locations of their parent-chaeból.
Though the formal limits to the participation of foreign networks were removed in 1991, in the '00s, foreign-owned agencies tended to work on the margins and often limited their activities to handling accounts of their international clients in Korea. The only exception was TBWA Korea, an affiliate of TBWA Worldwide, which in terms of billings occupied 4-5 position among agencies operation in South Korea. Despite the relatively big size of its advertising market, South Korea has remained at the periphery of the developments that transformed the global advertising industry into a "network of networks" that connects public, political and financial spheres and bypasses national boundaries (Mattelart 1991).

The structures of the advertising industry, which continued by and large from the developmental state years, were shaken up in 2008, the first year in office of president Lee Myung-bak, a former Hyundai executive elected on the platform that promised 7 percent annual GDP growth, to be achieved, essentially, by furthering neoliberal deregulation. The year 2008 was marked by two decisions by the Constitutional Court, which destabilized the institutional foundations of the advertising industry. In July 2008, the decades-long system of before-the-fact advertising review was found unconstitutional because it was found in violation of the principles of the freedom of speech. Five months later, in November 2008, the Constitutional Court ordered a cancellation of KOBACO's monopoly on selling advertising time for terrestrial television and radio broadcasters, on the grounds that it infringed on the right of freedom of occupation of private advertising agencies. Collectively, the two decisions set the structures of the advertising industry adrift and provoked public debates about the desirable shape of the advertising industry. They incited collective reflection on how the ideals of the freedom of speech, on the one hand, and, on the other, public interest bear on advertising, and I took advantage of this heightened social reflexivity about advertising. My research is thus primarily concerned with the period between 2008 and 2010, even though I draw on advertising campaigns and documents from earlier years.

**Approaches to advertising**

As should be clear by now, my approach to advertising differs from manipulation critiques of advertising, which assume omnipotence of advertisers and ignore the messy realities of advertising production and consumption (e.g. Lefebvre 1971; Key 1989; Hendelman 2009). It also differs from celebrations of any unintended uses of advertising as subversive and resistant (e.g. Fiske 1989). Further, it resists simplistic culturalist explanations, all too tempting to apply to an East Asian other. Instead, I emphasize diverse agendas within which consumption and production of advertising are embedded, to highlight contradictions and contestations and
Introduction.

capture advertising as a complex social phenomenon, in the specific context of South Korea of the '00s.

I depart from earlier studies of advertising, often done within the structuralist tradition, that focused on how advertising constructs a meaning for the commodity and how it mediates consumption of things. Advertising does provide a window to gaze on the relation between humans and things, but I am concerned with advertising as a social practice that may or may not deal with commodities or consumption. My project builds on Neil Alperstein’s Advertising in everyday life, where he, through interviews, solicited diaries and self-reports, shows how “advertising becomes part of the cultural repertoire of resources available to individuals to use as part of their discursive strategy” (Alperstein 2001: 23). Stressing the continuity between advertising and other mass media texts, Alperstein describes how Americans use advertising as a resource for their everyday conversations, self-talk, dreams and fantasies.

Alperstein succeeds in showing how advertising becomes an aspect of social life in complex and unpredictable ways, yet he is not interested in showing the social consequences of this, like, for example, Abu-Lughod (1997, 2002) does for television in Egypt, showing how it not only enters everyday life but also becomes a site where TV-text producers push for various visions of nationhood, while audiences appropriate the texts to articulate their identities and attitude to dominant ideologies. In this study, I attempted to link the everyday of advertising consumption and production to broader processes that define contemporary South Korea, while making a case for advertising as first of all a local institution implicated in local projects and hegemonic struggles.

28 Within the structuralist tradition, advertising texts were treated as modern-day myths (Barthes 1999), and analysts attempted to uncover their hidden structures as well as mechanisms through which they produce difference between products and construct meanings for commodities. For example, Leymore (1975), Moeran (1996) and Blechman (2007) rely on Levi-Strauss’s studies of myth to treat advertising as resolving contradictions and as organized by binary logic, either within individual advertisements (Blechman 2007) or within a group of advertisements for similar commodities (Leymore 1975; Moeran 1996). Williamson (1978), building on the structuralist argument about meaning as difference, shows how advertising creates distinctions between products to endow them with meanings. The structuralist approach to advertising analysis, however, has been justly critiqued for analyzing advertisements in isolation from their material context and for bracketing social relations that comprise contexts of advertising production and consumption (Mazzarella 2002: 21-23). Structuralist critiques of advertising, while looking at advertising content to diagnose social effects of its messages, make insupportable assumptions about intentions and manipulative skills of advertising producers (Schudson 1984; Cronin 2004). Moreover, the structuralist approach has little to say about possibilities of multiple and subversive readings of advertising texts by audiences, whereas audience studies done on other media have long established that reception of a media text is never passive but involves an active social process, whose parameters might be determined to a degree by social conditions of the audience, but nevertheless leave enough space for viewers to use media to seek their own agendas, articulate locally relevant identities and reproduce local hierarchies (Mankekar 2002; Larkin 2002; Morley 1992). Thus, structural analysis might be insightful for studies that treat advertising as a text from which to read and diagnose contemporary culture and society, whereas it says little about advertising itself as a social institution.
Further, my research draws on the scholarship that emphasized the contingencies that shape advertising campaigns, particularly the relations between advertising agencies and their clients. Brian Moeran (1996) showed the dynamics inside a Japanese advertising agency, and they appear strikingly similar to the practices within a Trinidadian advertising firm, observed by Daniel Miller (1997)—and comparable to what I have observed at an advertising agency in Seoul (chapter 4). Similarly, Mazzarella (2003) and Kemper (2001) approached advertising by focusing on its producers in India and Sri-Lanka respectively; both scholars theorize advertising experts as culture brokers between local consumers and international companies, documenting how they translate images of global modernity, as it is portrayed in advertising of contemporary commodities, into “local idiom” (Kemper 2001) and how local difference gets produced, reworked and commodified (Mazzarella 2003). These studies provide a useful corrective to simplistic assumptions about advertising and its effectiveness. They go a long way to debunking what Anne Cronin (2004) called “advertising myths”—ungrounded beliefs about advertising that invest it with omnipotence, and ultimately benefit the advertising industry by bringing in clients, on the one hand, and, on the other, warding off stricter regulation whenever advertising practitioners commit to voluntarily curb their “powers.”

My research also draws on the prolific scholarly inquiries into advertising in South Korea. Impressive and meticulous work on revealing the connections between advertising, its content and industry structures, on the one hand, and, on the other, actually occurring cultural, social or political developments in contemporary South Korea was done by advertising historian Shin In Sup (Sin In-sŏp) and collaborators (Shin 1989; Shin and Shin 2004; Shin and Sŏ 2005; Shin and Sŏ 2011). South Korean cultural critics provided invaluable insights about the cultural references advertising messages contain, treating advertising as a window onto Korean culture and more often than not celebrating it as a “flower of capitalism” (e.g. Oh 2000; Mha 2004; Kim Pyŏng-hŭi 2006, 2009; Kwŏn and Yi 2009). Scholars within communication and business studies measured and explained concrete effects of advertising, often driven by instrumental questions about honing particular business strategies or improving existing policies (e.g. Sim, Kim and Cho 2006; Kim Min-ki 1994, 2005; Yŏm 2005). While drawing on this scholarship, I pose broader questions about how parameters of advertising, a global capitalist institution, have been shaped by struggles specific to Korea.

29 Structures to support academic research on advertising abound. KOBACO’s general support, in lieu of its mission to promote advertising industry and its culture, is behind the Advertising library, postdoctoral fellowships and research institutes, whereas the glamour of the advertising profession makes for vibrant advertising programs in many universities. At the time of my fieldwork, I was amazed at the sheer number of advertising-related events that occurred in Seoul. In September-November 2009, when I was actively seeking new contacts in the advertising industry and among advertising researchers, there was hardly a week when I did not attend at least one advertising conference, festival or a public seminar.
Whereas most advertising critics, scholars and journalists who write about South Korean advertising cannot praise humanist or “social responsibility” advertising enough, South Korean advertising is often unfavourably compared to the advertising industries elsewhere, particularly in the U.S.A. (e.g. Shin and Sô 2011; Kwangmi Ko Kim 1996). South Korean advertising is habitually critiqued—not only by academics, but also by journalists, advertising practitioners and foreign trade associations—for KOBACO's decades-old government monopoly over the sales of terrestrial broadcast advertising time, for restrictive censorship policies, for the dominance of in-house advertising agencies, for their subservience to wilful advertisers, for overreliance on celebrities, and, by some South Korean observers, for prudishness in the use of sex appeal strategies. These criticisms assume that advertising performs the same role universally and that local advertising industries should follow a uniform path of development in terms of both creative content and industry structures. In my approach, I question these assumptions and suggest that South Korean advertising, while different from advertising elsewhere, is configured to accommodate local realities, and my focus on advertising publics allows me to highlight how advertising is embedded in local processes and contestations.

**Methods, fieldwork and data**

The central part of my research was conducted from May 2009 till July 2010, primarily in Seoul, South Korea. As an object of study advertising is not clearly bounded, it is multi-sited and discontinuous. The boundaries of what constitute advertising are blurry, and the ripples an advertising campaign causes can go far and in unexpected directions, some of them manifesting publicly but many others remaining in private realm. Consequently, my fieldwork also spread over multiple sites and combined diverse strategies.

My initial research strategy was to follow particular advertising campaigns, trying to bring in the same analytic frame the sites of production, review and consumption and tracing the complex trajectories of particular campaigns; the story of the “KT olleh” campaign in chapter 2 is an outcome. While situating advertising in the everyday, I also attempted to reveal linkages between advertising and South Korea's broader political-economic context, which led me to seek interviews with media workers who deal with advertising, such as advertising managers of terrestrial broadcaster MBC, the Hankyoreh and the Chosun Ilbo. I also attended various events organized by media-focused NGOs, which turned invaluable in getting an overall sense of the complex media landscape in South Korea and its ideological vectors.

The most traditional among my fieldsites was an advertising agency in Seoul, where I was an
intern in December 2009-January 2010 and which I continued to visit till the end of my fieldwork in Seoul in July 2010 and with whose workers I kept in touch. The data from the participant observation at the advertising agency informs Chapter 4. I also observed advertising review meetings of the Korea Communication Standards Commission in November-December 2009 and February-June 2010, and my interpretation of those meetings was coloured by my brief participant observation at the now defunct Korea Advertising Review Board during my preliminary field research in summer 2007. My observations from the review meetings as well as interviews with their participants form the core of chapter 3. I also conducted short targeted visits to other advertising agencies, various civil-society groups involved in advertising review as well as advertising-dependent media outlets.

Additionally, I attended advertising-related events organized by the advertising industry, consumer NGOs and KOBACO: The Busan International Advertising Festival and multiple seminars organized by various advertising-related organizations, such as Korea Federation of Advertising Associations, Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation, Korea Internet Advertising Deliberation Organization, Korean Society for Consumer and Advertising Psychology, and Korean Society of Outdoor Advertising Studies. While actors in all these places were concerned with advertising itself, they engaged with it in different ways and for different purposes, and exploring these multiple sites against each other revealed conflicting claims on advertising—but also continuities in its cultural logics.

In his study of social effects of TV viewing in Belize, Richard Wilk convincingly argued that watching a medium and talking about it are two sides of the same process (Wilk 2002: 287), and my attention to social discourse about advertising was inspired by this insight. I conducted unstructured interviews with a dozen of Koreans who could be seen as regular consumers of advertising: undergraduate students from Hanyang University and also less prestigious Induk University and Seokyung University, all in Seoul; a successful small-business owner and his homemaker wife; an ambitious working mom employed by an international company; two precariously employed young woman, one between jobs and the other seeking an escape from the wilfulness of the owner-manager of a small international trading company; three government employees of mid-level seniority. In addition to these advertising consumer interviews, I asked general questions about advertising of whomever I was interviewing, from advertising regulators to advertising producers, since in addition to their official capacities, all those people were expert consumers of advertising by virtue of living in the contemporary society. I also solicited diaries about daily encounters with advertising from some of my interviewees. Whereas a few of them eagerly agreed to write such a diary, fewer actually found
time to do it, most ending up writing 1-2 somewhat formulaic entries. In chapter 2 I am
drawing on such a diary by university student Yōng-hūi who wrote most entries (10 entries
about 19 advertisements altogether) and whom I got to know well through our regular phone
conversations and emails. Whereas my selection was non-random and I relied on convenience
sampling and snowball sampling, relying on my social networks and on public places in Seoul,
this data allowed for a general sense of how advertising is talked about.

I triangulated the interview and diary data with advertising talk online. When I started my
research I was amazed at the amount of blog posts about particular advertising campaigns to be
found in Korean-language internet. Whereas many belong to advertising students, many others
engaged with advertising as a cultural product and enjoyed it for its moving message or its
entertainment value. The sheer amount of these blogs made any systematic research
impossible, but I collected postings about advertising campaigns that were mentioned by my
interviews, to get a broader sense of their reception.

This formal research was supplemented with collecting snippets said about advertising casually
in social situations. When directly asked about advertising, many of my interviewees struggled
to think of something concrete, yet the same people would volunteer stories about advertising
when talking about something else. This point was driven to my by the above-mentioned
working mom, Bosuk, a career woman in her late 30s and a mother of two. We met to catch up
in November 2009 and she was inquiring about the progress of my research. I said that I was
investigating the KT “olleh” campaign, which at that point was not running for about three
months. I asked her what she thought about it, and Bosuk said she couldn’t remember it at all,
and I changed the topic. One of the reasons we met was that Bosuk kindly agreed to proofread
an important letter which I had to send out in Korean. To illustrate a grammar construction,
which I was using imprecisely, she made an example of how her 5-year-old daughter repeated
the word “olleh” because she heard it in the commercial—the one that Bosuk could not
remember a half an hour earlier. This story well illustrates how people are often unaware of
their own relations with advertising and how asking direct questions about such matters does
not get the researcher very far.

Advocating multi-sited ethnography, George Marcus notes, “... any ethnography of a cultural
formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be
understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mese-en-scene of ethnographic
research” (Marcus 1995: 99). Consequently, my project while interrogating social practices of
advertising in contemporary South Korea, circumstantially made its object of study the social
Introduction

realities in which advertising occurred. In other words, it attempted to capture the entanglements of democracy and capitalism in South Korea in the first decade of the new millennium.

**Chapters**

Chapter 1, “The changing faces of advertising suppression,” provides an overview of the social field of South Korean mass media, highlighting the advertising’s place in it and tracing the roots of its public interest ethos in Korea’s recent history. Of particular concern are the flows of advertising money—the payments that advertisers make to media outlets to have their advertisements circulated. The driving question of this chapter is how advertising is invested, literally and metaphorically, in enabling a space of a democratic debate, so I focus on the moments when advertisers’ sovereignty over flows of advertising money is contested, questioned or suspended. The chapter’s narrative hinges on the three events, which all were labelled by their critics as instances of “advertising suppression”: (1) the 1974-75 Dong-A Ilbo “white pages” incident, when Park Chung Hee's regime pressured advertisers to withdraw their advertisements from the critical newspaper; (2) Samsung’s withdrawal of advertising from gadfly newspaper the Hankyoreh in 2007-2010; and (3) consumer boycotts in 2008 and 2009 by a civic group, known as Önsoju, against advertisers who advertised only in the conservative press but not in the progressive media. In each of these events, advertising’s commercial imperatives were subordinated to political tasks and the economic power of advertising over mass media was mobilized to enable or stifle mass media as a space of national debate.

Chapter 2, “Advertising publics in action,” focuses on advertising publics and how they shape advertising content in South Korea. In the first half of the chapter I demonstrate how advertising is consumed similarly to other popular cultural products and how advertising consumption is a critical process that is filtered through overall awareness of broader societal issues and of other members of the advertising publics, who are inevitably imagined as more naive and corruptible. I stress that advertising’s sales pitch is recognized but discarded as irrelevant for the consumption of the advertisements. I develop this point in relation to several advertising campaigns, by analyzing solicited advertising diaries and online blogs to demonstrate how some advertising consumers use advertising not to make purchasing decisions but to pursue socially engaged agendas. This argument culminates when I examine a trajectory of popular KT “olleh” advertising campaign, which in the fall 2009 invited public interventions that in the end forced the advertiser to promote progressive values desired by vocal advertising consumers. The active role taken by NGOs in the KT “Olleh!” controversy leads me to consider how civic groups attempt to appropriate advertising discourse and
pressure advertisers to promote wholesome values, whether or not those values are conducive to consumption of the advertisers' commodities. In the second half of the chapter, drawing on public discourse materials and my interviews, I marshal evidence that the most praised advertising campaigns in South Korea are pathos-ridden, sentimental advertisements, which promote humanist values—the kind of advertisements that a North American viewer is likely to scoff at because of perceived excessive sappiness and melodrama. I draw out the appeals of the humanist advertising by considering advertising talk about “humanist” campaigns and advertising in general. I place these advertisements, and the popular fondness for them, within the melodramatic sensibility, whose pervasiveness Korea scholars have extensively commented on, interpreting it as a symptom of “compressed modernity.”

Chapter 3, “Advertising truths and censorial dilemmas,” offers an ethnography of advertising review and broadly falls within the project outlined by Dominic Boyer as "the ethnographic analysis of censorship as a complex of intellectual practices in social-historical context" (2003: 515). I am treating censorial institutions as the sites of production of advertising publics: When censors are constitutive of the parameters of advertising discourse they are by extension constitutive of the parameters of the advertising publics to be conjured by that discourse. Detailing the decision-making process of the Special Advisory Committee for Broadcast Advertising (under the government-authorized censorial Korea Broadcast Communications Commission), I argue that practices of advertising review produce a “smart consumer”—not so much of commodity but of advertising—who expertly knows when to believe advertising promises and when to turn a blind eye to the discrepancies in reality and advertising. Drawing on both participant observation and interviews with advertising censors, I show how the process of producing ”smart consumers” was implicated in the censors’ own ambitions and anxieties, namely how censors were often torn between protecting the unwary and demonstrating their own open-mindedness and respect for the freedom of expression.

Chapter 4, “Desire for kind advertising and the everyday of ad makers,” offers an ethnographic account of work at a South Korean advertising agency. It identifies the gap between the discourses that glamorize creativity of advertising, on the one hand, and the hierarchical, exhausting conditions of advertising work, on the other. Drawing on my participant observation at a Seoul advertising agency, this chapter explores how advertising makers navigated conflicting demands of advertisers and advertising publics and, in the process, sought to satisfy their own personal and professional ambitions, finding openings for pursuing creativity and making personally meaningful and socially engaged advertising campaigns. The experience and aspirations of regular advertising practitioners are read against the narratives of South Korean
advertising auteurs Park Woong Hyun and Yi Jeseok, who made their careers with campaigns that epitomized the public-service ethos of South Korean advertising. The advertising agency is shown to be the site where the limits for pursuing public interest in advertising are set and tested.

Chapter 5, “Advertising Museum: Asserting the hegemonic vision of advertising,” looks at the Advertising Museum in Seoul as a site where cultural logic of advertising is reproduced. I map the museum narrative onto broader political economic context, to draw attention to inconsistencies that sneaked in. I read them against recent challenges to the existing advertising regulation, particularly the neoliberal attack on KOBACO, the symbol of the priority of public service functions of advertising, to show how the vision of advertising that acknowledged advertising as a valuable resource and assigned moral and legal ownership of it to the public is challenged. Overall, I present the museum project as an attempt to secure hegemonic status for a particular vision of advertising by leaning on the cultural authority of the museum as an institution and by inculcating desired views to schoolchildren, the target audience of the museum.
Chapter 1. The changing faces of advertising suppression

Know that all the little advertisements are bullets shot for democracy.
The Dong-A Ilbo, February 22, 1975, encouragement advertisement

On June 8, 2009, the citizens’ organization Media Consumer Sovereignty Campaign (Öllon sobija chukwon k’aim’ein, commonly abbreviated to Önsoju) held a press conference to announce that it would boycott companies that advertise only in the three biggest conservative newspapers, the Chosun Ilbo (Chosôn ilbo), the Dong-A Ilbo (Tong’a ilbo) and the JoongAng Ilbo (Chung’ang ilbo), and not in the two progressive national dailies, the Hankyoreh (Hankyôre) and the Kyunghyang Shinmun (Kyônghyang Sinmun). Önsoju charged the three conservative newspapers, collectively known as the ChoJoongDong, with habitually publishing “distorted” (oegok toen) reports and thus preventing Korean people from making informed decisions and ultimately obstructing Korea’s democratic development. As Önsoju’s leader Kim Sông-gyun explained,

... advertising in the ChoJoongDong, in the distorting newspapers, is the same as distorting and committing wrongdoings, it is financing bad organizations, that is how I see it. ... advertising can simply be defined as capitalism, but the notion of advertising in our country is that giving money to those bad companies [the ChoJoongDong newspapers] is cooperating with their bad deeds and committing a criminal act (pömjoe haeng’wi), we see it as similar, so there is a certain moral responsibility (todôkjôkin ch’aeg’im), [and] we are questioning that responsibility.”

(Interview with Kim Sông-gyun, June 23, 2009)

The first target of the ChoJoongDong advertiser boycott was selected to be medium-size KwangDong Pharmaceutical, a manufacturer of popular snacks and drinks. Önsoju’s leader read in front of journalists,

We are not enemies of the enterprise. We are your partner and your consumer, your

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1 The official English translation of the organization’s name is “Korea Press Consumerism Organization,” but the literal translation of the Korean name is “Korean Media Consumer Sovereignty Campaign.” “Consumerism” has opposite connotations for Korean and English speakers. For Koreans, it is a way to put consumer and consumer rights in the centre, so consumerism is evoked positively and for all practical purposes stands for “consumer sovereignty.”

2 “Progressive” and “conservative” are self-designations of the two influential political camps in South Korea. Both stand by and large on liberal positions, though “progressives” articulate interests of the educated middle class and primarily stress civil liberties, like freedom of speech, whereas “conservatives” represent those with vested economic interests and push for free market and deregulation in economy. I use “progressive” and “conservative” not as analytical terms but as descriptive ones.
worker and your owner. Kneel down before the will (ttūt) of the consumer, the will of the Korean people! . . . KwangDong Pharmaceutical must decide—are you going to fight with consumers? Are you going to listen to consumers' opinion and stay with consumers?³

Three hours after the press conference that declared the boycott, the KwangDong Pharmaceutical announced that it would place advertisements in the two progressive newspapers. The boycott was called off. Three days later on June 11, 2009, Ŭnsoju proclaimed a boycott of five companies of the Samsung Group, urging them to start advertising in the Hankyoreh and the Kyunghyang. Unlike KwangDong Pharmaceutical, Samsung completely ignored the boycotters.

The three conservative newspapers, whose advertisers Ŭnsoju was after, however, cried foul. The Chosun Ilbo headlines read: "Blackmailing organization promotes sales demanding 'Place advertisements in left-wing newspapers'" (June 9, 2009);⁴ "Advertiser witch hunt, here we go again . . . 'violence shakes the fundamentals of free market economy'" (June 10, 2009);⁵ "After tormenting weak business like mafia . . . sudden boycott of a leading company" (June 12, 2009).⁶ A JoongAng Ilbo editorial lamented,

Nowhere in the world does such advertising terror (kwanggo t’erō) exist. . . . The Hankyoreh, which stands to gain from their blackmail, on the 9th reported the name of the boycotted company and products. This is precisely helping the coercion of the kidnapper by publicizing the identity of the kidnapped victim. It seems like new terrorist (t’erōbŏm) 'Ŭnsoju' has taken the responsibility for promoting their advertising sales. This symbiotic relation is a criminal symbiosis.⁷

Within a few days since Ŭnsoju went public with its manifesto, seminars were held, critical expert opinions were published and even "Help centre for enterprises subjected to advertiser boycott" was opened. On June 22, 2009, the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office started

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an investigation of Önsoju's leader and five other moderators of Önsoju's online forum, upon the suspicion of infringement with business operations, intimidation (konggal') and coercion (kang'yo).

As I watched this situation unfold during the first month of my fieldwork, I was intrigued. If Önsoju's target was the three conservative newspapers, going after their advertisers seemed like a roundabout way. Yet the idea itself, to challenge advertisers' discretion in allocating their advertising budgets and demand that advertising distribution is guided by considerations of public interest not advertisers' profit, was fascinating and bold. It also seemed fundamentally contradictory: media advertisers' boycott implied a criticism of the capitalist model of mass media, when advertising, the main source of media's revenue, systematically goes to conservative, pro-business outlets and creates negative incentives for publicizing critical opinions that could shake the status quo (e.g. Murdock and Golding 1977; Curran and Seaton 2009). But rather than voicing this critique and confronting advertisers' stifling influence on mass media, Önsoju attempted to enlist advertisers as allies and criticized the media itself. Not challenging the media's dependence on advertising at all, Önsoju attempted to harness the flows of advertising money in order to empower the existing progressive media and to reform the conservative press. Despite being perplexed at the rationales that animated the advertiser boycott campaign, I cheered for Önsoju and its tireless leader Kim Sŏng-gyun—and also wondered whether they could indeed succeed in pressuring advertisers to open their advertising budgets to public input.

What made the situation even more intriguing, the reactions to the Önsoju boycotts seemed excessive. In practice the Önsoju campaign came down to posting spirited updates on the Önsoju website, doing a few one-person protests (public political assembly in urban spaces being outlawed by Lee Myung-bak's regime) and holding press conferences. The KwangDong Pharmaceutical boycott sorted out the first day, it was hard to imagine that Önsoju's members' not buying Samsung products could hurt Samsung in any noticeable way. The campaign was covered by the media, but it was not anywhere near a mass movement, and at least some of my Korean acquaintances heard about the Önsoju boycott from me for the first time.

The conjuncture around the Önsoju advertiser boycott in June 2009 introduces the major theme of the chapter: how advertising money—the payments that advertisers make to media outlets to have their advertisements brought to the attention of media publics—were claimed for realizing visions of public interest. Tracing how advertising was seized for political goals, from the time of military dictatorships into the post-democratization neoliberal era, I sketch
how advertising has been implicated in securing the cultural hegemony for political establishment and business elites in South Korea. At the same time, I emphasize how the lasting discourses about advertising as a medium for public good afforded for challenges to advertisers' discretion in allocating their advertising budgets and ultimately to the politico-economic interests that advertising strove to advance as a capitalist institution.

It is the moments when advertisers' sovereignty over flows of advertising money was suspended, questioned or contested that are my focus. The chapter's narrative hinges on the three events, which all were labelled by their critics as instances of “advertising suppression.” In each of these events, advertising was politicized and advertising’s commercial imperatives were subordinated to political tasks and the economic power of advertising over mass media was mobilized to enable or stifle critical voices. First, I consider the 1974-75 Dong-A Ilbo “white pages” incident, when Park Chung Hee’s authoritarian regime put pressure on advertisers to withdraw their advertisements from the critical newspaper, in order to gag its troublesome journalists. I treat the incident as the moment of rupture when advertising, on the one hand, was recognized as an effective instrument for disciplining the mass media and, on the other, became invested in realizing the liberal ideal of a public sphere. The interference with advertising money flows in the name of public interest by South Korea’s next military dictator Chun Doo-hwan (1979-1988) is interpreted as building on that momentum. Fastforwarding through the democratic transition of the late 1980s and sketching South Korea’s media landscape in the first decade of the 21st century, I bring into focus the second big-profile case of “advertising suppression:” Samsung withdrawing its advertising from gadfly newspaper the Hankyoreh in 2007-2010. I draw out rationales that enabled observers to appeal to Samsung’s corporate responsibility and to pressure Samsung to renew advertising in the Hankyoreh. For the third episode, I return to Ōnsoju, to show how the boycott and reactions to it were rooted in the practices and discourses that had governed South Korean advertising and that it was precisely the legitimacy of Ōnsoju claims that warranted such a strong reaction. This chapter thus illustrates how advertising supports certain social imaginaries not directly with its messages, but indirectly with its money. It provides a broader context to the claims that commit South Korean advertising to public interest and traces their historical and politico-economic origins.

“Advertising suppression” under the authoritarian regimes

In 1971, Park Chung Hee (1962-1979), the leader of a military coup of May 1961, catalyst of South Korea’s aggressive economic development and already South Korean president for two
terms, was elected president for the third time, despite dwindling popular support for his leadership. In October 1972, Park declared a state of emergency, quoting alleged threats from North Korea, but more immediately seeking to quash wide-spread domestic dissent. The National Assembly was dissolved, and the existing constitution was replaced with the Yusin Constitution, which essentially granted Park unconstrained powers and created conditions for prolonging his presidency indefinitely. Among measures to control the opposition was the revised Media Law of 1973, which gave the president censoring power over all media and enhanced organizational control over newspapers and media channels via consolidations. Any critical account of South Korean government was likely to be interpreted as pro-communist propaganda and could have severe consequences for the critics, from loss of employment to torture (Kim Chu-ŏn 2008: 140-147).

Nevertheless, enclaves of dissidence persisted (Park 2011). For once, journalists, who traditionally saw themselves as public intellectuals and promoters of enlightenment and modernization (Kang 2005), spoke out against Park Chung Hee’s authoritarian ways. The resistance took the form of reporting on instances of popular unrest and signing collective declarations that demanded restoration of press freedoms (e.g. Kim Chu-ŏn 2008: 96-97; 121-123). To gag the critical media, Park's regime resorted to so-called “advertising suppression” (kwanggo t’anap), or putting pressure on companies to withdraw their advertising from critical media outlets. The tactic was first applied against the Chosun Ilbo in 1973 (Ibid.: 263-265), but its most notorious instance targeted the Dong-A Ilbo, a national daily published by Dong-A company (which also published periodicals, ran a broadcast channel and operated movie theatres). The advertising suppression was provoked by two hundred Dong-A Ilbo journalists launching a free press movement in October 1974 to protest against censorship. The journalists issued “Declaration of the Freedom of the Press,” which advocated the freedom of speech and called for opposition to external interference with the media content. Park told his Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to "rebuke the Dong-A Ilbo" (Tonga Ilbo rŭl hon nae jura), and the KCIA chose to act by cutting Dong-A off from its advertising. Owners and advertising managers of the companies that advertised in Dong-A media were called to the KCIA's notorious Namsan office, where they were threatened and forced to sign an oath that they would not advertise with Dong-A (TRC 2010; Kim Chu-ŏn 2008: 290-291).  

8 At the time of the incident, Park's government denied its involvement. It was only after the democratic transition of the late 1980s that it became confirmed that Park Chung Hee himself was behind the incident. After a two-year investigation, South Korea’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee decided in 2008 that the responsibility for Dong-A advertising suppression lied with the Central Intelligence Agency, which acted on Park Chung Hee’s order (TRC 2010).
From December 16th, 1974, Dong-A saw a mass exodus of advertisers, including businesses with long-lasting bonds with the company. When cancelling their advertising contracts, advertisers' managers would quote orders from their company presidents and refuse to elaborate beyond that. Within a week, by December 24th, a dozen major advertisers cancelled their contracts with the *Dong-A Ilbo* and withdrew their advertisements from Dong-A movie theatres. With Christmas season being one of the peaks of advertising expenditures, this was a major blow.

On December 25th, the newspaper filled the newly opened advertising space with advertisements for January issue of the *Dong-A Yōsōng* magazine, despite the fact that the issue had already sold out. On December 26th, as more advertisers withdrew contracts, the newspaper covered the unfilled pages with articles and advertisements for Dong-A’s other publications and announcements of future broadcasts. On the 27th, the advertising space on four pages was left blank, and these dramatic “white pages” (*paekchi*) gave the name to the incident. By the end of the year, all major advertisers terminated their contracts, and the advertising pages of the New Year’s issue carried Dong-A’s company anthem, Dong-A group advertising, classifieds—and opinion advertisements.

The newspaper lost its usual advertisers, but it found new ones. Critical civic groups ran advertisements of encouragement (*kyōngnyō kwanggo*), and so did anonymous readers. The first encouragement advertisement was published by veteran journalist Hong Chong-in: “Even though it is possible to use force to temporarily cancel the advertisements, which are necessary for publishing the *Dong-A [Ilbo]*, such an act is very dangerous and self-injurious for the power and should not be committed,” he wrote (Kim Chu-ŏn 2008: 268-269). In January 1975, “Movement to help Dong-A” (*Tonga topki undong*) took off, and encouragement advertisements poured in. Some directly condemned media suppression and asserted civil rights, similar to Hong. Others posted ambiguous poetic messages, like “Light shines brighter in the dark” or “Could not watch quietly any longer. . . ,” and a newly wed couple even printed an advertisement promising to call their child “Dong-A” if it were a boy (Kim Chu-ŏn 2008: 271).

Sympathizers sent money gifts to the Dong-A office and paid for subscriptions in advance.

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9 Most media histories mention this advertisement as the first encouragement advertisement, however in a later interview the Dong-A advertising manager Kim In-ho argues that Hong's piece was an opinion article published in the advertising section because the advertisement that was supposed to be there was withdrawn. Moreover, Hong did not pay for the advertising space. According to Kim, the first encouragement advertisement was placed by Kim Dae-jung, then a renown dissident, who personally came to the newspaper office and paid for an advertisement. Under the title "Let's protect the freedom of media," Kim's advertisement called for protecting freedom of media: "As a citizen who desires freedom of media and restoration of democracy, to keep the candlelight of the freedom of media that started with a blaze, I am paying for this advertisement." The advertisement was signed as "A citizen who wants to protect the freedom of media." (Yi Su-gang, "Tonga saľae tte kyŏnyŏ kwanggo ch'ŏl ch'amyoja núm DJ," *Midi onil*, March 15, 2006, http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=44791 (October 5, 2011)).
Koreans abroad also sent in their advertisements with generous donations. In the heat of the movement, those who wished to pay for an advertisement to support the newspaper formed a long line in front of the Dong-A office downtown (Sinnott 2006: 437). In January, the newspaper ran 2,943 encouragement advertisements, and by May 1975 that number grew to 10,352. Even though advertisements were anonymous, placing such an advertisement was a courageous act. Those who were identified as having paid for an opinion advertisement were called in by the KCIA and threatened with tax audits (TRC 2010: 88-89).

In the course of the Dong-A “white pages” incident, advertising first became a tool for oppressing freedom of expression, but then was reclaimed as a medium for advancing democracy, the opinion advertisements allowing for an unexpected space of public debate when all other venues for popular protest were blocked. The anonymity of advertising protected the regime critics to a degree, whereas the fact that they paid for the advertising space not only bought them public attention but also shielded the newspaper, which carried less responsibility for the advertisements than for articles. Moreover, the advertisements were an authentic voice of the people rather than journalists’ representation of it and thus could not be dismissed as “corrupted media,” a frequent target of Park’s condemnation. Where corporate advertisers yielded to the pressure, media publics stepped in and appropriated the medium of advertising to support the newspaper both with money and with words of encouragement.

The vision of advertising as a medium for democracy was articulated in a piece contributed to the Dong-A Ilbo by Shin In Sup (Sin In-sŏp), now a prominent advertising historian but then a lecturer at Sogang University and marketing manager in charge of advertising at the Honam Oil Refinery Company. He translated into Korean an article by Tom Dillon, president of U.S. advertising agency BBDO, which was published a few years earlier in Advertising Age, a professional journal of the advertising industry. Entitled "Freedom must advertise,” the article reflected on the benefits that advertising brought to a society and culminated in passionate conclusion:

I think it [advertising] is as vital to the preservation of freedom in my country [U.S.A.]

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11 After Dong-A published an encouragement advertisement signed by an “army lieutenant” Defence Security Command (Yukkun poan saryŏng bu) brought in three employees of Dong-A’s advertising department at the dawn of January 15 and demanded that they reveal the name of the person who wrote the advertisement. The three advertising managers insisted that they did not know and by the night of the 15th about 400 Dong-A employees staged an overnight sit-in to demand their release, issuing a declaration that denounced the apprehension of the three as unlawful. After spending two nights at the Defence Security Command, the advertising managers promised to publish an announcement in the advertising section that the “army lieutenant” was not an active-duty soldier (instead of a correction article demanded by the agency) and were released (Kim Chu-ŏn 2008).
as the free exercise of publishing a newspaper or the free exercise of building a church or the free exercise of the right of trial by jury. For not only is advertising the only practical source of advocating to the people of this country the economic choices they have before them, but it is also . . . practically the sole support of the only communication system that is not under the control of the state. Without the financial support of advertising, not only would there be no practical freedom of economic choice, but there is also a very serious question whether there would be any practical freedom in politics and religion. (Dillon 1975(1973): 128).

Shin also participated in a debate, published in the *Dong-A Ilbo*, under the title "There is no media freedom without advertising freedom: Media and advertising—mixed feelings about Korean realities" (*Dong-A Ilbo*, January 14th, 1975). The overall anti-communist pathos of Dillon's piece resonated with Park Chung Hee's official propaganda, but championing freedom to advertise under the circumstances equaled championing freedom of expression against Park Chung Hee's media suppression. In the context of the 1975 South Korea, "Freedom must advertise" resonated not so much as an ode to the free market but as a lament about the benefits that the advertising failed to bestow on South Korean society—and therefore as a call for action to enable South Korean advertising to bring in freedom of economic choice, politics and religion. It designated advertising not as a space best left to the forces of the free market, but as a space for active political interference for realizing ideals of freedom against the authoritarian regime.

In the end, Dong-A owners caved in and opted to cooperate with Park's regime. Despite all the encouragement advertisements and donations, the *Dong-A Ilbo* lost 98 percent of its consumer advertising; its advertising revenues plummeted by 50 percent by January 25th, 1975, further dropping by 70 percent by February 25. Similarly, the overall advertising revenue of the Dong-A broadcasting channel decreased by 97.7 percent (Kim Chu-ön 2008: 267-268). In March 1975, the Dong-A owners fired or indefinitely suspended over 130 journalists and agreed to have the newspaper censored by the KCIA (TRC 2010: 89). Purged *Dong-A Ilbo* restored its advertising revenues by July 1975 (Kim Chu-ön 2008: 294) and has been ever since complicit with the agenda of Korea’s conservative political elites (even though their orientation evolved from authoritarian developmentalism to globalizing neoliberalism over the years).

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12 When Shin recalled this episode in 2009, he conveyed that he was so concerned about the repercussions that he did not come home for a few days after the article came out, fearing security agents coming to arrest him. Whereas nothing happened immediately, he did get a visit from the KCIA a month later, for what he described as an amicable discussion (personal conversation, August 21, 2009).

13 For a critical assessment of Dillon’s article also see Armand Mattelart (1994: 31-32).
The *Dong-A Ilbo* “white pages” incident can be interpreted as a turning point in how advertising has been conceived and acted upon in South Korea. First, the flows of advertising money became recognized as a potent lever for disciplining mass media, and, in consequent contestations over media control, from Chun Doo-hwan’s media consolidations to Ōnsoju’s boycotts, advertising would be an important tool. Second, the encouragement advertisements, which poured to the resisting *Dong-A Ilbo*, demonstrated the potency of advertising as both an enabler of critical mass media and a media space where critical opinions could potentially flourish. It was advertising money paid by readers and sympathizers that provided the financial support to the newspaper when commercial advertisers retreated. It was in the *Dong-A Ilbo*’s advertising section where the notes that no one dared to author as articles appeared. Third, advertising became implicated in realizing democracy, understood at that moment primarily against the authoritarian government repressing liberal freedoms. This led to contradictory claims on advertising. On the one hand, the freedom to advertise became intertwined with political freedom and any interference with advertising would be later condemned as “advertising suppression.” On the other, advertising was claimed as a medium for achieving democracy, and this high destiny took precedence over advertisers' freedom to advertise if it were taken in a narrow liberal sense of having complete discretion over one’s advertising budget. This bigger freedom to advertise came with responsibilities, namely to contribute to enabling all other desirable freedoms by supporting free media and facilitating a meaningful public debate. This noble role for advertising and advertisers resonated well with the discourses that had presented Korean capitalist enterprises as engaging in economic activity not for private profit but for the benefit of the whole nation (McNamara 1999; Eckert 1993).

Thus, even though the scale of the financial flows that supporters directed towards the *Dong-A* was insufficient to keep the newspaper afloat and convince its management to continue resistance, the incident powerfully asserted the publics’ moral claims on advertising. After the “white pages” incident, South Korean advertising was claimed for purposes that transcended the advertising’s immediate function of selling commodities, and it was never given up upon, as happened in many other capitalist locales, where the veneration of private enterprise, private property and free markets crippled the claims that held advertising accountable to its public functions.\(^{14}\)

Advertising continued to be used as a disciplinary lever over mass media by South Korea’s next military dictator Chun Doo-hwan (1979-1988). If, for Park’s regime, advertising suppression was a sporadic tool to tame particularly troublesome media, Chun Doo-hwan’s control over

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14 See Stole (2006) for how it happened in the U.S. in the 1930s.
advertising was systematic. Chun's regime consolidated existing broadcasters and forcefully transformed them into public companies; in 1981 the control of all broadcast advertising was entrusted to the newly established Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation (KOBACO). Legally an independent public corporation, KOBACO proclaimed its official mission as protecting the public nature of broadcasting and preventing undue influences over media content from advertisers. Whereas KOBACO might have succeeded in insulating the media from advertisers' influence, KOBACO's total control over broadcast advertising made the broadcasters more vulnerable to the pressures from administration. Chun's regime tightly controlled the newspapers' advertising revenues as well. Newspapers remained private but were also consolidated: publishing licenses were issued only to six national dailies and a local paper per province, with exception of the Seoul area. The government controlled the quota of advertising revenues of the allowed publications (Park, Kim and Sohn 2000: 113).

If Park Chung Hee justified his interference by making “corrupted media” a common target of his vitriol (Kim Chu-ŏn 2008:80), Chun quoted public interest and abuses of media by advertisers. His other policies—tightening anti-monopoly and fair competition laws as well as establishing Fair Trade Commission—also used rhetoric of public interest to curb influence of businesses, whose new economic wealth transformed them into a powerful force in Korea. Cynically or not, Chun's regime advanced a particular vision of mass media, premised on asserting national airwaves as commons and media outlets as public institutions, subjecting them to public management, albeit usurped by the authoritarian state at the time. While the emphasis on the publicness of mass media allowed for its subordination to the state, it also enabled public demands on mass media.

The corollary of the discourses about the public nature of mass media was audience activism, which took off from the early 1980s. It started when national broadcaster KBS was held accountable to its public service mandate. Criticizing KBS, on the one hand, for being a mouthpiece of government propaganda and, on the other, for commercialism and excessive amount of advertising, viewers refused to pay KBS subscription fees. In 1986, the sporadic protests developed into a full-scale movement to boycott KBS subscription fees initiated by the National Council of Churches and soon joined by Catholic and Buddhist organizations as well as by women organizations; the boycott continued till 1989 (Kim Young-han 2001). The boycotts of KBS subscriptions were staged again in 1992-1993, when a pro-government personality was appointed as KBS president and the journalists who protested the decision were arrested.

People's moral and legal ownership of mass media translated into moral and legal ownership of
advertising and shaped expectations that that advertising, which uses public broadcast or 
broadsheet space for private profit, contributes to the public interest, both with its messages 
and its revenues. The discourses of public interest disseminated by Chun's administration 
enhanced the investment of advertising into broader societal projects and further denigrated its 
commercial functions. They encouraged scrutiny of motives behind advertisers' decisions and 
empowered the general public to demand that advertisers use their capacity to advertise to the 
best interests of the society as a whole. The public ownership over advertising was embodied in 
institutions and material practices, such as in multiple government, quasi-government and 
non-government advertising censorship boards as well as in KOBACO itself. Epitomizing this 
vision of advertising, KOBACO, despite its compromising origins and multiple attacks from free 
trade proponents, survived and prospered through consequent democratization and 
liberalization.

Thus by the 1980s, the two co-existing visions of advertising claimed it in contradictory ways. 
On the one hand, the stress on freedoms against the authoritarian rule incited sympathies with 
the demands for “freedom to advertise,” as described in Dillon's article and advocated by Shin. 
This “freedom to advertise,” while resonating with anti-dictatorial struggles of the moment, 
rhymed well with spreading liberal, and eventually neoliberal, discourses, which venerated the 
entrepreneurial freedom and interpreted “freedom to advertise” in the narrowest sense, to grant 
advertisers sole discretion over their advertising decisions. On the other hand, the existing 
material practices, such as KOBACO's oversight over terrestrial broadcasters and various 
censorial practices, invited privileging public interest in how advertising money and messages 
were allocated, and so did the prevalent discourses of the primacy of public interest in the mass 
media and government propaganda. It is the interplay of these two visions that defined the 
contestations over advertising into the '00s.

Post-democratization media landscape

By the time of South Korea's democratic transition in the late 1980s, all officially recognized 
media outlets were subsumed by the government. The public broadcast channels had KOBACO 
controlling their advertising revenues, and their pro-government slant was so obvious and 
intolerable that in the mid-1980s it provoked a series of the above-mentioned organized 
refusals to pay subscription fees. The remaining print media, on the other hand, grew into 
wealthy oligopolies. The forcefully consolidated newspapers had few competitors for 
advertising, and their capital accumulation was facilitated by tax breaks (Park, Kim and Sohn 
2000). Moreover, newspaper companies were allowed to branch out into other industries,
leading to their growth into conglomerates, which, in addition to running newspapers, also published various magazines and even entered tourism, education, hospital and real estate industries (Kim and Shin 1994: 55). This economic wealth overdetermined ideological alliances of the newspapers' owners—with the existing political institutions as guarantors of the newspapers' prosperity and also with big business, as newspapers' advertisers and as fellow conglomerates. Complicit journalists were rewarded generously, and various policies and practices ensured that they sided with the privileged.\footnote{Journalists habitually received "appreciation money" from interviewees, who thus ensured favourable coverage. Under Chun Doo-hwan, journalists also had their income tax reduced (Park, Kim and Sohn 2000: 113). Media workers were among the primary beneficiaries of the public fund that KOBACO financed from the commission that it gathered for its media rep services. Intended to promote the media and advertising industries, the fund supported various media-related public interest projects, from academic research and construction of facilities, but its considerable part also went to providing advantageous loans for house purchase and children's education for media workers as well as for journalists' overseas training and observation trips (Shin & Sô 2011: 388-9). South Korea's beat accreditation system nurtured close association between journalists covering state affairs and politicians, and there have been multiple possibilities for alternating, and even combining, media and government careers (Heuvel and Dennis 1994; Park, Lee and Kim 1994; Yang 2000). Journalists were rewarded for cooperation with the government with positions in the Ministry of Culture and Information and other ministries, in overseas missions, as presidential secretaries, spokespeople and assistants. As Park, Lee and Kim write, All through the 32-year rule under the institutionalized military, the regimes' ingenious and inveterate control measures relentlessly bled the press into a feeble, tame institution. The owners and managers built up press empires under an oligarchic cartel system at government's encouragement. Meanwhile, press employees became status-conscious, conservative functionaries, spoiled by the rewards of extremely high salaries and generous fringe benefits. And if they were lucky enough, loyal enough, troublesome enough, or competent enough at a different gear, they were recruited by the government for power positions both inside the government or outside. Some of them distinguished their career with the art of control of the press, their familiar turf. (Park, Lee and Kim 1994: 290-291)}

While in 1987 the participants of the grand pro-democracy coalition—students, workers, civic groups, religious groups—were rallying for democracy and freedom of press, the mainstream media remained passive onlookers. Later they helped muffle the demands of labour by blaming striking workers for economic difficulties. Thus they swayed the middle class to withdraw their support from the labour movement, whose agenda included democratic reforms beyond procedural democracy. Democratization freed media from the direct government control, but the symbiotic relation between the political establishment and mainstream media remained. Democratization, however, brought a change in the relations between media and advertisers. No longer directly controlled by the state, mass media fell under the control of capital. Post-democratization deregulation led to the mushrooming of publications. If at the end of the 1987 there were 30 dailies, by 1995 there were almost five times more, 148; within the same period, the number of periodicals more than tripled, from 2,412 to 9,720 (Shin and Sô 2011: 459). In the face of saturated media consumption market, media outlets were forced into fierce
competition with each other, becoming more subservient to the interests of advertisers and more prone to sensationalism. In competition for advertisers' money, the newspapers have been said to withhold stories critical of advertisers, cover advertisers' news favourably and extensively and tailor their special sections to attract maximum advertisers, sometimes even letting advertiser's staff to write relevant section articles (Kim Dong Yule 2003: 74-75). The tendency only aggravated since the 1990s, when new media and the internet entered the competition. The national terrestrial broadcast media, on the other hand, were insulated by the KOBACO system from these developments, though the launch of cable television (1995), the start of satellite broadcasting (1995), the emergence of private broadcasting (1990) and the eventual growth of the internet media intensified the competition for advertising money in broadcasting as well.

With democratization and consequent de-regulation, chaebol, the largest advertisers in Korea, emerged as major players in the media field. Their chilling influence on South Korean newsrooms is revealed in "A study of Korean journalists' perception of business' muscle on newspapers" by Kim Dong Yule (2003). Most journalists Kim interviewed and surveyed admitted the business influence over editorial rooms and often compared it to the pressure exerted by the authoritarian government of the previous decades. One of them bitterly summed up the new reality,

"Journalist is no longer a passionate fighter in this country. They are just another job like banker, mechanic, an supermarket salesman/saleswoman. You do not need to worry about your social position. No Korean journalists are working for the country's better future or based on social responsibility model, which we honoured in the past. We are working and living on chaebols advertising money." (Kim Dong Yule 2003: 150, Kim’s translation from Korean)

The situation in the media replicated the broader conditions in post-democratization South Korea, where, though procedural democracy was achieved, the ruling elite held on to political and economic power, turning new freedoms into a means of consolidating its hegemony (Choi

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16 Private terrestrial broadcaster SBS was launched in 1990, its advertising was sold through KOBACO as well.

17 Occasionally, KOBACO, too, was caught abusing its advertising distribution function to coopt media outlets. In a widely reported incident in 2001, KOBACO feuded with national TV broadcaster MBC, which aired a program criticizing KOBACO's monopoly on advertising sales and argued that MBC should be able to set rates for its own advertising slots. In retaliation, KOBACO suspended airtime sales for MBC on the next day, dealing MBC a serious blow before the Lunar New Year holiday, a prime period for advertising sales in generally slow winter months. As a result, MBC sold little airtime in comparison with other national channels and with its own sales from the previous year, which provoked it to file a complaint with Korea's Fair Trade Commission, demanding 4 billion won in compensation for lost sales. (Lee Jun, "MBC Files Complaint Against KOBACO," the Chosun Ilbo, January 29, 2001, accessed October 15, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2001/01/29/2001012961177.html.)
The ChoJoongDong and the Hankyoreh

Closely connected to chaebol stood the three biggest national dailies—the Chosun Ilbo, the JoongAng Ilbo and the Dong-A Ilbo (the same Dong-A Ilbo, whose taming by Park Chung Hee’s regime was discussed in the earlier section). Collectively known as the ChoJoongDong, the three newspapers have grown into a political force in its own right. The ChoJoongDong were credited for orchestrating the 2007 electoral victory of pro-business president Lee Myung-bak, and many of Lee’s appointees to key administration positions made their careers in the ChoJoongDong. On the other hand, the three newspapers feuded with Kim Dae-jung’s and Roh Moo-hyun’s progressive administrations. Many in the progressive camp held the Chosun Ilbo responsible for driving Roh Moo-hyun to suicide in May 2009 with its relentless attacks on Roh and his family.

Of the three, the Chosun Ilbo and the Dong-A Ilbo emerged during the colonial times (both in 1920) and were conceived as torches of enlightenment by their founders, though in practice the two newspapers ended up in the grey zone between being instigators of anticolonial struggles and pro-colonial collaborators. After the 1945 liberation, the two cooperated with building a modern nation-state and educating the masses about boons of capitalist modernization (Kang 2005). It was from the 1960s, when Korean economy took off, that the dominant view of media as a public service began to ebb in favour of seeing media as a commercial enterprise and granting more authority to management over editorial staff (Kim Min-Hwan 1994: 38). The two newspapers were thoroughly tamed by the authoritarian governments. The Dong-A “white page” controversy and an earlier smaller-scale “advertising suppression” episode with the Chosun Ilbo purged the newspapers of cantankerous journalists and turned them into mouthpieces of the government. In 1965, the mainstream media camp was joined by the JoongAng Ilbo, established by Lee Byung-chull (Yi Pyŏng-ch’ŏl), the founder of Samsung Group. Embodying the government-business alliance of the times, the JoongAng Ilbo faithfully disseminated the ideologies of government-led capitalism. The insipid newspapers prospered in symbiosis with the ruling regimes till the 1980s, and their owner families cemented their ties with the ruling elites, particularly the chaebol. Commentators portray the ChoJoongDong as the

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18 The JoongAng Ilbo separated from Samsung, but the ties between the two companies remain. Chairman of the JoongAng Ilbo, Hong Seok-hyun, is a brother-in-law of Samsung chairman Lee Kun-hee and there were even allegations of the conglomerate continuing to own the newspaper through a secret deal. Hong was involved in the Samsung slush fund scandal instigated by lawyer Kim Yong-ch’ŏl, to be considered later in the chapter. Kim Seung-hyun, Ser Myo-ja, “Head of JoongAng Ilbo summoned,” Korea JoongAng Daily, March 5, 2008, accessed November 21, 2011, http://koreaJoongAngdaily.joinmsn.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2886990.
heart of the conservative alliance comprised of the big business, bureaucracy, conservative intellectuals and other political and economic elites. The ChoJoongDong acted as a passive bystander throughout the democratic transition and, after the democratic transition, continued to represent the conservative forces.

The years of the authoritarian rule declawed the mainstream media, but they also produced critical journalists, who unable to find regular employment, turned die-hard activists and underground critics. The early 1970s saw a proliferation of underground campus newspapers, which were an important vehicle for disseminating ideas of chaeya, dissident intelligentsia who advocated moral principles and national interests (Park 2011). When the owners of the Dong-A Ilbo chose to cooperate with Park Chung Hee's regime in 1975, the fired Dong-A journalists continued resistance and many of them joined chaeya. Chun Doo-hwan's repression of critical journalists gave another boost to the underground media.

After the democratization, in December 1987, these dissident journalists started a national daily, the Hankyoreh. The money for the newspaper came from a nation-wide donation drive, in the course of which 27 thousand subscribers jointly contributed 5 billion won (about $8 million at the time). As of May 2005, the Hankyoreh was owned by over 61,000 small shareholders, who were regular readers and employees (Hankyoreh 2009: 4).

Ideologically, the Hankyoreh stands on nationalist positions advocating liberal democracy, economic justice and reunification with North Korea. The Hankyoreh founders pledged that the newspaper "will be a shield to the freedom of the people and a fortress for democracy" (Hankyoreh 2009: 4). The newspaper is proud of its unusual institutional practices, such as democratic elections of editors and refusal of “appreciation money” (habitually paid to journalists by their interviewees). The Hankyoreh consistently ranks first in various surveys about trustworthiness and accuracy of reporting.

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19 Park Kee-soon, Lee Jae-won and Kim Chie-woon, for example, describe this collusive amalgamation as "the political power-press complex," which is based on "the unique, extraordinary and symbiotic relationships between the ruling political power and the media owners/publishers/editors as well as the news executives and elite pressmen" (1994: 275).


21 In a 2008 opinion poll, for example, 57.4 percent said that the Hankyoreh was the most trustworthy of all South Korean mass media, followed by public broadcaster KBS (45.3 percent), progressive daily the Kyunghyang Shinmun (43.7 percent), and public broadcaster MBC (41.6 percent). At the same time, in the fairness of reporting the Hankyoreh ranked third (45.3 percent) after the Kyunghyang Sinmun (53.2 percent) and KBS (46.3 percent). (Kwak Sang-a, "Öllon hakcha 65.8 % "öttlil haji aniýnda,,” MediaUs, March 31, 2008, accessed December 6, 2011, http://www.mediaus.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idno=2191.)
university students, the newspaper evolved to appeal primarily to left-leaning liberals among the educated, 78 percent of its readership being “male in their 30s and 40s with white collar job and high level of education (university and above)” (Hankyoreh 2009: 20-21).

In addition to the *Hankyoreh*, the progressive camp included another daily, the *Kyunghyang Shinmun*. Founded by the Catholic Church in 1946 and affiliated with Hanwha chaebol, the *Kyunghyang* became independent in 1998, transformed into an employee-owned stock company and aligned with Korea’s progressives. Two public terrestrial broadcasters, KBS and MBC, particularly the latter, have also traditionally been on the progressive side, though during Lee Myung-bak’s presidency, newly appointed senior managers heavily interfered with the two broadcasters’ reporting practices, despite spirited protests and strikes by KBS and MBC unions.

**Politics of print advertising**

The ChoJoongDong occupy the top three positions in the rankings of the South Korean newspapers for circulation and readership.\(^{22}\) South Korean newspapers do not publicize these statistics, but it is estimated that the ChoJoongDong controlled 70 percent of broadsheet circulation in Korea in 2008.\(^{23}\) The *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang* are far behind the ChoJoongDong both in circulation and readership numbers. According to a survey, in 2008 the *Chosun Ilbo*, the *JoongAng Ilbo* and the *Dong-A Ilbo* accounted for 14.3 percent, 12.5 percent and 9.5 percent of daily newspaper readership respectively, whereas the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang* commanded only 2.5 percent and 2 percent (Hankyoreh 2009: 17).

The many critics of the ChoJoongDong repeatedly pointed out that the ChoJoongDong enjoyed superior circulation numbers and drew most advertising *not* because the three newspapers reflected the majority views. Many newspaper subscribers were lured with free gifts and the newspapers had elaborate schemes to distribute some of their newspaper copies for free to boost their circulation numbers and look attractive to advertisers.

The *Hankyoreh*, on the other extreme, has never been favoured by advertisers and has been permanently in a tight spot financially. As the *Hankyoreh*’s advertising manager lamented in the interview, many advertisers believed that, because of the *Hankyoreh*’s left leanings, its readers were poor and, therefore, an unattractive marketing segment. The relatively low

\(^{22}\) Newspaper circulation stands for the number of copies a newspaper distributes, through subscriptions, sales and free deliveries. Readership is the newspaper’s total circulation multiplied by the average number of people who read each copy.

circulation numbers also fuelled the belief in the futility of advertising in the *Hankyoreh*, so the newspaper has been locked in a vicious cycle: Because of the lack of money, the *Hankyoreh* published fewer pages than the ChoJoongDong newspapers and therefore could not cover as extensively entertainment and everyday living topics, prioritizing critical commentary on the current issues, the *Hankyoreh*’s speciality. But because of the limited coverage the *Hankyoreh* was not attractive to advertisers and even its devoted readers sought practical lifestyle information—the section that attracts most advertisers who pitch relevant services and commodities—in the ChoJoongDong. Thus a *Hankyoreh* subscriber who shopped for a vacation package would have to buy a copy of the *Chosun Ilbo*, because the *Hankyoreh* did not have a section on travel and attracted few advertisements from tourist agencies. The *Hankyoreh*’s critical reporting further complicated its relations with advertisers, particularly with chaebol, which from time to time got in hot water over labour disputes, bribery scandals, etc. It was not unusual if the day after a critical article was published mentioning a particular advertiser, the advertiser would call the *Hankyoreh* and cancel its advertisements for the next issue (Interview at the *Hankyoreh*, October 16, 2009).

More importantly, the decision about which newspaper to advertise in is never merely a business decision but a political act registered by other newspapers, as well as by supporters of the conservative and progressive camps. Advertising in the ChoJoongDong is much more than an economic decision to promote a product to the ChoJoongDong readers; it is an investment in the good relations with the newspapers and the conservative forces they represent. To advertise with the ChoJoongDong is to tap into their extensive networks of influence. Advertising in the *Hankyoreh* is also a political decision read not simply as a marketing strategy but as a gesture of support for the *Hankyoreh*’s ideological position and the progressive forces it represents. Some advertisers would refrain from advertising in the *Hankyoreh* on principle. The *Hankyoreh* advertising manager shared an anecdote about a medium-size furniture manufacture for whom it would make business sense to advertise through the *Hankyoreh*—yet the company owner, of North Korean origins, would flatly reject such a suggestion with “I hate commies” (*ppal’gaeng’i sirö*). Other advertisers, however, consistently placed their advertisements in the *Hankyoreh* specifically to support the newspaper and with little concern for commercial payoff, particularly before the 1997 IMF crisis. Despite tighter advertising budgets after 1997, the presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun (who were in the same progressive camp as the *Hankyoreh*) were a boost to the newspaper’s popularity with advertisers, as many companies would place advertisements in the *Hankyoreh* to invest in a positive relationship with the group in power. With the 2007 election of conservative Lee
Myung-bak, many of the businesses no longer saw it necessary to advertise in the *Hankyoreh*. Moreover, after Lee came to power, the *Hankyoreh* lost lucrative government advertisements, which were usually published in all national dailies to inform the public on important matters or to promote the government’s vision on particular contentious issues. In other words, advertising is politicized at the highest levels and is in the midst of struggles over controlling media discourses, and by extension, public debates, by channelling advertising revenues.

After the democratic transition, advertising flows were freed from the state control (except for the broadcast advertising still sold through KOBACO). But advertising’s immediate commercial imperatives—to market a commodity through the most cost-efficient medium to the audience that is most likely to buy the commodity—were once again subordinated to broader projects implicated in defending and contesting vested political and economic interests. On the one hand, the mainstream print media, empowered by the guaranteed freedom of expression and arms’ length relationship with the state, capitalized on their public reach to hustle for advertising money and in the course cemented their cosy connections with advertisers. The human networks that connect Korean business elites with political establishment and the revolving door between mass media and politics led to a further consolidation of the pro-business conservative alliance, which only enhanced its sway since the neoliberal deregulation became hegemonic after the 1997 IMF Crisis. On the other hand, following the suit of the authoritarian government, big advertisers took advantage of their advertising budgets to buy favourable, or at least neutral, coverage from the media. Despite the ascendance of the neoliberal hegemony and popular resonance of the discourses of entrepreneurial self from the late 1990s (Seo 1998), the neoliberal ideologies had limited valence in so far as mass media and advertising were concerned, and particularly advertisers themselves cautiously avoided any public assertions of their rights to distribute their advertising revenues as they saw fit. The

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24 On a more mundane level, the South Korean dailies are informally but rigidly classified into different tiers based on their circulation numbers, and the expectation is that an advertiser advertises more or less equally with the newspapers within the same tier. To advertise in only one of the newspapers within a tier is to invite other newspapers in the same tier to demand that the advertiser places advertisements with them as well—or embraces negative coverage to follow. Thus the newspapers ensure equitable distribution of advertising budgets through tactics which border on blackmail. The ChoJoongDong form the upper tier, and the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang* are in the second tier, with a number of smaller dailies with similar circulation numbers, such as the *Seoul Sinmun* and the *Munhwa Ilbo*. Thus placing an advertisement only in two newspapers, which would make sense from a business perspective to efficiently cover conservative and progressive publics, say, in the *Dong-A Ilbo* and the *Hankyoreh*, would likely provoke negative articles from overlooked newspapers both in the first tier and in the second tier, and any positive effects from the advertisements would likely be drowned in the negative publicity. The *Hankyoreh* advertising manager shared that some advertisers who wished to support the *Hankyoreh* but did not want to advertise in the other second-tier newspapers, asked to have their advertisements buried in the middle of the newspaper so that no one notices them. The *Hankyoreh* declares that it abstains from such blackmail-like practices, but to solicit contracts, its advertising personnel would first approach advertisers who place advertisements in other newspapers of the second tier.
earlier discourses, which claimed mass media, and advertising, for the public interest, provided a platform for critiquing the collusion between advertisers and the mass media, as the following story of a three-year row between Samsung and the *Hankyoreh* illustrates.

"Advertising suppression" of the '00s: Samsung and the Hankyoreh

Samsung is the biggest and most influential Korean chaebol. In 2010, Samsung employed 344 thousand people and its net income reached 21.2 billion U.S. dollars (Samsung 2011), accounting for about 1.45-2 percent of South Korea’s GDP. Within Korea, Samsung is notorious for the influence it exerts on all spheres of life, provoking bitter jokes about the Republic of Korea being the "Republic of Samsung." Samsung is also the biggest advertiser in Korea. In 2002, Samsung Group accounted for 1 trillion won worth of advertising contracts—or about 15 percent of total advertising expenditures in Korea, which that year reached 6.8 trillion won (KOBACO 2007: 26). In 2007, Samsung Electronics alone was responsible for 2 percent of total advertising expenditures in South Korea (calculated using data from KAAA 2009: 16, 20).

While Samsung's ideological alliance is with the conservative media, Samsung publishes advertisements in most of South Korean newspapers. Despite its critical coverage of Samsung-related affairs, the *Hankyoreh* receives some of Samsung’s advertising money, which in 2006 accounted for as much as 20 percent of the *Hankyoreh*’s advertising revenues (correspondence with the *Hankyoreh*, June 2010). The *Hankyoreh* managers explained that by supporting diverse media, Samsung paid back to Korean people, who made Samsung a successful company, by buying Samsung products and, some of them, by working hard at Samsung enterprises. As will be discussed later, the progressive camp saw Samsung's advertising in all media as a way for the chaebol to demonstrate its corporate responsibility and commitment to democracy in Korea.

Samsung’s comprehensive advertising might seem to be a marketing strategy to cover all possible segments of Korean consumers. Yet in the case of the *Hankyoreh*, whether Samsung advertises in the *Hankyoreh* or not did not make a difference in Samsung's sales, as the *Hankyoreh*’s advertising department representative readily admitted to me (Interview at the *Hankyoreh*, June 23, 2010). Where this advertising made a difference was in the newspapers' budgets: Samsung's marketing strategy creates strong incentives for the media to abstain from

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criticizing Samsung, not to lose its advertising: Samsung and other chaebol are known to pull their advertisements if a newspaper publishes critical articles about them, leaving the publication scrambling to fill the suddenly opened advertising space and selling it at a discounted rate if at all (Interview at the Hankyoreh, October 16, 2009). Whatever Samsung's rationales, its advertising practices are a de facto recognition of advertising as a powerful channel that enables mass media, not simply as a marketing instrument, and, to a degree, an acceptance of the duty to facilitate diversity of mass media and public debate. The diverse distribution of advertising, particularly spending some of the advertising money on the progressive media, honours the public moral ownership of media and reproduces the ideologies of public interest which shaped many media institutions, such as KOBACO.

The limits of Samsung's commitment to democratic media, however, were exposed in the so-called Samsung slush fund scandal and its aftermath. In October 2007, Samsung's former top lawyer Kim Yong-ch'ol went public with allegations about Samsung keeping a slush fund distributed among bank accounts under executives' names, including Kim's own, for bribing influential officials, prosecutors, journalists and scholars. Kim described how he himself participated in such practices and provided names of high-ranking people involved. At first Kim approached newspapers but they would not touch the story. It was the Catholic Priests Association for Justice, which played an important role in Korea's pro-democracy movement of the late 1980s, that stepped in and hosted a televised press conference for Kim. At the press conference, Kim scandalously said, "Samsung instructed me to commit crimes," and "A basic responsibility for all Samsung executives is to do illegal lobbying, buying people with money." Kim also talked about pressure on witnesses and prosecutors involved in the earlier trial about the legality of the deal when Samsung chairman Lee Kun-hee (Yi Kih-hui) sold shares to his son who was thus enabled to take control over Samsung's holding company. Following the press conference, civic organizations laid charges against Lee and his aids to the Prosecutor's Office.

The conservative news media covered the scandal in a cursory way, stressing Samsung's counter arguments and questioning the whistleblower's credibility. Economic dailies opposed investigation into the case on the grounds that it might provoke an economic crisis in Korea. In

26 Kim rose to fame as a prosecutor who led the case of the corruption charges against Chun Doo-hwan. In 1997, Kim joined Samsung and eventually become the head of Samsung's legal department, only to quit in 2004. In 2007, Kim made public allegations about wrong-doings going on at Samsung and filed a legal complaint against Samsung chairman Lee Kun-hee and his aids.

the progressive camp, however, the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang*, reported in detail on Kim’s press conference and the consequent investigation. Samsung’s advertising in the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang* stopped immediately. At the *Hankyoreh*, they were prepared for this turn of events, as Samsung was known to pull its advertisements in response to critical articles. When they went ahead with covering Kim’s press conference, the *Hankyoreh* made arrangements for what they saw as the worst case scenario—going without Samsung advertising for a year (Interview at the *Hankyoreh*, June 23, 2010).

Samsung’s exercise of freedom to advertise was noticed by the broader public and critiqued. The disappearance of Samsung’s advertising grew particularly conspicuous after the Taean oil spill in December 2007, when a Samsung barge collided with anchored crude oil carrier off the Yellow Sea coast, causing great environmental and economic damage. In January 2008, Samsung published apologies over the accident in all national newspapers, except for the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang*. A number of civic organizations—Citizens’ Coalition for Democratic Media, National Union of Mediaworkers, People’s Coalition for Media Reform, People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, People’s Movement for Investigation of Samsung Illegalities—protested Samsung’s lack of advertising, holding a "Press Conference to Condemn Samsung that Tames Critical Mass Media with Advertising Suppression" in front of Samsung headquarters. They argued, "Ongoing advertising control of the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang* by Samsung is childish and vulgar personal revenge by chaeböl power that puts the force of capital first" and "We cannot condone that Samsung, nominated as our representative brand and heading towards being a global enterprise, thinks nothing of mass media's social functions and responsibilities and unleashes the current situation simply over an article that it did not like."

Samsung’s critics framed their demands in terms of fairness of advertising distribution and did a quantitative analysis of Samsung advertisements in different media outlets. The *Media Today*, the organ of the National Union of Mediaworkers, reported: "In the case of Samsung Electronics, it published plenty of advertisements for its refrigerators, printers, notebooks, cell phones, TVs in the ChoJoongDong, as if boastfully, but completely excluded the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang*."

Civic organizations began to print support advertisements in the *Hankyoreh*, condemning advertising suppression by Samsung and calling for saving the *Hankyoreh* and the

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29 Ibid.
The first advertisement, sponsored by the Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media, asked "Could readers of the Hankyoreh, which properly reported Samsung's slush fund scandal, also receive an apology [about the Taean oil spill]?

The discourse of "advertising suppression" by Samsung was reminiscent of how the Dong-A incident of the 1974-1975 was presented, and so did the call for encouragement advertisements and a subscription campaign on behalf of the Hankyoreh and the Kyunghyang.

Refusing to treat advertising placement as a private decision of an advertiser, legally free to allocate its advertising budget anyway it pleases, the protesters rooted their critiques and demands in appeals to corporate social responsibility—taken not as an empty PR slogan but rather as a real obligation, in this case, to support democratic mass media. Samsung’s (and to lesser degree other chaebol's) regular advertising practice of advertising in all media outlets regardless of their ideological camps was a materialization of this discourse. The protesters' demands reveal a sense of entitlement on the part of the media, including critical media, for advertising money, and, as activists saw it, it was "childish and vulgar" of Samsung to mix up its civic duties with personal peeves. This logic resonated with the discourses about public interest in mass media, which were propagated by Chun Doo-hwan’s regime. In this case, too, the public interest was evoked to control business, albeit not by the authoritarian state but by civil society. This moment asserted the publics' entitlement to participation in the decision-making as to where advertising money should go.

While framing the demands for fairness of advertising distribution in terms of corporate social responsibility, the protesters curiously mixed the demand for advertising support for the two critical newspapers with appeals to business rationale. The leader of the Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media was quoted explaining, "It is not that we are saying that Samsung should give a lot of advertising to the Hankyoreh and the Kyunghyang, we mean that [Samsung] must advertise normally, when it is needed in the process of product promotion or marketing."

Samsung's "normal" advertising gave a slice of advertising pie to each media outlet in Korea, and advocating that it continues with that is not simply appealing to Samsung's business sense but to literal understanding of corporate responsibility and a particular vision of the companies place in society.

The logic that empowered Samsung critics to demand that Samsung advertises in the media that criticize it is expounded in an article from citizen journalists' website OhmyNews:

In July [2009], it's been over 20 months since Samsung Group stopped advertising in

30 Ibid.
the *Hankyoreh* and the *Kyunghyang*. Gone this far, it is media suppression through advertising. This is advertising suppression by chaebŏl, which is unprecedented in the world media history, this is murdering democratic mass media.

Samsung, fundamentally, has a wrong consciousness about the relation between mass media and businesses in a liberal-democratic nation-state. Mass media is not a PR tool for publishing articles that favour business. While delivering right information about businesses to the nation, [they] have the function of examining and critiquing businesses’ social responsibility. The relation between mass media and business must not be that of intimate collusion but of enlightened mutual cooperation and checks.\(^{31}\)

The writer argues that "public responsibility" (*kongjŏk ch'aegim*) of mass media and business is to make sure that advertising does not interfere in that relation:

> When mass media and businesses abuse this tool for profit, there is no room for true democracy and for healthy capitalism," he warns. "Just like mass media are a public institution (*konggi*) and carry public responsibility, so big businesses carry social responsibility too. Big businesses must bear in mind that even though they are private enterprises, with their advertising they have social responsibility. Because it won't do to abuse advertising by oppressing critical mass media.

The writer urges Samsung to act responsibly and to live up to its corporate mission of "contribution to the nation-state and human society" (*kukka wa illyu sahwe konghŏn*). These appeals imply that the structural power of advertisers over media is to be given up by advertisers voluntarily out of their commitment to social responsibility, for "true democracy and for healthy capitalism" and that freedom to advertise meets its limit with corporate social responsibility. "Before it is too late, Samsung must itself end this vicious cycle. It must give up ideas about oppressing media by linking media reports with advertising. If Samsung wants to be a people’s company beloved by the people, if it wants to be recognized as a global company, Samsung must start by showing a responsible behaviour," urges the writer.

This public appeal to Samsung is grounded in a belief that Samsung should, and ultimately strives to, act as a responsible corporate citizen and is steeped in the developmental state era ideologies that positioned chaebŏl as patriotic enterprises which above all enhance the wealth of Korea as a nation, not private wealth of chaebŏl owners. It is particularly striking that the author believes enough in the efficacy of this appeal to write it and publish it, considering that the investigation into Samsung’s slush fund scandal demonstrated that it was not concern for

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morality, true democracy and healthy capitalism but rather pursuit of profit, primarily for Samsung's chairman and his family, that drove Samsung's activities.

Causing severe financial difficulties to the Hankyoreh, Samsung's "advertising suppression" lasted almost three years. In the preceding years, Samsung brought about 15-20 percent of advertising revenues to the Hankyoreh, being one of the newspaper's biggest advertisers. In 2008, its share dropped to 3 percent and in 2009 it was zero, the overall advertising revenues of the Hankyoreh that year falling by 22 percent in comparison with the pre-boycott 2007 year. Because of the great deficit in the newspaper's accounts, the Hankyoreh employees were taking turns in going on unpaid leaves of absence, but it was not enough to make them compromise on their position. "We are the kind of people who will keep making the newspaper even if we are not paid salaries, so we are not to be broken by advertising," the Hankyoreh's advertising manager told me in October 2009, when it seemed quite plausible that Samsung's “advertising suppression” would continue indefinitely (Interview at the Hankyoreh, October 16, 2009).

Samsung started placing advertisements in the Hankyoreh little by little from early 2010, first on the occasion of Korean figure skater Kim Yuna winning a gold medal at Vancouver Winter Olympics, an event that overwhelmed Korea with joy and pride. By then, Samsung’s slush scandal had blown over. In August 2009, Samsung’s chairman Lee Kun-hee was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to a 110 billion won (about $89 million) fine and a suspended three-year prison term; however, four months later, in December 2009, Lee received a presidential pardon and by March 2010 was back at Samsung’s helm.

The story of Samsung’s “advertising suppression” in itself was not particularly surprising: Big business uses economic muscle to gag a critical independent newspaper—except perhaps it was an unusual “happy end” that the Hankyoreh persevered and Samsung in the end resumed advertising in the Hankyoreh. When read in the context of earlier discourses of advertising in South Korea, this episode reconfirmed that advertising’s social functions as an enabler of public debate are privileged over advertisers’ freedom to advertise. During the three years of the “advertising suppression,” the public sentiment in the progressive camp was to criticize Samsung for dwelling on its private grudges and for neglecting its corporate responsibility to

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32 Of course, 2008 and 2009 were also the years when effects of the global financial crisis were felt in Korea, but, even accounting for that, the relative drop in Samsung’s share is indicative of the newspaper’s financial predicament.

enable diverse mass media and supporting South Korea’s democracy. Consequently, it was unimportant that advertising in the *Hankyoreh* made little difference to Samsung’s sales and that both parties involved and all the observers knew full well that the *Hankyoreh*, to remain the *Hankyoreh*, would have to again bite Samsung’s feeding hand, and probably sooner than later. That Samsung ultimately consented to this vision and chose to continue supporting the *Hankyoreh* is evidence to the prevalence of these shared expectations and ideologies about businesses, their relation to mass media and their commitments to social responsibility.

At the same time, the critiques of Samsung’s “advertising suppression,” while political in the final count, were wrapped in ethical reasoning. The critics relied on shaming Samsung, appealing to its “conscience” and insisting that it lives up to its declared noble corporate mission. In other words, the critics accepted that the decisions about where to place advertising were up to the advertiser, but, recognizing societal implications of advertising flows, they interpellated Samsung as a responsible corporate citizen, appealing to Samsung decision-makers’ presumed sense of public duty and ideals of corporate responsibility. In a sense, it was the ineffectiveness of such strategies that incited Önsoju’s strategy to boycott advertisers to force them into compliance.

**Harnessing advertising flows: Consumer citizenship and “advertising terrorism”**

Önsoju, the boycotters of companies that advertised only in the ChoJoongDong, formulated their demands in terms of consumer rights and ultimately consumer citizenship, which opened new terrain for action on advertising and advertisers. It was no longer an ethical choice by the advertiser whether to support the progressive media, but a matter of “consumerism,” a word put in the official English title of Önsoju, Korea Press Consumerism Organization. South Korean “consumerism” (sobijajuŭi, sobijachungsimjuŭi, k’önsyumörijŭm) is very far from the consumerism understood as succumbing to the desire for purchasing goods and services in ever greater amount, as it is used by critics of capitalist consumption. South Korean “consumerism” comes with overwhelmingly positive connotations and stands for putting consumer and consumer rights first.

Önsoju’s “consumerism” tapped into older practices that invested consumption into societal projects and pushed it into the public realm. As Laura Nelson has shown, in South Korea

34 The Korean name is Ôllon sobija chukwon k’aimp’ein, which literally translates as Media Consumer Sovereignty Campaign. However, Önsoju’s English-language webpage introduces Önsoju as “Korea Press Consumerism Organization.”
consumption has been an arena for expressing allegiance to the nation since the colonial period. By being thrifty and abstaining from excessive consumption Koreans contributed to the national economic growth (Nelson 2000: 107-114) and by not buying foreign goods they exercised patriotism, the practice that Nelson describes as “consumer nationalism” (Ibid.: chap 1). Throughout the 00s, consumer activism continued to be an important site for acting out societal ideals and consumption-focused citizens' organizations remained a dynamic force within civil society. Whereas the conventional politics lost legitimacy as many South Korean politicians got marred in petty bickering and discredited themselves with bribery scandals, cronyism and nepotism, citizens' organizations have proven their selfless dedication to public interest by volunteering endless hours to draw attention to issues of public concern and to propose policies for addressing societal wrongs (Shin 2006; Moon 2010). By putting “consumerism” on its banner, Önsoju claimed this legacy and affiliation contra critiques that accused it of “biased” championing for the progressive camp and its representative newspapers.

The advertiser boycott that opened this chapter was the second round of Önsoju's crusade against the ChoJoongDong. Önsoju emerged a year earlier in the midst of the chaos of the summer 2008, when downtown Seoul was engulfed with the anti-U.S. beef demonstrations and candlelight vigils. Started as protests against allowing imports of allegedly contaminated U.S. beef, they developed into a mass movement against Lee Myung-bak's government. First an online forum, Önsoju condemned the "distorted" coverage of the protests by the ChoJoongDong. The Önsoju internet forum—to be registered as a civic organization in four months—saw its popularity grow exponentially, with 40 thousand people joining in early June.

What started as a condemnation of the negative coverage of the protests turned into a full-fledged campaign against the ChoJoongDong. The three newspapers' complicity with the authoritarian regimes and obstruction of progressive presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Mu-hyun were all brought up and criticized. The participants of the Önsoju internet forum grounded their attacks by asserting their entitlement as media consumers and articulating a right to consume “fair” news reporting. Soon their vitriol led to an offline campaign against the ChoJoongDong, and advertising was chosen as the weapon in this struggle. No doubt Samsung's withdrawal of its advertisements from the Hankyoreh and the Kyunghyang, in its eighth month, was an important backdrop to these developments.

The Önsoju forum participants comprised and circulated lists of advertisers who placed advertisements in the ChoJoongDong but not in the Hankyoreh and the Kyunghyang. The public was encouraged to call the advertisers and tell them to stop advertising in the
conservative press. As consumers of media, the protesters were demanding not to be subjected to “distorted” coverage. As consumers of advertisers' services and commodities, and of advertisers' advertising, the forum participants were demanding that advertisers obey their will.

The initiative was supported by many progressive citizens' organizations, which took part in the anti-U.S.-beef protests, and soon the ChoJoongDong advertisers saw their offices paralysed with an avalanche of threatening calls and their websites flooded with angry protest messages. The callers posted logs of their activism on the Ónsoju website, and, according to Ónsoju, tens of thousands of calls were made to the ChoJoongDong advertisers on a given day (Interview with Kim Sŏng-gyun, June 23, 2009). Netizens also boycotted products of the ChoJoongDong advertisers and some activists put effort into promoting those advertisers' competitors.35 The ChoJoongDong and their supporters condemned the Ónsoju campaign as “advertising suppression,” “pressure on advertisers” (kwanggoju appak) and “advertiser blackmail” (kwanggoju hyŏppak), readily drawing parallels with the Dong-A “white pages” incident of 1974-75. This ironic reversal of roles, when organized citizens become the suppressor of mass media, the role assigned earlier to the authoritarian government, captured the changed spirit of the times and revealed how the earlier notions of public interest were trumped by the veneration of the neoliberal freedom to enterprise by the late '00s.

By mid-June, just as Ónsoju hoped, the ChoJoongDong was hurting. Some advertisers indeed pulled their advertisements unwilling to deal with angry protesters. While before the campaign the Chosun Ilbo came out on 68 pages, after June 12, when the Ónsoju activity peaked, it was reduced to 48 pages, the Dong-A Ilbo shrunk from 48 pages to 40.36 The Journalists Association of Korea reported that “the number of large corporations' advertisements printed in the three papers dropped from 12-15 per issue to 2-4.”37 Other reports quoted that advertising was reduced by half.

Three weeks into the boycott campaign, on June 23, the ChoJoongDong filed a complaint with the Broadcasting and Communications Commission, an administrative media watchdog, and demanded that the Ónsoju internet forum close down. The complaint was publicly supported by

major business associations and conservative civil society groups. The police announced the beginning of a criminal investigation of twenty-two moderators of the Ōnsoju internet forum.38

The police prosecution, however, only won more public support for Ōnsoju, which just on June 25, the day when the police investigation was announced, counted 6.4 thousand new members. Some angry protesters even attacked the buildings of the Chosun Ilbo and the Dong-A Ilbo. The Chosun Ilbo reported, “This is anarchy. Thugs are on the rampage; policemen are beaten; reporters are assaulted; newspapers are terrorized; and good-natured citizens are afraid to go out.”39

In less than two weeks, on July 1, the Korea Communications Standards Commission ruled that posting online information about the companies that advertise in the ChoJoongDong, with purposes to boycott them, was illegal. The hosting portal, Daum, was ordered to remove 58 out of the 80 investigated postings. Online activists behind the boycotts were summoned to the Prosecution Office for questioning, which, by the end of August, led to arrest of two cafe organizers, indictment of 14 forum members without physical detention and fines from three to five million won each imposed on eight more activists, all on the charges of interfering with the normal conduct of business.40 The decision was appealed, but after a four-month public trial, the Seoul Central District Court more or less upheld the earlier decision in February 2009. The 24 defendants were found guilty of obstruction of business (ōmmu panghae choe); the two main organizers received ten and six months in prison suspended for two years, and the rest were fined between one and three million won.41 This ruling firmly placed advertising within the commercial domain, asserting it as, first of all, a sphere of business and negating its public definition, which animated and legitimized the Ōnsoju activism.

38 Simultaneously the police started investigations in the organizers of the anti-U.S. beef protests, whereas the Korea Communications Commission investigated the truthfulness of reporting at the “PD notebook” program, which sparked the unrest.


41 “Obstruction of business” (ōmmu panghae choe, sometimes translated as “interference with business”) is Article 314 within Chapter XXXIV “Crimes against credit, business and auction” of South Korea’s Criminal Act (as amended in 2005). It defines “obstruction of business” as interfering with the business of another either by injuring their credit by circulating false facts or by other fraudulent means; or by threat of force, or by damaging records and record-keeping equipment. The violations of the Article is punished by imprisonment of up to five years or a fine of up to 15 million won (Criminal Act 2005, Articles 313, 314). This article has often been used to break and criminalize organized resistance of South Korean workers, and recently of migrant workers. (e.g. Chang 2011; Ko Robinson 2011; Republic of Korea Labor Rights Report 2011). Eckert mentions that, during the colonial period, “obstruction of business” was quoted as an offence under the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, to break down strikes of Korean workers (Eckert 1991: 204).
The Court, however, ruled that consumers were lawfully entitled to boycott newspapers' advertisers to sway newspapers' editorial policies and it was specifically the angry calls and threats that infringed on business operations and constituted a crime. The Court's ruling was taken seriously by new Önsoju leader, Kim Sông-gyun, who carried the torch of Önsoju's mission to destroy the ChoJoongDong. Again, rather than going after the ChoJoongDong directly, Kim continued to target advertisers to pressure them into withdrawing their advertisements from the three papers. To avoid legal problems, Kim's strategy was to announce the boycott over the Önsoju website, to abstain from calling the advertisers, to post online updates about not buying the boycotted brands and calculating the cumulative damage that the boycott was causing. "There is no law in the Republic of Korea that Önsoju is breaking," he repeated cockily to journalists, whose attention made him into a celebrity in June 2009, when the second round of boycotts started with KwangDong Pharmaceutical.

It was a few days after the Samsung boycott was announced that I met with Kim Sông-gyun at the Önsoju headquarters. Located in a dingy office tower behind Toksugung palace downtown Seoul, the Önsoju office was tiny, a meeting room with a kitchenette in the corner and a room with a couple of computers further in, where Önsoju's only salaried administrator was working away, keeping taps on Önsoju's vibrant online message board. Kim Sông-gyun, an agile and articulate man in his late 40s, looked tired and energetic simultaneously—as if he had given a thousand interviews but was willing to do another thousand to make sure that his point got across. While he never talked about it himself, Kim, a 1984 graduate of politically active Koryŏ University, was likely a former student activist.42

For my benefit, Kim reiterated Önsoju's official stance:

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42 In the midst of the boycott controversy, the ChoJoongDong alleged that Kim, had a conviction and served a jail term on violation of the national security law, which would be a clear indicator of Kim’s activist past. Kim sued the newspapers for libel, but lost.
is so bad that we are concentrating all our effort on rectifying those guys. Why wouldn’t we directly attack the ChoJoongDong but [attack] advertisers? It is because there is really no way to go directly after the ChoJoongDong. . . . because the ChoJoongDong has become a big power structure (kwollyŏk kigu), there are absolutely no measures through which they could be kept in check. If you ask to what degree [they are powerful], the ChoJoongDong makes presidents, they manipulate at the backstage, that’s precisely what the ChoJoongDong is. Just think that they are more powerful than the president. (Interview with Kim Sŏng-gyun, June 23, 2009)

For Kim, boycotting the ChoJoongDong advertisers was a means towards achieving a harmonious, democratic society with an effective public sphere, whose absence he saw as the major obstacle towards achieving social and economic justice in Korea:

If advertising no longer goes to those guys, those companies [the ChoJoongDong], a huge change will arise. . . . Because those guys in the ChoJoongDong publish distorted reports and lie, people cannot know the precise facts (chŏnghwakhan sasil). If this is this colour, that’s how it should be reported. But the ChoJoongDong keep saying that it is a different colour. . . . As the ChoJoongDong wither away, as the power of those guys declines, everything can be achieved normally (chŏngsangjŏgūro). What I am saying is that opportunities will open for our society, Korean society, to develop, as we consider what’s your opinion and what’s my opinion. This is not simply a problem of newspaper companies. Our country’s democracy, our country’s history, our country’s development, everything culminates here. (Ibid.)

Advertising itself was not the target of attack. For Kim, advertising was the last weapon in the struggle over Korea’s “democracy, history and development.” The goal of the boycott was to discipline advertisers, the legal owners of this powerful weapon, to use it for the benefit of the Korean people. At the same time, this essentially political goal was presented as an intervention by consumer-citizens:

We are not opposing those guys [the ChoJoongDong] because we oppose their political arguments, but we oppose them because they are wrong when those guys publish distorted reports and when they lie. . . . [the ChoJoongDong] say that we attack them because of the difference in the points of view. Who is conservative? Who is progressive? That is a political argument. But our position is different. What I am saying clearly is that because those guys habitually lie they are bad newspapers. So it is not a political argument. I say it is a consumer movement. (Ibid.)

A present Ōnsoju member jumped in to clarify that Ōnsoju's critics wanted to frame Ōnsoju as a
political movement to dismiss it because if Ōnsoju were a political movement, it became a matter of opinion who was right and who was wrong. "But a consumer movement is always right," he stressed. It was from this subject-position of empowered consumer-citizens that the Ōnsoju activists attempted to harness advertising flows.

The appeals to public significance of consumption resonated with older discourses about consumption as a site of activism and signalled Ōnsoju’s “pure” intentions. On the one hand, discourses of consumer sovereignty plugged Ōnsoju’s agenda into hegemonic discourses about the desirability of unimpeded markets. Indeed, among Ōnsoju's criticisms of the ChoJoongDong was that it interfered with the free market for advertising:

... some advertise there [in the ChoJoongDong] because they like those guys, but others advertise even though they hate them. Because, as I just said, the ChoJoongDong is an enormous force, if they don't like someone, they will write funny articles. If a company doesn't advertise there, ... [the ChoJoongDong] through their articles will pick faults at it and there are cases when they ruined companies like that. Because of that, they [companies] are fearful of such things, they advertise [in the ChoJoongDong] not because they see advertising effects, they place their advertisements simply to have insurance, as a preemptive measure. (Ibid.)

In other words, Ōnsoju accused the ChoJoongDong not only of interfering with consumer sovereignty by depriving the reading publics of “precise facts,” but also of distorting advertising decisions of businesses.

As the opening quote that introduced Ōnsoju's activism at the beginning of the chapter indicated, Ōnsoju claimed that “giving money to those bad companies [the ChoJoongDong newspapers] is cooperating with their bad deeds and committing a criminal act (pǒmjoе haeng'wi). The law that Ōnsoju saw as transgressed was obviously not the official law but rather the cultural logic that commits advertising to public interest. According to Ōnsoju, it was a “crime” to fail to prioritize advertising's obligations to the public. Because advertisers failed to voluntarily contribute to achieving a harmonious, democratic society with an effective public sphere, Ōnsoju attempted to discipline advertisers, the formal owners of advertising, so that they use advertising for the benefit of the Korean people, the moral owners of advertising. In other words, the struggle over Korea’s “democracy, history and development” warranted a suspension of advertising’s commercial functions and of advertisers’ discretion over allocation of their advertising money.

The second round of the Ōnsoju boycotts provoked as severe a response as the first round, even
though all the activism came down to posting spirited updates on the Önsoju website and doing one-person protests, which were conducted by a limited number of Önsoju’s core members. It was at this point that Önsoju were condemned as “advertising terrorists” by the conservative media, and, just as the year before, the police started an investigation of boycott organizers, including Kim, on charges of infringement with business operations, intimidation and extortion in relation to the boycott of KwangDong Pharmaceutical.

It became known that when Önsoju announced its boycott of KwangDong Pharmaceutical, Kim was invited to visit its office. What Kim described as reaching an amicable agreement the prosecution presented as extortion and intimidation. The Önsoju’s demand that KwangDong Pharmaceutical display a pop-up window on its website to announce a change in its advertising practices was framed as “a conspiracy to commit coercion,” whereas the demanded 7.56 million won (about $7 thousand) worth of advertising in the Hankyoreh and the Kyunghyang was a ransom within a “conspiracy to intimidate.” In a month, on July 29, 2009, Kim and Önsoju’s media activity team director, were indicted by the Seoul Central District Prosecutors’ Office on the charge of intimidation and extortion, and three months later, on October 29, 2009, the court found Kim guilty, sentencing him to a ten-month prison term suspended for two years.

Two other Önsoju members charged with the same offence were found not guilty. Kim appealed the decision, but was found guilty again in October 2010 and filed an appeal with Constitutional Court, which, in December 2011, ruled that Önsoju activism did not fall under the freedom of expression provisions and indeed constituted intimidation, coercion, and extortion. In January 2011, Kim stepped down as Önsoju leader and seemingly disappeared from the horizons of media activism.

Why were Önsoju’s activities, limited in their scope and effects, perceived as such a threat by Korean authorities to provoke a criminal prosecution? How does essentially blogging about not buying products from a particular company become “terrorism”?

Most immediately, perhaps, having witnessed the summer 2008 public protests that engulfed Seoul, Lee Myung-bak’s administration did not want to take any chances with another mass movement erupting. My Korean acquaintances sympathetic with the progressive camp,


suggested that Ōnsoju was squished because it went against Samsung: the criminal investigation started soon after Ōnsoju announced Samsung as its second target. Yet, as Ōnsoju themselves admitted, the amount of damage they could cause to Samsung was negligible, particularly considering that even criminal conviction of Samsung’s chairman failed to shake Samsung’s power and provoke an organized reaction from Korean people.

In a sense, accusations of terrorism were accusation that Ōnsoju refused to play by the rules—it refused to assume a cynical distance towards the vision of humanist capitalism that advertising advances. It refused to assume a cynical distance towards the “flower of capitalism” ideologies of advertising that committed it to public interest. Ōnsoju was labelled terrorist because it exposed the inconsistencies in the ideological edifice that supported Korean capitalism—by identifying with its literal claims. It attempted to hold corporations accountable to the image of humanism and benevolence that they create for themselves through mass media, including advertising, and it was disruptive that Ōnsoju demanded that companies act on this image by standing up for Korean democracy. Rather than presenting companies with an ethical choice, as critics of Samsung’s “advertising suppression” of the Hankyoreh did, Ōnsoju demanded that advertisers live up to their public personae.

At the same time, Ōnsoju succeeded in translating the old discourse of how mass media and advertising must serve public interest into the hegemonic language of neoliberal consumer citizenship. As noted above, in South Korea of the ’00s, political movements were often perceived as tainted and biased towards particular interests, whereas consumer movements, as citizens movements, were seen as pure and serving universal concerns (Shin 2006; Moon 2010). Drawing its legitimacy as a consumer movement—even calling itself Media Consumer Sovereignty Campaign—Ōnsoju however succeeded in formulating a political agenda. While making the movement itself less radical and excluding any critiques of capitalism as a system that created incentives for the ChoJoongDong’s structural abuses, it also made it more relevant, as it was the themes of consumer-citizenship that were most capable of mobilizing Koreans, as the protests against the U.S. beef revealed. The language of consumer citizenship allowed for political mobilization at the times when politics became a bad word, and criminalization of Ōnsoju’s activism suggests that Ōnsoju’s insistence on democratic distribution of advertising money had enough of a resonance to warranty a reaction. Ōnsoju were able to achieve politicization by taking a particular issue—the advertising practices of particular companies—and making it universal—the distribution of advertising money that discourages critical voices; Ōnsoju spoke to the problems that confronted the whole of Korean society and thus was a movement to change economic practices and institutions. In a sense, Ōnsoju was successful,
albeit for a limited time, in advancing a political agenda in a “post-political” moment (cf. Žižek 1999c: 198-209). Önsoju challenged the conservative hegemony in South Korea, and this challenge was disruptive if not of the conservative hegemony itself but of flows of advertising money, which cement the ties among business, the conservative media and conservative elites in power.

After the hectic period in June 2009, Önsoju's activity subsided. Still, the count of the damage to Samsung was updated monthly and as of August 31, 2011, surpassed 11.5 billion won (about $9 million), 1,436 people having posted updates.45 In the meantime, in July 2009, a new Media Law was bulldozed through the National Assembly, allowing for media cross-ownership and thus opening the opportunities for the ChoJoongDong to branch out into broadcasting. Many interpreted the law as Lee Myung-bak's return favour to the ChoJoongDong, which supported him throughout his election campaign in 2007—few other media outlets in Korea would have the resources to take advantage of the new opportunities. The contentious issue was that the new channels were allowed to operate as so-called comprehensive programming channels, providing both news and entertainment, thus potentially enjoying a broad audience, in competition with the three existing terrestrial broadcasters, public KBS and MBC and private SBS. The progressive camp saw this scenario as catastrophic, fearing that all media would be under the conservative ideological sway. No longer focusing on the ChoJoongDong advertisers, Önsoju cooperated with other media NGOs to block the emergence of what they saw as Korea's version of Fox News. They protested the law itself, protested the ChoJoongDong and economic daily Maeil Kyǒngje getting licensed for broadcasting, boycotted investors of the ChoJoongDong-owned channels—but all in vain, and four new channels started broadcasting on December 1, 2011, with much fanfare. For many it was particularly vexing that the new four broadcasters were to sell their advertising time themselves, bypassing KOBACO, which sold all advertising for “comprehensive” broadcasters till that point, which was believed to insulate them from excessive commercialism and undue pressure from advertisers. The KOBACO system found unconstitutional in 2008 but still lingering till that point due to lack of consensus over alternatives, the new broadcasters' assertion of control over their advertising laid an effective end to KOBACO's monopoly over broadcast advertising sales.

Conclusion

To conclude, the considered struggles over advertising flows reflect broader contestations about what advertising is and what it should do in a society. Particularly, I have stressed the vision that privileges advertising as an enabler of mass media and a public debate over advertising as advertisers' marketing tool. As I have shown, this logic builds on historical events, which have created precedents for drawing advertising into the sphere of political contestations. The reactions to Samsung's withdrawal of its advertising from the progressive newspapers make sense only if placed on the continuum with the Dong-A “white pages” incident of 1974-1975, when advertising was claimed as a tool for fighting for democracy and freedom of expression. Neither would the logic of Ōnsoju activism be discernible without it—and without recognizing Samsung's challenge to this logic.

The picture that emerges from the three episodes is that advertising is constantly contested because of its usefulness for controlling media and its essential role in enabling mass media as a space for public debates and potential politicization. However, as the conflict around Samsung's withdrawal of its advertising from the Hankyoreh as well as the Ōnsoju situation suggest, while advertising's potential continues to be recognized and while advertising publics (and, more broadly, media publics) continue to claim moral ownership over advertising, legal ownership by advertisers and their political-economic interests more often than not trump that ideal. Still, whether or not the supporters of the Hankyoreh and Ōnsoju succeeded in shaping in advertising flows, they reproduced a particular vision of advertising, which was rooted in subordinating its commercial goals to public interest.
Chapter 2. Advertising publics in action

Of course I like funny advertisements, but because I think that advertising is one of the methods to move people's hearts, I tremendously like advertisements that shake me up emotionally (kamsŏng ūl t'ok'tok kŏndŭryŏ junŭn kwanggo).

P'allang P'allang (dusl1984)

In this chapter, I question culturally appropriate modes of engaging with advertising, in an attempt, first, to scrutinize commonsense parameters of advertising as a genre and a social institution and, second, to examine how discourses of and about advertising are both reflective and constitutive of the ideological landscape of post-democratization South Korea. Considering advertising in a South Korean context and drawing out public-service expectations (the “flower of capitalism” vision discussed in the introduction) allows me to de-familiarize advertising and question the habitual understanding of how advertising should be engaged with. I explore how advertising becomes a site of contestations, and how its parameters are constructed, challenged and politicized—while placing the patterns of interactions with advertising within wider concerns about nation, media and capitalism in post-democratization South Korea.

Broadly, this chapter shows how practices of advertising consumption feed the tension between the instrumental purposes of advertising and the popular ambitions for advertising to be something more than a commercial tool—how advertising ends up an unlikely site of public debate and an arena for hegemonic struggles. First, I sketch common patterns of engagements with advertising. I demonstrate how advertising consumers engage with advertising as with any other public text, rather than relegating it to the domain of commercial interests and dismissing it as a profane, tainted medium. I stress how South Korean advertising publics read advertising socially—not just as a resource for information about commodities or as entertainment—and enlist it as a tool towards realizing their own societal ideals, claiming advertising as a space of contestations over dominant values. I develop these arguments by zooming in on responses, captured through an advertising diary and blogs, to various advertising campaigns. Second, I draw attention to the political potentiality of advertising publics. I examine a trajectory of an advertising campaign, “KT olleh,” which invited public interventions that in the end forced the advertiser to promote values desired by vocal and organized members of its advertising public, led by a feminist NGO. Third, I make a case for public-service announcements being the ideal

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towards which advertising publics push advertising in South Korea. I stress the popular appreciation for “ads that are not ad-like” and revisit the theme of the humanist advertising and “capitalism without capitalism,” linking it to popular melodramatic sensibilities and the challenges of the “compressed modernity” under capitalism in South Korea. In conclusion, I reflect on the opportunities and limitations of socially oriented engagements with advertising. While stressing opportunities for politics of representation and even occasional implicit critiques of capitalism that advertising accommodates, I emphasize that advertising is a capitalist institution, and no matter how deeply its consumers are concerned with public interest and how successful they are in conveying this vision to advertising, advertising serves capital first and the worldviews it advances in the final count secure material interests of advertisers.

Engaging with advertising in the everyday

“Has Dooly become corrupted?”

The first entry in an advertising diary by Yŏng-hŭi, a 20-year old university student (and thus a member of the population stratum many Korean advertisers were after), read:

Dooly (Tulli) is a [cartoon] baby dinosaur character, whom I have loved from early childhood, like all Koreans. Many people remember him as a symbol of childlike innocence, and, when I see Dooly, I, too, have many thoughts about childhood. But that Dooly was used in an advertisement for designated driver service gave me a bit of a shock. Designated driver service is usually for adults who have been drinking till late and cannot drive while drunk, so someone drives [them in their cars] for them, to use Dooly in such an advertisement... Hmm...!! I thought it's a pretty shallow business ability, and I also felt a bit bitter. When children think about Dooly, they will think about substitute driving, and this is a bit worrisome. (Yŏng-hŭi ‘s diary, May 15, 2010)

I gave Yŏng-hŭi her pseudonym after the kind girl in the cartoon, who found little dinosaur Dooly in the street and brought him home to live with her brother and father as a pet. Like the character in the cartoon, Yŏng-hŭi was kind, considerate and sincere. When I met her for the first time in May 2010, in my eyes she looked like a typical Korean undergrad, blue jeans and baggy checkered shirt, long loose hair with sparkly pins, a shy manner. Yŏng-hŭi majored in English at a low-tier university in northern Seoul and dreamt of working for an international NGO "to help poor children," as she told me at our first meeting, though in about three months she revised her goal, saying that she wanted to help oppressed women in Afghanistan. Among people who volunteered to write a diary for me about their daily encounters with advertising,
Yŏng-hŭi wrote most entries (10 entries about 19 advertisements altogether), which grew progressively longer as we got to know each other through regular phone conversations and emails.

In the quoted entry, Yŏng-hŭi wrote about an intertextual commercial, which drew on a popular Korean cartoon. In the cartoon, Dooly, the little dinosaur endowed with magical abilities, was preserved in an iceberg and ended up in Seoul, where the Yŏng-hŭi from the cartoon picked him up; soon Dooly made friends and got involved in various adventures. At his adoptive home, Dooly demonstrated certain rambunctiousness and often used his magical abilities to challenge the oppressive father. Overall, the cartoon has a sweet and mellow feel to it, though when it just appeared in the 1980s some critiqued it as setting an example for children to disrespect elders. In the designated driver service advertisement, Dooly rode a car with his merry friends from the cartoon, while singing a jingle, converted from nursery rhymes: "I am not a fool, I'll get a ten-percent rebate" (pabo anida sip p'ŭrŏsent'ŭ hwanggŭp Haydenp'adajip). The advertiser attempted to take advantage of Dooly's popularity not only by employing Dooly as a "celebrity endorser," but also by making a creative pun with the advertised service's phone number, the last four digits of which were "2222" which in Korean could be read as "Dooly Dooly" (tulli tulli), the chorus of the jingle performed by Dooly's passengers.

It is noteworthy that Yŏng-hŭi chose to write about the Dooly advertisement in the first place. Yŏng-hŭi did not consume alcohol, nor did she own a car or even have a drivers license, so the advertised service was doubly irrelevant to her. Yet she chose to write about the advertisement because the Dooly character resonated with her. In other words, she consumed the
advertisement not as an information about an available service, but rather as an entertainment product, a new, if unfortunate, episode in Dooly's adventures. Whereas not a user of the designated driver service, she was someone who knew Dooly. She thus recognized herself in the public that the commercial addressed.

It is also remarkable that rather than evaluating the usefulness of the information the advertisement provided to potential service buyers, Yŏng-hŭi critiqued the “shallow business ability” of the service seller. Even though the service was not relevant to her herself at that point, it could become relevant to her later in life and was probably already relevant to at least some of her friends and family, considering the notorious Korean “drinking culture,” which mandated participation in heavy drinking for social inclusion and for access to economic opportunities (and occasionally to fieldwork sites and research data). On the other hand, it seemed improbable to me that Yŏng-hŭi would want to run her own business at some point and would want to advertise it. Thus Yŏng-hŭi did not entirely bracket out the commercial purpose of advertising; however, rather than thinking of how the advertisement served her as a potential consumer and siding with buyers, Yŏng-hŭi sided with sellers and reflected on how she would have promoted the service, if she were the advertiser.

I encountered similar advertiser-focused readings of advertisements in other diaries I collected; some entries went straight into evaluating the advertisement from the point of view of its marketing effectiveness, which the writer assessed relying on the commonsense knowledge of marketing and sometimes even by searching online for available sales numbers. Some of my other diary volunteers did not go very far beyond this grassroots marketing analysis (meshing it with general points on Korean society and explanations of Korean culture for my sake). I encountered similar patterns in interviews when I asked opinions about advertisements, but because of their interactivity it was easier to stir the conversation away from spontaneous business administration analysis.

Yŏng-hŭi was not the only one who recognized herself as being addressed by the Dooly commercial. Her critical reaction to the Dooly advertisement was similar to reactions in blogs, albeit bloggers were more outspoken in expressing their disapproval. Like Yŏng-hŭi, many expressed disbelief and bitterness about such a use of a popular cartoon character.

When I saw that commercial for the first time, it's outlandishness (ŭiyesŏng) confused me. I thought maybe I misunderstood something. Dooly and his friends appeared in an advertisement for designated driving! What is that awkward feeling? Why can I not just view this commercial and naturally let it go? “Dooly” as a concept
of protecting family safety? Is it what they are wishing for, that children who watch recent animations say, “Daddy! When you are in a rush, let Dooly drive!” It is possible to feel closeness when seeing Dooly who came from the times when one was growing up, but isn’t it too much to stage Dooly as a guardian of family safety? Not that designated driving is not a good service, but there was some dissonance between Dooly as a family character and a service that is so unrelated.²

Really, to make cute Dooly into this. . . As someone who loves Dooly, I am very sad.³

After we have accepted the advertisement for a designated driver service, will we get to see an advertisement for loan services, with the concept that when family has financial difficulties, Dooly says “ho’i” and does some magic trick to overcome the crisis?⁴

Some joked that the owner of the company must be a Dooly fan and wondered whether the designated drivers were required to dress up in a green dinosaur Dooly suit when at work. Others facetiously commented that Dooly, too, must make a living.⁵ I discovered a lively discussion entitled, "Dooly did a commercial for designated driving service, has he become corrupted?"⁶ A netizen noted that Dooly must be about thirty by now (the cartoon first came out in the early 1980s) so it was about time he got a job. Others remarked that at least it was not an advertisement for loans (which are believed to seduce the gullible into debt), and someone joked that Dooly was trying to make money because he was sued for damages by the evil father of the family, whom Dooly kept injuring in the original cartoon.

Its commercial effectiveness aside, the advertisement clearly succeeded in conjuring up a public, or rather latching onto the existing public of Dooly fans. Bloggers and Yǒng-huí engaged with the advertisement as if it were as valid a cultural text as the original cartoon itself, though an infelicitous one, and this is revealing about cultural logics that shape responses to advertising. The cultural references the advertisement relied on to convey its meaning were noticed, placed, interpreted, commented upon and appropriated, as in the jokes about how

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Dooly had to make money. The sales message itself was recognized but discarded as irrelevant for the consumption of the commercial, which was not discriminated against based on its commercial instrumentality, yet its purpose to sell a service was never entirely forgotten. At the same time, few commentators questioned the usefulness of the information the advertisement provided to them as potential consumers and, like Yŏng-hŭi, vicariously adopted the position of the advertiser, assessing the deduced concept of the commercial or the advertiser's business flair.

Critical of the concept of the commercial, commentators nevertheless accepted the subject-position of a savvy and playful consumer of advertising. Importantly, the advertisement was not consumed individually but in relation to unknown others, who were imagined as watching the commercial together with the commentator but possibly not being shrewd enough to dismiss it as an unauthentic cultural reference and not to take it in as the final truth about Dooly and social norms around drunkenness. While the commentators themselves seemed to be content to consume the commercial ironically from a critical distance, the awareness of others, imagined as potentially more naive, prompted them to express their objection to the commercial. The gullible others were a necessary mediation for the cultural consumption of the Dooly commercial because the acknowledgement of their gullibility allowed for the critical commentator's playful engagement with the problematic advertisement. (This dynamic between the cynical speaker and the gullible other that justifies the cynic's engagement with (and enjoyment of) advertising illustrates my argument in introduction about how advertising is consumed from the critical distance and its smooth functioning depends on advertising consumers displacing their belief in advertising onto others.)

The Dooly-endorsed advertising campaign for the designated driver service was relatively low-profile, and so was the controversy it provoked. It incited neither mass media commentary nor NGO action to the best of my knowledge. As such, it can be considered representative of how advertising is consumed in the everyday and how an advertising public emerges. It also illustrates an important trait of advertising publics in South Korea—how advertisements are read and responded to as commentaries on social life that have real-world effects.

**Advertising as a space to engage with social issues**

When reading the advertising diaries and advertising-related blogs, what stood out for me was how quickly comments on advertising turned into a critical social commentary. It was rarely a fully developed critique, but, nevertheless, interpretations of advertisements in the diaries, and especially in blogs, went beyond reflections on personal relevance of particular advertising
campaigns. Often writers expressed broader concern for others in the advertising publics, who might get wrong ideas from exposure to unwholesome messages, and for society in general, whose norms and conventions might be shaken by controversial advertisements or whose problematic characteristics the advertisement revealed. The sentiments I quoted about the designated driver service commercial were quite representative in that regard, some worrying what children would think, others reflecting on the state of contemporary society where characters from children’s cartoons already endorse a designated driver service and might endorse predatory loan services in the near future.

This extensive engagement with social issues through commenting on advertising was unexpected. Prepped by Alperstein's study (2001), one of the few anthropologically minded studies of advertising reception, I was expecting most engagements with advertising to be reflections on personal relevance of particular advertising campaigns, particularly in diaries and interviews. Instead, it was surprising to realize that instead of seeing it as a resource for individual fantasies, dreams and self-talk, as advertising was for Alperstein's American informants, South Koreans used advertising more as fodder for engaging with social issues, either when reflections were recorded privately in the diary, or provoked in an interview, or when they were shared publicly through blogs. I noticed this tendency first when I started reading advertising blogs, so the diaries and interviews were a way to check whether the social orientation of comments on advertising in blogs reflected the public nature of blogs rather than the local media ideologies of advertising.7

It would be an exaggeration to say that the diary entries I collected never read the advertisements through the prism of the writers' personal life and concerns. In late spring 2010, when Yǒng-hǔi was writing her advertising diary, she was preoccupied with winning an opportunity to volunteer in India through a Korean NGO. As she explained, the position was very competitive, and she viewed it as a springboard for future opportunities and potential remedy for the low-quality instruction she believed she was getting at her university. With these concerns and aspirations in mind, she wrote about an advertisement from "As you think T" (saeng'gak taero T) series by SK Telecom, which showed a young man acing a job interview situation in an unexpected, “cool” way. Yǒng-hǔi wrote,

> Me, too, when I graduate from university I will need to get a job... This time when I will have an interview to go to India for overseas volunteering, I have to introduce myself within 100 seconds. So I am stressed, I worry how I should prepare. Would they know me well in such short a time? This opportunity comes before I start my

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7 The concept of media ideology is explored in Gershon 2010.
social life and later I am likely to have to go through many interviews. So this will become the foundation of those chances. . . . The interviewer [in the advertisement] asked something with a stiff expression about an international pending issue, but the man who was being interviewed said with all his heart “It’s pretty severe,” so it was very funny. But in the advertisement it appears not just as a joke but in the sense “during the interview don’t just try to show your positive sides but show what you are actually thinking.” Because of this meaning it was very cool, so I decided to write about it. (Yŏng-hŭi’s diary, June 2, 2010)

In other entries, Yŏng-hŭi reminisced of her high school experience, which she watched her younger sister repeating that year. In an entry about another "As you think T" advertisement, Yŏng-hŭi admired how it addressed the slogan "Do as you think" to high school students, encouraging them to pursue their passion as opposed to mastering all academic subjects for the mandatory College Scholastic Ability Test (which is the overwhelming stress in the lives of Korean school children, leading some to suicide\(^8\)). On another occasion, Yŏng-hŭi approvingly wrote about a public-interest advertisement, which targeted Korean parents to discourage their notorious educational zeal, with which they sign up their children for countless extra-curricular classes and tutoring services from early age.\(^9\) Yŏng-hŭi generally agreed with the message, but also expressed ambivalence that she herself was not subjected to such rigorous schooling, which connected to her ambivalence about the university she was attending and her opportunities in life (May 29, 2010).

Even though I came across such personal forays in her diary once in a while, most of Yŏng-hŭi’s entries veered towards comments about Korean society and attitudes particular advertisements encouraged or critiqued. Especially many of Yŏng-hŭi’s entries critically commented on representation of women in advertising, even though she never shared any stories of personally having suffered from patriarchal gender stereotypes and the situations depicted in the advertisements seemed removed from her immediate experience of a university student living with her parents. Yŏng-hŭi pointed out sexism in commercials for apartments for sale, which never showed men but only women, who were portrayed, on the one hand, having very materialistic concerns and, on the other, not having jobs and enjoying a leisurely lifestyle (entries from May 20, June 16). In one of her entries, Yŏng-hŭi critiqued the commercial for Georgia coffee (discussed in introduction), which presented that buying a coffee from a vending


\(^9\) An ethnographic treatment of extra-curricular education practices in South Korea can be found in Abelmann 2003 (chap 4) and Nelson 2000 (chap 5).
machine magically transported a tired male office worker into a lush oasis where women in bikinis flocked around him; Yŏng-hŭi pointed out that women worked hard and got tired too (May 17). Towards the end of our diary work, when Yŏng-hŭi’s entries were becoming increasingly long and personally engaged, she wrote indignantly about a cell phone commercial that featured singer/actor Rain (often praised for his masculine attractiveness) promoting a particular cell phone model as "manly" and mocked men who use pink "girlie" phones (so’nyŏ p’on),

Here “girlie” refers to a woman, but it seems that rather calling something womanly, it seeks to give it the image of greater feebleness by using the word girlie. In the advertisement, it says that a man cannot use pink colour, and must use a black, dark-coloured cell phone that would match his manly side. Many people think that womanly things are feeble, passive, domestic, like that. There is much talk that we [Koreans] should not speak like that, we should correct our speech habits, we should change the consciousness in Korea. But in the advertisements that we encounter in everyday life, such words continue to be used, and in people’s consciousness there is no way not to distinguish between manliness and womanliness. Where that gender division felt certain was at the end [of the advertisement], when the caption came out, “Manly for men.” What is manly, jet-black and dark? While gender equality is promoted socially, the consciousness about gender is divided from the very beginning, that’s why the consciousness does not change, it seems. (June 5, 2010)

Yŏng-hŭi’s perception of colours assigned to genders as a socially pertinent issue resonated with a few articles I read in Korean media at the time of my fieldwork, which talked about how young men opt to wear pink clothing to show insubordination to oppressive hierarchies in Korean society.

In the blogosphere, issues of gender representation in advertising were a common topic as well, and Yŏng-hŭi’s diary, while giving relatively a lot of attention to gender issues, was not unusual in picking up this theme. Overall, the range of topics whose discussion was triggered by advertising was diverse and loosely mirrored the pertinent social issues. In the earlier quoted comments on the designated driver service advertisement, for example, the bitter joke about advertising loan sharks as a next step in Dooly’s career resonated with the public discourse on how many Koreans fell into a debt trap, which blamed aggressiveness of loan advertisers for skyrocketing household debt and particularly for personal tragedies which happened when families were ruined due to debt. At the time of my preliminary fieldwork in summer 2007, I observed a high-profile scandal where a number of celebrities who endorsed loan services were
denounced by fans and general public, the issue of loan advertising and its regulation on everyone's lips (Fedorenko 2008). In 2009-2010, among frequently criticized were funeral insurance advertisements (for an insurance-like service, which promised to cover all costs for the subscriber's funeral whenever the death occurred, in return a fixed monthly fee was paid in the subscriber's name till his or her death). Particularly inflammatory was a campaign that recommended buying funeral insurance for parents-in-law as a gift; considering often tense relations between mothers- and daughters-in-law in South Korea, such a gift could easily be interpreted as a death wish.

The publicity of advertising thus results in a scrutiny of advertisements, for values and behaviours they endorse. No longer simply messages about available commodities, services or brands, advertisements become a discursive space of national debate. Advertisers' legal ownership over advertising and popular acknowledgement of commercial purposes of advertising do give advertisements a certain leverage with how they enhance the appearance and use-value of what is advertised. By no means, however, does it guarantee advertisers the final word in the debates in which advertisements participate as public texts. Rather, advertisers' need to influence consumer behaviour is used to discipline advertisers so that their advertisements circulate the messages that advertising publics see fit. (These dynamic is further complicated by the diversity of advertising publics and of their agendas, to be considered later.)

In most cases, these struggles over appropriation of advertising discourse remain invisible, the advertising public being content to consume advertisements in creative ways, as with the Dooly commercial. On some occasions, however, members of the advertising public launch full-fledged campaigns to have advertisers comply with their vision on an issue at stake, and more broadly, with their vision of advertising as a space of public debate and subject to democratic inputs. It is one of those cases that I consider next. I track a trajectory of a particular advertising campaign, highlighting the ripples it caused in everyday life and contestations it provoked, to illustrate how advertising is a site of national debates and a stake in struggles over dominant values.

**Contested advertising**

**“KT olleh” campaign**

In spring 2009, Korea’s biggest wired services provider KT acquired Korea’s second largest wireless carrier KTF, in what was one of the biggest mergers in Korean business, making new
KT the ninth largest chaebol in South Korea.\textsuperscript{10} Immediately after the merger, the new KT commanded almost 90 percent of Korea’s fixed-line telephony subscribers and approximately 45 percent of broadband subscribers.\textsuperscript{11} A pioneer in offering both wired and wireless communication services in one package, new KT had to compete with incumbents in both wired and wireless segments, which offered similar services albeit separately. Both wired and wireless communication markets in South Korea showed tendencies towards oligopolization, which made advertising and PR important tools for jockeying for market positions. Telecom companies were among the biggest advertising spenders, and their expensive campaigns often employed celebrities. KT’s major competitor in the wireless sector was SK Telecom, whose heart-warming, humanist advertisements (including the “Towards people” campaign discussed in Introduction) were considered by many to be the best of South Korean advertising. KT’s advertising agency Cheil Worldwide, an affiliate of powerful Samsung Group, formulated the task for the advertising campaign, to bury KT’s old reputation of an obsolete and clunky government-affiliated corporation\textsuperscript{12} and create a radically new image for leadership in technology and entertainment under the concept of innovation (Interview at Cheil Worldwide, November 23, 2009). As the agency brief explained, with what seemed like a jab at competitors’ campaigns,

\begin{quote}
We all know too well the rules for corporate advertising: be serious, touching, not fun, proper, authoritative, show only the view of the company. That’s why all Korean corporate PR is similar. . . . Let’s make a campaign that people could sincerely like and enjoy, that would be the most delightful and fun campaign ever, the new world where customer and KT could have conversation and have fun, not just simple corporate PR.
\end{quote}

In the late spring and summer 2009, a series of nine animation advertisements for TV and the internet was launched. All the advertisements followed the same plot: a protagonist encounters a positive event and says “wow,” only to encounter an even more positive event and then shout “olleh” (pronounced as the sports chant “olé”), after which the KT logo is displayed. If the "wow" moment marked the fulfillment of the customers' expectations, "olleh" stood for inspiring customers beyond their expectations. In one advertisement, for example, after a


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
lumberjack throws an iron axe into a pond, an old wizard appears, extending three shiny golden axes, and the lumberjack says “wow” in amazement; then he throws the same plain axe in the pond again, and this time three young women appear, each holds a golden axe and strikes an enticing pose, showing off shapely legs, to which the man shouts “olleh” in apparent ecstasy. In the last scene, the man dances and cheers in excitement in front of the three beauties as a voiceover announces, “the ultimate exclamation, olleh. Olleh! KT!” whereas at the background the sports chant “olé, olé, olé” is heard. By adopting the sports chant, the advertising campaign cleverly latched onto South Korea’s sports culture, hijacking its expression and creating the conditions for appropriating “olleh” slogan into the vernacular. The company press releases explained that, if spelled in Korean language using Chinese characters, “olleh” means “future is coming,” capturing the company’s innovative vision; moreover, if read backwards, “olleh” turned into English “hello,” which communicated the friendly image of the company.

The campaign enjoyed an explosive popularity, and by the end of 2009 was found by a public opinion poll to be the second most memorable campaign of 2009. The mass media covered the campaign as if it were news. Numerous articles in mainstream publications discussed KT's marketing strategy and praised business prowess of KT's CEO Lee Suk-chae. “Authority abandoned, funny image for Qook… KT 'Olleh!'” announced a headline of the conservative Dong-A Ilbo, the article itself positively reviewing KT's advertising campaigns, and quoting the advertising agency on the advertisement concept. In the progressive camp, the Hankyoreh published a complimentary article under the title, “Having shed the dinosaur image, young and joyful 'olleh.'” Smaller sports and entertainment publications echoed, “A second beginning with KT's 'olleh management;’” “The advertisement with mind-blowing animation, is it really KT?” The articles were reposted by bloggers, together with the commercials themselves and additional commentaries. Soon netizens circulated parodies, inventing their own wow/olleh

13 A public opinion poll of 6,000 people conducted by KOBACO as a part of its yearly research into consumer behaviour showed that 5.9 percent of 3,000 respondents who answered questions in the 2nd half of 2009 chose the “KT olleh” campaign as most memorable. The most memorable campaign, “Qook” also by KT, was chosen by 10.4 percent of respondents. (KOBACO newsletter #72, January 2010, accessed January 21, 2010, http://www.kobaco.co.kr/kor/newsletter/20100121/02_KOBACO.html.)

14 Qook is the brandname of KT's home entertainment package, launched immediately after the merger and a few month before the “KT olleh” campaign.


moments. One of them, for example, showed a man who jumped from a boat to save a drowning attractive “damsel in distress” (“wow”) and then found himself surrounded by a flock of voluptuous mermaids (“olleh”).

The “KT olleh” advertisement campaign became a part of local situated knowledge, and a useful resource for narrativizing daily life and its encounters. The exclamation “olleh” made it to everyday conversations and TV programs, its affinity with the sports chant likely helping the transition. The quotidian popularity of this advertising campaign dawned on me when, going for a meeting at the Chungang University campus in central Seoul in September 2009, I saw a poster congratulating business administration students for passing a qualification exam to work for customs. The successful passing of the exam was marked as “wow” moment, while drinking party to celebrate was “olleh.” As late as May 2010, or about nine months since the campaign was over, a friend who was familiar with my research, told me how when approaching my house he saw neighbourhood boys playing badminton and was surprised to hear one of them scream “olleh,” when his opponent was unable to hit his serve.

Figure 4. A still of a “wow” moment from the “Summer camp” episode of the “KT olleh” campaign (Cheil Worldwide, 2009).

The advertisement also provoked a debate about representations of women in South Korean media. There were critiques about portrayal of women in the above-mentioned “Golden axe” edition as well as in the “Summer camp” edition, where a couple sending off their son to summer school was portrayed as a wow moment, and then the husband’s sending off both his son and his wife was an olleh moment. Some also objected against the "Millionaire" edition, the
wow moment of which portrayed a blonde in evening dress hugging a young handsome man, and the olleh moment showed the same blonde passionately hugging a wrinkly old man with a sleek car in the background.

In one of the longer critical posts, a blogger reported how he incidentally observed a playing child use the word “olleh” and then explain it to his confused friend, retelling the “funny” “Golden axe” and “Summer camp” commercials to make the point. The blogger reflected, 

To me, a grown-up man, it is not a big deal to see the image of an adult lumberjack who shouts “olleh” when three charming young ladies appear and bare their clothing, showing off their naked thighs; it is not a big deal to see the image of a man who shouts ‘olleh’ in excitement after remaining alone, having sent his child and wife far away. As we live, we have encountered enough of such talk from married men who speak like that with people around. But what does it mean when such an image is seen by children? What are the thoughts of those children who see such advertisements as funny? . . . The father who rather than being with the family, rather than being with the mother [of his children], when left alone shouts ‘olleh’ in excitement and dances like a madman—what does this image mean to children, who [together with adults] think it funny? I don't want to talk about the 'distorted gender consciousness' or 'the power of the media.' It is just that I realized that the KT 'Olleh' advertising campaign, which till now I watched without much thought, is not an advertising campaign that should be watched thoughtlessly.”

Responding to complaints about the “KT olleh” commercials, media division of feminist organization Womenlink (Yŏsŏng min’uhwe) contacted KT in mid-August, asking the company to pull the advertisements. Womenlink argued that the campaign was insensitive to gender equality issues because its episodes cast women only in supporting roles and not as protagonists, thus reproducing the stereotypes of gender roles. The charge was backed up by a report with a quantitative content analysis of the advertisements, which showed that only one of the nine advertisements had a woman as a protagonist having an olleh moment. Womenlink demanded that KT stop the advertisements and advised that KT deal with these issues more sensitively in the future, in accordance with KT’s corporate mission. KT responded that pulling the advertisements was impossible, but promised to consider Womenlink's points in the future. Unsatisfied with this resolution, Womenlink posted their critical opinion online and went on one of the national TV channels (MBC) to announce a boycott of KT till the company stop the

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campaign.

Most major newspapers covered the story, and numerous bloggers re-posted and commented on Womenlink’s report, some approvingly, some critiquing Womenlink and women in general for being too “sensitive” (*min’gamhada*) and lacking sense of humour, a common line of counter-attack directed at Korean feminists to diffuse accusations of gender discrimination. A week later, KT agreed to withdraw the advertisements. As I was told at Womenlink later, KT was at first reluctant but yielded to pressure from its advertising agency, which feared the negative publicity for its client. At that point, the campaign had been running for about two months and was close to its natural end. It is unclear how things would have turned out should the Womenlink take an issue with it earlier.

The feminists’ victory was confirmed when in about six months the next series of KT advertisements picked challenging the outdated norms as the central theme; KT’s new campaign ran under the slogan, "Flip the usual way" (*ta kūrae rūl twijibōra*). One of the commercials made fun of the tradition that all Korean middle-aged women have the same perm for hairstyle. Another mocked fathers who nap at home instead of playing with their children outdoors. Yet another ridiculed the custom that when going out with co-workers on a boss's invitation everyone orders the same cheapest dish because the boss had to cover the bill. Significant in the light of the earlier controversy, one of the advertisements was directly promoting women's equality by ridiculing patriarchal norms. In the advertisement, which appeared before the Lunar New Year holidays, three men were shown idling around the house, napping, eating and tinkering with the TV remote, whereas four women were preparing food for later festivities. One of the younger women grumbled "How come it is only women who work for the Lunar New year?" and, presumably, her mother-in-law responded, "That’s the usual way with the Lunar New Year." Then an alarm sound went off and the voiceover incited, "Flip the usual way." In the next shot, the mother-in-law stood up and pronounced, "Those who don't work, won't eat," and in the next scene the three men were shown doing dishes while the four women were dancing. Similar to the earlier campaign, KT commercials assumed a fun, entertaining tone, but the critical message and a call to change the discriminatory traditions was an acquiescence to the demands of advertising publics.

The “KT olleh” case is a useful antidote to popular imaginaries of advertising as an omnipotent medium capable of interpellating viewers if not to the purchase of commodity but to the whatever ideologies it might be articulating. While advertising might appear as a seamless top-down discourse where advertisers authoritatively speak to the advertising publics, there are
enough openings for demanding that advertising complies with the public's vision of the world, the situation around the “KT olleh” campaign demonstrates. Like any other media text, advertising content is compared against existing ideas, filtered through hopes and aspirations, connected to social imaginaries—in other words it is processed critically. Moreover, advertising producers listen to the wishes of advertising consumers, not simply for the sake of achieving a sale but because in many ways they identify with advertising consumers and are themselves members of the advertising publics. (I develop this argument in chapter 4.)

Figure 5. A still from the “Lunar New Year,” “KT olleh” campaign (Cheil Worldwide, 2009).

The “KT olleh” campaign offered advertising consumers a cultural resource to be entertained by humorous animations and to be appropriated to demonstrate cultural competency and articulate everyday experiences. Alperstein's metaphor that in its everyday uses advertising is similar to improvisational jazz, which picks up various themes and shapes them into something new (Alperstein 2001: 103, 107), was apt there. However, my emphasis is not so much on the breadth of spread and unpredictability of use of advertising in everyday life, though the “KT olleh” campaign certainly illustrates that. Rather, I want to draw attention to how an advertising campaign conjured a public and how the public's critical members mobilized to interfere with advertising discourse and commit it to their own social agenda (while others were content to consume the advertisements as they were). The situation around the “KT olleh” campaign is thus an example of, on the one hand, how advertising is put to strategic use in relation to realizing particular social agendas, and, on the other, how Korean advertising agencies and advertisers honour the vision of advertising as an influential public text.

The advertising publics insisted not only on the advertiser taking their side in the politics of
gender representations, but also on the vision of advertising as a space of national debate, and the advertiser was forced to comply on both counts. KT management primarily cared about projecting a particular image for the company and the advertising message itself was but an instrument to that end; its content did not really matter as long as it brought the company popularity among the people, which was assumed to be important for generating profit. Because of this ultimate indifference to the message and great sensitivity to the public image, KT decision-makers were receptive to the input from the advertising publics, specifically the organized demand by the feminist NGO. As a result of this intervention, the subsequent KT campaign creatively attacked what many saw as an actual problem of the South Korean society, exposing patriarchal attitudes and promoting gender equality.

The two campaigns by KT showed that while discourses of advertising in the final count were formulated by advertising agencies, which structurally represented the interests of their clients advertisers, they were not sealed from the advertising publics' inputs. Particularly in the age of the internet, advertising publics have plenty of opportunities to express their visions of particular advertising campaigns, like bloggers or journalists do—and advertising agencies, which usually at least keep record of the public response their campaigns have provoked, listen and respond. While, structurally, advertising is more open to articulating the views of advertisers, their immediate interest in attracting consumers created incentives for opening advertising to the claims of public interest. Naturally, advertisers tend to privilege the vision of their target consumers, but because advertising public does not coincide with the target consumer niche and because the target consumer niche are not necessarily the most vocal members of the advertising publics, advertisers are forced to accommodate the visions of those who wish to claim advertising campaigns in support of their vision. Importantly, not only interpretations of particular advertising messages were open-ended and contested, so was the content of the messages themselves, and this openness to accommodating various points of view made advertising a space of public discussion.

**Advertising publics in the ’00s and the leadership of NGOs**

Advertisements themselves reach a wide audience, but they are an important part of South Korean mediascape also because advertising frequently becomes a matter of public discourse. It is when advertisements are brought into public discourse that an advertising public is truly realized, even though the threshold for being interpellated into an advertising public is

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20 Because of marketing research, the advertising industry can claim that it reflects the worldviews of the target consumer. Still, marketing insights are subordinated to the preferences and considerations of advertisers and advertising agencies, in Korea and elsewhere (cf. Moeran 1996; Miller 1997).
minimal attention. Such a proactive advertising public is essentially a media-focused social movement, and its origins can be traced to the consumer movements of the early 1980s, when the prevalent discourses of public nature of mass media fuelled audience activism. Mobilized into action by various NGOs, advertising publics carry the spirit of the primacy of public interest in the media into the sphere of advertising, their interventions enabled by the vibrancy of consumer and media activism in Korea, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the discourses and institutional practices that committed advertising to pursuits of public interest, as discussed in chapter 1.

Since I started working on Korean advertising, I had never been sure whether the overwhelming abundance of advertising-related media coverage and high frequency of advertising-related controversies were an objective fact of life in South Korea, or whether I noticed such stories everywhere because of my research interests. Whenever I picked up any of the multiple free subway newspapers on my commute in Seoul, rarely would I not come across at least one article about advertising, be it damages caused by imprudent advertising campaigns or gossip about celebrities contracted to endorse brands. (By comparison, I hardly ever saw an advertising-related story in Toronto’s Metro Today in 2007-2008, when I was doing preliminary work on this project.) Mainstream newspapers, too, regularly covered advertising news in entertainment columns, often commenting on whether the celebrity image in the advertisement was consistent with his or her regular image, like they would do for TV melodramas or films, and speculating on the advertisement’s significance for the celebrity career and resonance with fans. Mainstream newspapers also wrote about advertising as a part of their business reporting, to analyze marketing strategies of particular companies or to link trends in advertising to overall economic climate. Citizen journalists of OhMy News investigated false or morally dubious advertising they noticed. Particular advertising controversies were commented on in the broadcast news, and for a while, national news channel YTN had a weekly program where advertising trends and trivia were discussed.²¹

The extensive media coverage suggested that many people were watching advertising and responding to it. In other words, advertising publics included not only those interested to learn more about available consumables or passively waiting through a commercial break for the next show to start, but rather overlapped with mainstream media publics and actively sought information about advertising itself.

²¹ “Kwanggo iyagi.” I watched this program while in Seoul in the summer 2007, but it seemed to be discontinued when I returned for my main fieldwork in 2009.
The presence of active advertising publics, who critically or sympathetically engaged with advertising messages, was particularly noticeable in the South Korean blogosphere. Many bloggers who did not appear directly interested in advertising reposted advertisements they liked either because of their entertaining value or because of celebrities that they featured; fans collected on their webpages various advertisements where their idols appeared. With approximately three fourth of Korean advertising featuring celebrities, blogging about celebrity endorsers was a considerable part of advertising-related content online. On the other hand, some bloggers reposted advertisements to reflect on the values those advertisements assumed or promoted, either positively or critically, to question the implied stereotypes or values, as in the above-quoted discussions around the Dooley commercial. It was partially my puzzlement of the proliferation of meta-discourses of advertising that drove my project. When I started my research I was amazed at the overwhelming amount of blog posts about particular advertising campaigns to be found in Korean-language internet. Whereas many belonged to advertising students, many others engaged with advertising as a cultural product and celebrated it for its moving message or its entertainment value.

Despite the multiplicity of advertising blogs and online forums, it is citizens' organizations that usually take a leading role in organizing protest campaigns against controversial advertising. The content of advertising is frequently scrutinized by various NGOs, such as Seoul YMCA's Citizen's Mediation Room, YMCA Headquarters of TV Watching Citizens, Consumers Union of Korea, Consumers Korea, Korean Public Health Association, Media Division of WomenLink and Association of Advertising Consumers, to name the most active ones. These NGOs formally or informally monitor advertising related to their primary sphere of activity and often mediate in the situations when popular complaints about advertising repeatedly fell on deaf ears. The majority of interventions by consumer protection organizations were about unscrupulous, misleading, bad-faith advertising, which caused damages to consumers, who were unable to redress them on their own. In such cases, NGOs would informally communicate with the advertiser and agency, convincing them to apologize and issue compensation, and if the offending party did not yield, the NGO would take action through legal channels (interviews at Seoul YMCA, February 22, 2010, March 13, 2010; interview at Consumers Korea, May 6, 2010). In addition to acting on case-by-case basis, NGOs would occasionally monitor and analyze

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22 The precise statistics on celebrities in advertising are hard to come by. A journalist writes that 75 percent of Korean TV advertisements use celebrities and so do 70 percent of Japanese advertisements, whereas in the U.S., only 25 percent of TV advertisements cast celebrities. The sources of this information are not mentioned, but, at least in the case of South Korea, it appears like an accurate estimate. (Eom Nam-hyun, “FTC suggests guidelines to advertising in which celebrities appear,” Ad Starts 2009: 2009 Busan International Advertising Festival with Metro (English edition), 10.)
advertising either for particular products/services, like private loan advertising, or targeting particular populations, like advertising for youth; they would forward their findings to mainstream media, hold seminars to discuss them and formulate policy suggestions to be forwarded to relevant government structures. For example, in the winter 2010 the consumer protection division of Seoul YMCA held a contest “Fishing for bad loan advertising,” through which it invited general public to submit documented cases of loan advertisements that violated regulations and awarded prizes for best submissions; the data comprised in such a way informed a consequent report and policy recommendation.

NGOs act on behalf of advertising publics through institutionalized channels to impose their vision of what advertising should say and how it should guide conduct of its viewers. Their activities are implicated in “conduct of conduct,” guiding others by structuring their reality and attempting to make certain choices and behaviours more attractive than other choices and behaviours (Foucault 1982: 220-21). Seeking to take advantage of advertising’s presumed powers to shape subjectivities, NGOs piggyback on commercial advertising to promote values that they see appropriate for Korean society. Their interventions fall under “governing through community” (Rose 1999), as they claim advertising as a tool for shaping proper national subjects. In other words, they govern conduct of advertising producers so that they, in turn, guide conduct of advertising audience well.

The central axis in such governmental discourses about advertising are the gullible others, who are imagined as naïve and vulnerable to corrupting media influences, and therefore need more sophisticated and critical members of media publics to speak for them. The frequent references to the gullible other demonstrate that for many members of advertising publics advertisements are more than publicly circulating arguments towards a particular point of view but rather governmental instruments for realizing desired ideals in the everyday. "Public interest” looms large in such interventions, and, as I will be showing in chapter 3, it is through appeals to public interest that activists justify interventions whose uneasy relation with liberal freedoms (of advertisers) they recognize.

While acknowledging the victories in representational politics and successful NGO interventions into advertising discourse, such as the one by WomenLink, it is important to remember that they remain at the level of policing images and their effectiveness hangs on the premise that there is a mimetic relation between advertising and reality—that, for example, changing representations of gender in advertising would lead to changing behaviours in real life or stopping advertising sugary snacks to children will prevent children from eating the sweets.
As Anne Cronin (2004) shows, this mimetic relation cannot be safely assumed; rather it is one of the "myths" about advertising that enable the functioning of the advertising industry in its contemporary form. As Cronin points out, engaging with advertising images preempts engagement with advertising as an institution and its actual effects. Moreover, NGO interventions that draw attention to particular advertising texts also socially structure silence about marketplace censorship, which advertising enforces on mass media (Jansen 1991).

In the view of my arguments, however, the questionable practical outcomes of such interventions do not interfere with reproducing beliefs and dominant modes of engagement with advertising itself. Whatever their effects on people's behaviour, these interventions and critiques assert advertising as a site of scrutiny and popular participation, and, as I discuss in chapter 3, these mimentic assumptions provide a much greater leverage with the advertising industry than presuming a "smart consumer," who expertly knows when to read advertising cynically and not to take its claims literally.

By putting pressure on advertisers to formulate ideal visions of the national community—polite children eating healthful food, women not discriminated against, natural resources protected by environmentally conscious citizens—advertising publics reproduce the vision of advertising as a discourse about desirable behaviours, admirable lifestyles and proper values. They effectively demand that advertising provides inspiring spectacles of “capitalist realism,” and they contest the privilege of advertisers to solely articulate what this societal ideal should include. This commitment to "capitalist realism" pushes advertising makers to subordinate commercial imperatives to the romantic vision of advertising as “flower of capitalism,” to privilege advertising’s “flowery” aspects over its “capitalist” ones. As advertising gets deeper in articulating the fantastic world of capitalist realism, it starts talking about “humanism” and other commonly praised values and its images grow further and further removed from the advertised commodity, to the point that the commodity itself does not appear in the advertisement and imagining its sensuous attractions is left entirely to the advertising consumer. This ethos of advertising is explored in the next section through "advertising talk"—social discourse about advertising. In focusing on how advertising is talked about, I follow Richard Wilk (2002), who argued that consuming a medium and talking about it are parts of the same process.
Melodramas of advertising and fantasies of humanist capitalism

The ethos of advertising: “Ads that are not ad-like”

The desire for advertising to be socially minded and proactive in pursuing public interest repeatedly came up in my interviews. As Ga-yŏng, at the time a 33-year old university-educated white-colour office worker at a small trading company, explained in an interview, when she was influenced by advertising it was not because of product information, which was more exhaustive in consumer publications and online, but because advertising talked about contemporary issues (sisajŏk ida) in a way that she could identify and sympathize (konggam) with, and that she particularly liked it when towards the end there was a commentary that could just force a person to pay attention. . . . Even if it is related to that commodity, it throws in some different information about everyday life, something contemporary. . . . It seems to me that such commentaries could unify people to some degree. To make everyone share the sentiment (tŏ kat’ŭn maŭm katke mandŭ nun kŏt), “Ah, exactly, that is right, that's how it is,” making people think like that, intentionally or unintentionally, even if it is unconscious.” (interview, August 2, 2009)

Ga-yŏng gave me an example of such an advertisement, describing its visuals, but she could not recall neither the product advertised, nor the advertiser, nor even whether it was a for-profit or public service advertisement. Visuals aside, most of corporate image advertisements could have been a suitable example.

I have already noted in the introduction that the category of advertising in Korea, kwanggo, does not privilege commercial advertising. Indeed, for many South Koreans I talked to, the distinction between commercial and non-commercial advertising was not particularly meaningful. On quite a few occasions when my informants, like Ga-yŏng, while telling about an advertisement would describe its visuals and the message but not remember whether it was a commercial advertisement or a public service advertisement. Others, when talking about advertising in general, would describe a public service campaign and talk about its creativity, treating its non-commercial nature as insignificant. When I asked some of my informants to record their everyday interactions with advertising in a diary, I was surprised that public service advertising was included in those accounts. While I emphasized the open-endedness of what they could write about as long as it was related to advertising in any way, in my mind, public service advertisements were not an obvious part of this project (perhaps because in English they are called “public service announcement,” which is distinct from “advertising”). While
Chapter 2.

South Korean advertising publics treated commercial or non-commercial origins of particular advertisements as relatively unimportant, what was important was the ability of an advertisement, either public or private, public-interest or commercially motivated, to have the audiences sympathize with the message, particularly emotionally, because of its goodness and social significance, like Ga-yŏng explained.

Mr. Kim, a mid-career government employee in his 30s, reflected that he liked “advertising that warms up one's heart, advertising that works on feelings, advertising that can stimulate human emotions” (interview, August 15, 2009). Mr. Kim brought up a particular commercial by Korea's largest steel maker Posco, which showed a street auction for a bicycle in what looked like a Southern European poor neighbourhood. In the commercial, a boy first counted all his pocket change and then offered a clearly insufficient bid of five dollars. Instead of outbidding him, other auction participants nudged each other to yield so that the boy could fulfill his dream and get the bicycle, and the commercial ended with the boy riding the bicycle along the seaside. I looked up the commercial later, and the voiceover left no doubt about the message, “Five dollars... That would not have been enough. Yielding hearts gathered to make a dream come true. If you open your heart, the warmth of the world opens up.” As Mr. Kim explained,

Of course what Posco intended here was to show that because bicycles that people ride are made of steel, what we [Posco] make is the best. But as they were doing advertising for corporate purposes, they were also promoting the public interest (kong'ik). (interview, August 15, 2009)

Mr. Kim said this in response to his older colleague Mr. Hwang, who was also participating in the interview, and who mentioned earlier that he liked public interest advertising best, giving an example of an imaginary public-service campaign, which would show beautiful landscape and urge viewers not to litter in the streets. Mr. Kim, however, responded that such advertisements were too simplistic and no one would watch them, he contrasted them to the advertisements that engage emotions, like the mentioned Posco advertisement.

Whereas Mr. Kim was stressing the emotional appeal of advertising, his example did not oppose Mr. Hwang's appreciation for public-interest messages, but offered a more sophisticated strategy for making them resonate. In fact, Mr. Kim noted that recently public service advertising had became more interesting, and gave an example of an anti-smoking campaign he liked. After praising the campaign, he clarified,

But what I like is when corporations do this. Because “Don't smoke” is an obvious thing, of course there will be such an advertisement, and I watched it because it was interesting... But when an advertisement like the one I was talking about [the Posco
advertisement] comes from a private corporation . . . it can make one's heart sing in tranquility, it makes me feel good. (interview, August 15, 2009)

In other words, public service advertising was set up as the ideal for all advertising not because of its non-profit, non-commercial nature. What made public service advertisements an ideal for all advertising was their striving for public interest, their intention to engage with “contemporary issues” and have a positive social impact. If commercial advertisements could demonstrate similar commitment to public interest, they were as praiseworthy, if not more so, as Mr. Kim's comment suggested. Mr. Kim echoed the odes to “public-interest commercial advertising” of the government publication, with which I introduced this theme in the introduction.

Many of South Koreans I talked to shared Mr. Kim's particular appreciation for corporations that had their advertisements strive for a positive social impact by communicating essentially a public service message in a fun, engaging way, something that was considered difficult to achieve for regular public service advertisements. To give another example, Ms. Han, a long-time NGO activist, involved in advertising monitoring and media education (to appear as Media Educator in chapter 3), said that she liked advertising that promoted good values and wished that all advertisements were like that. When I clarified whether she wished that all advertisements were like public service advertisements, she chuckled and said that education for the sake of education was boring and no one would listen, and that good advertising must be entertaining to get people's attention (fieldnotes, March 2, 2009). As we talked about her own
favourite advertisements, she explained that she liked “advertisements that show a particular issue in an interesting light. There are advertisements that are not advertisement-like (kwanggo sûrôpjì antha), but project a positive image for the company. They do not seem like they are advertisements, they make one think” (interview March 2, 2009). In other words, Ms. Han advocated for advertising that transcended its commercial status and became a thought-provoking public text.

Personally, I found most public-interest commercial advertisements, including the earlier mentioned “Lunch box,” “Towards people” series as well as the Posco advertisement, overly syrupy and was more amused than moved by all their saccharine sentimentality. I read them like bloggers read the Dooly advertisements. Knowing that their ultimate purpose was to sell a service subscription or promote a brand prompted me to read those advertisements cynically and be on guard against attempts to exploit my emotions. While I enjoyed some of the comical campaigns, including the “KT olleh,” I could not, or perhaps would not, be moved by the pathos the humanist advertisements evoked. Yet whenever I articulated my critical take on humanist advertising to my South Korean acquaintances, they inevitably told me that I was overthinking it, and even sometimes hinted at me being a jaded cynic, while reiterating their own appreciation for such advertisements as heart-warming and emotion-stirring. The culturally appropriate way to consume humanist advertising was through identification, not from a cynical distance, unlike regular advertising.²³

**Melodrama and the moral occult, in advertising**

In their striving for sympathy and pathos, humanist advertisements resemble other commercially produced cultural products, such as melodramatic TV series, films and novels. The popularity of melodrama in Korea has been extensively commented on by scholars (Abelmann 2003; Lee 2004; Paquet 2007; Choi Jinhee 2010), and melodrama’s appeal is commonly attributed to the experience of the dizzying pace of social and economic transformation Korea went through in the 20th century. The pervasiveness of melodramatic sensibility is a response to the conflicting feelings that the rapid changes and their effects provoked, the argument goes. As Keehyung Lee writes, “[in South Korea] melodrama has served

²³ These moments of disagreement made me conscious of my own beliefs about advertising and how they did not fit with those of many South Koreans. In my mind, advertising was tainted with its commercial instrumentality and no matter what its content was I was unable to bracket out that fundamentally it was there to sell. In other words, no matter what its content was, I was processing advertising from a critical distance. Unlike myself, South Korean advertising consumers seemed comfortable to attune their attitudes towards advertising in response to its actual content and were willing to endorse it as any other public text as long as it articulated values and ideals they saw as agreeable. Many stressed that they appreciated the humanist advertisements because they could identify and sympathize (konggamhada) with their message, just like Mr. Kim talked about Posco advertisement.
as a symptomatic cultural vehicle that reflects the uneven effects of rapid urbanization and modernization that have conditioned people’s lives” (2004: 527). Relatedly, Nancy Abelmann argued that “melodramatic text and narrative conventions are effective in South Korea because they dramatize issues central to rapidly changing societies” (2003: 23-24); using Raymond Williams's concept, she describes the “structure of feeling” that accompanied Korea’s fast-paced social and economic transformation as “melodrama of mobility” (Ibid.: 293). Many authors linked melodrama to expression of han, the feeling of resentment caused by pent up frustrations, claimed by some as a uniquely Korean emotion, stemming from living through the succession of traumatic experiences of colonialism, national division and authoritarianism throughout the 20th century (see Abelmann 1996:36-38 for discussion; also Ahn 1987; Chung 2005; Lee 2004; Paquet 2007).

These arguments about melodrama’s appeal draw, in various degrees, on Peter Brooks' The melodramatic imagination, where he asserted “the melodramatic mode as a central fact of the modern sensibility”(1991: 64) because shared faith in divine order no longer dictates ethics of human life. According to Brooks, melodramatic excesses are vehicles for dealing with anxieties about moral order and ultimately about meaning of life, which individuals had to work out on their own in the absence of the sacred that would guarantee the stability of the ethical universe. Melodrama particularly resonates in rapidly changing societies: “Melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue” (64). On the one hand, melodramatic excesses offer outlets for repressed emotions and desires, which otherwise are impossible to resolve compatibly with the dominant social structures; on the other hand, melodrama articulates the “moral occult,” a domain of invisible forces and ethical imperatives, which see to the evil being punished and the innocent rewarded.24 Melodrama is animated by the moral occult as it “proves” the invisible moral laws in the modern societies by resolving melodramatic conflicts in a way that affirms those invisible moral laws and thus absolving the viewers' anxieties over lack of meaning and ethical collapse.

Advertising seeks to attract the same media audience as mainstream media, and consequently draws on similar aesthetic conventions. In advertising as well, the melodramatic mode is employed to draw attention, to encourage identification and empathy and provide cathartic pleasures, which find few outlets in the everyday. One of the memorable campaigns of Korean

24 “The moral occult is not a metaphysical system; it is rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth. It bears comparison to unconscious mind, for it is a sphere of being where our most basic desires and interdictions lie, a realm which in quotidian existence may appear closed off from us, but which we must accede to since it is the realm of meaning and value.” (Brooks 1991: 53)
advertising, “2%” series for fruit-flavoured drinks, for example, featured intense fights between a young couple, played by celebrity actors known for their roles in TV melodramas and films. Similar to classic melodramas, the sensational and excessive “2%” advertisements featured two characters on the edge of hysteria and collapse, under the slogan, “Love is always thirsty. When missing 2%” (two percent being the advertised amount of fruit juice added for flavour). One of the episodes showed the couple yelling insults at each other on the subway platform, the woman mocking her boyfriend for being poor and implying that she was also dating someone richer, to which the boyfriend slapped her on the face. In another episode, the woman was shown breaking away out of a posh car, running away in distress and incoherently screaming in the rain, while the boyfriend was shown lying bruised and unconscious in the street; in the end, he opens his eyes and shouts into the night sky, “We have gone mad” and hysterically laughs. In a number of advertisements, the couple was shown having shouting matches on roofs of skyscrapes, in one of the episodes the woman pointing a gun at her boyfriend in the heat of the argument, in another the boyfriend contemplating suicide.

The “2%” campaign might be an extreme case, though melodramatic idioms are frequently employed by advertisers in Korea and beyond. Brooks notes about writers of melodramatic novels, “Precisely to the extent that they feel themselves dealing in concepts and issues that have no certain status or justification, they have recourse to the demonstrative, heightened representations of melodrama” (1991: 64); advertising producers as well often deal “in concepts and issues that have no certain status or justification” as they claim superiority and desirability for particular products/services, which are only superficially different from the ones offered by competitors. Melodramatic excess is one of the strategies through which advertising campaigns attempt to produce such differences in the minds of the target consumers.

The melodramatic imagination at work is recognizable in how advertisements rely on hyperbole and aesthetic of excess to engage the viewer. It can be found in the satisfaction that models are shown to get from consumption of the advertised commodities. Advertising images of people experiencing sublime pleasure after sinking their teeth in a particular brand of pizza, or images of housewives ecstatically fondling laundry cleaned with a particular detergent, are all too

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25 From a conventional business administration point of view, such melodramatic intensity in advertising might seem risky because it is not conducive for happy consumption-friendly mood. Yet the melodramatic aesthetics were successful in attracting attention and provided cathartic pleasures for viewers who were able to identify with strong emotions. The “2%” campaign was a tremendous success, as the first season brought more than 170 billion won in sales (approximately 130 million dollars), an unprecedented event in history for a single item, according to the advertising agency that produced it (Daehong 2005). In terms of the popular culture status of the campaign, a telling indication was that one of the first “2%” advertisements was included as a study resource in the curriculum of my Korean language class in Seoul some five years after its launch, “to familiarize foreigners with Korean culture through advertising.”
familiar. Some advertisements stage a melodramatic conflict by identifying a lack in everyday life and exaggerating its significance, to show its eventual resolution through consumption of the advertised commodity, again exaggerating the satisfaction that could be obtained from consumption. If the usual strategies of commodity aesthetics enhance the commodity’s appearance and work on senses, melodramatic advertising preys on emotions. Fitting with the melodramatic conventions are stereotypical advertising characters defined as social types (“loving mother,” “hard-working employee,” “romantic lover,” “everyday hero,” etc); simplified oppositions between good and bad (dark-grey “manly” phone—good, pink “girly” phone—bad); and in concern with private everyday life situations, where these conflicts play out. South Korean advertising is particularly susceptible to melodramatic mode because of the above mentioned cultural predisposition towards melodrama and, in the case of South Korean terrestrial broadcast advertising, because of the regulations that put advertising in direct competition for viewers’ attention with regular programming. (In South Korea, in-program advertising is not allowed (as of summer 2010) and advertisements come in clusters before and after TV shows, which makes advertisements compete with TV programs on other channels.)

The humanist advertising is representative of how South Korean advertising does not shy away from extreme gestures of suffering and emotional constraint, the staple of melodramatic TV series. Humanist advertising generates emotional excess and pathos by evoking Brooks’ “moral occult”: they articulate the hidden humanist laws and side with those laws against business rationality, thus “proving” that humanism is still operative. Such advertisements articulate the moral, humanist universe, which otherwise has little place in the realities of the modern life. Dealing in the moral occult humanist advertisements can “move one’s heart,” as the blogger wrote about the “Towards people” campaign, and cleanse emotions.

The moral occult provides an answer why watching commercial advertisements by corporations articulate a humanist, ethically sound message is more satisfying than watching not-for-profit public service advertisements produced for the benefit of the public, as Mr. Kim said in the above-quoted interview. Perhaps to watch a corporation testify to the principles of public good in an advertisement is as satisfying as to watch a villain commend to the forces of good in a

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26 Stern (1991) provides such a careful “melodramatic” reading of a detergent commercial, where the housewife is shown first as lacking due to not fresh enough smell of her laundry and then wins back the love of her husband and restores familial happiness by doing laundry with the advertised product (distinguished on the grounds that it makes the laundry smell particularly nice). Melodramatic excess can be found also in dramatic comparisons between the superior advertised product and hopelessly inferior “other brands,” which never can make the laundry white enough, etc. In South Korea, however, comparison advertising has been restricted and is generally considered bad taste (Shin and Shin 2004).

27 Abelmann (2003) offers a concise summary of scholarly debates on melodrama and lists its characteristics (23-27). Useful description of melodramatic conventions, especially how they are selectively evoked in Korean film, can be found in Paquet 2007.
regular melodrama. In South Korea, as in many other places, big business is often perceived as corrupt, unscrupulous and inhumane (Janelli and Janelli 1993: 81-88). To have corporations speak for public interest and humanism—especially in advertising, which as everyone knows is a marketing instrument used to bring commercial profits—is to buttress the universality, permanence and stability of those values. Advertising publics, by valorizing humanist advertising, subscribe to realizing this humanist, moral universe in the real world. It is with such campaigns that advertising realizes its “capitalist realism” designation, offering an inspiring societal ideal to strive towards. It transcends its immediate application as a discourse about commodities and becomes an articulation of a social utopia where productivity of capitalism can be achieved without capitalist contradictions.

**Humanist advertising, humanist capitalism?**

Refuting usual accusations of advertising that it spreads consumerism and materialism, South Korea's advertising industry on many occasions advanced humanist values and praised the importance of people, celebrating everyday experiences and sometimes even ignoring to mention advertised commodities or services altogether. Rather than titillating with promises of sublime enjoyment to be obtained from consuming the advertised brand, many advertisements offered immediate enjoyment of strong emotions, often engaging the publics' melodramatic sensibilities and providing cathartic moments.

Such advertisements that abandon selling and realize advertising potential as a public medium can be read as signs of empowered and triumphant advertising publics, whose members, through individual and organized pressure, succeeded in imposing their worldview on the mainstream media. Speaking beyond target consumers to the imagined community of the South Korean nation, such advertisements seem to sacrifice their own commercial goals, they abandon both the usual advertising strategies of enhancing the appearance of the commodity and of promising fantastic satisfactions to be obtained from its consumption. Such advertisements hail members of their publics not as immature bundles of impulsive and manipulatable desires (as North American advertising frequently does) but as thoughtful yet playful consumer-citizens, who, on the one hand, are concerned for other members of the national community and hence favour humanist, didactic messages and, on the other, consume advertising like they consume other media—for entertainment, inspiration, emotional stimulation, etc.

Yet the message of advertising as a medium is still a sales message, and advertising publics *know* that advertising always sells something even without being told so by each advertisement.
As conscientious consumer-citizens, members of advertising publics are prompted to vote with their wallets for the advertisers who use the popular reach of their advertising to promote agreeable messages, be those entertaining advertisements that could put a smile on someone's face, or serious “humanist” advertisements that could sensitize someone to an important social issue. Consumption has long been invested with intense emotions and political significance in Korea. The democratization of the late 1980s not only denoted a major political change, but also marked a rapid transition from the developmental state and emphasis on thrift to a consumption-oriented mode of economic development, which resulted in the lingering tension between relatively recent fascination with consumer culture and deep-rooted beliefs in the immorality of excessive consumption (Nelson 2000; Lett 2000; Hart 2001; Kendall 2008).

By the time of my fieldwork in 2009-2010, the virtues of consumerism were no longer contested. Since the early 2000s, both progressive and conservative governments called for greater consumer spending, advocating domestic consumption as one of the ways to stimulate the national economy. On the other hand, it has become the common sense for even most critical oppositional organizations to articulate their critiques and demands from the subject position of a consumer. Consumerism began to stand for empowerment of regular people; even Önsoju, the boycotters of advertising from chapter 1, called their movement “Media Consumer Sovereignty Campaign,” emphasizing their rights and entitlements as media consumers and fiercely rejecting any attempts to frame their movement as a political one.

In the context where consumption was a privileged arena for expressing values and articulating political positions (while refusing to call them political), buying from a socially responsible advertiser was more than acquiring a commodity or service for individual enjoyment, it also became a form of civic engagement. Supporting “humanist” companies was presumably a way to vouch for the humanist agenda and also to benefit many unknown others who might become better, kinder, more adjusted and more fulfilled people by identifying with the inspiring messages and by being reminded of the significance of humanist ethics. Thus advertising campaigns, by inscribing additional meanings to buying particular brands, facilitated the area of consumption as a privileged arena for activism. In a sense, the more a society is invested in consumption, the more it needs to believe that consumption is more than buying, accumulating, using and disposing of things, but is a venue for supporting values and voicing positions and expressing identities.

Appreciating socially minded advertising, and even critiquing problematic advertisements that lack proper values, does not obstruct finding satisfaction in consumption but rather integrates
consumerism into society by giving it a “humanist” face. Humanist advertisements might not be playing up the commodity aesthetics directly, but they advance a utopian imaginary of humanist capitalism practiced by responsible, socially conscious companies with sound humanist values. Considered against the extensive restructuring of the South Korean economy along neoliberal lines throughout the 1990s and 2000s, this longing for moral values in advertising appears as a longing for moral virtues to override the contradictions that come along with neoliberal regimes and possibly as a reaction against the ethics of rational entrepreneurial self, which has been encouraged by government policies and has already taken a deep root in the everyday life of Koreans (Park 2007; Seo 2008). In this context, the humanist advertising articulates an appealing fantasy that the goal of equitable society—the goal that drove the anti-authoritarian struggles of the 1980s—is still achievable within capitalism, as long as an increasing number of people adopts humanist worldviews in their everyday behaviour and encourages humanism in society by buying from humanist corporations.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, advertising publics in South Korea consume advertising as first of all a public text and claim it for effecting change in the real world to match their own ideals. They privilege the aesthetics of pathos and seek to commit advertising to improving society, such projects culminating in “advertisements that are not advertisement-like”—humanist advertising, which articulates a fantasy of a utopian humanist capitalism, where corporations are first of all committed to public interest, understood along humanist lines to honour regular people and their everyday lives. This aesthetic is lends itself to melodramatic sensibility, which is characteristic of societies that went through a quick social change, as Korea did in the 20th century.

While generally apolitical, engagements with advertising are filtered through overall awareness of broader societal issues and coloured by the imaginaries of the other members of the advertising publics, who are inevitably imagined as shaped by advertising messages. This faith in the social powers of advertising, on some occasions, propel advertising publics into action, usually under the leadership of an NGO. The politics of advertising publics largely fall under the politics of representation, and through policing advertising images they participate in a national debate on desirable social norms and societal ideals.

Yet the effects of their interventions beyond shaping media images are uncertain. Considering the problematic nature of the assumption about the mimetic relation between advertising and
reality, the only certain contribution that advertising publics achieve is shaping the institution of advertising itself. By engaging with advertising as an authoritative public text that validates societal ideals, advertising publics realize the vision of advertising as first of all a public social institution, whose public functions are privileged over its immediate commercial goals.

A membership in advertising publics is generally obligatory unless one is willing to go a great length to avoid any contact with advertising or discipline oneself to never respond to advertising’s interpellations in the everyday—a project practically impossible in the contemporary world. For most people who are compulsively interpellated into advertising publics, critical engagements with advertising are a spontaneous reaction to commercial messages. By responding to advertisements critically, they negotiate the conditions on which they acquiesce to being members of advertising publics and thus, at least to a minimal degree, subscribe to the discourses advertising proliferates. In other words, what is at stake for them is their identities and worldviews, as they are articulated with or against advertising discourses. The stakes of engagements with advertising for demonstrating one’s politics and worldviews, are amplified for advertising censors, a peculiar segment of advertising publics, to whom I turn in the next chapter.
Chapter 3. Censorial dilemmas and advertising truths

"...censorship is always an opportunity, and censorship reveals something that is positive about a society, and a society with no censorship is in a very bad state..."

Julian Assange (Assange, Žižek and Goodman 2011)

NGO activist Ms. Han (whom I quoted in chapter 2 saying that she likes “ads that are not ad-like”) reflected on her involvement in advertising censorship at the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC), a quasi-government organization in charge of policing media content, including advertising:

Freedom of speech of course is very important, but I think that we need to be concerned about publicity that comes with it. Freedom, freedom of expression meets publicity at the Advisory Committee [of the KCSC], and we need to recognize the publicity of it [advertising] first. A message is communication. “What do I want to tell people with this? Does it really belong to the public realm?” I think that advertising should think about this as well. (Interview, March 2, 2010)

Ms. Han's statement captures the core dilemma of advertising censorship in South Korea of the '00s: she recognized advertising as belonging to public realm and therefore in need of public scrutiny, but she also acknowledged that this scrutiny of advertising sat uneasily with the liberal ideals of freedom of expression, venerated as the pillar of South Korea’s democracy. In this chapter, I posit advertising censorship as a privileged window to gaze at the contestations over cultural logics of advertising and to explore how those contestations are implicated in the broader politico-economic context.

This chapter looks into how advertising discourse and advertising publics are shaped by those policing advertising texts. Through an ethnography of advertising review, I investigate how the parameters of what is acceptable in advertising are minutely constructed and how this ongoing construction is enmeshed in censors' ambitions and preoccupations. Speaking to the politics specific to South Korea of the '00s, I bare how the ideas of the primacy of public interest in advertising clashed with newly hegemonic ideals of freedom of speech and freedom of enterprise, and how advertising censors negotiated those in concrete instances. At the same time, the chapter takes up the general problem of truth in advertising and pokes at the contradiction that advertising is required to tell the truth yet is expected to exaggerate the attractions of the advertised commodity—the contradiction particularly visible in South Korea
where advertising is presumably committed to public service, not just enrichment of advertisers. Drawing out the paradox at the heart of the public scrutiny of advertising, I argue that granting a greater agency to advertising consumers, while seemingly empowering them, ends up producing cynical subjects, whose critical distance towards advertising translates into privilege for advertisers to advance their worldviews and interests with lesser hurdles.

My focus is on advertising censors like Ms. Han—authorized reviewers of advertising at various quasi-government and industry organizations—who are simultaneously members of advertising publics and producers of advertising public. Censors are members of advertising publics by virtue of being exposed to advertising in their everyday life, and this chapter thus further details the practices of advertising consumption, considered in chapter 2. Yet my main concern is to draw out how censorial decisions about advertising are productive of advertising publics, those sophisticated consumers of advertising, who know how to process advertising from a critical distance, taking in its messages but not acting on them themselves and assuming gullible others in the need of protection as their reference point in relation to advertising.

The main body of the chapter offers an ethnography of advertising review based on my observations at the Special Advisory Committee for Broadcast Advertising of the above-mentioned KCSC. I show how practices of advertising censorship accommodate conflicting agendas—the urge to protect the gullible, the desire to demonstrate one's own fine understanding of marketing, a temptation to parade open-mindedness and liberal values, commitment to public interest (whose understanding was inevitably coloured by the reviewer's position)—or simply a need to be finished with the censorship meeting sooner and move on to other work. I offer three ethnographic episodes to bring to the forefront different dimensions of advertising review. First, the heated debate about four commercials for a Hyundai SUV, advertised as “Sexy Utility Vehicle,” introduces the censorship procedure, the censors themselves as well as ambitions and anxieties that they bring into their decisions. Second, the discussion about Dr. Dirt cleansing spray illustrates the problem of truth in advertising and the censors’ strategies for determining the acceptable limits for commodity aesthetics. The third episode, the discussion about a commercial for a donut chain, sets my argument about how advertising publics, or "smart consumers" in the parlance of the censors themselves, get produced. Before jumping into the ethnography, in the next two sections I explain my approach to censorship and sketch the historical development of advertising censorship in South Korea.

**The problem of advertising censorship**

Censorship, inside and outside of South Korea, tends to be understood as oppression and is
thus vilified. It is critiqued for violating freedom of expression, for silencing dissenting voices. The natural impulse is to side with the ones being censored and to mock censorial absurdities and rigidities. As Dominic Boyer (2003: 511) asks rhetorically, "Does any little boy or girl dream of becoming a censor when s/he grows up?" Even censors themselves are susceptible to this rhetoric as well. For example, the Advertising Team Manager of the KCSC, the chief administrator of the advertising censorship activities, shared bitterly that he did not like his organization’s repressive role. He particularly disliked being resented by advertising agencies, but, as he explained, someone had to ensure the legality of circulating advertisements and protect consumers and companies from unwholesome competition and it happened to be his job; he presented his work as one step short of being a self-sacrifice for the sake of ungrateful advertisers (interview, June 24, 2010).

Yet as Ms. Han's above-quoted statement rightly indicates, in the case of advertising censorship, the distinction between “good” freedom and “bad” oppression is complicated. Advertising itself could be seen as a commercially motivated attack on individual freedom and consumer sovereignty. Enhancing commodity aesthetics to serve the interests of commodity sellers (and, by extension, capital) advertising exaggerates the potential use value of the advertised commodity and interferes with rational decision-making of commodity buyers, as discussed in the introduction. Censorial interventions that limit freedom of advertising expression, on the other hand, often uphold agreeable ideals, such as gender equality, and restore consumer sovereignty by forcing advertising to provide information that is conducive to rational consumption decisions.

South Korean actors refer to advertising policing practices as “review” (simūi, sometimes also translated as “deliberation”), which is divided into a before-the-fact review (sajôn simūi, sometimes glossed as “pre-clearance”), when advertisements are reviewed before they have been released, and an after-the-fact review (sahu simūi), when advertisements are reviewed after they have been released. The word “censorship” (kŏmyŏl’) is not used to describe these practices, unless the speaker wishes to critique the structures that execute them. When I used the word censorship in my interviews at the beginning (thinking of ”censorship” as external and legally binding control over expressive content), it often provoked a rebuke from my interlocutors about how censorship was under Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo-hwan and how now South Korea was democratic, so what I was referring to as censorship was not external control (t’ayul’) but either self-regulation (ch’ayul), a welcome sign either of growing sense of social responsibility among Korean corporations, in the case of industry boards, or of vibrant civil society, in the case of monitoring NGOs.
Distinguishing censorship from review on the grounds that the former is enforced by the coercive state apparatus presumes a clear dichotomy between state and civil society, something that has been demonstrated to be problematic in practice as the inside and the outside of the state competence is constantly negotiated (Foucault 1991; Gramsci 1992 (1971): 159-160). Moreover, such a distinction ignores how often censorship works not by minute scrutiny and external coercion, but by the censor’s gaze becoming internalized by the censored, who then "voluntarily" comply with the censors’ requirements and sometimes surpass them in strictness, to prevent external interventions (Butler 1997: 128-129; Lakier 2009; Ganti 2009). Taking this argument further, Richard Burt argues that censorship by the state or other agencies is on the same continuum as criticism by authorized and unauthorized actors, as both censorship and criticism seek to regulate aesthetic regimes. Attacking Habermasian ideas on public sphere as a site for democratic debate, he writes, “Critical dialogue is often regarded as the solution to conflicts. But who would be allowed into it? On what basis? How would a dialogue be regulated? How do you tell authentic or critical dialogue from its co-opted, simulated, or dissembled forms?” (Burt 1994: xix). Kaur and Mazzarella (2009) propose "to reinstitute the concept of censorship as a particular (perhaps in some ways privileged) variant of a more general set of practices which we are calling 'cultural regulation'" (9), of which publicity and censorship are related phenomena albeit falling on opposing extremes of the continuum of public cultural interventions. They suggest that "extra-legal" and "extra-constitutional" acts of censorship in the public sphere are often more influential than official rulings (5-6). In the light of these interventions, I use “review” and “censorship” interchangeably, opting for "review" when exploring actual practices, to respect the sensibilities of people involved in those practices, and preferring "censorship" when talking about practices of policing advertising content in general, to avoid ambiguities.

Since the 1990s, scholars have argued that censorship is not simply repressive but productive—of power-knowledge regimes (Jansen 1991; Post 1998; Boyer 2003); of the domain of sayable and of subjects who come into existence within that domain (Butler 1997); of “normative modes of desiring, of acting, of being in the world” (Kaur and Mazzarella 2009: 5). My approach to censorship draws on this line of thinking, focusing not so much on what advertising censorship silences but rather what it enables—on the one hand, an extensive scrutiny and continuous claims on advertising to abide by shared ideals of public interest and, on the other, a production of a sophisticated advertising publics, whose members skilfully balance taking in inspiring and entertaining parts of advertising messages while ignoring advertising exaggerations and problematic associations.
The genealogy of advertising censorship and its terrain in the '00s

Official scrutiny of advertising in South Korea was initiated under Park Chung Hee, who, upon taking power, feuded with the mass media, charging it with corruption (Kim Chu-ön 2008: 80). At the time, advertising review was conducted separately for public channel KBS (in-house and in reference to KBS' supervisor Ministry of Culture and Information) and for private channels, which in June 1966 registered Private Broadcasting Association (Kyŏng et al. 1997: 393). All broadcast advertising was reviewed after-the-fact by Broadcast Ethics Commission, which occupied a grey zone of being a private agency of internal industry regulation, created on the government's recommendation and vested with legally binding powers from 1964 (Ibid.: 392). Print media relied on in-house review of advertising (Shin and Sŏ 2011: 365).

From the 1960s and into the '00s, the authority to scrutinize advertising resided with ambiguously positioned semi-government organizations. These organizations claimed independent status for themselves, as independent commissions, public corporations, or industry self-regulatory boards, and, it was precisely their non-affiliation with the administration that gave them the moral authority to judge on advertising and thus represent the broader interests of the public. Yet usually these reviewing boards were assigned their reviewing duties by government agencies; they were delegated to execute the Broadcast Law in relation to advertising and their decisions were legally binding. While claiming moral authority to justify their review, they relied on legal authority to have the advertising industry and mass media comply with their decisions.

When KOBACO was established in 1981, it was put in charge of legally binding advertising review and exercised it till 1989, when this duty was passed to the government-affiliated Korea Broadcasting Commission. In turn, the Korean Broadcasting Commission delegated advertising censorship to the Korea Advertising Review Board (KARB), an advertising industry organization, in 2001. Any advertising via any terrestrial channel in South Korea had to be pre-screened by the KARB and issued an approval certificate, as a legal precondition for being broadcast. The KARB's staff also combed through even marginally influential national, local and speciality publications and was authorized to order a stop to any inappropriate print advertising. Controversial and unprecedented cases were forwarded for deliberation to the

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1 The Korea Advertising Review Board was founded by the Newspaper Ethics Board and Periodicals Ethics Board in 1991, "to maintain self-regulation of advertising regulation and truthfulness and fairness of advertising content" (Kyŏng et al. 1997: 391). In 1994, the KARB was recognized as a legitimate representative of the whole of the advertising industry (by associations of advertising and media industries, including powerful Korea Advertisers' Association), and began before-the-fact advertising monitoring. It was funded by member associations and also received some money from KOBACO's Broadcasting Development Fund. The transference of review to the KARB was lobbied for by the advertising industry.
advisory committees organized by medium and composed of representatives of advertising circles, academics and consumer NGOs (nominated respectively by advertising industry associations and by prominent consumer organizations).

Advertising review by the KARB, however, was found in violation of the constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression in June 2008.\(^2\) The article of the Broadcast Law that prohibited broadcasting channels from accepting advertising without the KARB’s approval certificate was challenged by some Mr. Kim in May 2005, after his commercial for dried seafood was rejected by the news channel YTN, due to the lack of approval certificate from the KARB.

Mr. Kim claimed that the article of the Broadcast Law violated his right to the freedom of expression and that before-the-fact review (\(\text{sim} \hat{\nu}i\)) amounted to before-the-fact censorship (\(kën'yo\hat{\imath}\)). Even though the KARB was a self-regulatory industry organization, the argument went, it received its mandate to review broadcast advertising from the government Korea Broadcasting Commission, and therefore the KARB’s review was no different from a review by an administrative body, which was a violation of the principles of the freedom of speech (Kim Sang-hun 2009).

In June 2008, when the case made its way through the legal system, the Constitutional Court ruled that the articles of the Broadcast Law that stipulated pre-screening of advertising were in violation of the constitution. Chief Justice Yi Kong-hyun explained, “the censorship we are talking about here is in actuality a system that subjects imagination and opinions to administrative power, which, prior to publication, restrains them by judgement and selection.” According to him, “Advertising transmits ideas, knowledge and information to indeterminately great number of people, and as such it is a subject to protection of freedom of mass media and publication” (quoted in Chŏng Hyŏn-yŏng 2008). Less then three weeks after the Court’s decision, the KARB held a general meeting and all its employees were discharged from their duties; the KARB was pronounced an inactive legal entity, while all its activities were suspended. It was the first time in South Korea that advertising was ruled to be subject to freedom of expression provisions.

The KARB’s sudden abolition put structures of advertising review in flux. Media outlets, still legally responsible for the content of advertising they circulate, scrambled to quickly establish before-the-fact review procedures via industry associations. The above-mentioned KCSC, established six months earlier to perform content review of all media, ended up becoming the organization that made binding decisions on advertising, albeit after-the-fact. I consider the

\(^2\) Constitutional Court Decision 2005hŏnma506.
practices of its Special Advisory Committee on advertising later in the chapter.

While the formal structures of legally binding advertising review were set adrift, there was little change in the advertising review practices by multiple citizens' organizations, which doubled the official censorship. Whereas the various review boards presented themselves as balancing the interests of different parties—advertising consumers, advertisers, mass media—for the common benefit, NGOs tended to be openly partisan and committed to protecting consumers' interests. Institutionally different, the reviewing organizations were interconnected in multiple ways. Operationally, both official review boards and citizens' organizations all evoked the same set of laws which governed media and advertising and had to appeal to the same quasi-juridical authorities to impose sanctions. On the ground level, advertising monitors often started volunteering for an NGO but, as they gained experience, moved to paying industry boards or government agencies. All industry boards and associations tended to have consultative committees, whose members represented various stakeholders and generally included the same "usual suspects"—a prominent figure from a consumer or media NGO, a lawyer, a university professor, a representative of a heavyweight association at the sunset of his corporate career. In other words, key figures of industry organizations, government and quasi-government agencies all knew each other and moved among organizations and sectors, cooperating on particular projects, jointly organizing events, bigger ones subcontracting monitoring projects to smaller ones, etc. In a way of illustration, in the summer 2007, when after about a month of trying I exhausted all strategies I could think of to negotiate my way into the KARB, a serendipitous encounter with a consumer NGO activist resulted in her phone call to the KARB's president and I was admitted to observe the KARB's meetings a couple days later (Fedorenko 2007).

**Special Advisory Committee of the Korea Communication Standards Commission**

Questionable advertising, like other problematic media content, is brought to the KCSC's attention either by the KCSC's professional media monitors or by public complaints, to which the KCSC is obliged to respond. Thus collected cases are verified by the KCSC staff and then presented to the Special Advisory Committees, consultative bodies composed of nine experts—NGO activists, professors, lawyers, industry associations' leaders, which represented the interests of the whole of South Korean society. My focus is the practices of the Special Advisory Committee on advertising (hereafter the “Advisory Committee”), whose mandate was to reconcile the interests of both consumers and advertisers. Introduced by one of the commissioners, a university professor whom I met at an advertising-related conference, I was
allowed to observe the meetings in November-December 2009 and in February-July 2010.\footnote{In December 2009 and January 2010, I was an intern at an advertising agency (see chapter 4) and was unable to attend the KCSC meetings.}

At the Advisory Committee meetings, authorized members of advertising publics met and debated advertising. Envisioned as representing the whole of Korean society, the Committee was a designated space for public debate to come to a common mind on advertising, specifically what it is allowed to say in Korea. The nature of advertising as a discourse about lifestyles, values and ideals also committed the Committee members to debating social norms, and as I show, it was in discussions about provocative advertising that acceptable behaviours in South Korea were debated and determined. As already mentioned, the Committee members drew their authority from their affiliation with consumers and often stressed that they themselves were consumers of advertising in everyday life.

The Advisory Committees issued recommendations on whether the media content was indeed problematic and advised on appropriate sanctions. The sanctions varied from non-binding “recommendation” (kwŏngo) or “opinion” (ūgŏn chesi) to legally binding “notice” (chuŭi), “warning” (kyŏngo) and “apology to viewers.” Legally binding sanctions translated into penalty points, accumulation of which could result in the revocation of the offending media outlet’s license. They also could be accompanied with recommended “disciplinary action” against the staff responsible for allowing the circulation of the problematic content. The KCSC was not authorized to recommend sanctions neither against advertising agencies nor advertisers, retribution from which could be sought through Fair Trade Commission, consumer NGOs or court.

The Advisory Committee’s recommendations went for approval to the KCSC’s permanent committee, which made the final recommendation on behalf of the KCSC. The final decision could be made by three-people subcommittee, if they were unanimous. In case of the disagreements among the three subcommittee members, full nine-people General Commission (which included the three subcommittee members) decided by voting. The KCSC’s final decisions were forwarded for execution to government agency Korea Broadcasting Commission. The KCSC, though authorized by law to police all communications content in South Korea, was officially an independent consultative agency and had no legal authority to enforce its own decisions. The process, however, seemed pretty automatic.

The Advisory Committees had thus a consultative function within a consultative institution. Nevertheless, its members, appointed for one-year term, took their mandate to represent South
Korean publics seriously and earnestly debated the parameters of acceptable advertising. On every other Thursday, commissioners gathered by 10 a.m. for a two-hour meeting in the KCSC office at the Broadcasting Hall building in Seoul. Seated in leather armchairs around a hardwood seminar table, commissioners deliberated the flagged advertisements. In front of each of them was a name plate, a provided Samsung laptop, a microphone and a battery of canned drinks, and the meeting room resembled a conference space in a fancy downtown hotel.

At the head of the table sat the Chairman, a reserved cheerful man with a full head of grey hair. During the meetings, he let other commissioners do most of the talking, but channelled the overall flow of discussions by tactfully cutting off debates that were digressing from the issue at hand by calling for a vote or by reminding of the circumstances that the discussion omitted. On his right-hand side sat an Advertising Professor from Journalism and Public Relations department of a Seoul university. He authored countless books on advertising and wrote a blog, which combined shrewd analysis of recent developments in the advertising field with travel photographs, inspired poetry and open exchanges with students about living a meaningful life. Thoughtful and eloquent at the meetings, the Advertising Professor brought in theoretical insights and questioned larger consequences of their decisions for Korean society. He chaired when the Chairman could not attend. Next to the Advertising Professor sat Public Relations Director of a prominent think-tank. A U.S.-trained PhD, he sprinkled his speech with English-language expressions, flaunted his liberal opinions during discussions and was the only person to wear casual clothing to the meetings, a jersey with the logo of his U.S. alma mater. Further sat an Executive Director of another research institute, one of the three women at the Committee. I refer to her as Labour Activist because she was also involved in labour committee of a left-wing civic group for participatory democracy. Labour Activist was often among the commissioners who pushed for stricter sanctions, talking about how consumers were likely to be deceived, misled and dissatisfied and how children might get wrong ideas, which made me think for a while that she represented a consumer protection NGO. The last at the table on the Chairman’s right was Political Communications Professor from Journalism, Film and Advertising Department of a university outside of Seoul. In addition to his work at the university and review engagements at the KCSC, the Communications Professor was involved with left-wing media-focused civic groups and held a leadership role with an NGO, the Korea Advertising Consumer Association. In winter 2012, he was running for a seat in the National Assembly for the conservative Saenuri Party (known as Grand National Party before February 2012). His interventions meandered between firmly siding with consumers in need of protection and giving the benefit of the doubt to the creative expression in advertising.
On the left-hand side of the Chairman sat above-quoted Ms. Han, an executive director of a civic organization dealing with human rights and media responsibility. For consistency, here I refer to her as Media Educator because at her NGO, the focused on educational programs to teach media literacy to schoolchildren. She was also involved with other NGOs, critical of the media policies of President Lee Myung-bak and engaged in lobbying against the liberalization of media regulation. When I interviewed her, she passionately talked about how she saw her task, both as a commissioner, as an educator and as a citizen, in preventing capital from taking control over media, from "eating up culture"—a radical position in comparison with other commissioners, who generally did not question the role of advertising in society and focused on regulating it. At the time of my fieldwork, she cooperated with the above-mentioned Political Communications Professor on a research project about usage of profane language at the National Assembly. The seat next to her was usually empty, and I assumed it was assigned to the third female commissioner, a professor of nutrition, who was never present at the meetings I attended. Next to the empty seat sat a Deputy Director of an occupational health clinic at a major university; his interventions tended to be sympathetic with the advertiser's point of view. Finally, there was a lawyer with a criminal law firm, who brought in the legal perspective into the discussions.

The commissioners were a colourful bunch, not necessarily seeing eye to eye politically, but generally well-educated and well-accomplished, at least upper middle class (with the possible exception of NGO activists, whose stations in life depended on incomes of their spouses, NGO work normally providing a modest source of income). At least some of them brought in their expertise in reviewing advertising elsewhere—some had participated in meetings of the KARB, an older reincarnation of the official censorship body, and others had participated in review projects through NGOs. The nine commissioners were public intellectuals to various degrees involved in civil society groups and shaping the social field of the advertising industry not only through their roles at the KCSC, but also by participating in advertising monitoring and review at NGOs, conducting research on advertising and media, taking part in policy and research seminars, as well as by being experts quoted in the mass media.

The meetings of the Advisory Committee were also attended by the KCSC administrators. The head of the Advertising Review Team sat at the table with the commissioners; he presented the cases to be discussed and participated in discussions. At the beginning of my participant observation, the meetings were often attended by the KCSC's executive director, who also shared the table with the commissioners and partook in debates. Other 7-8 KCSC staff who attended the meetings silently sat at the back, took minutes and provided administrative
support when necessary. It was this "backbench," from where I observed the meetings, in the capacity of a “foreign PhD student of Korean advertising review.”

I introduce dilemmas and pitfalls of advertising censorship by detailing the review process of an advertising campaign for Hyundai SUV Tucson IX, which ran on major terrestrial and cable channels in the fall 2009 and came to the KCSC's attention in November. A somewhat extreme case, it well illustrates the procedures of decision-making at the KCSC as well as the anxieties, ambitions and politics that commissioners brought into the process. It also introduces the larger cultural struggles advertising censorship is enmeshed in, as censors exercise their authority for cultural regulation.

The routines of advertising review: "Sexy utility vehicle”

The Tucson IX commercials and the complaint

The imagery of Hyundai Tucson IX advertising campaign was banal for a car commercial. Different episodes worked the standard associations between riding automobiles and escaping the drudgery of the everyday. "Fabulous Night" and "Climax" featured a car moving fast through a night city; "Highway" and "Good morning" showed a car getting on a highway and driving out of town on a sunny day; in "Night wind" and "Lips," a car was parked at night with lit skyscrapers in the background.

What was provocative was the captions that accompanied the images:

Now as you are watching TV and envying IX—sorry but IX is stealing her lips. That's life ("Lips");
Now as you are thinking about her in front of the TV, IX is running with her towards climax. That's IX ("Climax");
Mother says, the night wind is cold, come back early. IX says, The night wind is cold, don't send her away. That's life ("Night wind");
Now as you are waking up in front of the TV, IX has already welcomed the morning with her laughter. That's life ("Good morning");
As you are sitting sleepily in front of the TV and thinking about the girlfriend you have parted with, IX is getting on the highway to the sound of laughter of a new girlfriend. This is life ("Highway");
Now as you are turning in bed, IX is getting ready for a fabulous night with her. That's life ("Fabulous night");
Each episode ended with a deep male voice announcing in English, "Sexy Utility Vehicle. Tucson IX." Overall, there was about a dozen slightly different versions, depicting situations of “you” missing out on life in front of a TV, while "IX" is enjoying and doing exciting things with “her” (kūnyō).

The literal way to interpret these advertisements is to think of IX who does exciting things as the car owner, whereas the car itself is “her.” Yet some episodes resisted that reading because the metaphor of a car as a woman can only go so far, in Korean as well as in English. Particularly the episode where “IX” was stealing “her” lips clearly indicated that the “her” the advertisement was alluding too was perhaps a woman. Still, there was no way of assigning either meaning definitively and the visuals that showed only the car provided an alibi for the advertisement— there was no sexual imagery whatsoever and it was up to the viewer what—or whom—to imagine as "her."

The KCSC received a complaint about four advertisements in the series. According to the complaint, the captions in "Lips," "Climax," Night wind" and "Good morning" episodes, while advertising cars, provoked associations between females and sexual imagery, which was a bad influence on children educationally. The official agenda that presented the Tucson IX advertisements to the Advisory Committee summarized the complaint and translated it into the wording of the relevant guideline, "Regulation about broadcast advertising review." The

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4 The information about the complainant was recorded by the KCSC staff, but it was kept confidential and not included in the meeting agenda.
commissioners were referred to Item 4 of Article 4 ("Dignity" (p’umwidüng)), which specifically banned "excessive bodily exposure or obscene and suggestive expressions." The commissioners were to decide whether the expressions in the captions, such as "stealing her lips" or "running with her toward climax," could hurt the feelings of viewers or damage the dignity of broadcasting.

The agenda indicated that no relevant precedents were available and ended with an opinion of the KCSC staff researcher,

That a car advertising used the words "stealing her lips" appears to be an advertising rhetorical figure to reflect the product concept of "sexiness, beauty;" it appears only in the caption, not in the composition of the scenes, so it does not reach a level where it can sexually appeal to the consumer, so the judgement is “no issue” (munje ōptä).

For the three other cases, the wording was identical except for the captions quoted. The KCSC researcher himself, a serious man in his late 30s, was seated at the back with junior staff and did not talk during the meetings unless he was asked technical clarifications on specific issues, which happened rarely.

In sum, the complaint treated advertising as an assertion of normative values and a technology for governing others (influencing children and their ideas of the world), quite consistently with how advertising is consumed by regular members of the advertising publics in the everyday, as was discussed in chapter 2. By referencing children, the complaint posited the gullible others in need of protection. The agenda, however, particularly the researcher's opinion, rephrased the issue in terms of commodity aesthetics and its limits; the researcher recommendation endorsed the privileges of advertising to use commodity aesthetics strategies and affirmed critical distance as the proper mode to engage with advertising. The complaint resolutely prioritized the advertising's public circulation and presumed effects, but the KCSC related the issue back to the advertising's commercial functions, acknowledging the validity of the strategies of the commodity aesthetics. It was this tension between advertising's publicity and commercial imperatives, complicated by reviewers' own ambitions and anxieties that framed the deliberation on the case (and many other discussions at the Advisory Committee of which the Tucson IX case was fairly representative).
The discussion at the Special Advisory Committee

Empowered by their mandate to represent the Korean society at large, the commissioners approached the meetings as a public forum for debating issues of consequence. They knew they were setting precedents for the advertising industry, shaping what was sayable and not sayable in advertising in the future. They also were mindful of possible spillovers of advertising representations into real life. When deciding on whether advertising violated dignity of broadcasting, the commissioners were aware that in fact they were debating social norms, and felt empowered to have a say in what counts as socially acceptable or unacceptable in Korea. At the same time, their debate was also about advertising publics—their proper engagement with advertising and by extension, their proper characteristics as advertising publics, namely their willingness to take lifestyle clues from advertising.

The Chairman opened the floor and invited opinions. The Advertising Professor started the discussion by saying that there were sexual allusions in the advertisement, but it was hard to link them to the guidebook since there was no nudity or sexual content in the images themselves and even captions taken literally did not contain anything particularly obscene or lewd. The Lawyer agreed that the overall meaning that the advertisements conveyed seemed problematic but the precise nature of the problem was hard to identify. The Labour Activist said that the advertisement was a bad influence on children, just as the complaint said. Other commissioners then pointed out that the bad influence was hard to identify in the advertisement itself because it did not directly instigate any bad behaviours. The Media Educator spoke that the advertisements were sexualizing cars and that she found that objectionable. Another commissioner pointed out that there were no specific guidelines which banned sexualizing cars, and his comment echoed the KCSC's researcher's opinion that as a rhetorical figure it was acceptable. Three commissioners spoke how they did think the advertisement was suggestive but because of lack of explicit obscenity they could not pin it down for violating any rules, even those those that prohibit obscenity.

As one of the meeting participants commented on their difficulties in a later interview, "If there was a model who appeared and did something sexual, if there was such a scene it would have been easy. But it is hard when sexuality is not direct but offered in association—in captions, or in visuals—even though it does not directly appear in advertising—but everyone can associate it. Associative advertisements (yönsang kwanggo) are the most difficult [for review]. Because

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5 This is a reconstruction of the meeting from my fieldnotes. My goal is not to present consistent portraits of participants but to flesh out the process of censorship, to illustrate how the debate meandered, which arguments were raised and how commissioners arrived at their verdict. In this section, the quotes are from my fieldnotes and rather than being a documentary minutes of the meeting serve the stylistic purpose.
people feel vulgarity, even though each particular scene is not vulgar (*yahada*). After listening and seeing it, it is vulgar. If a beautiful woman takes off her clothing in advertising, it is definitely vulgar. But when it’s words that provoke associations, judgement can be different from one person to another, so it is very difficult” (interview, March 15, 2010).

Just as commissioners seemed to reach a consensus that there was no sexual content there and therefore no issue with the Tucson IX commercials, one of the commissioners who kept quiet till that point, the Think-Tank PR Manager, disagreed and said that the background of the advertisements implied sex. He referred to his experience of living in the U.S. and said that it was pretty clear that people drove late at night to get somewhere where they could have sex in their cars. He insisted that there were clearly "sex code" (in English) and lascivious (*chagûkchôk ida*) content in the advertisement. "What else would they be doing out there at this hour?” he asked referring to the two episodes, "Lips" and "Night wind," which showed the IX parked at night in an empty parking lot against the background of skyscrapers in near distance—a scenery suggestive of the parking lots near the Han River, which, surrounded by a narrow stretch of green spaces designated as parks, cuts through Seoul and is overlooked by tall apartment buildings from both banks. He said that showing a car at night near the Han River was meaningful because many couples went there to have sex.

Other commissioners chuckled and someone jokingly asked how the Think-Tank PR Manager would know about that. He also chuckled and without denying the humorous accusations continued that "from a culturally informed position, there is a specific sexual message in those advertisements, and not everyone is supposed to get it." The advertisements were made for people in their 30s and for them, for the younger people, there was nothing scandalous there because they were more liberal, they actually did all that in real life, he said. In other words, he argued that there was sexual content in the advertisements but there should not be an issue with that because it was culturally appropriate. To me, it sounded like he was flaunting his own open-mindedness and cultural prowess as far as habits of a younger generation were concerned and perhaps throwing a veiled accusation of conservatism at commissioners (who were in their 40s, 50s and some possibly in early 60s).

This intervention reframed the discussion from what the advertisement actually said, from reading it as a text, to imagining it reception by target and non-target audiences. In this discussion, "the young people in their 30s" were framed as imaginary other (albeit not the gullible ones) engaging in all kinds of practices which to commissioners themselves were supposed to seem scandalous. In a sense, the Think-Tank PR Manager’s comment was in line
with the advertisement itself which created "IX" as a character who was “stealing enjoyment” (Žižek 1991: 165; Dean 2009: 58) of the passive TV viewer, doing exciting things, such as stealing her lips and running towards climax, however one imagined it. The Think-Tank PR Manager’s intervention suggested that all Koreans in their 30s fit into this category of womanizing IX's, but the commissioners themselves did not, with the possible exception of the Think-Tank PR Manager himself.

The Advertising Professor then shifted the debate to consider whether the fact that the advertisement targeted liberal people in their 30s was a reason not to be concerned about the messages the advertisements sent, that "This is life" comment in the end implied that "life is seducing women" and that might indeed be a harmful message to send to youths who might be watching. The Advertising Professor reiterated arguments that even though there were no sexual visuals, there was "sex code" there and "for our society" the copy was overly stimulating. The Labour Activist supported him, "just think about 'stealing her lips' expression, that is clearly sexual," she said.

The Communication Professor opined that the "Dignity" article they were considering was not really applicable in this case because there was no sexual imagery or lewd expressions. The Labour Activist suggested that the issue was that the advertisement was objectifying "her," so the problem with it was not obscenity but objectification of women. The Lawyer noted that spending night in a car around the Han River was definitely sexual, and that provoked a new wave of giggles among commissioners.

At this point the discussion had been going on for about half an hour, and the Chairman took charge of the meandering debate to push the commissioners to think about what kind of sanctions they could issue in this case. A few commissioners spoke, and there seemed to be a consensus that a legally binding sanction should be issued (resulting in penalty points for the broadcaster) but there was no agreement which one. One of the commissioners commented that if they issued legal sanctions, it would definitely make the news and all advertisers would hear the message (which was desirable, a common trope of the Committee's discussions being how advertisers brazenly and irresponsibly keep pushing the boundaries of the permissible). The Labour Activist attempted to reframe the advertisement on the basis that "going with her to the climax," if "her" is a car, might be an encouragement of dangerous behaviour and thus could be sanctioned on those grounds, yet others did not pursue this argument.

The Communication Professor commented that perhaps there was some problematic content if they look at it from the position of parents, but the advertisements was not made for the
parents but for young people in their 30s and for the younger people there was nothing scandalous there. He asked, "Aren't we looking at this advertisement from a conservative position? Aren't we looking at it from our own level?" Another professor disagreed that they still should be thinking about "our society" in general. Incidentally, after the meeting, I was in a car with the Communication Professor and the Advertising Professor, and the latter scolded the former, saying that he should carefully think whether he participated in the meetings as a professor or as a consumer representative. As a professor he could express freely any opinions, argue for freedom of advertising and so on, he said. But as a consumer representative he should think of the consumer, how to protect them, and Communication Professor agreed that it was a good point.

After about 40 minutes of discussion, the Chairman took the vote and the official recommendation of the Advisory Committee was decided to be a strong sanction, "disciplinary action." If implemented it would translate into penalty points for broadcaster and disciplinary action against the person who was in charge of accepting the Tucson IX advertisements to be aired.

To summarize the highlights of the discussion, the first cluster of disagreements raised from the fact that the scale of what was culturally and socially appropriate was sliding and the commissioners differed on whether their role was to passively reflect what goes on in society or to take a proactive role and try to shape behaviours by allowing or not allowing certain behaviours in advertising. It also illustrates how the commissioners often had to play legal and cultural arguments against each other, preferring to base their decision on technicalities and avoid making a moral judgement and thus risking appearing conservative to colleagues and observers. The decision was grounded in a particular vision of consumer, and disagreements were caused by whether they had to judge by the target consumer of the advertised commodity or by the advertising consumer, a general member of the advertising public that "Sexy Utility Vehicle" commanded as a campaign broadcast via national terrestrial channels. Moreover, they made their decision anticipating possible reactions from advertisers, wishing to send a strong message and thus preempt similar cases in the future. Finally, they brought in individual projects they were concerned about such as sexualization of cars, protection of the youth or demonstrating individual cultural prowess into their decision-making. Anne Cronin critiques how regulatory institutions in the UK “figure advertising as textual artifact divorced from the complex flow of finance, practitioners’ rhetoric, and commercial imperatives” (2004: 6), but a look at advertising review practices in Korea shows that it is far from a universal situation.6

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6 Reading official adjudications of the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority, Anne Cronin critiques them for
Censors reflections on the audience, media and background compensate for the impersonality of the codes which indeed tend to read advertising as a textual artifact.

**Next levels of review and the resolution**

The Advisory Committee's recommendation for a legally binding sanction was passed on to the KCSC's next level, the decision-making Subcommittee on advertising, whose three members, however, could not reach a unanimous decision on whether to sanction the “Sexy Utility Vehicle” campaign. The case went before the General Commission (of which the three participants of the Subcommittee on advertising were members). The General Commission was the final stage of decision-making for all the media the KCSC reviewed—broadcast programming, advertising, shopping channels, internet; its nine members were recommended by the National Assembly and appointed for three years by Korea’s president, mostly from academics, but also from high-profile businessmen active in industry associations.

The members of the General Commission also had difficulties determining whether there was indeed an issue with the Tucson IX campaign, as publicly available minutes of the meeting reveal. Repeating the trajectory of the debate at the Advisory Committee, members of the General Commission discussed first whether there was sexual content there. Some saw sexual associations in the Han River scene, in the "running towards climax" expression and in "good morning" (the latter was said to imply that IX and "her" spent the night together). A commissioner argued indignantly that if we considered the slogan, "Sexy Utility Vehicle," removing just one letter made it into "Sex Utility Vehicle," a car for sex, that what advertiser had in mind. Others said that they did not see anything particularly sexual there, just another teaser advertisement, just an image of a cool car. Even though it was sexual it was not that big of a deal "even ice-cream advertisements use 'sexual code' these days," another member noted.

The argument was rehearsed that there was no sexual imagery or wording in the advertisements themselves, and only the viewer could subjectively apply such interpretation, so the regulations could not be used to lay sanctions against the advertisements. Like the Advisory Committee, focusing on representations and "straight-faced pedantry" with which decision-makers engaging in "an elaborate discussion of representational detail" and ignoring the actual patterns of consumption of the product advertised, in her examples alcohol (2004: 43). In the light of my observations at a comparable site in Korea I wonder whether the produced texts were a strategy to hide behind regulations, avoid appeals and being judged as conservative and indeed pedant if they based their ruling on personal judgement.

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While I have never attended General Commission meetings, the KCSC publishes their transcripts on its website, fulfilling its mandate for being accountable to the general public. The story and further trajectory is deduced from the meeting transcript. ("Che 28 ch’a Pangsong T’ongsin Simūi Wiwōnhoi Chōnggi Ho’ūi ho’ūi parón naeyong,” KCSC, December 9, 2009, accessed April 27, 2011, http://www.kocsc.or.kr/ybbs/download.php?ko_board=Records&ba_id=4878&fi_no=1.)
general commissioners reflected on the times and morals, questioning if their own judgement was representative.

As the Advisory Committee did, the General Commission searched for a rule to pin the advertisement while avoiding a moral judgement: One of the commissioners wondered whether the speed with which the car was moving in the advertisement was higher than the speed limit and thus constituted a violation of a traffic code, but this line of argument was dismissed. One of the commissioners noted that in his view the issue with the advertisement was that it was very successful, and another continued, "I think that if we think of these commercials as successful, shouldn't our committee decide that there is 'no issue' with these commercials and just let them pass?"

Eventually everyone but one member agreed that there was no attackable problem with the advertisement. The disagreeing commissioner was the subcommittee member who was responsible for forwarding the case to the General Committee in the first place, and he repeated in various ways that even though he accepted the opinion of the majority in the General Committee, they really needed to think about why there was such a gap between their own inclination to assign the advertisement no sanctions and the relatively severe decision of the Advisory Committee, and whether it indicated some problems with advertising review in general. The other committee members dismissed this point, however. It was ruled that the was “no issue” with the commercials, just as the KCSC researcher recommended.

As both meetings reveal, the concern of the censors was to interpret the advertisement "correctly" which in practice translated into debating whose interpretation of the advertisement counted more. The commissioners were torn between making their judgement based on how they saw the advertisement themselves, or on how they imagined others reading it, the latter becoming more complicated as they realized that there were multiple others who might be watching the advertisement. There might be children watching the advertisement, who might get wrong ideas—and there might be libertarians in their 30s, whose sexual freedom in real life surpassed that promoted by the advertisement.

Yet in both meetings, there was a strong impulse to privilege the meaning intended by the advertiser, similar to the tendencies of consuming advertisements by regular members of advertising publics discussed in chapter 2. In the Advisory Committee meeting, it manifested in how the KCSC researcher and some commissioners defended the advertisement by stressing the advertiser's intended concept and by arguing that the perception of the presumed target niche, young people in their 30s, was to be privileged over all other members of advertising publics. At
the General meeting, commissioners quoted as arguments for no sanctions the conventions of advertising production, which they themselves were aware of, and supported their position against the the Advisory Committee's harsh ruling with dismissive comment that there were "food specialists" among Advisory commissioners who might not get it how advertising works. As with the general members of advertising publics, there was a tendency for censors to identify with advertisers in how the advertisements were judged. Equating interests of the advertisers with the interests of Korean society as a whole, the KCSC censors upheld the advertisers' privilege to exploit senses for commercial purposes.

The “Sexy Utility Vehicle” example illustrates how both advertising itself and advertising censorship attempt governing through advertising, as discussed in chapter 2. They endorse certain behaviours and corresponding values as normative or, in the case of advertising censorship, as aberrant. The activities of the review board are on the same continuum as those of the NGOs and vigilantes, considered in chapter 2, and as I mentioned earlier, there is an overlap between NGO activists and academics who populate semi-government and non-government review organizations.

It also shows how governmental impulses to protect the unwary were in tension with commissioners’ desire to assert their own open-mindedness, demonstrate cultural prowess and show off their knowledge about advertising trends. While the “Sexy Utility Vehicle” case illustrates how this tension worked at the level of the committees and individual commissioners, these conflicting tendencies also manifested when censors reflected on their activities in my interviews. Monitors, staff of review boards and NGO activists all confessed their own open-mindedness (kaebangjok) while stressing Korea’s overall conservatism (posujok), equating it with prudishness. Many stressed that, as censors, they had to take what they as individuals saw as a conservative position—because of the overall level of society and for the sake of protecting children, as with the Tucson IX commercials. Yet this concern with the gullible or the conservative did not necessarily trump the censors’ desire to assert a certain self-image in front of other commissioners and also, inevitably, in front of the broad advertising publics, including the advertising industry, whose members were imagined as watching and judging the KCSC decisions. The Tucson IX case thus illustrates how the will to govern through advertising was entangled in censors' own ambitions and anxieties. As much as censors were invested in governing others through advertising, they also saw censorial practices as work on themselves, and the “Sexy Utility Vehicle” discussion illustrated how the two projects were at times contradictory.
The “Sexy Utility Vehicle” case is also about regulating the parameters of advertising as a discourse. The censors’ own “open-mindedness” allowed for issuing the “no issue” decision and thus for affirming the critical distance as the proper mode to engage with advertising, granting the advertising industry the privilege to exploit human sensuality to a certain degree. Similar to the interventions that enlist advertising as a tool of government, advertising censorship shapes advertising as a social institution, delineating not only what it can say but also how it should be reacted to. At the heart of this productive work is the status of truth in advertising.

**Fantastic truths of advertising: “Dr. Dirt”**

While advertising censorship is a site of cultural regulation where social norms and normative behaviours are determined, it is also a site where proper ways of engagement with advertising are decided upon. Namely, while deciding on how far advertisers are allowed to push commodity aesthetics, the censors also negotiate how much of it advertising consumers should be able to take without being confused about the product properties and making an inadequate decision. In other words, they regulate the truth regime of advertising and stipulate appropriate and inappropriate expectations for advertising.

Advertising as a genre is not expected to portray reality as is, but rather an improved version of it, an inspiring spectacle of capitalist realism. The latter task however potentially contradicts the official purpose of advertising, to inform rational consumer decisions. Paradoxically, representations of commodities in advertising are expected to do both, to tell the truth and an improved version of it, and this competing commitments to truth and fantasy complicate censorial decisions about advertising. Indeed, the majority of complaints and monitor reports the KCSC received were about truthfulness of advertising claims. For example, a company advertised their mops as made with microfibre, while in fact it was not pure microfibre but a blend of various materials. Between 2008-2010, the ground for KSCS sanctions in the vast majority of cases was truthfulness (36.6 percent or 181 cases), followed by problematic use of music (7.7 percent or 38 cases) and misrepresentations of sales and promotions (5.9 percent or 29 cases) (KCSC 2011: 92); only in 3.5 percent (17 cases) sanctions were laid because of “dignity,” the category that comprised excessive bodily exposure and vulgar or sexual expressions (Ibid.: 100.) In that sense, the “Sexy Utility Vehicle” campaign was a rare case, even though the dilemmas that the reviewers had to confront—predicting whether advertising publics would consume the advertising message as a call to action and whether issuing a moral

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8 Problematic use of music usually stood for using folk songs or children’s songs in advertising.

9 The statistics for sanctions are likely to downplay complaints about “dignity,” because such cases were particularly difficult to establish, as the Tucson IX case demonstrated.
judgement on an advertisement implicates one as a conservative—were precisely the same that surfaced in more common “truthfulness” cases.

Talking about the routines of advertising review an executive director, who oversaw the advertising review activities and sat at some of the Advisory Committee meetings, presented advertising review as a technical operation of evaluating evidence: according to him, the most common problem was lacking supporting evidence for advertising claims and the main task of the reviewers was to make sure that there were actual grounds for the claim an advertisement made. Yet this presentation of practices of advertising censorship glosses over the problematic relations between advertising and truth, between advertising and reality. On the one hand, false advertising is prohibited and violations against truthfulness are spelled out in different regulations, and one of the tasks of the advertising review is to verify the truth claims of advertising, just at the senior administrator explained. On the other, advertising commonly enjoys a certain creative license to play up the positive sides of the advertised product and is not expected to alert potential buyers to its drawbacks. As advertising guru David Ogilvy wrote, “... I must confess that I am continuously guilty of suppressio veri [suppression of truth]. Surely it is asking too much to expect the advertiser to describe the shortcomings of his product. One must be forgiven for putting one's best foot forward” (Ogilvy 1963: 158).

Moreover, it is this creative license that makes advertising interesting. Advertising is enjoyed for entertainment and inspiration it provides, as I showed in chapter 2, and playful hyperbolic representations of satisfactions the buyer is to receive from consuming the product are often accepted. No one thought of complaining about the truthfulness of the Georgia coffee advertisement, which linked buying a canned coffee with being teleported to a tropical island and escorted by attractive women.

Exaggeration in advertising becomes problematized when it is unclear whether an advertisement represents the actual qualities of the commodity or whether it beautifies them for the commodity aesthetics purposes. At the Advisory Committee, the question of the limit of acceptable exaggeration in advertising was posited in relation to an infomercial for "Dr. Dirt" cleansing spray,10 which promised that, after using "Dr. Dirt," dirt would come off "like noodles" (kuksu ch’oróm) and showed different models peeling off thick "noodles" of dirt.

The discussion at the Advisory Committee revolved around whether it was realistic for consumers to expect that so much dirt might peel off as a result of the spray use. He suggested that it might be possible because of the spray's chemical ingredients, but the Think-Tank PR

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10 The Korean name of the product is “tte paksa.”
Manager objected that some people might indeed be that dirty. The committee was split between these two positions, some commissioners spoke that it looked extremely unlikely that an average person would be so dirty, but others pointed out that it was not entirely impossible that someone indeed was that dirty, and since the advertisement did not make any claims about the person who was using the spray, it remained ambiguous and, if read generously, it was not misleading the viewer but inviting to appreciate the potency of the spray in an extreme case. At that point, the KCSC staff brought out the bottles of the spray, and the commissioners tested the product themselves, spraying small amounts on the backs of their hands. For all but one, the results were nowhere near "noodles" though the amount of filth coming off was surprising and everyone seemed embarrassed and grossed out.

![Figure 8. A still from a commercial for “Dr. Dirt” cleansing spray.](image_url)

Even after testing the product, it was too difficult to either prove that it was misleading consumers or to say with certainty that it was not, and chairing Advertising Professor kept pressing, "Can we recognize this exaggeration as advertising?" (kwanggo rosō injōng hal’ su innūn kwajang inya). The Media Educator responded, "because they filmed a dirty (tte manūn) person, it is an exaggeration." The KCSC administrator summarized the ambiguity of the case saying that the advertisement might be partially true, but altogether it was not. The Advertising Professor suggested that there was no problem with truthfulness, just with disgusting visuals, and that argument was well received by others, the discussion going on for almost an hour at that point. In the end, after a roll-call of opinions, the final decision was to send the advertiser an opinion (not legally binding and not accompanied with any sanctions) that the
advertisement provoked disgust. (Item 3 of Article 4 about broadcasting dignity banned "expressions that created excessive sense of fear or disgust.")

The Advertising Professor’s question, whether the “Dr. Dirt” advertisement constituted too much of an exaggeration for an advertisement, reveals that commissioners were looking not for the objective, verifiable truth, but rather a truth that would ensure that the advertisement was consumed in the right way, either as information about a commodity or as a fantastic image, which might be well enjoyed for what it is, but not mixed up with real use value of the commodity. As the Media Educator answered my question about to what degree exaggerations were acceptable in advertising, "While it is interesting. If it becomes uncomfortable, it becomes a lying advertisement."

Exaggeration in advertising becomes uncomfortable when it is unclear whether advertising provides information about the commodity for commodity consumers or whether it entertains advertising consumers with fantastic images. The Georgia coffee commercial was uncontroversial because it was clearly outlandish. With “Dr. Dirt,” it was ambiguous whether the commercial claimed to represent reality. “Dr. Dirt” probably would not have raised questions about exaggerated effects if instead of human models it showed cartoon characters peeling off "noodles" of dirt, because in that case it would have been clear that it was a creative exaggeration.

Knowing when to read advertisements’ claims literally and when to read them metaphorically takes a particular cultural training in adopting a selective critical distance towards advertising, and gauging this critical distance viewers have towards advertising is essential for making censorship decisions. Advertising censorship establishes the standard for the critical distance by defining which exaggerations are allowed—and also it produces advertising consumers who know how to read advertisements appropriately. Advertising censorship thus is as much about the truth of advertising statements as it is about the level of exaggeration that consumers should be able to take.

This move from discussing advertising texts themselves to debating the likely reactions to them was a common strategy to deal with advertisements that made their claims nonverbally or by association, similar to the “Sexy Utility Vehicle” campaign. Abandoning the frustrating task of establishing the actual truth of the advertisement statement, commissioners often reframed the debate not to establish whether it was a true or false representation of a commodity, but whether consumers were likely to be mislead by the advertisement, and if they were, whether that would lead to serious consequences. In other words, a judgement about the truthfulness of
an advertisement was substituted with a judgement about advertising viewers and levels of their gullibility. The commissioners effectively established the lowest threshold of cynicism about advertising necessary to function in society, thus shaping advertising consumers.

**Smart consumers vs. gullible others**

To illustrate how advertising censorship produces discerning consumers of advertising and ends up granting a greater leeway to advertisers, I draw on another meeting of the Advisory Committee, where a heated discussion unfolded about whether or not consumers were likely to be mislead by a commercial for a donut chain. The TV commercial showed a shelf filled with colourful donuts and other baked goods, as a voiceover announced, "More delicious because they are baked at the store." The visuals illustrated a young couple walking into the chain’s cafe and enjoying donuts with coffee, saying "Yummy." The problem with the commercial was that its first shot showed both premium and regular donuts without distinction, but it was only premium donuts that were directly baked on the spot while the rest arrived ready-made.

During the discussion, the Think-Tank PR Manager insisted that consumers were "smart" (sũmatʻũ hada) and knew not to take advertising claims literally. The Communications Professor, however, disagreed saying that when he watched the advertisement he himself was misled and assumed that all donuts were indeed baked on the premises. "What about the consumers who are not smart?" he asked.

As discussion progressed, it became clear that the commissioners were split between the two positions and neither side would budge. The Advertising Professor then reframed the question from how smart consumers were to how much damage they were likely to incur should they be misled by the advertisement. The commissioners agreed that even if consumers were misled by the commercial, the damage would be negligible. Moreover, because the advertiser was an established chain, the commissioners speculated that it was an “honest mistake,” not intentional abuse. The Chairman summed up that there was an issue with the advertisement, but they should just let it go. The Labour Activist still insisted that it was about consumer experience, and consumers would be disappointed if expecting a freshly made donut they get a factory made one, but the rest did not support her position. It was decided that, for their purposes, there was no issue with the commercial.

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11 From what I have observed, violating advertisements by big advertisers seemed more likely to be treated as an “honest mistake” stemming from ignorance of the rules, whereas advertisements by small companies were more likely to be interpreted as opportunistic violations and thus given stricter sanctions. In the interviews with commissioners, however, most of them said that they generally tried to be stricter with bigger companies, because they had more resources and responsibility towards Korean people, and to give a break to the little guy.
The donut chain case demonstrates how advertising review functions as a cultural regulation in so far as appropriate levels of gullibility and cynicism are concerned. A judgement about the truthfulness of the advertisement was substituted, at first, with a judgement about advertising viewers, and, eventually, with an assessment of the damage the most naive consumers (recognizable as the gullible others from chapter 2) were likely to incur. If censorship is productive, in this case it produces a “smart consumer,” a sophisticated member of advertising publics who is skilful at processing advertising from just enough critical distance to be perceptive to its messages but not identify with them.

The "smart consumer" here is a cynical subject who maintains a critical distance from advertising. The smart consumer sees the message for what it is, a false representation of reality, baked donuts in this case, yet behaves as if the claim were true and proceeds to enjoy the donuts. As I argue in the introduction, advertising depends on viewers, on the one hand, being cynical enough to not literally expect the magical pleasures advertising shows, yet to suspend their disbelief and enjoy advertising as a fantastic spectacle and even consume the advertised product, albeit from a critical distance, not expecting the advertisement to come true literally. The snippets of the donut advertisement discussion suggest that advertising censorship is complicit with advertising in producing cynical subjects, and censors set the limits of how much cynicism is required for functioning in the advertising saturated society. In a sense, it is the censors that set the acceptable limits of exaggeration in advertising and produce advertising publics whose members know to consume advertising ironically, as discussed in chapter 2. “The consumers who are not smart,” the concern of the Communication Professor and Labour Activist, are forced to learn from the experiences when advertising promises do not match actual satisfactions to be obtained from the commodity. Through inevitable disappointments and frustrations, they are led to adjust their attitude towards advertising—to develop the kind of attitude that allows the advertising industry to get away with outlandish promises while enhancing the appeal of the advertised commodity.

Reviewing the decisions of Indian Advertising Standards Council, Angad Chowdhry concludes that advertising censorship is

   a highly strategic process in which councils created for the protection of “the consumer” are in fact deeply complicit in its production. One could say that the Council’s primary mission is not in fact to protect consumers so much as to protect ‘the consumer’—to produce and to police the acceptable boundaries of this figure (2009:137).

In my view, at least in the South Korean case, the produced consumer is not necessarily the
consumer of the commodity Chowdhry seems to have in mind but the consumer of advertising who relates to advertising discourse in a certain way. In the case of the KCSC, the produced consumer was a smart consumer who expertly knew when to believe advertising promises and when to turn on the shield of critical distance and turn a blind eye to the discrepancies in reality and advertising promises. More broadly, it produced the sophisticated advertising public, which knew when to turn in a cynical distance towards advertising and how to enjoy the fantasies it fetching without mixing them with reality.

By not assuming a mimetic response to advertising from the audience, censors recognized that advertising consumers have agency over their behaviour and do not surrender it to advertising whenever exposed to it. The censors at the KCSC did not fit the imaginary of an elitist, paternalist censor who imagines himself to know what is right for others better than they know themselves, thus robbing those they are shielding from the authority to make their own decisions. The advertising censors, both at the consultative board and at the decision-making committee, saw themselves as representatives of consumers, drawing authority not so much from their expertise and thus difference from the regular advertising consumers, but rather from being one of those consumers and seeing advertisements with the consumer's eyes. They saw themselves as empowered representatives of advertising publics and attempted to use their authority to commit advertising to articulating the discourses to which the majority of advertising consumers would acquiesce. Yet they have redrawn the community of advertising consumers to exclude the gullible others and privilege smart consumers, thus changing the parameters of the advertising medium itself. If the gullible other was to take in advertising discourse wholesale and literally, smart consumers were trusted to find their way through the advertising's exaggerations. From this position of a smart consumer, advertising was dangerous only if it was unclear how to process it, as factual information to base decisions upon or as a fantastic filler to be entertained by from a critical distance.

By training advertising consumers to exercise this critical distance the censors empowered advertisers to push the acceptable boundaries of commodity aesthetics, giving advertisers the license to exploit feelings for commercial purposes, frequently renegotiating what counts as “excessive,” which is prohibited by the regulation. As Kaur and Mazzarella (2009: 8) suggest, one of the things censorship does is routinizing transgression, and in this case, the censors routinized advertising's exaggerations and exploitation of feelings. As “AdBusters” founder Kalle Lasn writes about shocking Benetton advertisements of the 1990s,

12 Cf. Butler (1997: 41), who critiques censorship for assigning the potential victims of hateful speech the powerless role and denying them a critical agency, which in the end justifies interventions that grant agency fully to the protecting state.
I think these advertisements are operating on a deeper level than even the advertisers themselves know or understand. Their cumulative effect is to erode our ability to emphasize, to take social issues seriously, to be moved by atrocity. They inure us to the suffering (or joy) of other people. They engender an attitude of malaise toward the things that make us most human. We pretend not to care as advertisers excavate the most sacred parts of ourselves, and we end up actually not caring. . . . This blunting of our emotions is a self-perpetuating process. The more our psyches are corroded, the more desensitized we become to the corrosive. The more indifferent we become, the more voltage it takes to shock us. On it goes, until our minds become a theater of the absurd, and we become shockproof” (1999:23).

Lasn presents advertising as a machine for producing cynical subjects, and, in South Korean context, practices of advertising censorship are complicit in this process by stipulating the level of exaggerations a consumer should be able to take.

The censors’ project thus was very different from the one that NGOs engaged in when policing advertising (chapter 2). By policing advertising images, NGOs sought to address societal and biopolitical issues, taking it upon themselves to guide Korean advertisers so that they guide Koreans well. Whereas I argued that the actual effects of NGO interventions with advertising were questionable, they nevertheless reproduced the cultural logic of advertising that enabled demands on advertisers to comply with the visions of public interest. The assumption of smartness of consumers, which framed the KCSC decisions, on the other hand, provided no such leverage. Assuming that consumers are “smart” gives advertising room to play with its depictions, trusting that consumers would know which part of the message to believe and which part to dismiss. If a mimetic relation is assumed, advertising has to provide images and discourses with which consumers could identify without the buffer of the critical distance.

Following Žižek’s arguments how ideology works by disidentification (Žižek 1999a, 1999b), to demand advertising to tell the truth would be a way to disrupt the ideological fantasies that advertising supports. By accepting the rhetoric of advertising effectiveness, NGOs are able to shape advertising discourse and commit advertising to their own projects. On the most immediate level, their interventions counter the drive of the advertising industry to exploit emotions for selling and produce cynical subjects, contrary to the censors at the KCSC who normalize advertising’s transgressions into new realms. It would be an exaggeration to call this identification truly disruptive, however, as it limits itself to occasional interventions and does not confront the exaggerations advertising enlists to casually enhance commodity aesthetics. Still, NGOs put pressure on the advertising industry to stay true to its “flower of capitalism”
reputation in Korea, to dress its commercial purposes in public-interest messages, thus often promoting ideals which ultimately are not compatible with capitalist organization of society and pushing advertising in the realm of public culture.

**Reflexive censors, conservatism and freedom of expression**

A censor is usually imagined as elitist and paternalist, the prude who fancies himself to know what is right for others better than they know themselves, thus robbing those he is shielding of the authority to make their own decisions. This image of a repressive censor does not at all fit those people who I met at various institutions that censored advertising in South Korea. The advertising censors saw themselves as representatives of consumers, drawing authority not so much from their expertise and thus difference from regular advertising consumers, but rather from their similarity—from being one of those consumers and seeing advertisements with the consumer's eyes. They saw themselves as empowered representatives of the public—an advertising public conceived in the broadest sense and, by and large, coinciding with the national public—and attempted to use their authority to channel advertising to reflect visions of the majority, not so much the ideal direction in which they wished South Korean society to go. Rather than being self-righteous and judgemental, advertising censors often were reflexive about their role and particularly uneasy about how their activities interfered with the principles of freedom of expression. As already mentioned, demands for freedom of expression were among the catalysts behind the Grand Pro-Democracy Coalition of 1987, and at the time of my fieldwork freedom of expression frequently entered public discourse to critique current president Lee Myung-bak's unceremonious gagging of critical voices.

The role as oppressors of the freedom of expression in the advertising industry caused reviewers at both non-government and quasi-government various degrees of discomfort. For example, one of the activists from Womenlink (and a former member of the KCSC Advisory Committee) shared about the “KT olleh” case from chapter 2,

> At our organization we thought that there was an issue [with the “KT olleh” campaign] from the very beginning, but we thought also, 'Don't we need to recognize the freedom of expression even in advertising?' Thus even though we thought there was a problem we had no intention to address it ourselves. (interview at Womenlink, November 25, 2009)

Eventually, many phone calls from angry and upset women to the Womenlink's office convinced the feminists to interfere. The question about the authority to interfere with advertising discourse, "Don't we need to recognize the freedom of expression even in
advertising?” was in the air particularly since the Constitutional Court passed a decision in June 2008 that subjected advertising to freedom of speech protections, and most participants of the advertising review had an elaborate explanation to why advertising should be subjected to censorial interventions.

Among my interviewees, NGO activists of the older generation were most articulate in arguing for the need to scrutinize advertising. As Media Educator concluded after musing on how to reconcile the primacy of freedom of expression with the need to scrutinize advertising, “Advertising does not belong to advertisers only, it belongs to viewers, to the nation (kukmin), it must play such a role” (interview, March 2, 2010). She defended advertising censorship as combating marketplace censorship with censorship by civil society. Her point resonated with the argument for advertising censorship by the chairwoman of Consumers Korea, an outspoken critic of the KARB's abolition and a past participant of its consultative committees. She argued that before-the-fact advertising review was a consumer right because in the end consumers paid for advertising (as advertising expenses are included in the commodity prices), therefore they were entitled to control what was being said (interview, May 6, 2010). Their voices however seemed like a minority even within the NGO activists, and most of those involved in advertising review felt conflicted about how their activities compromised the hegemonic ideal of the freedom of expression extended to advertising.

Much more common were reflections that defended the need for advertising censorship through the presumed shortcomings of Korean advertisers or of Korean society in general. In my interviews, file-and-rank monitors, members of advisory boards, staff of the KCSC and other review boards would apologetically refer to the realities of South Korean society, which was deemed not ripe for freedom of speech and often unfavourably compared to those of North America, imagined as the haven of free expression—the land of ethical corporations and of unrestrained sexual freedom, both in life and in advertising. The conservative in South Korea would easily get offended at provocative expressions, whereas South Korean advertisers lacked the spirit of social responsibility and therefore did not deserve the freedom of expression yet, the argument went. A member of the KCSC’s Advisory Committee from an earlier term, who represented a children protection NGO, talked about commissioners themselves being open-minded and presented those who file complaints as conservative:

A review can be requested by anyone, so we have all these conservative adults requesting review saying that those things are too sexual. In our point of view, it is normal, not overly sexual in comparison with everything else. (interview, February 24, 2010)
Yet, as she explained with a sigh, as representatives of the whole of society, they were obliged to take the most conservative stance.

The necessity of review was also justified by drawing comparisons between Korean and foreign advertisers, the latter presumably acting more conscientiously even without a close public scrutiny. For example, Kim Min-ki, a professor of advertising who in various capacities participated in various review boards, including the KCSC and the KARB, contrasted Korean advertisers, whose advertisements needed to be minutely reviewed, with the U.S. advertisers, who, according to Kim, voluntarily embraced the principles of corporate social responsibility and could be trusted to regulate themselves without external censors, hence no need in North America for such structures at the KCSC or earlier KARB, whose dismantling in Korea Kim did not welcome. Kim concludes that review benefits the advertising industry by raising trust in advertising (Kim Min-ki 2005). Those sympathetic with advertisers presented themselves as repairing market failure and thus benefiting the advertising industry.

Reflecting on the need of advertising censorship in Korea, the head of the Advertising Team of the Korea Broadcasting Association (which conducted before-the-fact review for terrestrial broadcasters) linked exaggerated and false advertising to lack of democracy. He explained, that democracy was not a political order but a system of social life, which, for him, meant not harming others, and that he saw as lacking in Korea. As a result, there were businessmen who did not mind deceiving to make money only once. Whereas in the U.S. it would be recognized as wrong, he said, in Korea courts would not bother with such cases unless someone died or suffered serious defamation. It was because "capitalists (chabonga) are still privileged over citizens (simin)" (interview, May 10, 2010). He asserted advertising censorship system as a necessary remedy for incomplete democratization. In connection to my arguments in chapter 2, the picture of democracy that he draw resembles very much “capitalism without capitalism” that humanist advertising celebrates, and faith in consolidated democratization to repair capitalist contradictions.

As meetings at the Advisory Committee showed, reviewers' veneration for freedom of expression often led them to judgements that privileged the advertisers' strategies of commodity aesthetics. While making a judgement on what was an acceptable exaggeration in advertising, they also were making a judgement on the proper cynical distance that advertising consumers needed to maintain towards advertising, thus shaping the advertising publics. Paradoxically, censors ended up the defenders of the advertisers' privileges to engage in consumer aesthetics strategies by protecting the advertising industry from complaints from those members of advertising publics who overidentified with advertising discourse and thus
threatened to disrupt the circulation of fantasies and commodities it mediated.

**Conclusion: Censorship as a positive sign**

As I show in this chapter, censorship that grants advertising leeway with exaggeration and presumes “smart” consumers empowers the advertising industry to make more and more sensual and emotional experiences fodder for commodity aesthetics. Yet to dismiss advertising censorship as a complex mechanism for empowering the advertising industry would be to ignore that the ultimate smart consumer is the consumer who consumes advertising for pleasure and is not taken in by the sales message. In other words, the ultimate smart consumer responds to advertising as a public text and a popular cultural product, making its economic objectives irrelevant. Moreover, to dismiss advertising censorship as utterly complicit with the advertising industry is to ignore that the existence of advertising censorship reproduces advertising as a medium that needs to be scrutinized.

Julian Assange talks about censorship as a positive sign,

"...we should always see censorship, actually, as a very positive sign, and the attempts toward censorship as a sign that the society is not yet completely sewn up, not yet completely fiscalized, but still has some political dimension to it—i.e. what people believe and think and feel and the words that they listen to actually matters. Because in some areas, it doesn’t matter" (Assange, Žižek and Goodman 2011).

His point is about political censorship, but it can be applied to advertising censorship as well. Advertising censorship encourages the publics to keep a critical eye on advertising, raising the bar for what can be plausibly said in advertising and subjecting advertising to tighter scrutiny from variously positioned observers. It refuses to normalize the view that advertisers own advertising discourse because they pay for its production and circulation and it invites interventions to wrestle the control over advertising discourses on the grounds that it circulates as a public text.

So far, as I was stressing the antagonism between commodity sellers and commodity buyers as a key dimension in advertising, I focused on commodity buyers, or advertising consumers. The interests of commodity sellers are represented by the advertising agencies, yet as I show in the next chapter advertising makers often identify with advertising publics as well. For many of them it was the romantic vision of advertising as a creative medium serving public interest that drove them into the profession. Within advertising agencies, however, this "flower of capitalism" vision needs to be negotiated against the advertising’s commercial imperatives and
in the next chapter I consider how advertising makers navigate contradictory pressures on the ground.
Chapter 4. Desire for kind advertising and the everyday of ad makers

Kwanggojaengi [advertising makers] always worry about this. Though their fate is to be led by clients, media and budget, at the bottom of their hearts there is a stewing desire to make kind (ch’akhan) advertising.

Creative director Yi Jeseok (2010: 201)

As I show in this chapter, ad makers,¹ by and large, share the sensibilities of advertising consumers, who refuse to dismiss advertising as a mere commercial tool, and want their advertising to positively contribute to society. Like advertising publics, they appreciate socially minded, “kind” advertising—the attitude captured in my epigraph, a quote from celebrity creative director Yi Jeseok, who repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to making “public-interest advertising for the majority”² and refused to work with advertisers who did not share his vision. Often it was because of their enchantment with advertising as a cultural text—both with its flashy creativity and with its potential to inspire people for the good—that the current generation of ad makers chose their profession. They progressed into making advertising from being enthusiastic members of advertising publics. As I show in this chapter, the internal ideologies of the advertising industry, articulated by advertising auteurs, reinforced this identification with advertising consumers as they prescribed that ad makers sought inspiration (“insight”) in the everyday, by empathizing with ordinary people, their concerns and feelings. It was those ordinary people—stressed and overworked office workers, busy working mothers, small-scale franchisees, young people whose creative potential is muted by oppressive hierarchies—that early to mid-career ad makers identified with, as they themselves struggled with office and gender hierarchies. It is the worldviews of those ordinary people that ad makers, as cultural producers, strove to validate.

In this chapter, I explore how work at an advertising agency is shaped by contradictory pressures, on the one hand, to have advertising live up to the title of “flower of capitalism” and

¹ I am using “advertising makers,” or “ad makers,” to refer to all people employed by advertising agencies in a gender-neutral way. “Admen and adwomen” seemed too cumbersome, and I have considered using “advertising producers” as an umbrella term, but there is a special position within advertising agency called “advertising producer” (or PD in Korea), the person who oversees the actual production of an advertisement, and I did not want to cause confusion. Occasionally I use “advertising workers” as well to emphasize that making advertising is not a creative pursuit but a job.

produce beautiful, inspiring campaigns, and, on the other, to keep penny-pinching and risk-
averse advertisers (and one’s superiors within the agency) content with creative solutions that
are more often than not similar to the ones of the advertiser’s competitors and follow the
proven clichés. If, for regular consumers and censors, engagements with advertising require
negotiating the ideals of public interest against the ideals of free speech and free enterprise, ad
makers were caught up in the mundane practicalities of advertising production. Via
ethnography, I explain how, despite the shared commitment to public interest among
advertising consumers and producers, most of South Korean advertising falls short of the
romantic “flower of capitalism” ideal.

It was quite symbolic of South Korean advertising’s complex relations with capitalism that the
first thing that greeted me in the advertising agency, where I did my internship in December
2009-January 2010, was a portrait of Karl Marx. About the last thing I expected to encounter at
an advertising agency, a page-size printout was pinned in a cubicle of one of my teammates-to-
be, on the cubicle wall behind his computer, at the place where other employees placed posters
of completed projects, particularly if those included celebrities, or a barrage of post-it notes, or
photos of their families. When I later questioned Pak-pujang, the owner of the cubicle, he told
me that Marx was there to help him come up with ideas, which intrigued me even more, and he
added that I was the first one at the agency to correctly identify the person in the portrait. Pak-
pujang, a stout man in his late 30s-early 40s and with a Masters’ degree in Communication,
became my most provocative interlocutor at the agency, and our conversations were invaluable
for my understanding of the challenges and excitements of advertising work. In this chapter, I

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Following the practice at the agency and the usual etiquette of Korean corporate world, I refer to people I
met at the agency by their last name and position at the company, as I would refer to them in real life. The
system of ranks in Korea is cumbersome as employees are promoted to new ranks every 2–3 years (see
Janelli & Janelli 1993: 144-152). At the agency, the new hires were recruited as sinip sawon, or "new
employees," from where they informally proceeded to sawon, or simply employee, as newer new hires
entered the company. Sawon was not really a rank but rather a designation, sawons were addressed either
by first name or by last name and generic address ssi. The consequent ranks were chajang, pujang and
kukchang; these positions do not really reflect duties but rather a relative place in the office hierarchy.
Managerial responsibilities come with the designation of t’imjang (from English “team”), for those put in
charge of a group of workers assigned to a team (t’im). The designation t’imjang, however, does not
necessarily mean a higher rank than kukchang, rather it indicates managerial responsibilities. The career
growth could stop at the level of t’imjang; the employee could also be promoted to a senior managerial
position where he (rarely she) would be supervising several teams, isa or Division Head. There were about
eight Division Heads at the agency, one of which was promoted to CEO (taephyo isa) soon after the end of
my internship, the incumbent CEO retiring from business.

There are various “standard” English versions to translate these ranks, but there seems to be no unity and,
for an English-language speaker, distinctions among “assistant manager,” “deputy manager,” “general
manager,” “director” and so on can be rather confusing. I am using the Korean terms not to inscribe the
positions with meanings and associations that they do not have. It is not that important to pay attention to
ranks for following my argument, but I keep them to convey relative hierarchies for readers who are
familiar with Korean corporate world. To keep track of relative hierarchies, I number the ranks in
ascending order starting from sawon, the entry level.
present my participant observation at the advertising agency, Sōngsim Communications, and draw on multiple interviews with ad makers, both from Sōngsim and other agencies, as well as on advertising industry publications. My objective is to tease out how advertising workers navigate the conflicting pressures and how they, the most discerning consumers of advertising, conceive of advertising and advertising-making themselves, and, more generally, how the site of advertising production is a site where worldviews are asserted and debated.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section provides a historical background on the advertising profession in South Korea, outlining how by the 1990s ad makers, kwanggojaengi, have transformed from hucksters to creative visionaries. The second section introduces the public discourse on advertising work, particularly drawing on the writings of celebrated advertising auteurs, Park Woong Hyun and Yi Jeseok. It also registers the tension between the public discourses that frame advertising as socially engaged art driven by “concern for the masses” and the triviality of most mainstream advertisements. This leads me, in the third section, to discuss how external pressures, particularly the “master-slave” relation with

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4 Special thanks to Sungjo Kim for helping me come up with a suitable pseudonym for the agency where I conducted my fieldwork. Sōngsim (誠心) stands for “true heart,” and we felt that it was a plausible name for an older South Korean company, such as the one where I conducted my fieldwork. Names of my interviewees quoted in full (e.g. Cho Youmi) are the names of real people who insisted on being quoted under their real names. Within the agency, however, I make an effort to protect the identities of people I worked with. I refer to them either by an invented last name and their actual position (e.g. Choi-t’imjang) or by an invented first name (e.g. Chin-a), mirroring how I used to address them in real life. By the time of writing this chapter, all the people mentioned under pseudonyms have moved on, either to different teams within Sōngsim or to different advertising agencies.
advertisers but also concerns for advertising review, shape advertising content and to explore how ad makers sometimes succeed in saving advertising from advertisers. The fourth section describes the nature of work at the advertising agency, paying particular attention to everyday practices and experiences of agency employees, and the fifth section offers an ethnographic account of coming up with advertising ideas, following the conception of an advertising campaign for chocolate snacks. The last section identifies internal hierarchies that structure work at the advertising agency and influence advertising content. In conclusion, I discuss how advertising agency is the site where the limits of public interest in advertising are tested and negotiated.

**Kwanggojaengi: From a huckster to a creative visionary**

Historically, advertising was held in low esteem in South Korea. Advertising agents were linked to merchants, the lowest class in the traditional social hierarchy, and referred to as *kwanggojaengi*, a huckster, the name formed by combing the word for advertising, *kwanggo*, and suffix *jaengi* or *chaengi* designating someone who cannot restraint oneself from doing something unseemly—*kojipchaengi* (stubborn-jaengi) cannot help being stubborn and *hŏp'ungjaengi* (bluff-jaengi) cannot help making things up. "The one who in the previous life gathered bad karma, or betrayed one's country, or has committed crimes in three generations is born a kwanggojaengi," a saying went. John Stickler, an American founder of one of the first advertising agencies in Korea, said during the 5th Asia-Pacific Regional Marketing Conference in 1971,

> When I began in the advertising business in Seoul in 1964, I immediately learned two things: first, that advertising is a bad word here. (About the worst name you can call someone is 'kwangojangi' [sic]) and, secondly, that businessmen I spoke to had no concept of what advertising is or how it works. (quoted in Shin 1972)

According to the common logic, if a commodity needed to be advertised, it was an indicator of a flaw because it failed to sell naturally. Stickler reported to his international audience,

> As a rule, Korean executives think of advertising as something that one does at Christmas time instead of sending Christmas cards, just to put the company name in the paper. They do not associate advertising with sales, with generating leads, or even as part of the marketing mix. (quoted in Shin 1972)

The attitude towards advertising began to change as South Korea's economy grew, more consumer goods became available and international companies started advertising in Korea. According to advertising historian Shin In Sup, the turning point in the development of Korean
advertising was 1968, when Coca-Cola and Pepsi entered the Korean market and hired advertising agencies to conduct modern advertising campaigns, a novelty in South Korea of the day (Shin 1989: 23). From then on advertising industry associations mushroomed, starting with the Korean chapter of International Advertising Association which opened in 1968.

The advertising industry took initiative to educate the public in general, but particularly businesses and mass media, about the benefits of advertising. Foreign books on advertising were translated and articles were written. The advertising industry discourse stressed the benefits that advertising brought to businesses and society in general, linking advertising to the national goals of economic development. Public screenings of the winner advertisements from international competitions showcased advertising creativity (Shin an Shin 2004: 57), and gradually Korean publics began to pick up on the glamour of advertising work. Moreover, advertising was firmly put on the side of freedom and democracy against dictatorship after the Dong-A Ilbo "white pages" incident of 1974-1975 (discussed in chapter 1). Towards the end of the 1970s, the neutral term kwanggoin replaced derogatory kwangojaengi (Shin and Sō 2011: 355).

By the 1990s, kwangojaengi was reborn as a proud self-designation of advertising professionals. Kwangojaengi was no longer a huckster but an eccentric driven by obsessive passion for advertising, someone who cannot help making advertising, just like a stubborn person, kojipchaengi, cannot help being stubborn. At the time of my fieldwork, Kwangojaengi was the name of a busy online cafe, which united university students interested in advertising. Their obsessive-compulsive relation with advertising was conveyed in their call for new members—"advertising addicts who cannot hold advertising, even if they can hold shit." Kwangojaengi was no longer an occupation, but a disposition and an addiction, if not a destiny. As creative director Park Woong Hyun (Pak Ung-hyōn), the man behind "Towards people" campaign considered in the introduction, writes, conveying this fatalistic relation, "Just like a bird that through no will of its own was born to live flying, so I, through no will of my own, was born and live making advertisements" (2010: 269). Another auteur director Yi Jeseok (Yi Che-sŏk) shared in a media interview,

> In boxing, if you hit the temple from the chin, the brain is shaken. I want to make advertising that is as shocking as that. With swearing too, there is swearing that just

5 In North America, celebration of advertising creativity was a result of the "Creative Revolution" in American advertising in the 1960s (see Frank 1997).

expresses anger and there is swearing that truly wants to kill the opponent. To make such advertisements, one must become an advertising addict. Because people who do it for fun can’t bear it.  

This fanaticism about advertising is conveyed by the English name of the advertising professionals' association, "Advertising is all" (AIA). As the official website introduces it, AIA is a gathering of advertising professionals (kwanggoin) for whom "advertising is all" (in English) literally, who love advertising, for whom there is nothing to do without advertising, for whom advertising is all. It is a pure gathering (sunsu moim) made for dedicating all love and passion to advertising, to make the day come when good advertising becomes a beautiful legacy and those who devoted all their lives to advertising are proudly remembered for a long time."  

The figure of kwanggojaengi invites an endless fascination from the mass media, which celebrate and exoticize the kwanggojaengi's obsessive passion for creativity and intense commitment to advertising. By the 1990s, advertising directors behind well-loved campaigns gained public visibility. A few ad makers have penned books for the general audience. Park Woong Hyun's Advertising through the humanities: The techniques of creativity and communication of creative director Park Woong Hyun, co-authored with journalist Kang Ch'ang-rae, combines long quotes from Park's interviews, excerpts from Park's earlier magazine articles and loose, reflexive musings by the journalist on Park's campaigns and interview answers. Yi Jeseok was the author and hero of another recent addition to the confessions of an advertisement man genre, Advertising genius Yi Jeseok: A signmaker's killer ideas that surprised the world (Yi 2010).  

No wonder that advertising workers in their 40s and younger often construct their stories of entering the advertising industry as a sudden recognition of a calling. I heard many renditions of the narrative that hinges on the moment when the teller is confronted with powerful and beautiful advertising—the winners of some international competition he incidentally sees on TV or a particular Korean advertisement—and then resolves to enter the advertising profession. Such was the story of Pak-pujang. He reserved to become an adman after he, then a first-year undergrad, incidentally watched a collection of advertisements that won international awards. Having worked in advertising for over 10 years when we met in 2009, he still was fascinated by it and avidly followed international developments in the creative field.

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The intensity of the calling is well-illustrated by a story of a fourth-year advertising student Pak Ch’ang-uk who made the news in the fall 2010. He attempted to ride his bicycle around Seoul while charting his itinerary with a GPS-tracking cell phone application, to draw the logo of advertising agency TBWA Korea. The student told the journalists that he dropped his original major in physics and resolved to become a kwanggojaengi after seeing TBWA Korea’s “Towards people” campaign, the "Hero" episode discussed in the introduction. Drawing the agency's logo on the map of Seoul was his way to demonstrate his creativity to seek employment with TBWA Korea after he graduated.9

Since the 1990s, the advertising industry firmly captured imaginations of artistically talented people who fancied it as the space where they could make a living off their creative talents. Among ad makers I interviewed, many came from other creative professions, after getting frustrated at trying to make a living as an artist, an independent filmmaker, a poet, a novelist, a rock musician or an orchestra conductor. It was not the desire to produce advertising that efficiently sold commodities that attracted them to advertising. For ad makers, just as for advertising consumers, advertising’s commercial rationales were undeniable, at the same time valorizing advertising content allowed for disavowing them, for suspending them temporarily and enjoying advertising for its creative messages and pathos. They were in business of making “capitalist realism,” not commercial advertising.

Advertising, art and “concern for the masses”

If ad makers present themselves as creative visionaries, public discourses of the advertising industry often frame advertising as art, not a commercial enterprise. A chapter title in Park Woong Hyun’s book announces, "Advertising has been poetry from the long ago" (2009: 55), and indeed Korean critics habitually compare moving advertisements to poetry and refer to TV commercials as "15-second art" (15 seconds being the maximum length allowed for advertisements on terrestrial national channels).

Rituals of the advertising industry valorize advertising’s artistry over its commercial instrumentality as well. Advertising competitions celebrate advertisements for their aesthetic merit, not for the highest increase in sales of the advertised commodity. South Korea hosts a dozen of such competitions, the biggest ones being the Busan International Advertising Festival Ad Stars, modelled after the Cannes Advertising Awards. Relatedly, it is not uncommon to encounter statements like "this was a great advertising campaign, even though the product

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failed," even in advertising textbooks (e.g. Chang and Han 2006: 213). As Shin In Sup, also a steering committee member of the Busan Ad Stars, explained "Fundamentally advertising cannot neglect scientific approach, but what ultimately comes out is art, so it is often evaluated from the artistic perspective" (quoted in Kim Pyŏng-hŭi 2010: 183). Advertisers go along with this glorification of advertising as art because they see it as sensitizing consumers to advertising messages in general. During my interview at the Korea Advertisers Association, a sponsor of many advertising contests, I was told that their purpose is "to change perception of advertisements, [so that they are seen as] not just noise, not something to be zipped, but [as] art" (Interview at the KAA, September 30, 2009).

Yet if advertising is art, South Korean ad makers perceive it as socially engaged art, understood broadly as the art that seeks to encourage a social change. As creative director Pak U-dŏk expressed this attitude, "One good advertisement can change the world" (Pak U-dŏk and Yi Chu-ryong 2001). His statement is indicative of how ad makers are never too far from claiming that their advertisements benefit people in general, not just the advertiser. Yi Jeseok identifies “concern for the masses” (taejung e taehan paeryŏ) as a prerequisite for good advertising (together with originality).10 Similarly, Park Woong Hyun presents it as a commonsensical thing that his advertisements strive towards public service messages, while he frames it as making advertising that all people can sympathize (konggam) with. The journalist who co-wrote Advertising through the humanities contrasts Park's advertisements to the famous Apple 1984 campaign, "Think different," which, the journalist argues, encourages discrimination by promoting differences.

If you look at Park Woong Hyun's advertising, the protagonist of the story is "we" all. . . . If you watch 'everyone is someone's hero,' the hero there is not a heavenly creature like a genius of "Think different," but we ourselves. It shows how we can become heroes for each other through difference. (Park and Kang 2010: 189)

Park himself writes, "My interest is always not in the advertising festival prizes but in communication with the masses (taejung), with Korean masses" (quoted in Park and Kang 2010: 90).

Advertising as communication with the masses does not simply indulge the publics with melodramatic pleasures of discovering humanism in everyday occurrences, but rather confronts what the ad maker sees as the wrongs of the Korean society. Most Koreans know Park’s campaigns that taught the public that "Age is just a number," "Jeans and suits are equal," that

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celebrated the first women admitted to South Korean army ("I acknowledge the difference. But I challenge the discrimination"), that encouraged environment protection when advertising apartments ("Building sincerely").

This ethos of socially engaged, public-service advertising was taken to its logical end by "advertising genius" Yi Jeseok, when he chose to specialize in producing public-service advertisements. An art graduate from a provincial college, Yi could not obtain employment with advertising agencies as he dreamed, and settled in a job as a signmaker in his hometown. Yet one day a disparaging comment from a local business-card printer provoked Yi to change his life. He learnt English by teaching drawing at a nearby U.S. military base and, within a year, he got accepted to the reputable School of Visual Arts in New York. In New York, Yi at first lived in extreme poverty, but soon enough his projects began to win one prestigious prize after another. Within less than two years not only did Yi land a job with a reputable international advertising agency in New York, he also won more major international advertising awards than any other Korean ad maker—that at the age of 28. Korean advertising agencies now showered him with generous employment offers and Yi's international successes won him a lot of attention from the Korean media. In the end, Yi returned to Korea and, in May 2009, set up his own company, Yi Jeseok's Advertising Research Institute, which specialized in public-service advertising.

Taking a radical position in putting advertising to public interest, Yi reasons in Advertising genius Yi Jeseok,

> Of course, an advertisement that makes people buy beautiful shoes, slightly wider apartments or new dresses could be a happy advertisement. But is it not a much happier advertisement that could give homes to homeless people, give clothes to people who are freezing to death? Is not advertising more meaningful when, rather than making successful people more successful, it saves dying people, it revives people who are struggling? (2010: 169)

As he elucidates his position in an interview, "advertising that encourages consumption gives poor people the feeling of relative poverty and inferiority. I don’t want to make advertising for the minority, but public-interest advertising for the majority."11 In his book, Yi announces his agenda to serve Korean people through advertising:

> In reality, buying Nike shoes and making advertising in the end is to have everyone live well. If so, what kind of advertising would make everyone live happily? What kind of advertising can make people joyful and happy? (2010: 169).

Yi’s earnest wrestling with these questions led to his disappointment in commercial advertising, hence his establishment of his own agency that prioritized public-service advertisements and took commercial accounts only from advertisers who respected Yi’s commitment to making advertisements that did not alienate have-nots.

Yi Jeseok’s story might be extreme and unique. However, the ethos he appealed to was widely shared within the advertising industry. Particularly advertising students endlessly reposted and circulated Yi’s public-service campaigns, his colourful quotes on “advertising addiction” as well as his scathing critiques of the Korean society that failed to recognize Yi’s talent before he made it big in America.

My interviewees among regular ad makers could not afford to radically break away from making commercial advertising, like Yi did, and perhaps few desired to. They were generally at peace with commercial advertising as long as they occasionally saw it benefit the people, not just the advertiser. It was the advertisements which the ad makers saw causing broader social ripples that they brought up in my interviews as their most memorable advertising campaigns. The campaign Pak-pujang held dearly was a campaign for snacks made from Korean rice by one of the Korean chaebol. By and large indifferent to the economic performance of the advertiser itself, Pak-pujang saw the campaign as his chance to help struggling rice farmers, from whom the rice was bought, by stimulating rice consumption. Or, creative director Pyo Moon-Song (P’yo Mun-song) of Daehong Communications told me about a campaign for an apartment complex he produced in 2000. The advertiser was on the verge of bankruptcy, but the advertisement was so successful that the sales skyrocketed. Because the company could sell its apartments, it stayed solvent, because it stayed solvent, its employees kept their jobs, because they kept their jobs, they had enough money to feed their families and send their kids to school—which was particularly meaningful in 2000, in the wake of the 1997 IMF financial crisis, when many became homeless, Pyo explained proudly. For Pyo, facilitating the advertiser’s economic success was a means to bring all those good things into Korean society. Another ad maker could not praise enough advertisements that featured the disputed island Dokdo, thus, in his view, increasing the popular awareness of the issue among Koreans.

Yet despite the common praises to the joys of creativity and the repeatedly declared concern for the masses, in Korea, as elsewhere, the mainstream of advertising—the majority of advertisements that people are exposed to daily—often lacks a creative spark and rather crassly attempts to invest viewers’ desires into advertised commodities. The majority of advertising in Korea hassles for attention with cheap tricks—exploiting greed, mongering fears, playing up insecurities, using sex appeal to get attention, employing clichés as shortcuts to conveying
meanings. Countless advertisements—about 60-75 percent, according to different estimates\textsuperscript{12}—follow the formula of showing a smiling attractive model holding the product to the accompaniment of music, spiced up with special effects borrowed from a recent Hollywood blockbuster. Ads within the same industry habitually copy creative solutions from each other. At the time of my fieldwork, just as every soju advertisement cast a minimally clothed female celebrity in a sultry pose with a phallic bottle, every advertisement for fried chicken chains featured a girls’ band mixing up their routine with a mock cat fight over the chicken, whereas every coffee drink advertisement contained a kissing scene between two celebrities having a romantic moment. To comprehend this gap between the discourses about advertising work and the actual advertising that circulates in the everyday, it is necessary to look into the practices of advertising production on the ground, into what kind of constraints, demands and hierarchies ad makers have to deal with.

\textbf{The limits of creativity: Dealing with advertisers and censors}

Sometimes when I watch TV, there are advertisements which are strange beyond words. Even though a brand has certain recognition, and clearly their advertising agency is all right. Then I always think to myself, “The advertiser must have interfered a lot.” Or, when the mouth clearly seems to be pronouncing wrong words and when dubbing is awkward, I think, “Ah, they must have been caught at the review.”

Creative director Ryoo Hong-Joon (Daehong 2007)

An advertising campaign starts long before making the actual advertisements, with the agency competing for a client’s account. Some accounts are secured through informal networking, but for many clients the agency has to compete in an open tender, known as competitive presentation, or, in Korean, as a PT (\textit{p’it’i}). The editorial to the special issue of advertising industry publication \textit{Kwanggo Chōngbo} (\textit{“Advertising Information”}) on competitive presentations observes:

\begin{quote}
The most commonly associated image of an advertising professional for students who prepare to enter the advertising industry is that of staying up all night preparing for a PT, making a brilliant presentation in front of the advertiser, winning the contract and receiving an ovation. For on-the-ground ad makers too, the process of preparing for a new competitive presentation often feels like the core of their job. The accompanying stress reaches the point of killing one with overwork. (\textit{Kwanggo Chōngbo})
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Precise statistics are hard to find and most authors quote their estimates without providing sources. Kim Hong-tack quotes 70 percent (Kim 2007: 273). Sejung Marina Choi’s comparative study counted that 57 percent of TV advertisements in prime time in 2002 used celebrities in Korea (as opposed to about 9 percent in the U.S.) (Choi 2005).
Except for the ovation, this quote gives a fair idea of the intensity that builds up towards the moment of actual presentation. When preparing a competitive pitch, South Korean agencies usually have three-four weeks to develop their bid, though it is not unheard of for an advertiser to ask agencies to present on a week’s notice. A task force of 10-12 account planners (or account executives, “AEs”) and creatives is pulled across teams and, after receiving an orientation from the advertiser, they individually work on campaign ideas, which later are presented to be reviewed and critiqued by other members of the task force and a Division Head (isa). During the two of such meetings I observed, critiques were harsh and stress levels were intense, the Division Head playing devil’s advocate and siding with imaginary hostile consumers and sceptical advertisers, questioning employees’ common sense and marketing flair, and sending the taskforce back to their cubicles to come up with something more exciting by the next day. After several fervent planning meetings, the Division Head approves of one or two campaigns to be presented to the advertiser, which are then executed by creatives.

On the set day, participating agencies present their ideas to the advertiser. The stakes are high—winning the bid could bring a lot of money to the agency and losing it means that a few weeks of work were wasted. Only the agency that wins the bid is paid for its expenditures of time and resources. A veteran adman Sŏ Ch'ŏng-hŭi describes the moment of the competitive presentation for the benefit of the youths considering the advertising profession:

Advertising agency has to treat the advertiser company that gives them work as a master (sangjŏn ch’ŏrŏm).

“If you kindly grant us your account, during the next year we will conduct advertising campaigns with such objectives and plans. Be so kind to have a look and please contract our agency.”

As the advertising agency pleads like that, the company that places the order, says, “Hmm, let’s have a look at how well you have prepared. Ahem!”

“Go there and let’s look at the backside. Come here and let’s look at the front. Toddle around and let’s see the side. Smile and let’s see inside the mouth.”

Like Yi To-ryŏng teased Ch’ung-hyang, like a judge in a beauty pageant, the client

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13 Generally agencies go as far as producing a storyboard, not an actual campaign. However, on some occasions, an agency would produce an animatic, even a several versions of it, to stand out from the competition, in which case the agency’s expenses go up considerably (Kwanggo Chŏngbo 2005: 11).

14 According to some estimates, an agency spends about 40 million won (about 36 thousand dollars) to prepare for a competitive presentation for an account worthy 10 billion won (9 million dollars) (Kwanggo Chŏngbo 2005: 11).

15 Reference to “The tale of Ch’ung-hyang,” a popular folktale.
evaluates the advertising agency inside and out. (Sŏ 1996: 24-25)

Sŏ calls his relevant chapter "'Blood-splashing PT scene," making a pun as the first two syllables in the "blood splashing" (p'i t'wigi) sound similar to p'i-t'i (Ibid.: 24). The Kwanggo Chŏngbo editors, too, mention a variation on that pun ("blood-pouring PT," p'i t'ŏji nūn p'it'i) and compare the PT moment to the army experience of Preliminary Rifle Instruction, or PRI, which Korean conscripts jokingly decipher in Korean as "blood spatters, muscles knot and teeth gnash" (p'i ga nago, ar i paego, i ga kallinda) (2005: 10). I have not attended competitive presentation themselves, but their descriptions constitute a large part of the industry lore—stories about clients who will give highest grades to one agency but pick another one in the end; stories about advertisers who change their mind about the winner after realizing that another contender is housed in the same office tower (and thus presumably easier to build a working relation with); stories about advertisers negotiating behind the scenes with contending agencies for extra services to be delivered for free.

After the contract is won, the process of developing an advertising campaign involves a lot of back-and-forth with the advertiser, whose managers more often than not have their own ideas about what shape the advertising campaign should take, which celebrity to contract as an endorser and so on—and often challenge the expertise of the agency. If the client has objections, the process starts anew till the client is satisfied. Ad makers often lament that advertisers see their relation as a master-slave one because they pay the agencies and generally fail to see ad makers as professionals. Pak Ch'an-yong, advertising professor and former ad maker, comments on the habitual antagonisms between advertisers and their agencies,

I don't know if it is a prejudice, but advertisers are inclined to distrust agencies. There is some naivety in the heart of the advertiser, who thinks, unlike myself, agency people are not creative, they don't know marketing, they don't know TV programs, newspaper advertising rates they quote are too expensive, and so are expenses for producing a TV commercial, if I do everything myself, there will a great advantage to the company (2003: 182).\(^{16}\)

The shortness of a standard advertising contract (one year) and frequent competitive presentations keep agencies on their toes and reproduce the hierarchy between the advertiser

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16 To provide the other perspective, when I discussed this matter with an acquaintance who happened to be in charge of hiring an advertising agency and overseeing the production of the advertising campaign for her company, a software manufacturer, she stressed that advertising was a huge expense and should the campaign be unsuccessful it would be that manager who liaised with the agency who would be blamed, which naturally encouraged conservative solutions. She also noticed that her decision to favour one of the bidding agencies was influenced by their suggestion to use as a celebrity endorser heartthrob Lee Min-ho, whom she wanted to meet in person.
and agency.\(^{17}\)

Considering the above dynamic between advertising agencies and advertisers it is no wonder that, for ad makers, the advertiser is the primary audience to be convinced and impressed, whereas considerations about effectiveness and creativity come later, if at all.\(^{18}\) Advertising workers talk a lot about how advertisers, to their own detriment, block ad makers’ creativity, set unreasonable deadlines, advance eccentric demands, push agencies to copy successful advertisements of the advertiser’s competitor or even to plagiarize visuals that were provided as reference\(^{19}\)—and in the end might reject the campaign altogether. Anecdotes about unreasonableableness of advertisers are plenty. I was told a story about a client company’s senior manager, vetoing an excellent campaign because his wife did not like the celebrity cast in the leading role. Another time I heard about a client tearing off the storyboard from the stand, tossing it on the ground and stumping on it, saying that he expected a new campaign idea by the noon of the next day. As Yi Jeseok writes, summing up typical attitudes, “If a kwanggojaengi is to talk about all the nonsense that clients do, the conversation will last till morning, no, even a month won’t be enough” (Yi 2010: 151).

Perhaps the most famous story about the conflict between an ad maker and the advertiser comes from Park Woong Hyun. As he reveals in his *Advertising through the humanities*, he failed to sell the campaign he was proud of most. The campaign, a fine exemplar of the humanist advertising, was inspired by the anti-American protests sparked by a tragic incident in June 2002, when two schoolgirls were run over by a U.S. tank north of Seoul. The advertisement voiceover told the actual story of a single netizen posting online that he was going downtown to have a candlelight vigil for the two girls, even if only by himself. The message became viral and soon downtown Seoul was taken over by candle-holding protesters that demanded that the U.S.A. take responsibility. The advertisement was executed as a

\(^{17}\) Internationally it is not that often when big accounts are open for bids, many partnerships lasting for decades. In Korea, however, long-term partnerships between advertisers and advertising agencies are few and mostly are between chaebol and their in-house advertising agencies. A standard contract between an agency and an advertiser lasts a year, and many businesses call agencies to compete for their accounts each time the contract expires or even earlier. An established advertising agency in Korea is estimated to participate in about 300 competitions a year, with about a trillion won (about 900 million dollars) worth of accounts at stake (Kwanggo Chóngbo 2005: 12). Most of the account money goes for media expenditures, the agency gets only a 8-12 percent commission off that amount.

\(^{18}\) That an advertising agency’s primary concern is with pleasing the advertiser (and not with producing an effective marketing campaign) was showed by researchers of advertising in the U.K. (Cronin 2004), Japan (1996) and Trinidad (Miller 1997), and it is not surprising that it is true for South Korea as well.

\(^{19}\) In 2009, observers commented on a striking similarity between a recent advertisement for Lotte whisky and an advertisement for Louis Vuitton bags: both featured a young man in a casual outfit enjoying the outdoors—the former advertisement presenting a bottle of whiskey and the later a bag as a focal prop in the idyllic scene. Also in 2009, LG had to pull a campaign after it ran for only five days as it was found plagiarizing work of a Japanese artist.
slideshow of photographs from the events, similar in style to Park’s “Towards people” campaign, and accompanied with traditional Korean music. “That year one candle lightened up the world brightly. All thought it was impossible. Impossible is nothing,” the narration went. The advertisement was for Adidas, which, however, refused to buy it, to Park’s dismay. Despite the commercial failure, the advertisement is one of the easiest advertisements to find in the Korean internet and, thanks to a whole chapter devoted to it in Advertising through the humanities, is recognized as Park Woong Hyun’s masterpiece, whereas Adidas is critiqued by Korean netizens for narrow-mindedness.

Park Woong Hyun’s auteur status allowed him to “save” an advertising campaign despite the advertiser’s lack of appreciation. For most ad makers, however, advertisements disliked by the advertiser are simply buried. As I was told many times, as much as it hurts to give up an idea that one worked on really hard, there is nothing to be done but let it go.20

Next to advertisers’ whims, external review was a relatively minor concern for ad makers. Again, if an advertisement was flagged by reviewers, the most severe consequences were for the media outlet that ran it, whereas should an advertisement be disliked by the advertiser, the agency could lose the account. An investigation or even sanctions from the review board meant many phone calls and extra paper work for the agency, but there were no immediate consequences such as fines or legal suits either for the agency or the advertiser. At Sŏngsim, no special procedures were in place to ensure that an advertisement did not violate the review rules. Review was organically considered when campaigns were discussed—or dealt with should an advertisement be caught, which, however, happened rarely. As Pak-pujang explained,

... an advertisement will definitely be caught by review if it says that something is there, which is not there, or deceives. But I think it comes down to the ethics of the person who makes advertising. Do I really need to be cheating [“cheating” in English] to that degree to make an advertisement? I can feel it personally. People with common sense, ethical people, can judge that level on their own.

As I was told again and again, since the abolition of the Korea Advertising Review Board in 2008, the review got much looser and, having worked under the tougher regime, established

20 Still, advertising workers find ways to realize their creative ambitions. A junior copywriter with a small advertising agency, Min-yŏng, who talked about how much she wanted to win prizes in advertising festivals but it was hard because the advertising that agencies produced was rarely the advertising that agencies themselves liked. The advertisements they produced were what advertisers wanted and their creative solutions were not necessarily the best thing from the creative point of view, she explained. Min-yŏng’s entry to the 2009 Busan Ad Stars Festival made it to the final round, yet it was not an actual campaign but rather a special festival entry made as a mock advertisement for one of the agency’s accounts. (She submitted to the festival with the permission of the advertiser.) Again, this solution is possible only for advertising competitions, and depends on the advertising workers investing their spare time in creating advertisements that they like.
agencies navigated the new guidelines easily. Nevertheless, ad makers were conscious of the rules and sometimes talked about what they saw as unreasonable limitations, like impossibility of using nursery rhymes in jingles or having a child hold a product advertised.

Scarier than the formal review were citizens’ organizations. Unlike official reviewer boards, the NGOs were not invested in close reading of the regulations and rather relied on their moral authority as representatives of civil society. Even without a legally binding power to block what they saw as problematic campaigns, NGOs could mobilize public support for their view, call for boycotts and organize negative publicity, as happened with the “KT olleh” campaign, for example (chapter 2). In relation to the “KT olleh” case, it was in fact the advertising agency that convinced the advertiser to back down and pull the advertisements, worried about provoking the wrath of NGOs. Still, dealt with when conflicts arose, activist NGOs were not considered in the routine operations of an advertising agency.

Advertising agencies thus address their work, first of all, to their clients, not to the commodity consumers or advertising consumers. It is the client's hunches about what is likely to appeal to the people, the client's wishes to visit particular locations for the shoot or to meet a particular celebrity that count more than the agency' expertise. Ad makers need to sell their creativity or “concern for the masses” to advertisers first, and it is not an easy task even for an established advertising auteur Park Woong Hyun, as the anecdote about the unsold “Candlelight” commercial suggests. The following sections zoom in on a particular advertising agency in Seoul to investigate how advertising workers on the ground navigate conflicting demands from the cautious advertisers and discerning advertising publics, while realizing their own ambitions as kwanggojaengi. My goal is to explain how banal and base advertising campaigns end up constituting the majority of South Korean advertising, despite the fact that ad makers, more than anyone, subscribe to the romantic “flower of capitalism” vision of advertising and share with advertising consumers and advertising censors the desire to advance public interest via advertising.

The agency routines

For Sŏngsimians, time to leave work never comes. Only the time when the project is finished is the time to leave the office. They are people who from the centre of the advertising world, move the world. They create the legend of the creative.

(Sŏngsim’s corporate brochure)
The rhythm of work at Sŏngsim

The agency where I was doing my participant observation, Sŏngsim Communications, was a decades-old in-house agency, affiliated with a chaebŏl, a large family-owned multi-industry conglomerate. It occupied three floors in an office tower in downtown Seoul and employed about 200 people. Before my interview with the CEO, I had visited offices of other advertising agencies in Seoul, and it was surprising to me that Sŏngsim office space did not convey the cult of creativity that was so obvious in other agencies. No pianos in the reception room, no fancy artwork, no fake trees decorated with thank-you cards from grateful clients, no framed quotes from legendary admen—not even a decorated reception area, where to mesmerize the visitor with the best creative work of the agency. Some of the trophies were proudly displayed in the CEO office, but many others collected dust in one of the meeting rooms, together with old reports, books and unwanted stationary. The agency looked like any other office: the land of cubicles, organized into isles, 8 aisles on each half of the floor, a 5-6 people team on each side of the isle and a big, usually cluttered table in the middle for holding minor meetings and browsing delivered newspapers and the agency's newsletter.

The team I was assigned to comprised five people, and our cubicles were lined up in a row of one of the eight cubicle aisles occupying half of the floor. The window cubicle had a slightly higher separator wall, but still was wide open to curious gazes; it belonged to tall and lanky Choi-t'imjang (team chief), who has worked for the agency for 20 years. His background was in marketing and he did an MBA in one of the top universities in Seoul. He was soft-spoken and always polite, addressing his subordinates by last name and position, which set him apart: Most t'imjangs at Sŏngsim talked down to their subordinates with informal forms (panmal) and, when under stress, even added expletives like saekki. My acquaintances in other teams often commented that I was assigned to Choi-t'imjang's team because its members were so nice (ch'akhada) and polite. I agreed, having observed on a few occasions a t'imjang across the cubicle divide fly off the handle and cause his subordinates to move around at nearly the speed of light fetching him papers, USBs, projectors or whatever he was in need of. Employees of his team euphemistically described his management style as "charismatic."

Everyday work at an advertising agency follows the uneven rhythm of projects, frequent tight deadlines keeping everyone on tiptoes. The working day at the agency starts at 9 am, the office is quiet as people settle in their workplaces, check emails and fill up their humidifiers, which are almost as numerous as computers. The energy is low as many are tired from last night, staying up working overtime or socializing with clients. The tempo gradually picks up, and by 10 am the office buzzes with activity—phone calls from clients, phone calls to media outlets, meetings
scheduled and cancelled. Teams have brainstorming sessions in their aisles, a creative director might draw attention as he conveys his ideas to his subordinates by spicing up his speech with expressive onomatopoeic words and occasionally breaking into award-worthy impersonations of a pushy middle-aged woman or a whiny child. It is rare to find everyone in their cubicles—some teams retreat to the meeting rooms, some AEs are away meeting clients, creatives might be gone for a shoot.

The most visible difference that separated the agency from other Korean offices was the casual dress code. With exception of Division Heads and CEO, who always wore business suits (albeit decorated with most eccentric ties), Sōngsim employees wore casual outfits. As a company brochure bragged, "Sōngsimians do not tie neckties. They tie only their hearts and shoe strings." Men mostly wore jeans, and many experimented with hairstyles and hair colours and fashionable accessories. With women though the difference from regular offices was not that noticeable to my eye, they were always well-groomed and stylish. When heading out for a meeting with a client, male AEs would change from their casual outfits into shirts, neckties and suit jackets, which most of them had around, and thus transformed into regular businessmen.

From around 11 am, everyone anticipated the lunch hour, which officially lasted from noon till 1 p.m. There was a food court in the basement of the building, but most people went to one of the myriad of mom-and-pop restaurants mushroomed at the back of the building. As most businesses had their lunch from 12 till 1, it was of strategic importance to get there early in order to secure a spot, so the lunch exodus started around 11:30. During my internship, I usually had lunch with my team. Even though I consider myself a fast eater, I struggled to keep pace with the male employees, who gulped down their food within 10 minutes so that we were back in the office around 12:20. They could spend the rest of the lunch hour napping in their chairs with headsets on—to block noises as well as co-workers' snoring. Occasionally the slumber party was interrupted by a ringing phone, which often provoked profuse swearing about the caller being thoughtless enough to disturb people during the lunch break, the only quiet time in the day. As much as Sōngsimians relished their lunch hour, when things were busy, the team would order takeout or even have instant ramen, forgoing the lunch nap.

As my internship progressed, I made friends with female employees at the agency, and going for lunch with them was an entirely different experience. Like men, they would take off a little early but instead of going to the old-fashioned greasy spoon restaurants at the back, we would go to the food court of a newly opened shopping mall a 10-minute walk away. The pace also could not be any more different as we would take the whole lunch hour to eat our food and even be 10-15 minutes late returning to the office. The women (3 to 10 of them gathered) jokingly pitied me
for having to eat most of my lunches with Korean men who did not know to take their time with such things, they said. Once in a while one of the junior male employees would be invited to come along, and inevitably he would be teased for eating his food too fast. As during my lunches with my team, conversations mostly revolved around work, yet once in a while women would indulge in sarcastic comments about their male bosses, that level of openness never approximated during the meals with my team.

Around 1 p.m., people who were out for lunch came back and people who were napping woke up, and everyone got to business again, the same whirlpool of activity as in the morning. Things quieted down again towards five o'clock. It was the best time to approach people for interviews since few were doing something important, and most just looked busy in front of their computers, browsing the news or communicating over instant messenger. It was the time when cakes presented by grateful clients were consumed in the meeting rooms—carefully cut into equal portions and distributed in paper coffee cups, to be eaten with chopsticks left from takeout orders. On few occasions would anyone leave early.

The workday was officially over at 6 p.m., but it was hard to guess it as everyone kept doing whatever they were doing, until the t’imjang said that it was time to go. Because I was a foreigner and intern, my teammates were very careful that I did not "overwork" and always urged me to leave right after six. They themselves usually stayed till about seven, finishing up the days’ work, as they said, though from my earlier experience of working at a Korean office it was more of a performative act to demonstrate one’s zeal to the superiors, who indeed might be staying late because they had unfinished work to do. That said, there were frequent occasions when ad makers needed to stay late, either to work on an competitive presentation or to come up with ideas for the next day's meeting.

**The splendour and misery of advertising work**

The exhausting demands of advertising work are captured in an essay by a former copywriter. Written as a diary of a kwanggojaengi, the piece follows him through the day as he wakes up at 5:54 am, gets to the office through Seoul traffic jams by 7:30 am, starts his morning with headache medicine and heavy, unhappy thoughts,

As I work, what I am afraid of is to fall into a routine. If you keep digging the same well, the spade moves automatically. I have been doing this for about 7 years, and it is easy to spot the easy route. . . . But if I start digging my well that way, it will become

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21 I briefly worked as a contract translator and interpreter for a South Korean software company in December 1998-January 1999 and May 1999.
my grave. This project must be different from the last one, different from what other people have done; in the business I am immersed in, I always have to put in at least a minimal effort so that no one can imitate it. Is it why they say kwanggojaengi live 10 years less than an average person? (Pae Chun-hyŏng 1996)

The reader follows the kwanggojaengi to meeting with the agency’s client at 10 am, when his proposal gets rejected and the advertiser demands a new campaign idea in a day. Back to the office by 1 p.m., the kwanggojaengi gets nagged by a creative director for not being assertive enough with the advertiser. In the afternoon the protagonist stops by his house only to leave again for a 6 p.m. shoot with a celebrity, who could fit it in her schedule only from 9 p.m. till 9 a.m. After everything is set up for the shoot at 10 p.m., the protagonist goes home again to rest for 3-4 hours and then heads back to the office to the editing room. Throughout the essay, the kwanggojaengi craves the company of his wife, he expresses extreme gratitude for her support and understanding and at the same time he feels sorry that he neglects her. This essay conveys the extremes of the advertising work, and while not every day was so demanding, such packed schedules were entirely imaginable.

In 2008, an online posting circulated in advertising-related sites that compared the work pace of an advertising agency in Korea with the workplace of an advertising agency in Australia. The writer had worked as a graphic designer and an art director for 11 years in Korea before immigrating. Having worked about two years in Australia, she bragged about the leisurely pace of work:

> What is meant by “tight deadline” [in an Australian advertising agency] is totally different. The manager says that he is worried about a tight deadline and transfers some work to others, which is totally different from Korea. To me, who habitually worked at night till 12 or 1 a.m. 20 days per month in Korea, it is laughable when they describe that as “busy” or “urgent.”

My acquaintances in the agency did not talk much about working overtime, perhaps accepting it as a standard work practice at an advertising agency, and for that matter, in many other Korean offices. Once when I was having lunch with Pak-pujang he was eating uncharacteristically little, and when I asked, he said that he was not hungry because he had a really big breakfast since he spent the night in a nearby sauna having stayed in the office till dawn, trying to come up with ideas. While few advertising workers would go to such extremes, it was not unheard of, especially for ambitious men who did not have families. On another occasion, Choi-t’imjang,

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when sending me home at 6 p.m., sighed deeply at the prospect of having dinner with clients in the evening, saying that it would be his third night of work-related drinking in a row and he would really rather go home and sleep.

Entertaining clients was an important aspect of advertising work, about which I learnt only anecdotally. I was never invited for those outings, perhaps due to a number of factors—my gender, foreignness and the privacy of information exchanged. As I pieced from conversations and interviews, mostly with people outside of Sŏngsim, such gatherings involved a few rounds of heavy drinking and often ended in room-salons, with young female entertainers.23

I was told by advertising workers at Sŏngsim and other agencies that, in comparison with independent agencies, which do not have a mother-chaebŏl client to fall back on, Sŏngsim was not busy at all, they have few late night meetings and what seemed hectic to me was leisurely in comparison with other agencies. Many told me that Sŏngsim was a very traditional agency because it was old and affiliated with a chaebŏl; following its chaebŏl’s corporate culture, Sŏngsim “old-fashionably” valued long-term employment and stressed teamwork over individual competition, unlike other agencies. As one of the copywriters told me praising the traditional values of Sŏngsim, few people got fired even if they were not particularly good at their job, yet her colleague, who was present at the conversation, objected that because of that many young talented recruits found Sŏngsim boring and moved to more exciting, less traditional agencies.

What makes advertising work stressful is not just the hectic tempo but also the high stakes of advertising activity. Advertising workers are aware that the amount of money that an advertiser invests in a campaign is huge and it is up to them to make it not wasted. The responsibility is particularly heavy with small-scale advertisers, which hope to reverse their fortunes with an expensive TV advertising campaign. Pak-pujang talked about how he felt an enormous responsibility when he was working on an account for an ice-cream franchise:

> In the case of Hongbok Confectionaries, there is a [franchise] brand of premium ice-cream, Romantique. I have a particular attachment to this brand in comparison with other items because, in the case of Romantique, regular people set up a franchise shop. . . . Each ice-cream cafe is a property of regular people. . . . So depending on how

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23 Cho Youmi (Cho U-mi), a managing director of Korea’s branch of Leo Burnett and one of the highest ranking female advertising professionals in Korea, shared how socializing with clients, usually old men who represented the advertiser company, frustrated women wishing to make careers in advertising since it was awkward if not dangerous for them to follow male colleagues and clients to such establishments. She told me that her own strategy was to entertain the clients herself—she built a reputation for being funny and entertaining, she told clients many jokes, she made them laugh and, after ensuring that they had a good time with her, she sent them to a room-salon on their own (interview, May 15, 2010).
I do [advertising], the livelihood of these people can go in or out. For these people, it took a lot of money to set up an ice-cream cafe. Some people could have invested all their retirement package into this. They need to earn a lot of money from their cafe, if they do a franchise. They also need to pay Hongbok Confectionaries. So depending on how well I do, it can be decided whether those people earn money and live well or whether they don’t. For research purposes, I dropped by a few franchise shops and introduced myself, “I am the one in charge of Romantique advertising,” and the owners pleaded with really honest, really desperate expression, “Please make advertising well so that our business goes well.” So I could not help feeling responsible. “I should try even harder,” I thought. “It is not just about the sales of the Hongbok Confectionaries, but I can definitely have an influence on people like that.” When I think that, I cannot be lazy.

The responsibility for the advertiser’s money translates into the pressure of coming up with good ideas. To quote Pak-pujang again,

When ideas don’t appear, you just want to die. Very much so. You cannot sleep at night, the stress is heavy. Tomorrow you must bring in some idea, but you have no suitable idea. Others will all come with something, but I have nothing to bring in. You just want to die.

The reverse of this torture of generating an idea is the elation of having come up with a good one. Creative director Pyo Moon-Song of Daehong Communications compared it with running a marathon to experience the runner’s high, “It’s really hard and you suffer in the process but then there is a moment, the death moment (sajŏm), and then there is euphoria that makes it all worth it, the runner’s high.” He stressed that the greatest reward of advertising work was not money but the satisfaction one feels when coming up with a good idea, and it is this creative roller-coaster that often invited comments that advertising workers were “advertising addicts.”

This constant pressure to generate ideas transforms the overall outlook of advertising workers, subordinating everyday activities to searching for advertising ideas. A creative director Yi Pong-jae of Cheil Worldwide shared with a journalist in a media interview:

I have a habit of applying everything to advertising. When someone shares their sorrows with me, I should give them strength, I should console them, but I think how to use it for an advertising idea. When I listen to someone speaking earnestly, I think, what would be a good way to express it in advertising? This is a very bad habit. Sometimes I am afraid that I have developed such a habit—like photographers cannot

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24 Romantique brand and Hongbok Confectionaries are pseudonyms.
see the world unless they are looking through a camera less, I cannot see things unless I see them with the eyes of advertising. (Yi Pong-jae, Yim Mu-sŏng and Yi Chi-ŭn 2004)

It is from this advertising-centred perspective that ad makers consume books and social theory. As Pak-pujang explained about the Marx portrait, the inspiration he got there was from Marx’ theory of surplus value, which inspired him to find ways to present the commodities he advertised as equivalent to more than they actually were in reality. Having studied cultural studies during his Masters’, Pak-pujang had a rich repertoire to draw from: once he showed me an old creative brief where he used Roland Barthes’ concept of ex-nomination for a potato chips campaign. On another occasion, he lent me his copy of John Fiske’s *Television*, and, as I couldn’t help noticing from his notes on the margins, Fiske’s critiques of mass media—such as the exploited dichotomies of feminine and masculine, passive and active, dark and light and so on—were immediately useful for advertising campaigns. My initial impulse was to see this as an opportunistic appropriation and critique it, yet my own experience of coming up with ideas for a campaign (to be described later in the chapter) sensitized me to how difficult it is to say something not entirely banal about a very banal commodity and to how any help—be it from cultural studies or from a random observation on the subway—were all welcome. Pak-pujang’s creative appropriation of cultural studies testifies how the intensity and high demands of advertising work compel advertising workers to invest their subjectivity into being a kwanggojaengi and process everything they encounter as fodder for advertising. I suggested this interpretation to Pak-pujang during one of our long interviews, when I brought up his Marx portrait, but he said that there was really no good reason for him to have Marx in his cubicle because Marx would have thought of him as a “bad guy” (nappŭn nom) helping the capitalists.

As for Pak-pujang, for most advertising workers as much as advertising work is taxing, it also is perceived as extremely rewarding. Financially it is comparable to other office jobs, but, in terms of degrees of alienation from the object of one’s labour and in the office itself, it provides attractive openings. Unlike the above-quoted essay writer, who emphasized the alienating aspects of advertising work, most ad makers, who stay in their jobs, while occasionally complain about the long working hours, tiredness and lack of sleep, still stress the excitement of being a kwanggojaengi.

Most of my interviewees from Sŏngsim and other advertising agencies told me that they could not imagine themselves working in a regular office. Cho Youmi (Cho U-mi), the managing

25 On a similar note, Brian Moeran shares a fascinating story about how, while doing a fieldwork at a Japanese advertising agency, he took advantage of his knowledge of structuralism and Levi-Strauss to generate ideas for an advertising campaign (Moeran 1996).
director at Leo Burnett Korea, told me, for example, that she would be unable to fit anywhere else, because she was “too emotional.” While in other companies in the past it was a problem and people thought she was “crazy,” in advertising it worked to her advantage. Choi-t’imjang got the idea to work in advertising after he visited a number of advertising agencies for his MBA thesis in marketing. He was so impressed with the work environment that he did not want to seek employment anywhere else. Indeed, in comparison with other Korean offices, an advertising agency offered a freer environment as workers were given a lot of autonomy in how to perform their tasks, individual quirks tolerated if not encouraged. Many praised the variety the advertising work offered because, as ad makers work on different accounts, they learn about different industries and meet new people. A young copywriter confessed that she got bored fast so the advertising work was perfect for her since with advertising one always worked on different products and advertising itself was only 15 seconds long.

Advertising work offers a rare opportunity for de-alienation when workers can actually see through the results of their labour circulating in the world. For Choi-t’imjang, for example, the most attractive thing about working in advertising was immediately seeing the outcome of one's efforts, as an advertisement on TV or in the newspaper. For him, the process of translating immaterial thoughts into a concrete thing that existed in the world was appealing in itself, and in that he said he related to people who designed buildings. Pak-pujang shared this sentiment,

> When I think up a good idea it is very, how to put it... very satisfying. In itself. It is satisfying, and also when through that idea the advertiser's sales go up, or the brand image improves, when such results begin to appear, I think to myself, 'I've done properly the work that I am doing.' That's why I keep doing this.

The immediacy of results was linked to positive effects in lives of people, as discussed above—improved livelihoods of rice farmers, saved jobs of construction workers, greener environment. As I presented it so far, discourses within the advertising agency by and large mirror the outside discourses about advertising, while accounting for the unique challenges of advertising work, such as dealing with advertisers. To address the gap between the discourses about advertising work and the actual advertising that circulates in the everyday, I offer an ethnographic account of coming up with an advertising campaign. My goal is to show what kind of considerations go into generating an advertising campaign, where creativity and concern for the masses come in—and where they come out.
Creative work at the advertising agency

AEs' planning meeting: Creativity on the ground

One of the mornings early into my internship, Choi-t’imjang called a planning meeting with Pak-pujang and myself. We immediately proceeded to one of the small meeting rooms—printouts from previous competitive pitches hanging on the walls and absence of windows made it feel rather drab and depressing. As we sat down at the big table in the centre, Choi-t’imjang put two boxes of two kinds of snacks and explained: The client was concerned that sales of one of its most popular items, chocolate snack Miocaro,26 were stagnating, and the agency was to devise a new advertising campaign as a solution. There was a complication, however, because the client insisted that the snack be advertised together with another snack, chocolate cookie sandwich Ch’ok’o, because they both had cocoa as an ingredient.

As Choi-t’imjang spoke, Pak-pujang opened the two boxes and fondled the individually packaged snacks, closely inspecting the design and the appearance of the snacks themselves. Miocaro, the main protagonist of the campaign was a big round chocolate-covered two-layered chocolate spongy cake with white cream in between the layers and its sidekick Ch’ok’o was a smaller and thinner cookie sandwich—hard chocolate cookies decorated with elaborate ornaments, held together by a thin layer of cream. Both Pak-pujang and Choi-t’imjang knew these snacks very well, so they just opened the packaging and examined them. Pak-pujang insisted that I eat one of each cookies, and though I was not hungry and generally disliked snacks I complied, and they intensely watch me chewing. Both snacks seemed too sweet to me, and I said diplomatically that they were sweet and chocolaty. Pak-pujang pressed, "Are they moist?" and I said that Miocaro was indeed pleasantly moist and the cookie sandwich had nice crispness to it. Pak-pujang and Choi-t’imjang nodded approvingly and waited for more insights from my fresh perspective. I commented on the dramatic contrast between the dark chocolate layers and the white cream in both snacks, and they agreed that it was indeed a beautiful contrast.

Pak-pujang first proposed that the campaign played up the blackness. "Black" (he used the word in English) is delicious, black is elite, premium (kogüp ida), Pak-pujang said, and Choi-t’imjang nodded. I thought that a "black cookie" sounded unappetizing. They brainstormed associations with black, and Pak-pujang was instantaneously energized playing with associations—he brought up special black watches that were used in the British army, then he talked about black holes, suggesting that falling for the cookie taste was like falling in a black

26 Product names in this section are pseudonyms.
hole. I cautiously pointed out that neither of the cookies was actually black but dark brown, but Choi-t’imjang said that that degree of precision would not matter. Pak-pujang said that "dark" would work instead of "black," too.

The second idea was to play up the visual appearance of the products—dark chocolate layers and the white cream—either as contrast or as harmony. Choi-t’imjang stressed that the client wanted the cocoa to be the main selling point, and played with the idea of using "It has cocoa in it" as the main concept. Choi-t’imjang and Pak-pujang liked the cocoa idea best because it met the advertiser’s request to stress cocoa, which was the rationale for advertising the two snacks together. Thinking of the aisles in Korean convenience stores filled with all kinds of chocolate products, I asked how many products in the market had cocoa as an ingredient and whether it was truly unique to Miocaro and Ch’ok’o, and Choi-t’imjang explained that many did, but the client had the best processing technology in Korea and naturally wanted to emphasize it. We agreed to meet again at 5 p.m. and discuss directions for a creative brief to be presented to the creative team.

Coming up with ideas, falling for clichés

Trying to earn my keep as an intern, I worked hard on coming up with an idea for the campaign. As I said during the meeting, the most likeable thing for me was the contrast in colours between dark brown and white, so at first I focused on that direction. I was reminded of another campaign for cookies, which juxtaposed the cookie, two biscuits connected with chocolate cream in the middle, to a picture of a chocolate woman and a beige biscuit man united in a passionate kiss.27 I began to search for visually stark contrasts, but for some reason only zebras came to mind, blocking other thoughts. The problem with zebras was that I could not think of any appetizing way to connect them to the cookies. The idea of bringing up zebras because of the connection to Africa (where, as I knew, the cocoa beans were imported from) seemed far-fetched and again I could not think of how to translate that association into a "key insight," a stark critical point that sums up the product and conveys the rewards from consuming it.

After a quarter of an hour, my mind was swirling with advertising clichés, recalling random campaigns which had something to do with snacks, cookies and chocolates—Kit Kat about "having a break," Bounty’s "taste of paradise"—and zebras were quietly grazing at the background. Getting frustrated with the cacophony of advertising slogans in my head, I asked myself, Why would anyone want to consume this snack? I could not imagine myself having either of those two cookies, unless to demonstrate my eagerness as an intern at the advertising

agency that held the account. I thought that I would probably have Miocaro or Ch’ok’o for breakfast if there was nothing else around. But generally it seemed like an unhealthy, sugary, fattening snack and there was no good reason to consume it in my opinion. From there I concluded that the only reason to consume those cookies would be irrational desire, therefore what needed to be emphasized was pleasure and indulgence to be enjoyed when consuming the cookie. Again, from my personal perspective, I was not that impressed with the taste, but I thought that the stable sales figures indicated that there must be enough people who regularly buy them and, since it cannot be for any rational reason, it must be for the taste that they must find enjoyable. I caught myself thinking something like "to convince people to buy this we should say that cocoa is rich, to equate cocoa with pleasure and indulgence" and immediately was scandalized at how fast I slipped into cheap advertising tricks. Having failed to identify the use value of the commodity, I resigned to the strategy of commodity aesthetics.

As I kept struggling with generating an idea, I registered an intuitive urge to work the themes of desire and seduction, as those were the associations chocolate triggered in my mind, quite in line with advertising discourse, as I noted to myself. As I was writing down "cocoa>chocolate>sensuality," I realized I had no idea who the target audience was as such a message would be inappropriate for children. The target consumers were not mentioned at all during our planning meeting. When I brought up the topic of potential customers and the use of the product, Choi-t’imjang talked about how the advertiser wanted the two kinds of cookies advertising together because they both had cocoa in it and I did not push it because it seemed more important to minimize my interference with the habitual unfolding of the meeting. In retrospect, the time at the meeting was spent on strategizing how to please the advertiser.

In the end, after spending about two hours thinking about chocolate snacks and their possible attractions, I jotted down a creative brief that linked cocoa and pleasure, linking it to fun rather than sensuality in order not to exclude children, and felt painfully embarrassed that I could not think of anything less banal. I was frustrated at how my mind tricked me into thinking along the most cliché advertising lines, like linking cookies and primal instincts—something I would critique if looking at advertising from my normal vantage point, that of a critical advertising consumer, not a desperate advertising producer. I consoled myself that it was my first advertising assignment and that a career in advertising was never my aspiration anyway.

**Cocoa Black**

The meeting was postponed twice, and when we finally gathered, as I expected (and was somewhat relieved), my idea was shot down. Both Choi-t’imjang and Pak-pujang were very
diplomatic about it, which I appreciated at the time but especially later as I observed a Division Head viciously tearing apart novice presenters during a PT preparation meeting. The ideas Choi-t’imjang and Pak-pujang brought were not radically different from the first meeting, and again we discussed the merits on focusing on the cocoa or playing up the visual contrast. In the end, the brief presented to the creatives proposed two key insights. The first one equated blackness with deliciousness, which was explained by cocoa. The "creative tips" that the AEs supplied to the creative team offered a number of execution strategies: presenting the cookie as a "black hole" where one can fall into because of the irresistible cocoa taste; suggesting that the secret of black is cocoa; suggesting that black is not the end, but a beginning—of the new era of cocoa. As Pak-pujang told me later, Wikipedia was an invaluable source of ideas, and he spent a great deal of time studying English-language Wikipedia pages; his propositions for symbolisms for black were inspired by it. The second suggested concept proposed to focus on cocoa itself, stressing that the cookies were delicious because they were made with cocoa. The idea of playing up with contrasts was seriously considered during the meeting but dismissed because it would be too burdensome to ask the creatives to consider three approaches.

In the end, the commercial featured a popular boy band, whose members dressed in black testified that their favourite colour was black, particularly "cocoa black" as they performed a pop dance to flamenco music. One of the band members was shown taking a big bite of the cookie and then the band danced holding up the cookie box. The advertisement did not seem to have a particular resonance and was lost in the advertising clutter. It was another mainstream advertisement that followed the formula of showing celebrities, adding a fancy soundtrack and special effects.

My creative fiasco made me more appreciative of the advertising work and also less scathing about cliché advertisements as I imagined behind them someone like myself, trying to sell to others a commodity they themselves did not find particularly attractive but having to come up with a "key insight" that might convince others to buy it—or at least convince bosses and the advertiser that a reasonable effort was made in that direction. In an oft-quoted passage from his memoir, acclaimed creative David Ogilvy wrote, “I . . . resign accounts when I lose confidence in the product. It is flagrantly dishonest for an advertising agent to urge consumers to buy a product which he would not allow his own wife to buy” (Ogilvy 1963: 65). Few ad makers, and few advertising agencies, can afford such a luxury. On the one hand, advertised products are very similar within the same industry and in too many cases their use-value is questionable. On the other, the advertising industry is so competitive that few agencies can turn down clients. No wonder that such creative challenges often lead to trivial solutions.
Later I learnt that advertising chocolate snacks with integrity was attempted by "advertising genius" Yi Jeseok. Yi produced a campaign for fair-trade chocolate, promoting it as “honest chocolate.” True to his vision of advertising as first of all serving the people, Yi created commercials and posters that draw attention to the “honest” drawbacks of the chocolate: some of the advertisements apologized for the expensive price, mediocre taste and simple package design of the product, whereas other episodes warned consumers that if they ate too much chocolate, their teeth would rot and they themselves would get fat (Yi 2010).

**Seniority, gender and internal hierarchies**

As a foreigner and as an intern with a “nice” team, I experienced the internal hierarchies within the advertising agency only minimally. Yet I could not help noticing that the agency was not a solidarity circle of like-minded creative people who together bargain with narrow-minded advertisers and conservative reviewers. Like other Korean offices (Janelli and Janelli 1993), advertising agencies are very hierarchical, promotions often follow seniority over talent and women are structurally marginalized to stay in junior positions.

Office hierarchies and power dynamics were laid bare during PT preparation meetings, where the taskforce of 8-12 AEs and creatives proposed individual ideas for the competitive pitch and debated them. I observed two such meetings during my fieldwork, for home water purifiers, whose manufacturer wanted to increase its market share, and for a funeral insurance company, whose main problem was public mistrust in such services. During both meetings, I witnessed how ideas of my acquaintances were evaluated, dismissed and rejected by the Division Head, who did not mince his criticisms. The Division Head was a rather charismatic creative type who was rarely seen in the office, usually in relation to competitive pitches or client visits. To get to his private office in the corner, he paced kingly by our cubicles apparently not registering the existence of anyone below the t’imjang level in the office hierarchy. During the presentations, he oozed impatience: he would quickly glance at powerpoint slides as they changed and then turn his back towards the screen, staring at the wall with the most bored look as the presenter was explaining. During the discussion, even though the floor was open, the Division Head dominated the debate and only one or two members of the taskforce, who were the closest to the Division Head in age, volunteered their opinions, mostly paraphrasing what the Division Head said, which he himself pointed out with irritation.

The recent hegemony of gender equality discourses in Korea, the creative nature of work and impossibility to fake good ideas somewhat shattered the glass ceiling for women, but it was nevertheless present. Most visibly, at the time of my internship, even though the agency
employed many women, all senior positions were held by men, the highest-ranking woman held the position of kukchang, the 5th rank in the agency's hierarchy. I was told that was because the gender equality policies started not that long ago women simply did not have enough time to progress far enough through the ranks, and indeed about three months after I finished my participant observation, some women were promoted to managerial t'imjang positions. Where hierarchies stood out most was in informal socializing, such as who went to lunch with whom. Whereas for men, it was either their team members or other men of the same rank (or outside acquaintances and clients), for women it was either their team members or other women regardless of their rank. It was only with women that I encountered a taeri (2nd rank) of one team having lunch with a pujang (4th rank) of another team.

During one of our long lunches with female Sŏngsimians the conversation meandered to how difficult it was for them to balance advertising work with having children. Chin-a, a copywriter in her early 30s at the rank of ch'ajang (3rd rank) and a mother of a 5-year-old, explained to me that to convey professional demeanour women downplayed the fact that they had families and she herself "forgot" about hers as soon as she entered the office. As she said, if a man had a picture of his child in his cubicle, he was "family-oriented" (kajŏngjŏk ida), a positive characteristic, but if a woman displayed a picture of her child, people said "she thinks only about home," meaning she was unprofessional. Perhaps it was to convey professionalism that women were eager to use sex appeal in advertising campaigns they worked on—while in private conversations they mocked their male superiors who favoured "sex code" strategies because they enjoyed picking models and watching such advertisements being made.

I was surprised to realize that women like Chin-a—in their late 20s or early 30s, critical, ambitious and determined to have both a family and a career—were behind some of the racier advertising campaigns I noticed while in Korea. I got to know female creatives from Daehong Communications who were proud of their work for "Cool" soju campaign, which featured singer Uee perform a sexually suggestive dance and was controversial for its copy, which implied that it was okay for young people to "think casual" (the slogan of the campaign) about sex. The women behind the campaign saw it as empowering and were hoping that young people, whom the advertisement targeted, would perceive it in the same way. The members of the team also worked on the campaign for an energy drink, which was advertised by showing a skirt zipper getting slowly undone on a woman's naked thigh as the drink can was getting open. The

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28 The most controversial advertisement of the campaign featured Uee saying to a date, "I'm cool (nan k'ul' hae). . . Am I really your first?" to which the guy stumbles and other men around are shown all unable to come up with a coherent answer. Uee laughs and tells them, “Think casual” (in English), and then performs a “cool shot dance” (k’ul’ syat daensŭ) consisting of energetic squats and pelvic thrusts.
campaign was criticized by netizens for its vulgarity and even drew attention of the review board. As the female creatives explained, they envisioned a parallel advertisement of a shirt getting unbuttoned on an attractive man, which would balance the message, but the male creative director in charge of the campaign killed that idea as "boring." It might be boring for a man, but for a woman it would have been fun to watch, one of them commented. That there were not enough "sex appeal" advertisements with male models was the only criticism of sex appeal use in advertising that I heard from women in the advertising industry. Paradoxically, endlessly rehearsing the axiom that "sex sells" was another way for women to prove their professionalism in the advertising industry.

**Conclusion**

Advertising work, despite being structured by multi-layered hierarchies, offers openings for pursuing creativity and for feeling good about the work itself and its contribution to society. Just as advertising consumers refuse to spurn advertising and insist on treating it as more than a sales messages, so do ad makers as they strive to produce advertisements which would do more than just present a commodity in an advantageous light. Ad makers find opportunities for both creative expression and articulating their worldviews, taking advantage of generous advertising budgets and their roles as cultural producers. Particularly corporate image advertisements, not tied to the characteristics of a specific product, offer a lot of room for advancing one's visions of a progressive society, creating conditions of possibility for Korean advertisements to promote humanism and gravitate towards public-service messages.

Advertising is a profit-seeking business and there is a tension between the ad makers’ desire to make resonating, socially relevant advertisements and the advertisers’ use of advertising as a sales tool. Whether ad makers like it or not, before they are are creative visionaries they are employees of a capitalist business in service of the client and their creative impulses are either to be channelled in the desired route or be left outside. Work at an advertising agency demands that ad makers discipline their subjectivity to prioritize advertiser’s goals over their own impulses for creative expression. The worst blow to a creative director is when a client reproaches, "What are you, shooting a movie here?" (interview at Sŏngsim, January 19, 2010) The question contains an accusation of unprofessionalism and self-indulgent abuse of the advertiser’s money, making artistic inclinations of ad makers a liability. Seniors at the agency were ready to advise juniors, who got carried away with creative self-expression, to pick up an artistic hobby on the side and channel artistic impulses there. Relatedly, I noticed a common tangent in my interviews with ad makers, when sometimes they would launch a long, emotional
speech about how making advertising was not art, but a skill, quite contrary to what I was used to reading in the advertising industry's publications. Eventually I grew to interpret such a speech not so much as an attempt to convince me but as a reminder to speakers themselves, as a strategy for disciplining themselves to suppress their unwieldy artistic impulses and desires for socially engaged advertisements in order to produce instrumental advertising.

In a sense, "advertising genius" Yi Jeseok is the ideal self of a South Korean kwanggojaengi—enchanted with the creativity discourse, he went with fanaticism about becoming an ad man, yet once he was successful, he bypassed the most lucrative opportunities and focused on producing public-service campaigns. As he explained in his book and in many interviews, when he had his agency job in New York, Yi kept questioning himself whether he was truly happy with what he was doing, "Is money all it takes for a successful life? Are you saying that a successful kwanggojaengi is someone who flies a helicopter to shoot advertisements?" Formulating something that could be a motto for all kwanggojaengi, Yi declares "I will go on dealing with social issues through advertising. I will have a positive influence on society by actively reacting to those issues. Even if mine is a small talent, isn’t it good to contribute it to society?" (2010: 208).
Chapter 5. Advertising Museum: Asserting the hegemonic vision of advertising

As visitors to the Advertising Museum in Seoul step into the museum space, they find themselves in a small circular room, whose entry door immediately shuts behind them as lights go off. From pitch-black darkness a short video, “Origin of advertising,” begins, projected circularly onto the walls of the room, so that one has to keep turning around to see everything. The five-minute video starts with a young boy asking his grandfather about how advertising came to be, and the grandfather opens a thick ancient-looking volume entitled Ad is all (in English) from where history of advertising comes alive. Artful computer animation illustrates the birth of life on the earth, starting from stormy skies and volcanic clouds and continuing into appearance of flora and fauna. Moving from prehistoric times to human civilization, visuals evoke epic moments of Korean history, and the grandfather explains that communication had been a part of human history from the time immemorial and advertising was necessary in ancient times to announce wars and convey information. The boy asks about the beginning of modern advertising. From the pages of the Ad is all emerges a postman riding a bicycle in a pre-automobile modern city and, as he passes by small shops on a busy street, five words are highlighted one by one—"to imagine," "to create," "to communicate," "to move," "to make widely known." As the postman waves farewell, the doors on the opposite end from the entrance automatically slide open and the visitors have successfully moved from the mundane world, where advertising was often just an annoyance, to the museum space, where advertising has become a celebrated object.

When I first visited the museum in June 2009, the video seemed surreal in its enthusiastic embrace of advertising as a means of creative communication and complete disavowal of its commercial imperatives. When on my second visit I questioned the Museum Curator, Mr. Kim, he explained that the basic message of the video, which foreshadowed the message of the Advertising Museum itself, was that "advertising is information." "Because it [the video] was made so that secondary school children could understand advertising, it might seem childish (yuch’ihada) to people of older age," he added.

To me, who had been reading critical literature on advertising, which holds it responsible for many ills of the contemporary life, from children’s obesity to sensationalism and triviality of mass media, the video was not so much childish as ominous. My first impulse thus was to

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1 Ad is All is the English name of an advertising professionals’ association, which was briefly discussed in chapter 4.
critique the museum stance, exemplified by the video—for encouraging the viewer to appreciate advertising aesthetically, for celebrating advertising as useful information, for discouraging scrutiny of advertisers’ motives and for ignoring advertising’s controversial effects on society. Yet as, in the course of my research, I reflected more on the museum exhibit and on the role assigned to advertising in South Korea, the premise of the museum began to seem more understandable. By asserting the primacy of advertising’s communicative functions and celebrating advertising’s benefits to society, the video gave a rather fair representation of what advertising is hoped to achieve in South Korea. Training museum visitors to appreciate advertising for its aesthetics and benefits to society does not equal, I argue, creating docile consumers but rather reproduces a proactive advertising public that puts pressure on the advertising industry to comply with this idealistic vision advertising and to subordinate the commercial objectives of advertising to its social applications as a means of public communication. Contrary to the neoliberal spirit of the times that encourages entrusting advertising to the advertisers’ discretion and leaving it to the market to deal with abuses, the museum trains a new generation of appreciative, sophisticated and demanding advertising publics—not cynical consumers of advertising.

This chapter thus looks at the Advertising Museum as a site where the parameters of advertising as a social institution are asserted and reproduced; it also draws out how the cultural struggles over advertising are mapped onto the broader political-economic context. Treating the Advertising Museum as a site of contestations that go beyond the regimes of advertising industry, I draw attention to inconsistencies that sneaked in the museum narrative. I read them against recent challenges to the existing advertising regulation, particularly the neoliberal attack on Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation (KOBACO), the symbol of the priority of public service functions of advertising, to show how the vision of advertising that acknowledged advertising as a valuable resource and granted moral and legal ownership of it to the public is challenged. Overall, I read the museum project as an attempt to secure hegemonic status for a particular vision of advertising by leaning on the cultural authority of the museum and by inculcating desired views to schoolchildren, the target audience of the museum.

The first section outlines the context in which the Advertising Museum opened in November 2008. Specifically, I provide more background on the museum founder, KOBACO, which has been a state-sanctioned monopolist distributor of broadcast advertising time and a major player in the broadcast advertising industry since 1981. I describe the KOBACO-mediated system of broadcast advertising sales, discuss the ends to which it was a means and trace how challenges to the decades-old state monopoly on broadcast advertising sales have intensified, culminating
in the Constitutional Court decision against KOBACO around the time when the museum opened. In the second section, I introduce the museum itself, its space, organization and visitors. The third section describes my first visit to the Advertising Museum in June 2009; offering my reading of the museum narrative, I elicit its rationales and draw attention to its contradictions. In the fourth section, my interpretations are contrasted with the explanations provided during a guided tour of the museum by the museum curator and a South Korean advertising historian. I ponder the implications of the museum’s historical narrative hinging on the freedom to advertise and its blossoming in South Korea in the ’00s. The following section draws out how the museum deals with commercial functions of advertising and shows that it purports public service advertising as an ethos for all advertising in South Korea. At the same time, I draw attention to the inconsistencies in the museum narrative and particularly to its inability to make a case for the necessity of KOBACO as a beneficial regulatory institution. The last section discusses the museum’s closing video about the future of advertising against the all-positive reactions to the museum gleaned from the internet. In conclusion, I revisit contestations about KOBACO to question what is at stake in framing advertising as a resource to be exploited collectively.

**The Advertising Museum in the context**

The Advertising Museum officially opened on November 7, 2008. A five-billion-won (over $4 million) investment from KOBACO’s public fund, the Museum was in preparation from the early ’00s, as three series of committees comprised of representatives of KOBACO itself, advertising circles and museum experts decided on the museum concept and exhibits. The museum opening was a formal affair, with a dozen prominent advertising scholars and representatives of advertising associations simultaneously cutting the ribbon and then receiving a museum tour. The media covered it briefly, not bothering to go beyond the official press release. Perhaps it was not such a big deal because the museum was the second advertising museum to open in Korea, the first one having opened two and a half years earlier in the south-eastern city of Kyŏngju. Known as Museum Q—a pun on the English word "cue," which in Korea has been appropriated to signal the beginning of video recording in filming sets—the first advertising museum was affiliated with the Department of Broadcasting, Mass Media and Advertising at Kyŏngju University and spearheaded by one of its professors, a former adman. Sponsored by a wide range of advertisers, advertising companies and associations as well as KOBACO, Museum Q had its own building not too far from Kyŏngju’s historical attractions and celebrated advertising profession with exhibits on "auteurs" of Korean advertising and on the genealogy of Korean advertising agencies.
The Advertising Museum in Seoul declared its mission as "to promote advertising industry and its culture" (KOBACO 2008). According to the museum curator, the museum was needed because negative opinions on advertising still existed in Korea, and it was the social responsibility of KOBACO as a public corporation to educate the public on those issues (Interview, June 18, 2009). To me, negative attitudes towards advertising seemed long extinct, gone with the radical revolutionaries of the 1980s. However, “promoting advertising culture” was more than just re-staging already won hegemonic struggles for the pleasure of winners. Rather, it signalled the intensified contestations over the necessity of public oversight over the advertising industry, as indicated by the context in which the museum germinated.

The museum founder, KOBACO was a symbol, an advocate and, as far as terrestrial broadcasting was concerned, an executor of the vision of advertising that invested it with public-interest purposes. Established by Chun Doo-hwan to ensure the public control over airwaves in 1981, KOBACO has transcended its initial purpose as the tool of the authoritarian government to control mass media, and its most oppressive duties were either transferred to other entities or gradually abolished. By the '00s, KOBACO has firmly grown into its assigned role of protecting the public nature of broadcasting as well as facilitating and promoting positive contributions that the advertising industry could make to society. For people unfamiliar with the intricacies of the advertising and broadcasting industries, KOBACO primarily stood for public service advertising, being the main sponsor of public-service advertising in South Korea. KOBACO nurtured this reputation by flashing its name at the end of every campaign it produced, by conducting an annual national festival on public-service advertising as well by sponsoring a $10,000 grand-prix for public-service advertising category at annual Busan International Advertising Festival, which made it the only international advertising festival to provide such a prize. Moreover, KOBACO, through its own PR activities, touted itself as the defender of public interest, and particularly of minority voices, in broadcasting—this is how it was lauded by small religious and regional broadcasters, who stood to benefit from the KOBACO-centred system of advertising distribution, as well as by some citizens' organizations concerned with consumption and media. As a representative of People’s Coalition for Media Reform commented, arguing for the benefits of the KOBACO system, “For all broadcasters, KOBACO is like a breast that feeds them financially through advertising.”

Yet the vision of advertising as a public resource, which KOBACO epitomized and from which it drew its legitimacy, had been repeatedly contested. South Korea’s advertising regulation in

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general was often criticized for interfering with free trade by the advertising industry and mainstream broadcasting circles, by the Korea Advertisers Association, by proponents of free market among politicians and government regulators as well as by international observers. Specifically KOBACO was blamed for distorting market prices for advertising and removing incentives for broadcasters to produce popular programs. The push for deregulation came after the WTO Uruguay Round (1986-1994), during which South Korea committed to opening its advertising market starting from 1995, to remove entry barriers for international advertising agencies.³ The removal of KOBACO's monopoly was one of the contentious points in the negotiations, and the intention to introduce competition in the broadcast advertising sales and shake up the old public corporation was voiced by most newly appointed KOBACO’s heads, all of whom failed to act on it in a consequential way. Throughout the ‘00s, Korea’s Fair Trade Commission would make critical statements about KOBACO violating the principles of a free market and express various degrees of commitment to eradicate its monopoly as an obstacle to free competition, but again nothing ever came out of those declarations.⁴ The free trade arguments were also repeatedly voiced by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which also consistently urged abolition of KOBACO's monopoly. In 2000, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism proposed a law that would introduce a private media representative for private broadcasters, thus setting up a system of competition between public and private television in terrestrial broadcasting.⁵ The initiative, however, fizzled out due to political wrangling.⁶ In 2005, it was revived by parliamentarian Ch’ong Pyŏng-kuk for Grand National Party (GNP), whereas a more radical bill was simultaneously developed by Democratic Party’s Son Pong-suk, who argued for introduction of more then three media representatives and removing regulations that interfere with free competition in the sector.⁷ In 2007, in the wake of signing


the KorUS FTA, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism renewed its critiques against KOBACO's monopoly, stressing inevitability of transition due to possibilities of investor-state disputes.8

The challenges to the vision of advertising that commits it to public service culminated with the election of president Lee Myung-bak, who made it his priority to deregulate the media industry. The deregulatory impulse gained momentum in 2008, when the advertising and media industries were shaken up by two Constitutional Court decisions. First, on June 26, 2008, the Constitutional Court found unconstitutional the existing system of before-the-fact advertising review by an industry board (Korea Advertising Review Board, briefly discussed in chapter 3), on the grounds that the industry board was authorized by the government and hence its review amounted to state censorship, which violated the principles of the freedom of speech.

And then, some five months later on November 27, 2008, the Constitutional Court ruled that KOBACO’s then 27-year-old monopoly on selling advertising time for terrestrial television and radio broadcasters was unconstitutional, on the grounds that it infringed on the right of freedom of occupation (of private advertising agencies), guaranteed by the Constitution.9 Rather than recognizing KOBACO as a protector of public interest, the Court found it to be an obstacle to free competition. Characteristically, enhancing the public control of advertising—for example, making KOBACO truer to its mandate of public corporation by introducing a public board of directors—was not even on the agenda of the debates that followed the Constitutional Court decision, which ordered to find a better way to manage broadcast advertising within one year. The Court’s rulings were enthusiastically welcomed by the advertising industry and mainstream media, but vehemently condemned by small broadcasters and some citizens’ organizations. For example, the joint statement by the National Union of Media Workers and labour unions of Christian Broadcasting System and Buddhism Broadcasting System warned, “If KOBACO is abolished and private media representatives are set up, broadcasters will have to compete to make more sensational programs to attract advertisers and will not make programs for public interest.”10 The two rulings destabilized the institutional structures that materialized

10 Kim Rahn. KOBACO’s Ad Monopoly Ruled Constitutional, The Korea Times, November 27, 2009, accessed
the public control over flows of advertising messages and revenues, and the social field of South Korean advertising was set adrift.

These challenges to the vision of advertising that privileges its public functions over market logic fit with the broader political-economic context, specifically the ascendance of neoliberalism and the conservative turn after South Korea's democratization of the late 1980s. In the economic sphere, the developmental state model was exhausted by the 1980s, as the traditional competitive advantages that led South Korea's export-oriented economic growth—cheap labour and protectionist barriers for local industries—were eroded by growing power of organized labour and by intensified international pressures on South Korea to open its economy for global capital. Moreover, from the 1980s, chaeból had outgrown their dependence on the state and transformed into global players, also pushing for deregulation of economic activities from within, to liberalize trade relations and capital flows to move production abroad and invest surplus capital (Cherry 2005; Harvey 2005: 107-110).

In the political realm, though the grand coalition of oppositional movements in the spring 1987 succeeded in bringing in a procedural democracy and constitutionally guaranteed liberal freedoms, other goals that drove the anti-authoritarian struggles of the 1980s, such as achieving social and economic justice and distributive democracy, were sidelined. The coalition split after the initial victory, the demands of more radical members were marginalized, the labour movement being blamed for economic difficulties of the middle class and losing popular support (Koo 2002; Choi 2005). The narratives of anti-dictatorial freedom gave way to the narratives of trade freedom, the ideals of political freedom understood as a means towards achieving social and economic justice and distributive democracy, were trumped by neoliberal freedom to enterprise and to be regulated by market mechanisms. Along the way, the public/private dichotomy was redrawn to put private businesses and private citizens on the same side against the state which symbolized "the public" as by definition oppressive, inefficient, restrictive.

The hegemony of neoliberalism was cemented after South Korea was hit by the 1997 IMF crisis. As a condition of a bailout package from the IMF, it had to implement a neoliberal restructuring, under the leadership of the first oppositional president, the sad ironies of the situation repeated by many observers and scholars. As Choi Jang Jip argues, the late 1980s democratization in Korea ended with a conservative democracy that excluded the interests of the majority from mainstream politics, because policies of both the ruling party and the opposition party adopted neoliberal orientation (Choi 2005, 2010; also Shin 2006). The conservative hegemony consolidated with the election of Lee Myung-back in 2007, whose pro-
business platform emphasized economic growth and promised that creating favourable conditions for business would produce trickle-down effects for everyone else. Eliminating mechanisms for imposing public claims on advertising fit the broader agenda of deregulation in the media industry.

It was in this atmosphere that the concept of the Advertising Museum was developed and implemented since the early '00s. The museum exhibits were inevitably in dialogue with other discourses on advertising that circulated in Korea at the time, and this fact is symbolically emphasized by the coincidence that the museum officially opened its doors on November 7th, 2008, about three weeks prior to the Constitutional Court decision, which ruled unconstitutional the primary activity of KOBACO, the museum's founder.

**The museum's space and visitors**

The Advertising Museum is located in Chamsil, a prestigious area of Seoul, which combines expensive residential apartments and sleek office towers. The Advertising Museum occupies half of the third floor (912.4 m²) in the high-rise of the Korea Advertising Culture Centre, also financed from KOBACO's public fund. The museum space is organized into five halls. "Socio-cultural history of Korea through advertising" traces the historical development of Korea's advertising history. “Advertising that moves the world” expounds the trends of contemporary Korean advertising, explains “advertising benefits” and introduces international advertising competitions, inviting viewers to watch the winning pieces on interactive computer stands. "The story of advertising production" illustrates advertising planning and production with maquettes, life-size and miniature mannequins as well as educational videos. In the “Advertising experience” hall, visitors can take pictures of themselves and then use them to create an advertisement, writing their own copy and combining provided background sets, commodity images and soundtracks. The last hall is devoted to KOBACO and public-service advertising, of which KOBACO is the main sponsor and producer in South Korea. The transition back to the mundane world is mediated by another darkened room with a video on the future of advertising. Outside the exhibition area, there is a digital archive of Korean advertising, and the floor below houses the Advertising Library.

Even though the museum was conceived, planned and realized under KOBACO's tutelage, it is not a monolithic mouthpiece for KOBACO and carries traces of various agendas, and the members of consultative committees were intentionally drawn from different circles. The museum-planning process was closed to the public, but when I met one of the experts involved, a prominent advertising professor, he shared that there were disagreements about the overall
direction of the museum and he personally pushed for the museum to be solely dedicated to public service advertising because that way it would have been unique in the world. On another occasion, a KOBACO functionary, who was involved in conceptualizing the museum, told me that his own vision for the museum was to design it similarly to the Advertising Museum in Tokyo, where advertisements were presented in situ, busily surrounded by commodities and other artifacts of the epoch. The execution of the museum was outsourced to a specialist company, which inevitably added its own vision, and in many ways, the museum aesthetics—heavy use of life-size mannequins, miniature reproductions of important scenes and artifacts, inevitable “experience” exhibit with a photo-op, sleek chronologies on the walls, sensor-activated sound effects, children as intended audience—ended up similar to other smaller museums in Seoul, such as the Dong-A Newspaper Museum, the Police Museum, the Kimchi Museum or the Presidential Museum. Quoting budget constraints, the contractor thwarted some of the more innovative ideas of the museum planning committees, the KOBACO official shared with disdain.

The Advertising Museum in Seoul is open to the public and charges no entrance fee. However, among my Korean acquaintances, only those who were advertising researchers were aware of the Advertising Museum and even people working in the advertising industry were surprised that such a place existed. As I visited the Advertising Museum half a dozen times during my stay in Korea in 2009-2010, usually I was the sole visitor in the whole museum. Once my solitary viewing was disturbed by a cleaning staff, on another occasion my appearance scared away a young couple who seemed more interested in privacy than in advertising, and another time I ran into a graduate student of advertising from Sweden.

In accordance with the original plan, most museum visitors were school children, who were brought on school trips for a one-hour tour of the museum followed by a two-hour talk about advertising by KOBACO experts or advertising industry professionals. Unexpectedly for the organizers, the museum also became a popular field assignment for university classes, and many such reports ended up posted on individual blogs; essays about a visit to the Advertising Museum are even available for purchase through South Korean paper mills. In 2010, the number of museum visitors surpassed 15 thousand people, which translates into about 45 visitors per day.\(^\text{11}\)

As most contemporary museums, the Advertising Museum entertains while educating. Advertising, with its dazzling imagery, easily lends itself to the entertainment purpose, and the

halls of the museum are generously decorated with posters, reprints of newspaper and magazine advertisements as well as monitors playing TV commercials. Life-size and miniature mannequins of advertising professionals and detailed maquettes of advertising production scenes provided additional attractions and were frequently photographed for reports in the blogs. The other purpose, to educate, was served by numerous explanatory videos as well as lengthy textual explications, attached to most stands and redoubled by voice commentary automatically triggered by motion sensors, generously, if not excessively, installed throughout the museum.

Figure 10. A view of the historical exhibit at the Advertising Museum in Seoul.

Except for the narrow hallway of the historical exhibit, the museum space appeared to be open-concept, inviting the visitor to wander from one exhibit to the next, but in reality motion sensors controlled the itinerary. A visitor was directed from being amazed at the alterity of old advertisements, to being dazzled by creative extravagance of contemporary advertising, then to learning about advertising media and advertising professions, to creating an advertisement with oneself as a model in an “advertising experience” booth, and finally to appreciating public
service advertising and KOBACO's leading role in its production. Triggered by the visitor's movement, sensors would activate the next voiceover or video thus drawing the visitor to the next item on the charted path. Straying off inevitably produced a cacophony of many computers talking at once. Sometimes recorded explanations went off for no apparent reason, giving the museum an eerie feel, as if in the absence of humans machines were discussing advertisements among themselves.

Figure 11. A view of the Ad Gallery at the Advertising Museum in Seoul.

**Alternative origins of advertising and the museum's other narrative**

The theme that was so categorically rejected in the origins video—the relation of advertising to capitalism—surfaced in some of the museum exhibits in unexpected ways. Most dramatically, the origins video was immediately contradicted by the "Socio-cultural history of Korea through advertising" hall. The hall dated the beginning of the history of advertising in Korea to the year 1876, when Japan forced the Kanghwa Treaty on Korea, obliging it to open its ports for international trade. Many historians of Korea date the beginnings of capitalism in Korea to that moment (Eckert 1991: 1-6). Instead of presenting advertising as an expression of timeless need
to communicate as the opening video did, the historical exhibit linked advertising to commerce, emergence of modern mass media and imperialism. As the historical exhibit expounded its periodization (both in English and Korean), "Modern commercial advertising first appeared in Korea in 1876 when the [Kanghwa] Treaty of Peace was signed. Newspapers were published and advertisements were introduced along with the products of Western civilization. The history of Korean advertising, . . . spans the 124 years following the publication of the first modern Korean advertisement in the Hanseong jubo Weekly [Hansǒng Chubo] . . ."

Paradoxically, the Hansǒng Chubo advertisement, which was showcased in a special display nearby, appeared on February 22, 1886, a decade after the history of advertising began in Korea, according to the museum explanation. The museum provided no information on what was that modern commercial advertising that appeared in Korea for the first time in 1876 or where it appeared (the first Korean newspaper to be published in six years in 1883), which suggests that it was the Kanghwa Treaty itself that the museum assigned as the beginning of modern advertising in Korea. Thus, the historical exhibit unambiguously linked advertising to Korea’s transition to capitalist modernity and recognized its foreign origins, contrary to the opening video, which framed advertising as a universal expression of the timeless human need to communicate. The historical exhibit was characteristic of how the museum while seemingly aestheticizing and depoliticizing advertising nevertheless could not avoid an implicit commentary on the social formation that modern advertising is tied up to.

The rest of the historical exhibit narrated the evolution of Korean advertising, guiding the visitor from past to present through a narrow hallway decorated with period advertisements on the one side, and a chronology of advertising industry events on the other. Advertisements were arranged chronologically by periods in a way that was reminiscent of traditional art or natural history museums. Explanations to the displays appeared on computer screens and as a sensor-triggered voiceover. They offered an uneven mixture of historical, economic and political background facts as well as an occasional commentary on technological developments in mass media, which were still insufficient to engage with exhibited pieces beyond antiquarian curiosity. Labels to individual exhibits always included the production year; sometimes a label named the commodity advertised, sometimes the advertiser and occasionally the advertising agency. In few cases the noteworthiness of an advertisement was briefly expounded, usually to draw attention to a particular development in the advertising industry, such as the publication

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12 "124 years" was also a mysterious number. If the exhibit counts from 1886, 124 years will have been in 2010; the museum opened in 2008 and it is unlikely that the engraved panels of the explanations were changed every year. Moreover, I took the photograph of the exhibit that mentioned the “124 years” in 2009. If the exhibit counted from 1876, then 124 would be in 2000, which is before the museum was conceived.
of the first full-page advertisement or appearance of celebrity advertising. Beyond chronology, no particular logic to the selection of the museum exhibits was discernible, and the sense of eclectic antiquarianism as the guiding principle for the historical exhibit was reinforced by the few artifacts on display—an old radio, a small black-and-white TV set, a video camera with rolls of film.

No iconographic explanations or clues were given as to what meaning the contemporaries had been likely to derive from the displayed advertisements. Especially the advertisements from the pre-WWII exhibits appeared like hieroglyphs, whose meanings were no longer readable (symbolically and literally, as many of them heavily relied on Chinese characters, which are no longer used as heavily, and some advertisements were written in Japanese). What, for example, was one to make of a 1914 advertisement that featured a young woman in a traditional dress smoking a cigarette? In the first decade of the 21st century, it was not entirely acceptable for South Korean women to smoke in public and an image of a smoking woman would perhaps invite associations with loose morals, but this interpretation seemed like an improbable concept for a tobacco advertisement of the time. Or, what meaning would denizens of colonial Korea derive from a half-page 1938 newspaper advertisement for Chevrolet, visually dominating the 1910-1945 exhibit? Was it a symbol of progress and Korea’s participation in the most refined consumption available? More generally, with advertising being a relatively recent phenomenon, how was it received? Did people trust its messages? Were they annoyed by it? Fascinated by it? The museum provided no answers.

Ambiguous meanings of particular advertisements aside, the artifacts sketched the space of capitalist modernity in colonial Korea. The emergence of foreign mass-produced commodities and English-language newspapers indexed imperialism and opening of Korea’s market to international capital. Ads in Japanese, some produced by the biggest Japan’s advertising agency Dentsu, reflected colonization of Korea by Japan and the policies of cultural assimilation. The disintegrating social fabric could be gleaned from a 1903 leaflet that advertised immigration to Hawaii—perhaps an attractive option to landless peasants. Yet the exhibits’ focus on everyday objects—soy sauce, toothpaste, shoes—grounded these global forces in concrete place and conveyed an acute sense of everydayness (Harootunian 2000), like in a 1901 photograph of a tobacco advertisement on top of a streetcar, crowded with standing men and children in traditional clothing at the backdrop of a shoddy roof-tile construction, or in a 1929 movie poster, which announced that Pola Negri’s movie, “Woman on trial,” was playing at Chosôn Movie Theatre in Seoul.

From the post-war exhibit and on, commodities that advertisements promoted grew more
recognizable. Advertisements from the 1960s illustrated the “reason why” mode of persuasion, and their earnest tactics of enhancing commodity aesthetics seemed naive by current conventions. "ABC cosmetics are the most trustworthy cosmetics that you can use with easy heart!” pronounced a 1961 newspaper advertisement, which featured black-and-white headshots of 35 (!) entertainers.

Since the 1970s, the exhibited advertisements featured a familiar universe of brands—posters for Samsung and LG (then Lucky Goldstar), TV commercials for Lotte snacks. Aesthetically more in congruence with current trends, the advertisements portrayed not the products advertised themselves but symbols that visually conveyed the value that viewers might gain from consuming the products. A 1970 advertisement for cosmetics, for example, showed the actual product advertised only in the corner, and the limelight was on the beautifully made-up face of an intensely staring celebrity endorser, pressed against a bouquet of crimson roses; the copy read, "Flowers are said to be beautiful, but . . ."

The evocative imagery and emotional appeal was also used in the advertisements of Korean chaebol, which throughout the 1970s rose to economic power. It is chaebol advertisements that first clearly transcended the commercial message format and became public texts, in the sense of being socially engaged and occasionally politically charged. “Miracle on the Han River” exhibit (1968-1980), illustrating the advertising of the developmental state period, was dominated by a 1978 Samsung advertisement featuring the turtle warship (kobuksōn), which signified Korea's naval victories over Japan in the 16th century and, in the context, read as Samsung’s pledge to outdo Japan in the economic competition, a ventriloquism of the government’s push for export-driven economic growth. Disavowing the realities of the authoritarian rule and cronyism of South Korean politics, a nearby 1977 LG advertisement urged, "The child of your family might become president of this country in the future, raise him well." The exhibit well illustrated how advertising aesthetically falls under “capitalist realism” (Schudson 1984; Introduction). These advertisements illustrated the hopes for a better future, which motivated Korean masses to endure long working hours, harsh working conditions and authoritarian governments (Nelson 2000: 17-18).

The advertisements from the exhibit of contemporary advertising (1988-present) resembled advertisements in the streets of Seoul—same logos, same playful use of sex appeal, same dare in using politically controversial topics. A full-page advertisement, for example, featured a black-and-white photograph of a sombre young woman, the banner over her shoulder marked her as drafted for sexual slavery for Japanese army, the problem of “comfort women” during WWII being a painful and unresolved matter in Korean history. The copy read, "Are we to be
conquered? Will we conquer? History can be repeated," and the logo in the corner indicated that the advertisement was for Prospects, a sports shoe manufacturer. A nearby poster imitated government propaganda images that called on South Koreans to report spies, except in this case the picture of an ominous North Korean boat in the night was to promote wireless carrier 011 with a logo, "For spy reporting, also 011 . . . " The North Korean theme was also exploited in the 1998 Hyundai advertisement, which featured two boys, laughing and hugging, one in a casual attire and the other in a North Korean uniform and a red scarf. In the centre of the display, a built-in monitor played commercials, which would not have seemed out of place on TV before or after a popular melodrama series. The hallway of the historical exhibit ended with an open-space “Ad Gallery,” which showcased winners of the 2007 creative awards and also briefly expounded recent trends in advertising—emphasis on design, aesthetics of fusing humans with technology, focus on environment and health—illustrating each trend with ornate advertising posters.

The walk through the gallery left an impression of the growing abundance, of “arrival” into the prosperous future. Not only advertised commodities grew more varied, the settings in which they were presented grew more luxurious. The subtleness of sales appeals—many advertisements left it to the viewer to connect the dots between their whimsical imagery and advertised commodities—suggested a refinement of needs and desires and also the fulfillment of immediate material needs. Whereas earlier advertisements evoked mundane human needs and individual aspirations, many advertisements from the '00s commented on social issues, like the advertisements that took up North Korean themes.

Having minimized the socio-cultural context, the historical gallery invited the visitor to process the exhibited advertisements aesthetically, pondering the artistic execution of advertisements as if they were artwork. Transformed by the “museum effect” (Alpers 1991), advertising in the museum was a spectacle in its own right. By not situating advertisements into a particular interpretative frameworks or sketching the advertisements' socio-cultural space for the observer, the museum asserted advertising as a worthy object of attention for its artistic content. The museum guaranteed aesthetic significance of advertising and the aesthetic enjoyment that could be derived from it, like art museums guarantee the value of artworks sold through auctions (Baudrillard 1981: 121-122). As any museum disciplines its visitors in particular viewing practices and particular relations to exhibited objects (Bennett 1995), the Advertising Museum trained visitors to give attention to advertising, to appreciate it as a creative medium and as a mirror of an epoch.
Freedom to advertise

On my second visit to the museum a couple of weeks later, I was accompanied by professor Shin In Sup, renown scholar of history of Korean advertising as well as an artifact donor and a member of the committee that planned the contents of the museum. I met Shin during my pilot fieldwork in summer 2007, and we have grown close over the time I was in Seoul. Whereas Shin’s involvement with the museum was limited to exhibit consultations in the early planning stages, he was a veteran of the South Korean advertising industry, starting his career as an advertising manager in one of Seoul newspapers in 1965. Shin’s biography inaugurated the new series of “Ad men of our times” (Uri sidae üi kwanggoin sirijū) in 2010, and Kim Pyŏng-hŭi, the author, calls Shin “the Rosetta stone of the Korean advertising.” We received a guided tour from the museum curator, above-quoted Mr. Kim, an early-career museum expert, who did not participate in the exhibition-making process itself and was brought in to curate the museum after it opened. Initially puzzled at my request for an interview, the curator gladly explained the mission and brief history of the museum while sharing his experiences of guiding tours of schoolchildren.

The historical exhibit followed the chronology of Shin’s history of Korean advertising (Shin In Sup 1989; Shin In Sup and Sŏ Pŏm-sŏk 2005), and Shin often expanded on the curator’s smooth explanations, noticeably rehearsed in countless tours for visiting schoolchildren. While commenting on the advertisements in the exhibit or explaining the background of newspapers in which they were published, Shin sometimes would question the curator about the museum practicalities, such as publication of the museum catalogue or the quality of the reproduction of old newspapers. He also took the lead in answering my more pointed questions about rationales for exhibit inclusions and exclusions. Though not privy to all the decisions made in relation to the museum, he readily offered informed guesses, based on his knowledge of the advertising industry and the experts involved.

For the earlier periods, Shin explained, the advertisements were chosen to illustrate the hallmarks of advertising development in Korea. He drew my attention to an advertisement for an advertising agency from 1910, which testified to the existence of a Korean-managed advertising agency then; a 1921 Dong-A Ilbo article, which introduced its readership to the idea of classified advertisements; and a page from the Dong-A Ilbo in 1926, which hosted the first advertising contest in Korea. The advertisement for Chevrolet did not have a particular meaning, Shin answered to my question, except to illustrate the fact that in 1930s Chevrolets were heavily advertising in Korea, whereas a busy advertisement with a woman serving liquor, which I overlooked, was there to signify colonialism by the fact of being produced by Japanese
advertising agency Dentsu.

As the curator commented, the advertising of the epoch reflected it culturally and socially, and drew an example of how, because in the post-war period people were concerned primarily with survival, advertising promoted only medical and food products. As we moved to the 1968-1980, “The miracle on the river Han” exhibit, Shin pointed out that he was the one who wrote copy for the LG advertisement, ”The child of your family might become president of this country in the future, raise him so that he grows well," and the curator commented jokingly that at those times it was a risky statement and Shin might have ended up summoned by the notorious Agency for National Security Planning (Angibu), which dealt with dissidents and critics of the military regime.

About the post-1988 exhibits, the curator explained that they illustrated the effects of societal liberalization and deregulation. The message of the exhibit was to show that topics considered beyond limits earlier could be freely treated, in advertising. The curator drew my attention to an advertisement for bath products from 1994 featuring a silhouette of a naked woman, facing her back towards the viewer, and pointed out that nudity, both male and female, used to be a taboo (whereas the exhibited advertisement showed a nude female, its other version featured a nude male, Shin added). The exhibited advertisement was the first to contain a nude and appear in the mainstream media. The advertisement with North and South Korean boys was picked to illustrate that North Korea was no longer a prohibited topic; the curator noted that if such an advertisement came out earlier the CEO of the advertiser, Hyundai Oilbank, would have been summoned by security services for investigation. The “comfort woman” advertisement was illustrating a similar point: such an advertisement was impossible in the 1970s out of a fear of a row with the Japanese embassy, but advancements in the freedom of expression made it possible, the curator stressed. Shin noted that the liberalization was an effect of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, which though being a sports event, brought freedom of expression to Korea, not just in print media but also in advertising. "This kind of freedom," he said pointing to the picture of the naked woman, "this kind of freedom," pointing to the advertisement with the two boys.

The guided tour made me realize that the guiding narrative of the socio-cultural history exhibit was that of the growing freedom of advertising expression. Through advertising, Shin and the curator retold me the story of South Korea's democratization, echoing scholars working within the civil society perspective (e.g. Kim 2000; Armstrong 2002; Diamond and Shin 2000; Kim 2003). Though the divisive moment in their version of Korea's 20th century history was the Seoul Olympics in 1988 and not the democratization movement in 1987, they presented the conjuncture of the late 1980s as a climax towards which Korean history was building up
throughout the 20th century, until liberal freedoms were realized; the post-democratization present of liberal democracy was celebrated as arrival, and the achieved liberal freedoms were proudly juxtaposed against earlier abuses by dictatorships.

At the time in the first month of my fieldwork, I was surprised by this investment into the freedom of advertising, which, for Shin and the curator, was obviously on the same continuum with the freedom of mass media. Yet in the light of my arguments in the previous chapters, this designation of advertising as another realm of public sphere is not surprising at all. Quite congruently with popular visions of advertising, the historical exhibit and the opening video equated advertising with other means of communication, and the former celebrated the freedom to advertise as a sign of achieved democratization.

At the same time, the celebration of freedom to show nudes in advertising or play with North Korean themes also smuggled in the ideal of neoliberal freedom, mixing, on the one hand, the freedom from dictatorships with, on the other, freedom of advertisers to use any content in publicly circulating media. In other words, there was a slippage from freedom understood in political terms to neoliberal freedom, the formal freedom for market exchange as the ultimate value (Harvey 2005: 36-37; Dean 2009: 51). The freedom-focused narrative of the historical exhibit thus reflected how the claims on advertising as a public resource were being re-written along the neoliberal lines, subverting the freedom (for advertising publics) to claim advertising as a space of public discourse in favour of the freedom (for advertisers) to enterprise and use advertising as a sales tool without being burdened by other considerations.

Characteristically, despite the strong connection that the museum made between freedom to advertise and societal freedom, the most impressive story that linked advertising to freedom—the Dong-A “white pages” incident, which was discussed in chapter 1—was conspicuously missing. The dominant interpretation of the Dong-A “white pages” incident implied a critique of any state-directed interference in the mass media, and perhaps excluding it was a sign of the sensitivity of KOBACO, the museum founder, to accusations of being a state-authorized monopolist in advertising sales for the terrestrial broadcasting industry. The row between Samsung and the Hankyoreh (chapter 1) unfolding at the time of my museum visits, I could not help thinking that the "white pages" incident could have been an impressive way to draw attention to the fact that media's dependence on advertising made the media vulnerable to whomever pulled the purse strings, be it the state as in the Dong-A incident in 1974-1975 or big business in the '00s.
Primarily celebrating advertising as a means of communication and a creative endeavour, the museum nevertheless addressed the economic functions of advertising in a tucked-away exhibit on advertising as a social institution, under the title "Benefits of advertising." Praising advertising as a "flower of capitalism," the exhibit credited advertising for promoting competition; lowering commodity prices; providing useful information about products; protecting media outlets from influence of government or political parties; instilling healthy consumption habits and educating about socially desirable behaviours. This exhibit presented advertising as a socially important institution for all the mediatory functions it performs in society—supporting media, educating consumers, providing commodity information, etc. Problematic effects of advertising were briefly acknowledged in the last paragraph of the exhibit, but they were presented largely as a thing of the past:

Because exaggerated, overstated or false advertising can cause damage to consumers, such advertising received legal and social sanctions. There was also a critique that advertising promotes consumerism, overconsumption, impulsive purchases. However, those negative functions become self-regulated due to development of advertising and consumers’ savvy.

During my early visits to the museum I found this explication astounding in its one-sidedness, and concluded that the museum could not have been any more brazen fulfilling its official mission, "to promote the advertising industry and its culture."

However, if "Benefits of advertising" is read as setting up the program for what advertising could and should achieve, as an articulation of advertising ethos, it invites high expectations for advertising and creates conditions for advertising publics to demand their realization. In a sense, it was a commitment to realizing these potential benefits of advertising that made possible the advertising activism of Önsoju and NGOs, that inspired vigilantes and justified advertising censorship. A lost opportunity for promoting media literacy and teaching critical attitude towards advertising, the "Benefits of advertising" exhibit nevertheless asserted the primacy of advertising’s societal functions over its sales purposes, relegating the latter such insignificant a role as not to grant them a separate treatment in the museum.

In addition to the "Benefits of advertising" exhibit, the societal role of advertising was considered in the exhibit on public service advertisements by KOBACO. The exhibit explained public service advertising as advertising "for the interest of the people as a whole," as opposed to "product advertisements, corporate advertisements, and organizational advertisements [,
which] are for private interest of the advertiser or for promotion." It was the only exhibit in the museum to distinguish between various kinds of advertising, thus implicitly problematizing the definition that saw all advertising as an expression of human need to communicate. The public service advertising exhibit was the only exhibit to doubt that commercial advertising was unconditionally committed to public interest. It implied that it was only public service advertising that truly realized the promises of advertising as a medium, the five keywords—to imagine, to create, to move, to communicate, to make widely known—whereas the commercial advertisements appropriated the medium for their suspect purposes. Still, the museum opting not to articulate any coherent critique of commercialism of regular advertising, the exhibit on public service advertising, rather than being a critique of commercial advertising, read as an articulation of the ideal for commercial advertising to look up to.

In line with the museum’s overall commitment to downplaying the commercial interests that drove advertising and advertisers, the exhibit on KOBACO silenced KOBACO’s role in buffering advertisers’ pressure on broadcasters, the main argument for KOBACO when it was established and later when attacks on the KOBACO monopoly were launched. The exhibit coyly phrased KOBACO’s mission as ensuring "the fairness and variety of broadcast advertising" without explaining why fairness and variety might be compromised if broadcast advertising was left to market forces.

Still, the impulse to glorify KOBACO was unmistakable, and KOBACO’s institutional history was devoted a whole exhibit, dominated by lengthy textual explanations, which strategically omitted the details surrounding KOBACO’s origins under Chun Doo-hwan, while explicating major KOBACO-related developments, from the production of the first public service campaign in 1981 to winning the first prize for levels of customer satisfaction among government organizations in 2007. The message of KOBACO’s usefulness was reiterated by an inescapable sensor-activated video, where Korean and foreign experts talked about the benefits that KOBACO had provided to Korea. The emphasized benefits, however, said little about the threats that KOBACO averted, but rather stressed the projects KOBACO performed with its public fund. In other words, there was neither evidence provided that KOBACO indeed protected the public nature of broadcasting nor good reasons for maintaining KOBACO’s incumbent role as the exclusive media representative for terrestrial broadcasters.

Being founded by KOBACO in itself presented the dilemma for the museum, as KOBACO’s very existence interrupted the vision of advertising as a natural resource for positive societal contributions, advanced by the museum. If advertising were indeed a naturally beneficial force, a creative endeavour and an expression of the human need to communicate, the museum had
no way to justify the need for an organization like KOBACO, whose fundamental premise was the contradiction between the interest of advertisers and public interest. Unable to address the contradiction, the museum emphasized secondary activities of KOBACO, which did not interfere with the practices of the advertising industry, such as production of public service advertising, conducting research and sponsoring educational activities, funding cultural events, developing infrastructural facilities. The museum presented KOBACO not as a regulator that policed excesses of the advertising industry but rather at most as a facilitator that created conditions for the advertising industry to bloom.

The Advertising Museum walked a fine line between empowering the advertising industry and aggrandizing KOBACO. On the one hand, the museum chose not to deal with the influence of advertising on mass media in any serious way, asserting "media nurturing" function of advertising in the “Benefits of advertising” exhibit and completely omitting the well-known controversies in the relations between mass media, advertisers and the state. On the other hand, the museum spared no effort in praising KOBACO, but failed to convincingly demonstrate a social need for the functions that KOBACO performed, specifically for its mediating role between the broadcasting and advertising industries. The position that first praised advertising for positive contributions it brought to society and then insisted on the necessity of a state-authorized public corporation as a protector of the interests of society presumably from advertising, was obviously contradictory. In the context where the museum project was developed under the aegis of KOBACO, these rifts in the museum narrative suggested weakness of KOBACO’s ideological position vis-a-vis the advertising industry. KOBACO’s ideologues were unable to formulate a vision for the museum that would persuasively justify the existence and the current role of KOBACO, and this failure to justify the structure that for decades materialized the belief in the primacy of public functions of advertising signals a crisis of this vision. As I suggested above, these dilemmas around KOBACO represent broader contestations about the regimes of advertising in South Korea.

“Advertising makes your future beautiful:” Recruiting advertising publics

The museum ended symmetrically with a five-minute video about the future of advertising, projected in another darkened room, which mediated the transition from the world of the museum to the world outside. In the video, the familiar boy and the grandfather walked through the museum halls to cheerful music, suitable for ending credits of a Disney movie. Answering the boy’s question about the future of advertising, the grandfather explained how
advertising of the future would be more responsive to consumers' wishes and more creative, and the visuals showcased fantastic future technologies—endless rows of monitors hovering in the air and changing images in response to hand gestures of a young woman in a steely futuristic outfit. The video eventually broke into a quick succession of diverse scenes: a conductor directing an orchestra; a samulnori performance acted out; soccer fans cheering; an elderly woman smiling while four youths did chores for her; two middle-aged men in construction helmets doing hi-fives; a groom kissing his bride. The caption read, "Making your passions more diverse, making your living more enriched, making your life more worthwhile..."

In the very end, as the models from previous scenes posed for a group picture against Seoul skyline, and the final message appeared, "...advertising makes your future beautiful." The group picture began to grow smaller, and as the camera zoomed out, it turned out that the picture was a billboard mounted on a deserted planet, the Earth seen in the distance. The final message declared, “You are the future of advertising.”

If considered out of context, the “Future of advertising” video is stunning in its boundless optimism and unrestrained glorification of the benefits advertising is to bring to society. Yet it was not all that surprising if read against the museum exhibit which pushed for the vision of advertising as a means of communication to benefit the whole of society, if read against the South Korean context where advertising had been celebrated for its public service. Just as the rest of the museum, the “Future of advertising” articulated a romantic ideal of advertising and imagined what it would be like if advertising indeed lived up to that ideal. Again, the video and its one-sided depictions of advertising can easily be criticized, yet what I wish to emphasize is that in its whole-hearted embrace of advertising, it interpellated the museum visitor as someone to make that idealistic vision happen. The call “You are the future of advertising” is to appeal to the viewers to take a proactive stance towards advertising and indeed shape that future, to compel the advertising of the future to realize all the benefits that the museum promised advertising could contribute to society. In other words, the video recruited the museum visitor as an active member of the sophisticated and demanding advertising public that in South Korea of the '00s succeeded in keeping advertising a realm of public life.

The enthusiastic reviews of the museum in the internet provided circumstantial evidence to the efficacy of this mission. An online search for “advertising museum Chamsil” through one of Korea’s top portals Naver.com in October 2010 fetched about 450 blog entries, and as I browsed through some of them, they were all enthusiastically positive and recommended the museum. To quote a rather typical comment from a high school student’s blog,

Till now, I thought that advertising is simply for selling and promoting commodities.
But after seeing and hearing many things today, I felt that advertising expresses the level of national development and that it is an influential tool.\textsuperscript{13}

Another blogger, a university student, wrote,

I went to the Advertising Museum because of an assignment, but to me it became a very valuable experience of encountering advertising creativity. \ldots For an hour and a half, one can be surrounded by advertising and think, see and feel only advertising. I have spent a unique weekend travelling into advertising.\textsuperscript{14}

These quotes suggest that the museum was quite effective in achieving its declared goals and the young generation was indeed developing appreciation for the advertising industry and its culture. More broadly, the museum might train visitors to pay attention to advertising, but at the same time it trains visitors to expect advertising to render a public service. The museum trains visitors not to give advertising any slack for being first of all a business venture and to demand that advertising lives up to the high standards set up in the exhibits on the benefits of advertising and on public service messages.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The Advertising Museum was a peculiar space where the "flower of capitalism" vision of advertising was articulated and pushed to extreme, where visitors were invited to identify with this romantic vision of advertising and to realize this vision into the future. During my repeat visits to the museum, I puzzled over the cultural logic of advertising that made such a place possible. Eventually, I reversed my stance, from somewhat of a disbelief and indignation over the museum's neglect to take this opportunity and inculcate critical attitudes towards advertising to recognizing that advancing this fantastic vision of advertising opened up possibilities for putting demands on advertising and the advertising industry. (Even though I still think that the museum could have benefited from a more explicit discussion about the tension between advertising's commercial interests and its public functions.) I travelled from being appalled at the museum's standpoint to acknowledging its potential for creating proactive and empowered advertising publics.

If the museum indeed focused on inculcating critical attitudes towards advertising, it no doubt would equip its visitors with some useful skills; however, living in the society saturated with advertising most of them had likely already learnt to filter through advertising puffery to some

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degree. Rather than focusing on producing “smart consumers,” who know not to believe advertising and thus, paradoxically, allow the advertisers to get away with questionable statements either about commodities or social values (cf. chapter 3), the museum encouraged its visitors to identify with advertising messages, to appreciate their artistic sides and the work that goes into advertising production—but also to expect a lot from advertising, to hold up public service announcements as the ideal towards which all advertising should strive for and to hold advertising responsible for realizing its potential benefits to society.

Of course, the museum is just one node where attitudes towards advertising are produced and reproduced. Moreover, even at the time of its opening in November 2008, the museum’s attitudes towards advertising seemed partially anachronistic. Holding advertising accountable to a public service mandate did not rhyme well with the hegemonic ideals of neoliberal freedom and the primacy of the market as the preferred regulatory mechanism; the earlier practices of public regulation of advertising, represented by KOBACO, were meshed with the oppressive involvement of the state and contrasted to neoliberal freedom from regulatory interventions, to the point that the museum failed to articulate a vision that would justify its founder’s primary role, the sales of advertising for terrestrial broadcasters on behalf of the public. Nevertheless, the Advertising Museum enjoyed a certain cultural authority and commanded an authoritative voice, whereas blog entries about its exhibits suggested that they resonated well with their target audience. With the museum’s active outreach program to schools, it is nurturing a generation that will expect beautiful things from advertising, and it is interesting to see how this sustained effort will shape Korea’s advertising industry in the future.
Conclusion

Advertisers might be driven by their valorization needs when they conduct an advertising campaign, yet on the ground advertising circulates as a public cultural text. Advertising’s effects in real life, in the final count, are determined by those who chose to consume it—and by how they chose to consume it. If advertising was processed from a cynical distance, if its messages were enjoyed for the spectacle of “capitalism without capitalism” and the gap between the fantastic images of advertising and the everyday was accepted as inevitable and overlooked, then advertising re-invested subjects in the capitalist economy of enjoyment. If advertising messages were taken as influential public texts to be identified with and if its depictions were taken as an ideal to strive towards, then the gap between advertising imaginaries and reality became a compass for transforming the reality and advertising itself became interpellated as a tool towards this transformation. The two options outline the extremes of engaging with advertising, and different advertising campaigns invite different responses from different people under different circumstances.

Thanks to the existence of proactive, demanding advertising publics, advertising in South Korea in the ’00s was a vibrant space of public life. Advertising publics—understood broadly to include regular advertising consumers, but also advertising censors and advertising makers, all those who engage with advertising discourses in their everyday lives—mobilized to work towards the ideal of a humanist society that advertising texts advanced. On the one hand, they policed advertising images for their congruency with those ideals. On the other, they supervised the activities of advertisers to compel them to live by those ideals in their business practices; the shared understanding of the primacy of advertising’s public functions, of what the Advertising Museum praised as advertising’s “benefits to society,” over advertisers’ immediate commercial goals fuelling those demands.

Advertising publics in South Korea thus succeeded in making advertising a site of politicization. Recognizing advertising as a world-making discourse, advertising publics were conscious of their power and attempted to determine the world themselves, taking advantage of advertisers’ sensitivity to their demands and, occasionally, of their collective power to impose their will on advertising. They never gave up on advertising as the turf of business interests and never tired of countering business visions of advertising with alternatives.

Most immediately, advertising was secured as a site for politics of representation. Advertising was a space where gender roles were debated and normalized, where social values were
contested and where it was decided what acceptable and desirable behaviours were for South Koreans, imagined as the members of the broader advertising public. My example of the “KT olleh” campaign in chapter 2 illustrated how advertising was made responsible for advancing proper gender roles; similar contestations on a smaller scale played out in the censorship boards, NGOs and everyday talk about advertising. Whereas advertising's commercial imperatives were acknowledged and advertising publics even indulged in amateur marketing analysis of the business rationales behind particular campaigns, they generally were unwilling to give advertising any slack just because it was a medium paid for by advertisers. The responsibility that came with advertising’s circulation was supplying inspiring images of “capitalist realism,” capturing not the problematic practices to be found in reality but a better society towards which members of advertising publics should strive. Overall, advertising publics were often successful in taking advantage of advertising as a public text to express societal ideals and assert normative lifestyles and values.

These expectations for advertising to articulate agreeable values culminated in the popular fondness for humanist advertising, whose ambiguous relation with capitalism and capitalist advertising I discussed in introduction and chapter 2. Humanist advertising promised the possibility of achieving a humanist harmonious society within capitalism, denying that the antagonisms to which humanism was the answer were generated by capitalism itself. By articulating a fantastic vision of capitalism and its potentials, humanist advertising invested desires in the “really existing” capitalism. Yet it also created opportunities for literal identification with this discourse, from where a critique could be mounted of the gaps between the reality and the ideal vision. It encouraged advertising that abandoned commodities and articulated values which, when pushed to the limit, could be used for critiquing capitalism.

South Koreans are as skilled as most modern subjects in adopting a cynical distance towards the information advertising provides about commodities. Yet while the information about commodities is a legitimate site for exaggerations, the information about the advertiser is not. The spectacles of “capitalist realism” offer a leverage to demand that companies live up to the image of the corporate social responsibility they claim for themselves. Onsoju demands for the advertisers to support a democratic public sphere with their advertising—a demand virtually unthinkable in North America—was partially enabled by the visions of humanist, benevolent corporations that advertising portrayed in South Korea and certain tendencies within advertising publics to identify with those messages.

Advertising publics recognized advertising's social impacts, albeit in a way that primarily celebrated the potential benefits of advertising to society. While possibly creating a greater
receptivity towards advertising, this attitude also enabled demands on advertisers to deliver those benefits, which politicized advertising beyond advertising images and enabled questions about what it was that advertising money mediated in South Korean society and whether it was in the interest of the general public, not just advertisers or advertising-receiving media outlets. Such were contestations around the public control over the institutions, which claimed to supervise the advertising industry on behalf of Korean people, from KOBACO to various review boards. It was this recognition of advertising’s potential benefits that made possible the critiques of Samsung’s “boycott” of the Hankyoreh and Önsoju's activism. In other words, advertising publics were also often successful in articulating and realizing their vision of what advertising should do in South Korea, and their attention to the flows of advertising money created opportunities for interrupting the financial links that secured the alliance between the conservative media and business, however temporarily.

Still, in a larger picture, the activism of advertising publics has limited consequences. All advertising, including its humanist varieties, by virtue of being advertising, endorses corporate-controlled capitalism. While rightly pointing out the deficiency in the everyday, advertising suggests solutions that come down to consuming commodities or buying from socially responsible corporations. Large-scale systemic inequalities and their solutions are beyond the scope of advertising discourses.

Specifically for the humanist advertising, celebrating humanist advertising and praising benevolent corporations behind it leads to a denial of the divisions between the interests of corporations and people, the divisions necessary for political action against the interests of corporations and in favour of collectivist solutions for a more equitable redistribution of opportunities and benefits. These advertisements speak to the problematic symptoms of capitalism but assert that they can be resolved within capitalism. They do provide a platform from which to critique abuses of capitalism yet fundamentally this critique is limited because it assumes that it is possible to have capitalist productivity without having the symptoms of capitalism, that it is possible not to prioritize profit seeking within capitalism and to reconcile profit seeking with public service. This critique fails to recognize that the problems humanism attempts to solve within capitalism are produced by capitalism itself.

Moreover, designating advertising as a sphere of politics, on the one hand, opened up advertising for intervention, but on the other prioritized consumer citizenship as the preferred mode of involvement. In other words, members of advertising publics when seeing themselves as political subjects saw themselves primarily as consumers, which inevitably limited their horizons of what can be challenged. As Jodi Dean explains, “That consumer choices may have
politics—fair trade, green, vegan, woman-owned—morphs into the sense that politics is nothing but consumer choices, that is, individuated responses to individuated needs” (Dean 2009: 11). Thus while successfully engaging in representational politics and on exceptional occasions even re-routing the flows of advertising money, advertising publics could not enforce structural changes. Arguably, designating the issues of consumption as the sites of intensity diverted political energies from more sustained critique of social and economic inequalities.

The limits of advertising activism were in the exclusion of knowledge that advertising emerged as a capitalist tool and it was capital’s solution to the antagonisms between commodity buyers and sellers, as discussed in the introduction. The advertising publics’ claims on advertising were grounded in their status as consumers—not so much of advertising as of commodities—and their engagements with advertising both destabilized advertising as a commercial tool but also asserted its legitimacy as such. For advertising publics to become a radical transformative force, they will have to stop being an advertising public.

To tie my earlier points together, these politics of advertising are specific for South Korea of the 00s. Multiple forces came together to produce the scenario where advertising became a site of ongoing contestations, not just at the level of individual reception but at the level of advertising publics. As I showed in introduction and chapter 1, the entrepreneurial ideologies of the colonial period adapted to the times of dictatorship, and the instrumental use of public interest discourses by the authoritarian governments to enforce economic growth and contain dissent contributed to staking advertising as a realm of public interest. Paradoxically, these public claims on advertising became endangered after the democratization of the late 1980s, as “public control” grew to mean “state oppression” and violation of liberal freedoms.

South Korea’s post-democratization trajectory followed the scenario David Harvey (2005) described to account for the global ascendance of neoliberalism. South Korea’s was one of the democratizations of the 1980s that opened doors for a tighter integration of new democracies into the circuits of global capital, which was in search for new spaces to expand in response to the accumulation crisis in the 1970s (Harvey 2005: 107-108, 110). And indeed, while democratization in South Korea after 1987 led to an establishment of procedural democracy, more radical demands for social and economic justice, articulated by radical workers and students, remained unrealized. Neoliberalism became hegemonic, especially after the 1997 Asian Debt Crisis, and both progressive and conservative political parties accepted it as the only viable path—what Choi Jang Jip (2005) described as Korea’s conservative democracy. Democratization thus cemented the distribution of wealth to the rich and kept the state as a tool for their protection, the sad irony being that it was the oppositional forces that spearheaded
the neoliberal restructuring. In the course of the neoliberal restructuring the progressives surrendered the state to neoliberal interests, and the split between citizens movements and labour movements only secured this defeat. The Korean case confirmed Jodi Dean’s diagnosis of contemporary liberal democracies, that “democracy in practice is the rule of the wealthy, the protection of a governmental elite who serves their interests, and the constant chatter and opining of everyone else in the circuits of communicative capitalism” (Dean 2009: 41).

Advertising, on the one hand a denizen of the commercial sphere par excellence but on the other a public text and the mobilizing discourse of advertising publics, was shaped by these changes—as were advertising publics whose engagements with advertising define in the final count advertising's place in society. As I have suggested, advertising was claimed for public service since the times of military dictatorships and, even though the public ownership was usurped, its principles were externalized in institutions, which lasted into the 00s and indeed enabled a certain buffer between media and advertisers. The democratization brought discourses of freedom, which among other things opened doors for gradual dismantling of structures that kept advertising within the public domain to a degree. As chapter 5 showed, the advertising industry was a great beneficiary of declared liberal freedoms. Advertising content liberalized from the 1990s, the 2008 saw two decisions by the Constitutional Court which paved the way for destroying the institutions in which the societal consensus on the necessity of public control over advertising was materialized. At the same time, the activism of advertising publics was inhibited by conflicts between their vision for advertising and their recognition of freedom of expression for advertisers. By the 00s, the discourses of freedom made it difficult to lay public demands on advertising, especially for those who affiliated with the left spectrum of Korean politics and subscribed to the ideal of liberal democracy. My research thus documented the encroachment of neoliberal hegemony in a particular realm, the advertising industry, and among advertising publics.

At the same time, advertising is not simply reflective but also constitutive of changes. As an influential public discourse, advertising guides conduct and articulates the horizons of the imaginable. Advertising plays a role in larger cultural, social and political struggles and transformations, by advancing, revising and contesting societal ideals and goals directly with its messages and with its money, which are channelled towards particular media outlets. As my

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1 “Real existing constitutional democracies privilege the wealthy. As they install, extend, and protect neoliberal capitalism, they exclude, exploit, and oppress the poor, all the while promising that everybody wins. The present value of democracy relies on positing crucial determinants of our lives and conditions outside the frame of contestation in a kind of “no-go zone.” These suppositions regarding growth, investment, and profit are politically off-limits, so it’s no wonder that the wealthy and privileged evoke democracy as a political ideal. It can’t hurt them” (Dean 2009: 76).
chapters showed, advertising texts are receptive to inputs from advertising publics, and, as limited as it is, advertising does become a space where a common mind is if not achieved then proclaimed on the matters of societal importance. These normative effects of advertising were precisely the burden advertising censors were dealing with when being torn between the respecting the advertisers' freedom to advertise and protecting societal morals.

Advertising publics in South Korea are conscious of their power to shape advertising and, by extension, the world in which it circulates. Advertising publics are in the process of creating a humanist society that advertising celebrates, even though the project is impossible and contradictory. While they certainly do not frame their goal in terms of breaking free of capitalism, they often attack the commercial instrumentality of advertising and subordinate it to public interest. Claiming advertising, a commercial tool, as a site for democratic politics and confronting the limits of this project, advertising publics face—and deal with—the contradiction between private property and collective interests. They end up employing advertising to poke at contradictions of capitalism and at inconsistencies of its supporting fantasies. Advertising publics operate from the immanent contradiction within capitalism—the promise of harnessing the capitalist productivity to achieve a society where human needs are satisfied and prosperity achieved, the irregularities sorted out by the wisdom of the market, on the one hand, and, on the other, the reality of the everyday where human needs are systematically sacrificed to the valorization needs of capital and the market forces work to polarize distribution of benefits and opportunities. In other words, advertising publics take upon the internal failures of capitalism, and it is in confronting those failures where, as Žižek argues (2009), seeds of a new order are possible.
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Appendix: Advertising expenditures in South Korea, 1976-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Advertising expenditures, in million won</th>
<th>Gross Domestic Product, in hundred million won</th>
<th>Advertising expenditures as % of GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>93,500</td>
<td>140,880</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>120,300</td>
<td>180,633</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>169,941</td>
<td>243,882</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>218,554</td>
<td>313,934</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>275,254</td>
<td>377,885</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>318,359</td>
<td>486,727</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>432,621</td>
<td>557,217</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>555,314</td>
<td>655,590</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>683,354</td>
<td>751,263</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>739,312</td>
<td>840,610</td>
<td>0.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>818,539</td>
<td>981,102</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>972,352</td>
<td>1,151,643</td>
<td>0.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1,278,523</td>
<td>1,371,115</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,564,635</td>
<td>1,547,534</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2,000,133</td>
<td>1,866,909</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2,395,461</td>
<td>2,260,076</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2,815,857</td>
<td>2,575,254</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3,228,713</td>
<td>2,906,756</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>4,028,426</td>
<td>3,402,083</td>
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<td>4,951,257</td>
<td>3,988,377</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5,655,559</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>5,376,953</td>
<td>4,911,348</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>3,484,581</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>4,620,573</td>
<td>5,294,977</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,853,430</td>
<td>5,786,645</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5,713,847</td>
<td>6,221,635</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>6,844,211</td>
<td>6,842,635</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6,966,774</td>
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<td>0.96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6,840,102</td>
<td>7,793,805</td>
<td>0.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>7,053,882</td>
<td>8,105,159</td>
<td>0.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>7,633,932</td>
<td>8,491,612</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>7,989,657</td>
<td>9,025,413</td>
<td>0.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7,797,096</td>
<td>10,264,518</td>
<td>0.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>7,256,000</td>
<td>9,795,080</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>