

THE STICK IN THE SWILL BUCKET
AND CRITICAL ESSAY

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
September 2010

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Abstract

The Stick in the Swill Bucket focuses on the implications of Advertising on society by focusing on the journey of Benjamin Baxter as he works as a copywriter for the advertising firm Falcon. The play focuses on the techniques and devices used by advertising agencies to sell products and how they can be misleading and highly influential, by showing them as a direct influence on Ben's downfall and the corruption of society as a whole at the end of the play. The play intends to make its audience re-evaluate its views of Advertising and become more vigilant to the adverts they are exposed to in their everyday lives.

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Critical Analysis

The process of creating *The Stick in the Swill Bucket* taught me a great deal about the art of playwriting and significantly influenced my growth as a writer. Previously my writing was story driven, written hastily based on an initial idea, which often caused other aspects of my plays, such as character and plot, to be over looked. The process of creating this play has enabled me to address and overcome some of these problems and it is this growth as a writer which I intend to explore through this analysis.

The Inspiration behind *The Stick in the Swill Bucket* came from my frustrations at the invasion of my everyday life by advertising. As a student I found I was targeted more frequently by advertisers than I had been previously and it began to alarm me how hard it was to escape their insinuations. I began to catalogue how often I encountered some form of advertising during an average day and was shocked by the results. Even within my own home I was subject to several different forms of advertising either from communication channels such as the TV, internet or phone, or more directly through my post box. I also began to look at the effect the advertising was having on those around me. Most people blocked out the adverts, registering little or no interest, but younger people seemed to be more directly affected, acting out adverts they had previously seen, singing jingles, mimicking slogans and desiring inappropriate products. It was clear to me then that these adverts were more powerful than I had anticipated. The correlation between the attention they were given and the impact they could have on any one individual was of a particular interest to me. Through further research I learnt about the techniques companies employ to influence the unfocused state with which most people receive adverts. Of particular influence was Vance Packard's book *The Hidden Persuaders*, where he described the psychological tests being carried out by

companies in order to discover the “*whys* of our behaviour, so that they can more effectively manipulate our habits and choices in their favour” (1980,32). The book also had several case studies which were fundamental to the shaping of *The Stick in the Swill Bucket* such as the rebranding of prunes in the 1950s where “Overnight the prune became a delightful, sweet fruit, almost a candy, if you were to believe the ads” (1980, 138). The idea that a failing product could be completely rebranded and be highly successful as a result really captured my imagination, as it was a direct indication of the power advertising could have. These aspects helped to cement the idea of creating a play which explored and exposed this world as the powerful force it truly is, with the aim of making people more aware of adverts and more vigilant to what they are exposed to on a daily basis. Although the play focuses on an individual in a specialised industry, I felt that as advertising is a worldwide phenomenon experienced daily by thousands of people it was a relevant and relatable issue to be the focus of my play.

It was clear during the planning of my play that I needed a style which would do justice to the mystical, almost otherworldly quality of the advertising world with which I’d become so enthralled. Throughout the course we were exposed to several different forms of writing and I found myself drawn towards those which offered a more expressionistic form of theatre with aspects of magical realism. Plays such as Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* and Fin Kennedy’s *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found*, and novels such as Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* heavily influenced the production of this play with their work, which combined the idea of the world as we know it with magical elements such as Angels, the living dead and Gods. As I read more of these plays it became apparent to me that magical realism would be an appropriate style for *The Stick in the Swill Bucket*, as this would give me scope to indulge the mystical aspects of advertising while still allowing me to use the

relatable location of modern day London. It was this decision on style that had the most profound effect on the shaping of my play; the magical realism genre gave me scope to create a more fantastical landscape which better reflected the world of advertising as I saw it. The main areas that this influenced were space, characters, language and plot.

Initially I found starting the writing process difficult. In an early seminar Anthony Weigh suggested using the space to generate inspiration. He asked a series of questions based on space, including “where are they?” “what/who is in the space?” and “what can they see” (26th October 2009)? The use of the space as an impetus had an interesting effect on my text. I had decided that there should be two locations, the office and the home with Ben being the link between the two. However this meant that the characters became intrinsically linked to their locations. Other than Ben, I found I could not remove the characters from their setting and as a result several had become stereotypes of those locations. This view was echoed by Stephanie Dale in a supervision meeting where she pointed out that several characters had become “unrealistic”. She also suggested that it may be useful to think about the “objectives and aims of each character” (November 2009). If I wanted the audience to completely believe in these characters and their ability to persuade people I would have to develop them further.

The use of space as inspiration obviously provided me with the stimulus I needed to begin work; however, it had had a negative impact on my creation of characters. After reading Fin Kennedy’s *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found* I began to experiment with the idea of a more fluid space, with locations and scenes running into each other without any real definition. This was a technique I had admired in Kennedy’s play as it added to the dream-like state of the drama, making the changes that occurred seem more uncontrolled and irresistible, something I wanted to replicate in my own play as I felt it would reflect the idea of advertising as an irresistible force. Through research it became

apparent to me that in theatre “we are used to divisions marked ‘Act’ and ‘Scene’. Mostly we read these divisions as implying a break in time or a shift in place” (Meisel, 2007, 3), and these divisions were hindering the development of my play, as they did not create the tone I was aiming for. I therefore decided to try and write the second draft without any definitive act or scene breaks, as I hoped this would better reflect the style I was trying to achieve.

This had an interesting affect on the play. By allowing the scenes to flow into each other I removed the emphasis on the locations. It was no longer important where the characters were, but rather what they were saying or doing in those locations. This was much closer to the magical realist form of writing that I was aiming for. The fluidity between the scenes created a greater sense of Ben being carried along within the advertising world, suggesting the power and ubiquitousness of this world as it flows into everything. It was at this point that I also developed his use of monologue throughout the play. I thought that this would stand in direct contrast to the moments of dialogue in the play and would help to provide a structure during the moments of fluidity where the scenes merged. The use of monologue in Ben’s speech was also a reflection of the use of direct address in advertising. By breaking down the ‘fourth wall’ in this way I hoped to break up the text and prevent the passivity of the audience experience in a similar way to Brecht’s ‘*verfremdungseffekt*’, which would, I hope, help to create an atmosphere where the audience questioned what they were seeing, helping me to achieve my aim of creating a play that revolutionised the way advertising is viewed in today’s society.

In his book *How Plays Work* David Edgar states that “Emplotment gives meaning” (2009, 29). It is the way in which a story is told, the sequence of actions, which can help to convey the meaning of the play. He divides this into two sections, emplotment through time and emplotment through space. Since I had removed any definable space from my play, it

made sense that I try to plot my story through time. However, although the lack of any defined space had provided me with the dream-like, magical quality I had been searching for; it presented a new problem in the form of plot. Since all the scenes now flowed into each other, the definition between days, weeks or months had become blurred. Through the workshop and following discussion I learnt that the audience found the timeframe of the play hard to follow and that it wasn't clear how much time passed between each scene and during the play as a whole.

I had initially decided that there should be no interval in the play, as I felt an interval would break up the action, and would hinder the build up of suspense and tension. However through the writing process it became clear that there was a definite break in the action which split the play into two halves. The break occurred directly after Ben's monologue about the launch of the product. I decided therefore to accentuate this break with a blackout. This gave me space to re-organise the scenes and give the impression of a time lapse, making the movement to six months in the future more believable. After implementing this break it became easier to plot the rest of the play. It was clear that the action leading up the break needed to consist of Ben earning a place on the project and helping to get it to the point of the launch, and the action after the break needed to consist of what happened after the launch. Following the advice of Stephen Jeffreys given in an early seminar on time, I knew I needed to have a "cliff hanger" at the end of the first half, which would ensure the audience would want to return and a "laugh" after the break to "get them back on side" (11th October 2009). Therefore the decision to have the silent children walk on stage before the break was an indication of what was to come and would be both intriguing and disturbing. And the start of the second half, with the re-introduction of Steve discussing his new designer tan, should work to generate a laugh, fulfilling both these devices. The interval itself enabled me to more

accurately structure my play based around the launch, making the later drafts much easier to follow, while maintaining the fluidity I desired.

However, whilst the fluidity provided a style closer to what I required, the problem of the characters, which was accentuated by this style choice, still existed as they remained stereotypical and unrealistic. It was clear that I needed to make my characters more believable, because if they were not believable then the audience would not care about them and “an audience that doesn’t care stops listening in the end” (Ayckbourn, 2002, 14). The main problem seemed to be that with very little experience of people from this line of work and almost no knowledge of the world itself I was basing my characters on assumptions I had made about the industry. Trying to generate authenticity in the world of advertising within my play was a real challenge for me, and making my characters broader and more realistic meant that I needed to research into the advertising world. Therefore I devised a questionnaire which I sent to people who worked within the advertising industry. The questions included details about the working day and the lifestyle around work, and the answers I received were fundamental to the shaping of the characters. I found that the profession was a lot more ruthless than I imagined. Several of the answers revealed how competitive the industry is, with people explaining that they are constantly trying to persuade clients they know best and keep accounts. Another valuable source of information was online blogs from contemporary copywriters such as Dave Trott from CTS advertising. In his blog he often discussed and revealed the techniques he used to generate new adverts, and his general thinking behind his work. He also occasionally drew on techniques from other people within the advertising world such as James Lowther whose work he discusses in his post “Is Any Advice Worth A XXXX?” these tips such as “chuck out the brief”, “do the opposite” and “Fight for it” (11th July 2010) directly influenced how Ben approached the initial brief on

the product in my own play. Other posts also influenced the play such as the claim that “Communication isn’t about speaking correctly, it’s about being heard correctly” (21st July 2010), this view that you can make people see your point of view simply by changing the language you use is echoed in the play when Tranquillity is rebranded by Michelle and Ben. This research into the world of advertising both from the questionnaire and other resources resulted in a number of changes, mainly to the character of Michelle.

My research meant that I could create a more believable dialogue for Michelle, which included the terms and jargon she would be affiliated with. Particularly useful in this area was the Chartered Institute of Marketing, whose glossary provided an insight into the slang words and acronyms used within the industry to define individuals and describe the attraction of products. Terms such as “nag-factor”, “shelf shout” and “bumpers” (‘Marketing Glossary’ website, 2010) found their way into the play and the acronyms used to define demographics reinforced my ideas of the stereotyping of the audience which inspired the production of the play. However it was not until a much later seminar where Steve Waters pointed out that “power comes from not exerting it” (14th June 2010), that Michelle really began to develop. In an early cold reading of the play, the actor reading Michelle said she believed her character hated Ben and her objective was to get rid of him. This interpretation led to her portrayal of Michelle being incredibly harsh and unlikeable, it was through a combination of this reading and later comments I received that I began to see that rather than having Michelle demand that Ben leaves, it was much more powerful for her to dismiss him altogether with some menial task. I began to find ways for her to exert her authority without getting angry or out of control. In an early draft of the play Michelle quickly resorts to anger:

Ben: Right, well...I guess we’d better get started.

Michelle: Started?

Ben: Yeah you know, no point wasting time is there? I thought we could try-

Michelle: Oh, you're leading this then are you?

Ben: Sorry?

Michelle: You're, uh, taking the reins, are you?...

Ben: No. I just thought-

Michelle: ...Taking the lead? Taking control?

Ben: No.

Pause

Ben: But that is why you've called me here isn't it? To get started on the campaign?

Michelle: Huh! Is that what you thought? I wondered why you came bounding in here.
And there was me thinking the coffee was a kind of bribe...

Ben: Bribe?

Michelle: ...but in fact you thought, you really thought that I wanted to get started
straight away, barely fifteen minutes since the meeting and you thought we'd
just get straight on with it?

(Lines (1) 2010, 4)

I needed to find a way for Michelle to express the fact that she did not want to work with Ben without her seeming emotional or uncontrolled. Therefore in order to make her seem more controlled and therefore powerful in the submitted version, rather than demand Ben leave she offloads unimportant jobs on to him to keep him quiet, leaving her free to do the important work:

Ben: Right, well...I guess we'd better get started. /I've brought some ideas I was working on-

He indicates a folder under his arm.

Michelle: That would be better than just standing there staring, yes.

Ben puts the folder on her desk and opens it.

Ben: Well...I-

Michelle: There's some photocopying to do on the product portfolio, then you can type up the memos I've drafted to media and art, so I can fire them off this afternoon.

Ben: But I thought-

Michelle: Make sure you get it done before lunch; you know what those media guys are like about lunch breaks.

Ben: I thought I was going to be working on the campaign.

Michelle: You are.

Ben: No, I thought I'd be working with you, on the creative.

Michelle: You are working with me.

(Lines (2) 2010, 5)

In this version, Michelle's initial sarcastic comment coupled with her blocking of Ben's questions better represent her power and position in the agency. In this version I also attempted to keep Michelle's speeches fairly neutral as it became evident to me through reviewing my past drafts, that anger on her part was an indication of weakness. Therefore, by making her respond to each of Ben's questions in a dismissive tone both her position over him and her own emotional control become more apparent and served as key aspects of her character. I feel this version of Michelle is much more realistic and believable as a character; her sarcasm and apathy to the moralistic element of advertising define her as a character and help to make her final betrayal of Ben more believable.

The constant exposure to new plays on the course also affected the language used by characters in the new draft. Throughout my reading I became captivated by plays which captured the complexities of language. In particular Anthony Neilson's *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* where he explored the illogical side to language with 'Insecurity guards' who when questioned point out "Why would you guard something if it's secure" (Neilson 2007, 27)? And Harold Pinter whose manipulation of language I found particularly interesting:

Kate: If you only have one of something you can't say it's the best of anything.

Deely: Because you have nothing to compare it with?

Kate: Mmm (*Pause*)

Deely: (*smiling*) She was incomparable.

It was these technicalities and nuances of language that I believed to be fundamental in the world of Advertising. Often the way products were worded disguised other meanings, or forced the viewer to come to a desired conclusion. In order to help me reach my goal of unveiling the world of advertising I attempted to reflect the impact language and words could have with the slogan “tie up their tongues with tranquillity”. At the beginning of the play this slogan acts as a comedic comment on the secret desire of parents to silence their children, with Ben naively suggesting that when they’re eating they cannot talk. However when it is later revealed that tranquillity really does silence people as it reduces them to a comatose state where they no longer have the ability to make decisions of their own free will, the implications of the language are revealed. With the slogan I attempted to improve my manipulation of the language used in the play and reflect the way language used in advertising can be deceptive, since the slogan makes sense with both explanations I believe I have achieved this.

Whilst Michelle and Ben became more defined as characters through the use of more complex and intelligent language, despite my best efforts I could not make the character of Fliss fit the story. The decision to cut her from the final version was a difficult one, as for me she was the moral Geiger of the play, providing an alternative view of advertising. However it became clear after reviewing the play that she was not working in the story. Removing her had an interesting effect, several of her moral views could be inferred onto Ben making his motivations and actions clearer and his character more complex. Rather than having Fliss worry about the affect the product has on the children, it became Ben’s priority, making his final resistance to Michelle more believable.

Removing Fliss also allowed the character of Continuous Spin to become more integrated within the story. It became clear that many of the scenes with Continuous and Fliss contained important information which should have been conveyed to Ben, without her I had greater freedom to allow Ben to encounter Continuous and this led to the development of Continuous into more of a advisory role, giving him a greater opportunity to manipulate and influence Ben's decisions which made more sense with regards to Ben's downfall at the end of the play.

This in turn also led to the decision to change the way that parts were distributed within the play. Initially I had intended that the actor playing Continuous Spin would also play every other role in the play, this, I hoped, would help to reinforce the idea that advertising was ubiquitous and unavoidable and that there is a degree of facelessness in advertising where you are lumped into the role of consumer without any individual personality traits or uniqueness. However apart from the character of Howard, none of the other characters shared any major similarities with Continuous Spin and his multirole playing diluted his impact as an archetypal mystical character. The decision to separate him from the other roles led to his character becoming more defined and extreme. He began to embody all the fantastical elements of advertising in a disconcerting, wild being. This, for me, was much closer to the magical realist style I had envisioned, and echoes can be seen between Continuous and the character of MR LIES in *Angels in America* from whom I drew inspiration.

Unwilling to lose the ideas of ubiquitousness and facelessness, I decided that there should be two choric actors, one male and one female who acted all of the remaining roles. This would maintain the ideas I had initially hoped to convey through the use of doubling and also had the added advantage of reflecting the idea that the only discernable difference in the

eyes of the advertisers was that of gender. Because the decision to multirole parts was deliberate I wanted to the audience to be aware of the fact that the same actor was playing several roles. It was not important to me therefore that these roles were not stereotypical, although several playwrights warned against the use of stereotypes in drama; “in great drama, the most memorable and indeed the most meaningful moment is when the character departs from and even challenges his or her role” (Edgar, 2009, 58), and although I was aware that the stereotyped roles would be predictable, the situation into which I was immersing them was not, and their stereotypical nature was an advantage to my aim in that it was a reflection of the way in which adverts targeted, created and reinforced stereotypes within our society. It also meant that I could create a greater variety of roles which gave a sense of the world as a whole, and allowed Ben to experience firsthand the affects the product was having on those around him.

Another problem I encountered which was typical of much of my earlier work was that of action. Early versions of *The Stick in the Swill Bucket* would often contain whole scenes without any action at all. Or if action were used, it was as a means of exposition:

Ben goes to the window and opens it.

Michelle: Right, so this cereal, it says here that- what are you doing?

Ben: Opening the window. Can't work unless the window is open.

Michelle: I don't want the window open.

Ben: Why not?

Michelle: Because I don't, it's noisy and cold. All the hustle and bustle I don't want to hear it.

Ben: But that's exactly why I like it! The sounds of the world going on, London, the traffic, the public, our public those people we're trying to reach, it's good to listen to them, don't you think?

(Lines (1) 2010, 9)

In this version I used the action of opening the window to reveal Ben's inner thoughts on the world around him. Which was a technique I had often employed in my previous work, however on reflection this seemed a very simplistic and blunt way of revealing information and lacked the intelligence and subtlety I was aiming for. In a seminar with Claire Ingham she explained the differences between telling and showing and its importance in film. She showed us the short film *Inside Out* where a love story is told without the use of any words at all. It became apparent, from this lecture that actions could represent a number of things and could be used to reveal things about a character without them openly stating it. It appeared to be an almost universal opinion that "In the world of the play there are no accidents. Nothing occurs by chance, not even chance" (Fuchs 2004, 6), and so I began to re-examine my play and try to remove any arbitrary actions or moments of dialogue and replace them with things that helped to forward the story.

An example of this can be found in the opening scene. In this scene, whilst trying to convince Michelle that she should work with him Ben walks around her desk and knocks one of her awards off of a shelf. This action had a number of implications on the text, the first most obvious advantage was that it drew the audiences' attention to the awards which informed them of Michelle's success as a copywriter. Secondly the action of accidentally

knocking over the award reasserts Ben's status. Ben has been growing in confidence throughout the scene up until this point, where he feels comfortable enough to walk around and explore Michelle's office, making their status seem almost equal. However by having him knock the award from the shelf accidentally, it reminds the audience of his inexperience and lower status than Michelle. And finally the action had a final advantage of allowing Michelle time to look at Ben's portfolio, which allows him eventually to convince her to work with him, therefore forwarding the plot. In the submission version of this text therefore the actions carry a lot more meaning and implications than they did in earlier drafts of the play, and I have learnt throughout the writing process that within the boundaries of a play, nothing is arbitrary.

The biggest problem I encountered while writing *The Stick in the Swill Bucket* was how to end the play. I knew I wanted it to represent Ben's downfall and be a reversal in terms of his downfall being caused by something which he had initially desired. I was also aware that in keeping with my magical realism theme the ending would need to be of epic proportions on par with Kushner's Angel descending from the hospital ceiling or Kennedy's revelation that Charlie is an unidentified corpse.

In the original draft of the play, the story came to its conclusion with Ben being trapped by both women. Fliss attempted suicide as a desperate attempt to convince Ben to stay, as she knew Ben's moral nature would mean that he would rather live with her than have her death on his conscience. And Michelle, wanting to ensure Ben's silence and complete dedication to her, rips out his tongue with a kiss. For me the removal of Ben's tongue was important as it symbolised that he was completely trapped in the world he was once so keen to enter. Since the original product was a cereal called taste for which Ben created the tag line "tie up their tongues with taste" (Lines (1) 2010, 16), it seemed an

appropriately ironic twist that Ben's own tongue is removed at the end echoing the idea of him being the cause of his own downfall. However upon reading this ending in class and discussing it with other people it became clear that it did not suit the style of the rest of the play. With no hints of this gory ending earlier on it did not seem to follow the rest of the story.

In the first tutorial with Steve Waters he asked a series of questions, one of which was "What is the worst thing that could happen to these characters and to the world as a whole" (17th November 2009)? It was this question that made me rethink my ending. Although it did reveal Ben's demise, it was a highly personal and melodramatic ending. Ben's downfall had very little effect on the rest of the world within the play. Reviewing my initial aims and intentions on writing the play helped me to realise that in order to achieve the re-evaluation of our perception of advertising that I was aiming for, the ending would have to happen on a much larger scale, and affect a greater number of people, ultimately everyone who inhabited the play. It also became clear that I needed to involve the advertising world more as a direct influence. It is from the combination of these decisions that I drafted the new ending.

In the second draft of the play, Ben and Michelle are approached by a government official asking for their involvement on a new healthy eating campaign, this campaign would co-inside with the launch of the Taste cereal nationwide in the hope that it would "lead to everyone enjoying *Taste* for breakfast" (Lines (2) 2010, 65). When Ben begins to try and back out of the campaign Michelle revealed that she had trapped Ben into working on taste by making him sign a waiver in the first scene, and the two of them attend a press conference where Ben condones taste. In this version Fliss no longer attempts suicide but instead eats the cereal herself which I hoped would reflect the extent to which Ben's campaign has had an effect, as Fliss had been opposed to advertising throughout the play and it is only her own

partner's advert that can cause her demise. While this ending was closer to what I wanted to achieve it was still riddled with problems. Whilst the inclusion of the waiver explained Ben's inability to escape, which was lacking in the previous draft and the inclusion of the Government helped to generate a greater sense of the scale of the dilemma, the press conference at the end of the play did not seem to be a viable scenario. It was clear from discussions on the play that the audience found it hard to believe that there would be a press conference over the decision to launch a new healthy eating campaign from the government, where Michelle and Ben would be the focus of attention.

It was also clear that although certain additions such as the government involvement and the introduction of the waiver helped the play make more sense thematically in terms of hidden implications, they occurred too early in the play, meaning that from an early point there was no hope of a reversal for the audience and so the ending itself, apart from being unbelievable, lacked the impact I desired. As David Edgar states in his book *How Plays Work* "Drama is about the balance between the expected...and the surprising" (Edgar 2009, 204), and a reversal at the end of the play was how I initially intended to achieve my aim of making the audience re-evaluate their views of advertising, by providing them with the unexpected and making them question what they were seeing.

Edgar also states that "If you want to make audiences cry, make them laugh at the same thing first" (Edgar 2009, 173), this was something I had witnessed firsthand in a number of plays and wished to recreate with my own. The most prominent example for me is in *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth. Throughout the play the protagonist, Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, tells highly elaborated and mystical stories. Often exaggerated and full of incredible feats they invoke laughter both from the other characters and from the audience. One of these stories features a giant and a drum, with the message being that if he were ever in trouble

Johnny would simply have to bang the drum and the giants would appear to help him.

Despite the other characters mocking this story and thereby making the audience too, doubt its credibility, when Johnny bangs this drum in the final scene and the trees shake in the final moment of the play, the effect is instantaneous. The nature of Johnny's unfaltering belief in his tales makes this end scene even more tragic, with his desperate summoning of the giants, and armies of 'Byron Boys' it is the fact that we, as an audience, laughed at these tales that makes the harsh reality that they are all he has even more apparent in the final moments.

I hoped to create a similar stirring of emotions in my own work, therefore in the submission version of the play I included another reversal closer to the end of the play, where Ben attempts to reveal the truth behind the chemicals in the product, before Michelle releases information about the new 'health benefits' of the cereal. It is only at the very end that we hear that Michelle has beaten him by getting her report published first. This ending, was much closer to what I was trying to achieve, the addition of Ben's decision to risk his job, gave the audience hope that he may be able to stop the spread of the product across the country. It was also more in keeping with his character, who although ambitious, was morally and fundamentally good. In order to better realise the scale of the ending, I decided to set the final scene in the Underground. This was beneficial in a number of aspects; it allowed me to incorporate some of the adverts and new advertising techniques that had been discussed earlier in the play, such as the body scanner system. It also opened the ending up away from the private spaces of the Falcon office and into the public places of London; this reinforced the idea that the product was having a direct affect on the public in the play, as they were now seen on stage.

Although the ending in the submission draft of *The Stick in the Swill Bucket* is the closest to what I initially intended, I am aware that there are still several problems with it.

The use of the body scanner adverts in the final scene could prove to be confusing and overly complex when performed over Ben's final speech. It could also seem like a chaotic ending with so much happening on the stage at the same time, and in further drafts I would have to work out a way to make the action seem more controlled or find a way for Ben to deliver his final monologue alone on stage, while still maintaining the climactic feeling which is generated from the build up of the adverts and actions.

Overall these techniques that I have implemented throughout the play, such as the fluidity of space, the use of monologue, the ideas of multi-role playing and the use of stereotypical characters all help to contribute towards the initial aim of my play to make the audience re-evaluate it's view of advertising. In terms of theatre this 'style' of magical realism, which I have tried to achieve, will, I hope, create a theatrical experience that is both enjoyable and unusual for the audience. The techniques I employed throughout the writing process, not only contributed to the themes and meaning within the play, but they also create drama that makes these themes and meanings interesting to the audience. While the fate of the world within the play is relatively bleak, Ben's realisation and re-evaluation of his views on advertising and attempt to prevent the spread of the tranquillity advertisement, will I hope cause people to re-examine their own views of advertising. This suggests that as a writer I believe I have reached a satisfactory conclusion to the play and have broadly achieved what I intended when I started writing.

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The Stick in the Swill Bucket

By Sarah Lines

Characters:

Benjamin Baxter: A young ambitious copywriter, late twenties.

Michelle Taylor: A senior copywriter, early to mid thirties.

Continuous Spin: An embodiment of the advertising world, in both speech and style of dress he resembles a compère or ringleader, he is ageless.

Man's Voice / Howard: The head of Copywriting at Falcon, Early fifties / Alexander: A government official / Steve: Early Thirties works in Media at Falcon - One male actor plays all these roles.

Woman's Voice / Louise: Mid-twenties Ben's Landlady / Woman: A businesswoman from a client company / Tramp: An eclectic being that inhabits the streets of London, her age is indeterminate - One female actor plays all these roles.

Points to note:

Parts have been deliberately doubled and any devices to highlight this fact should be employed within the production to generate the idea that the advertising world is ubiquitous and unavoidable.

The two choric actors generally interact as needed or directed by the stage directions, they sometimes have other character roles than those stated above, such as show girls, party goers and commuters.

Space within the play is relatively undefined and scenes should flow continuously without breaks or blackouts other than those mentioned in the text.

/ indicates an interruption, when the / occurs in a line the next speech should be started.

...at the beginning and end of lines indicates that the reader should run the lines together, ignoring other speakers.

Words in **bold** indicate that the two speakers should talk at the same time.

Prologue:

Continuous: Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to tonight's show. I hope you are all sitting comfortably and are ready to enjoy this evening's entertainment. We here at The Stick in the Swill Bucket aim to ensure you get everything you could possibly desire from a theatre going experience, your every whim will be fulfilled, every wish granted and every desire satisfied.

Pause

Terms and Conditions Apply.

Pause

I just have a short disclaimer which, since no one reads them, management have considered it necessary that I read to you. Please bear with me while I indulge them in this little legal frivolity.

He clears his throat, and then reads at gathering speed.

The Stick in the Swill Bucket is a completely original and unique show, all names and places used are completely fictional and any resemblance to reality or real people is purely coincidental or paranoia on your part.

Use of the show to create any nuclear, chemical or biological weapons is strictly prohibited. Should the show generate any ideas of this or any other nature, said ideas will be the legal property of the writer and

should not be used, acted upon or discussed under any circumstances.

Any ideas or opinions arising out of, or incurred as a result of the show, or performance witnessed tonight, should not be held against The Stick in the Swill Bucket , its actors, writers or producers, by you or any others under any circumstances, to the fullest extent as permitted by law.

Talking about the show prior to performance is strictly prohibited unless it is in good nature, positive terminology and in accordance with our terms and conditions. By watching this show you agree to adhere to every letter of these terms and conditions without exception or omission.

Ignoring these terms and conditions could lead to death, personal injury or sheer dissatisfaction with the show itself.

Thank you. Enjoy the show.

Soundscape of famous advert jingles slightly distorted. They need to be maintained enough so that they are recognisable but with a definite alteration which leaves people confused. It starts off alone then builds as the voices start. It fades out just before the final voice talks.

Man's Voice: The Future's bright, the future's...our company.

Woman's Voice: It's a great deal easier with...our website.com

Man's Voice: Our Holidays built with...ourselves in mind.

Woman's Voice: I'd rather have a bowl of...cereal

Man's Voice: Every little...keeps you coming back

Woman's Voice: Find the perfect mix, with...our product.

Man's Voice: Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's...our product.

Woman's Voice: Taste the...similarities at our shop.

Man's Voice: You're loving it.

Woman's Voice: Zero, Nothing, that's...what's good for you in our burgers.

Man's Voice: It's good to talk...because it makes us money.

Woman's Voice: Targeted pain relief with...our product.

Man's Voice: Have a break. Have...our product.

Woman's Voice: Apparently this isn't just food.

Ben: Monday. Meeting with Howard at 10. Up at 6. Go for a run, health kick, get fit. Back in seven minutes later, cramp, stitch: pathetic. Start tomorrow.

Shower, shave, clean cut, professional, looking good! Grab some toast, out the door!

Back in, forgot bag. Good start.

Travel:

Commuters enter and "travel" with Ben.

Bus, train, tube, train, bus: pushed, shoved, hustled, bustled, part of it, love it, new day.

Work:

Commuters become Falcon's employees when Ben says "Work".

eleventh floor, computer on: inbox, 88 messages, junk, junk, memo, junk, invoice,
junk, junk, party invite – cut short, time for meeting:

Chorus become people in the meeting.

Sit, listen, "We at Falcon" "valued employees" "best of the bunch", "sell the product,
destroy the opposition" blah blah. First Pitch, Michelle

Pause

That won't work. That'll never work. That won't sell. What is she doing? It's all
wrong, I know! Just ask me! "Benjamin?" Heads turn, eyes stare, brain reels, mouth
opens and it's there, that's brilliant! "You're paired together!" Together! With
Michelle Taylor! Can't believe it! Meeting dismissed.

Chorus leave.

Go to her office, long corridor, door after door, brought her a coffee, she won't like it.

Michelle: I don't like coffee.

Ben: No.

Michelle: No.

Ben: Oh.

Pause

Michelle: Just put it down.

Michelle is sat writing at a desk. Ben looks for a place to put it down, both his hands are full and he is searching for quite some time. Michelle is obviously becoming impatient trying to work.

Michelle: Oh give it here.

She takes the coffee from him and puts it down.

Ben smiles brilliantly. Michelle ignores him and goes back to work.

Ben: Right, well...I guess we'd better get started. /I've brought some ideas I was working on-

He indicates a folder under his arm.

Michelle: That would be better than just standing there staring, yes.

Ben puts the folder on her desk and opens it.

Ben: Well, I-

Michelle: There's some photocopying to do on the product portfolio, then you can type up the memos I've drafted to media and art, so I can fire them off this afternoon.

Ben: But I thought-

Michelle: Make sure you get it done before lunch; you know what those media guys are like about lunch breaks.

Ben: I thought I was going to be working on the campaign.

Michelle: You are.

Ben: No, I thought I'd be working with you, on the creative.

Michelle: You are working with me.

Ben: You know what I mean.

Michelle: Look, Ben, I've got this covered. I've had another session with the DMU and found an angle we can run with. It's done. It's sorted, we'll run it past Howard later today just to get the go ahead, then we'll be ready to pitch to Clarity later this week.

Ben: But how can it be done? We've only just had the meeting.

Michelle: Well there are a few minor things to sort out, but essentially it's fine.

Ben: You don't think I can do it, do you?

Michelle: I'm sorry?

Ben: You don't think I'm capable of being the creative on this product.

Michelle: No one's doubting your capability Ben.

Ben: So try me, give me a chance to let me try my wings. If I don't perform, I'll do the monkey work and leave the creative to you. What have you got to lose? You're stuck and I might be able to help, our synergy has got to be better than anything we produce alone right? I mean I can't promise to win you anymore of these awards *(he walks round her desk, taps one and knocks it over)* shit, sorry, *(he fumbles with it trying to put it back)* but I might at least be able to help you get something pitch worthy to run with.

Whilst Ben has been fumbling with the awards Michelle has spun his folder round and scanned the contents she quickly spins it back before he turns to face her

Michelle: Look Ben, it's great that you're so keen, but the truth is I really don't need any help, it's just a case of re-thinking and I'd-

Ben: I don't know about that.

Pause

Ben: Everyone needs help, don't they? Whether they ask for it or not, they get help from all sorts of places, either directly from friends, family, colleagues, or indirectly from ideas generated from what they see, or hear, or read...

Michelle: What are you trying to imply?

Ben: Oh nothing. But if I were you I'd reconsider my offer, because even if I didn't see you, and you still ran with that *(he indicates the folder)* I could haul you up for plagiarism or corruption of creative licence. Couldn't I?

Michelle regards him for a long time, then she smiles.

Michelle: Alright Colombo, I'll tell you what I'll do. We'll see what you can do with this campaign; we'll put the whole thing in your name. If it carries you get to take complete credit for it all. If it bombs, you take complete responsibility and all the consequences that go with it. Ok?

Ben: Sounds fair to me, but I'd prefer Sherlock if you wouldn't mind, after all everybody knows I look like a young Robert Downy Jr.

Michelle: Ha! Well, Rob, I guess you better have a look at the brief then.

Ben: As simple as that?

Michelle: Unless you'd rather go back to the photocopying?

She hands him the brief.

Ben: No, no, let me see...Ok. Clarity's new cereal launch blah blah exciting advances....predominantly children's market...calming effect?

Michelle: And now you see the problem.

Ben: Calming? For kids?

Michelle: I know.

Ben: That'll never sell.

Michelle: I know.

Ben: How are we supposed to capitalize on the kids market with a calming cereal? Kids want things that fizz and whistle and bang, they want bright colours and loud noises.

Michelle: Well it is bright blue.

Ben: Blue?

Michelle: Blue is calming. Apparently.

Ben: Fuck, look at the stuff in it.

Michelle: Again, another problem.

Ben: There are more chemicals in this than floor cleaner.

Michelle: That's a wonderful selling point. Should we make that the strap-line?

Ben throws her a look

Ben: There must be a way to sell it. What've they called it?

Michelle: *Tranquillity.*

Pause

Ben: Seriously?

Michelle: "*Tranquillity*" part of the new aurora range from Clarity.

Ben: Seriously? Who came up with that? Who seriously thought that was a good idea? '*Tranquillity*'! Most kids I know can't even say *Tranquillity* let alone eat a bowl full of it!

Michelle: And how many kids do you know?

Ben: Well, none but-

Michelle: That was a valid argument then.

Ben: You know what I meant. It's a shit name.

Michelle: Oh forget the bloody name would you? Let's try and do something else.

Ben: Ok, ok, fine. *Pause Tranquillity...Tranquillity....Tranquillity...What does it make you think of? Kids' cereal?*

Michelle: Brats.

Ben: That won't sell the product.

Michelle: And if I said 'love' and 'cute' and 'adorable' that would, would it?

Ben: No, but we're brainstorming, I'm trying to find an angle on this thing, some way to capture the essence of this crap so we can sell it to the masses. Brat's not helpful, it's-

Michelle: You asked what it made me think of, it makes me think of spoiled, screaming, snot-nosed little brats.

Ben: *Yes but*, if we do some horizon scanning to find out what we associate with the product we can work on an angle that people won't expect it'd be less aggressive, less forceful, less..

Michelle: Effective?

Ben: No, more effective. It would mean we could override the comparative advertising that is road blocking channels at the moment, and still penetrate the market and convince the buyers from other brands to switch to Clarity. There's been a paradigm shift in the way we advertise, if we think about this properly we could get the biggest ROI possible, break through the clutter and find an integrated solution to get this thing on the run way. I mean I think we should touch base with Clarity and synch up our ideas so we can hit the ground running you know?

Michelle: Err, no. Look Ben, do you want to drop a few dozen of those buzz words and try and talk to me on a normal level.

Ben: You use jargon too.

Michelle: That's not the point Ben, jargon won't sell the cereal for us, we still have to think. We have to out think our opposition.

Pause

Ben: Wasn't Clarity behind Snax?

Michelle: Snax and Skinnies.

Ben: So, is this aurora range zero fat too?

Michelle: It's their trademark.

Ben: They did well, to get that off the ground.

Michelle: How so?

Ben: Well those lipid absorbing bacteria, they make sure your body doesn't absorb anything don't they? You could spend all day eating and you wouldn't put on any weight at all. You get nothing from that food. Effectively it's completely useless.

Michelle: Or complete genius. After all, it still tastes the same, so effectively you can eat whatever you want and never have to worry about putting on weight or damaging your body. Even people who are allergic to things can enjoy them because it all passes through their system.

Ben: I suppose. I guess it's all about how you look at it.

Michelle: Exactly, now where were we?

Ben: Children.

Michelle: Oh yeah.

Ben: How are we going to do this?

Michelle: All we've come up with so far is Brat.

Ben: Doesn't say much about us does it?

Michelle: How do you mean?

Ben: Well clearly not the nurturing types are we?

Michelle: How can you nurture something like that? Some howling little gremlin that just wails all the time.

Ben: How would you know if you haven't got one?

Michelle: My next-door neighbours have just become new parents. Sometimes I'd like to grab their little shit and rip it's tongue out, that'd shut him up.

Ben: Shut him up...

Michelle: Yeah he always, starts at three in the morning, without fail, just as I'm drifting off, it's like he knows. They've always hated me, well maybe not hated, but disliked me at least, it's like they know that I have no idea what to do with them, what they want.

Ben: That's it!

Michelle: What's it?

Ben: We'll shut them up. The cereal! It's calming right? It's designed to calm kids down. That's what it does.

Michelle: Yeah? So?

Ben: So, we show it doing that!

Michelle: And that will appeal to kids how?

Ben: Not kids, the parents. We'll direct it at them. Appeal to their subconscious. You know all that subconscious mumbo-jumbo Freud, Jung and all that? They'll like it and they won't even know why. We'll relate it to how they really feel about their kids. The thoughts you never voice, the thoughts you never tell anyone, thoughts like how annoying kids are first thing in the morning when they're bouncing off the walls and you can barely drag yourself out of bed. Like how you'd quite like it if they had their voice taken away, just for a day or so, or at least until you got to work.

Michelle: What are you talking about?

Ben: We can show the comedy in the whole thing, show it as an easy solution, while mentioning the health benefits.

Michelle: There are health benefits?

Ben: Less hyperactivity, less stress.

Michelle: But the additives.

Ben: Flavour enhancers, taste enrichers

Michelle: Ok, what about the colours, E-numbers?

Ben: Aesthetic boosting extras.

Michelle Laughs.

Ben: We don't actually have to say what's in it; it's up to them to check the label isn't it?

Michelle: I didn't know you were so corrupt.

Ben: I'm not corrupt. It's only showing them what they were already thinking.

Michelle: And how do you know that's what they were thinking?

Ben: Ah come on! Comedians? T-V dramas? Are you telling me all those letters about 'the youth of today' have no grounds?

Pause

Anyway, I'm not saying we show them being bad parents or anything, just tired. Like I said appeal to the comedy. People like what makes them laugh.

Michelle: But we have to have grounds for it. People may like what makes them laugh, but they won't buy it unless they have some facts too, you know like 'clinically proven to protect teeth. '

Ben: It's not toothpaste.

Michelle: It was an example.

Ben: It definitely won't improve their teeth...

Michelle: It was an example.

Ben: ...More likely to rot them, with the amount of sweetener

Michelle: It was a stop that ok? Look, we need it to sound convincing not just amusing.

Ben: Won't it just carry on the 'specially formulated bacteria' that Clarity's famous for?

Michelle: That'll help, but 'kids on diets' doesn't have positive connotations. We'll have to work on the health angle, benefits for the kids that kind of thing. It's probably better to underplay the whole "nothing is absorbed" angle. Parents won't buy something if the kid gets nothing out of it.

Ben: These ingredients, are any of them natural? You know like from plants and stuff?

Michelle: I doubt it, why?

Ben: I just thought it might help you know, natural ingredients, organic, that sort of thing.

Michelle: Well its wholegrain.

Ben: Is it?

Michelle: Yeah, that's about all it's got going for it though.

Ben: But that's good, that'll sell. It's passed the EU standards?

Michelle: We wouldn't be trying to sell it if it hadn't.

Ben: So it's ok right?

Michelle: Well I'm not going to be digging into a bowl full anytime soon.

Ben: No but it's not like, dangerous or anything is it? I mean if I'm signing my name to something-

Michelle: It wouldn't have passed if it was. But if you want to be off the campaign, we could ask Howard to-

Ben: No you're right.

Pause

Michelle: Ok, so the approach we're going for is comedy, shut your brats up, get some peace and quiet routine. Play up the whole "modern hectic lifestyle" angle.

Ben: Yeah, tie up their tongues with *Tranquillity*.

Michelle: Oh, that's good! I like that.

She makes a note

Michelle: Do you know what? I think this might actually sell.

Ben: Of course it will.

Michelle: Because it was your idea?

Ben: Not just because of that. Because other cereals only promise to feed your kids, this one promises to shut them up. They're not just buying a product, they're buying a promise.

Michelle smiles, as she does so the scene changes the mismashed adverts and static is heard ending with Howard speaking to the room.

Howard: I am not going to buy a product that I don't believe in, and so far a bright blue, calming cereal for kids does not get my hopes up. Do you know how many cereal adverts are out there? Or how many adverts come to that? Hundreds,

thousands of the damn things, and we just have to make one. Now don't go telling me about the latest CGI or HDR or PHP rubbish, you can stick as many flashing wotsits as you like on it but if they don't believe in it they won't buy it. This better be good guys, this better grab them by the knackers and force them to listen, because they're switching off. My wife, my own wife wants to get a Sky+ box , so that we can "skip the adverts". My own fucking wife wants to skip the very things I spend my life's work creating. They're "boring" or "annoying" she says, stupid cow doesn't even realise that the only reason we can afford a sky+ box is because of adverts. She should be watching *them*, not some drippy American drama. But she's not, most of them aren't, they're finding ways to escape us and we need to stop this. I want this advert to be the best Falcon has seen. Clarity are a leading brand and this is their first cereal, if we can make this work then they'll keep coming back, we'll have them as clients for life, the big bucks for life.

Michelle: Alright Howard, do you have to give us a pep talk every time we come in here?

Howard: I just want you to know the scale of this deal. It's pretty big.

Michelle: Well, I'm good with big things.

They laugh, Ben looks nervous.

Howard: So, hit me, what have you got?

Michelle: Well...

Ben: The air becomes fat with voices, engorged on words and sentences. Your thoughts are all on what will happen if this gets the go ahead. Parties, promotions, campaigns, deals, all fill your mind. Your hands start to sweat, damp, clammy handshakes and disgusted girlfriends fill your mind and you try to subtly wipe your hand on your trousers. Just the slightest movement so they won't see, won't know what you are doing. Please don't realise what I'm doing. You can't concentrate on the conversation...

Michelle: Ben?

Ben: ...You can't hear what they're saying, what they're talking about but you know you need to tune in, to listen, because it'll be your turn soon and you'll have to speak, to carry on with the pitch and...

Michelle: Ben?

Ben: ...sell it to them; stop thinking about your hands, concentrate, concentrate.

Michelle: Ben! I was just telling Howard about the initial idea, maybe you could elaborate a bit?

Ben: Err..Yeah...err....Actually, we went for parents...err....shutting their kids up.

Pause

Howard: I'm not sure I'm following.

Michelle: Well, you know, play up to the whole 'kids are annoying' idea.

Howard: I thought it was a kid's cereal. How will that appeal?

Ben: We decided to target it at the parents.

Howard: You decided to change the target market?

Michelle: It's not changing anything Howard. At the end of the day it's the parents that will buy the cereal. Yes, some may give in to the nag-factor, but not all.

Ben: It's supposed to be funny.

Howard: Funny?

Ben: The idea that you could shut your kid up for a bit, make him lose his voice.

Michelle: So if we shift the focus onto the parents, they've got to see some benefit in it, other than just giving little Jimmy what he wants.

Howard: Jimmy?

Ben: It's an example.

Michelle: So, the idea is; the morning routine, chaotic, noisy. Mum and Dad looking run down, kids running wild, then they eat the cereal and peace is restored; Mum and Dad are happy and relaxed while the kids are running around in the background trying to speak.

Ben: Like a real life mute button.

Michelle: It would obviously be a farce, something to make them smile.

Pause

Howard: Do either of you have children?

Michelle: No

Ben: No, / but (*his phone rings*)

Howard: Turn that off. Do either of you know what it is like in the morning?

Michelle/Ben: No

Howard: Neither do I. My wife deals with the kids, I normally leave before they get up. But I get them at the weekend, their sleepy eyes and porridge smeared smiles...And it is a nightmare trying to get them ready for anything! *(Chuckles)* a real life mute button! What I wouldn't give for one of those on Sunday morning. Where did that come from?

Ben: I don't know. Just watching people I guess.

Howard: Well, well done Ben. It sounds promising. Obviously I need to see some story boarding or something. Get on to Art and see what they can come up with, then report back to me about lunch time. What are we looking at?

Michelle: Currently it's set to be a bumper with one of the morning shows.

Ben: Shown either side of the program.

Michelle: We've got Art working on the graphics for the digital campaign. Media are working on bringing down the CPM so we can get more impressions. Our click through rate on the last campaign was pretty low so we're aiming to generate as many eyeballs as we can without click through.

Howard: Good idea, it's an outdated medium anyway. Focus on the television and digital campaigns after all we all know the money is in the new media. I'm glad you are so keen! I've never seen an ad turned around as quick as that. There must just be some sort of chemistry between you two, eh?

Michelle: Now Howard, don't go giving him ideas. You know I like my independence.

Howard: I wouldn't worry Ben, she must like you, or else she'd have tried to fob you off with some menial task or other.

Ben: Err, yeah.

Howard: I'm glad you've got it off the ground. We may as well push it all forward then. I'll give Maxine a quick call and we could be launching by the end of the week. Who knows maybe we've got a new team in the making, Michelle and **Ben!**

The mishmased advert static is heard as Ben checks his phone and the scene fades into:

Louise: Ah **Ben**.

Louise is carrying Ben's things down from upstairs into the living room.

Louise: So you did get my message.

Ben: Oh, no, no Louise come on, you can't do this.

Louise: I thought you might not have done, since you hung up on me so abruptly.

Ben: Look I'm sorry ok? But you can't just ring me at work like that. You'll lose me my job.

Louise: You left this morning without paying your rent.

Ben: I know, I'm sorry, I'll pay it by the end of the week. I promise.

Louise: It's been six weeks Ben. Six weeks without any money. You might be my boyfriend's cousin but you're not mine. I'm not running a charity here. We have bills to pay too you know.

Ben: Yes, I know, but like I said Friday-

Louise: Friday, Friday, it's always Friday.

Ben: But this time I mean it, I've been put on a new campaign, with Clarity, you know that health food crap you love? I'm working on their campaign.

Louise: So?

Ben: So, it means I'll be earning more. I can pay you back, the whole six weeks.

Louise: Seven.

Ben: Seven weeks. And who knows, I might even be able to bring you some free samples.

Louise: Free?

Ben: Yup, free from everything, calories, fats, nutrition.

Louise: Oh, ha ha very funny. I'm glad you find this all so amusing; we'll see how funny you find it when you're living on the streets shall we?

Ben: Oh Louise come on! I didn't mean it; give me a chance, please? Till Friday? Please?

Louise: Why should I?

Ben: Because I'm a man in need?

Louise: Hmmpf

Ben: Because you're a nice person, because you wouldn't throw someone out with nowhere to go? Because Mike'll kill you if he finds out.

Louise: No he won't. We discussed it. I'm sorry Ben, but we can't afford to keep a renter who doesn't pay rent. You've got to go.

She goes back upstairs/offstage

Ben: Aw come on! Louise! I can pay, just give me until Friday and I'll pay, I promise. And I'll be a better housemate, I could start doing chores, maybe I could start washing up, or maybe clean the bathroom, or maybe, maybe

Continuous: Maybe it's Maybelline.

Ben: What?

Continuous: Nothing.

Ben: Huh?

Continuous: Zero.

Ben: I don't understand-

Continuous: That's what's added to our burgers. That's what makes MacDonald's.

Ben: Oh, the television.

He switches it off.

Ben: Look Louise-

The television comes back on

Continuous: You're loving it.

Ben: What the-?

Continuous: Just do something.

Ben: I thought I'd-

Ben goes back to the television and tries to switch it off again.

Continuous: Have a Break.

Ben: Why won't you turn off?

Continuous: Calm down dear, it's only a commercial.

Ben: It's only a? This is getting weird now, it's almost like it can hear me.

Continuous climbs out of the TV and in the room.

Continuous: Oh but I can my dear.

Ben: What? Who are you? What do you want?

Continuous: I want whatever you want.

Ben: I don't understand.

Continuous: It's my job to understand what you want and to help you achieve it, or at least make you think you can achieve it.

He steps forwards and shakes Ben's hand.

Continuous: The name's Continuous, Continuous Spin, You can call me Continuous, or Mr Spin, in fact you can call me whatever you want. Because that after all, is why I'm here. I'm here to be whatever you want, whenever you want me to be what you want me to be.

He grins and hands him a business card

Ben: It just says WANT

Continuous: Exactly, W.A.N.T, the World Advertising Non-sensical Trust

Ben: Non-sensical?

Continuous: Indeed. Well it's all nonsense really. And that's part of the beauty, part of the charm. There's never a stupid thought, or a stupid idea. I can sell anything, anyway, anywhere. Never out of work and it's good work at that, good money. We create the desire; we get the people buying the stuff you want to sell. There's nothing like a hard hitting, attention grabbing, side splitting, mind sticking, desire breeding advert that makes you want.

Ben: Oh, right, good I've gone crazy. Brilliant.

Continuous: You're not crazy. Unless you want to be? Is that what you want?

Ben: What? No. I don't want anything. Thank you, but I'm just fine. I'm just going to gather up my things and get back to the office, so I'll-

As he says this Ben begins to gather his things.

Continuous: You don't look fine.

Ben: Well I'll admit the circumstances don't present the most convincing argument, but I am fine, honestly. It's just a minor hiccup. I've just been but on a huge campaign actually so in a way this is good. *(To Louise)* I was going to move out anyway, get my own place, so this is just a little sooner than planned, but that's fine. I'm fine.

He goes to walk off Continuous follows him, at a short distance.

Ben: Are you going to follow me around all day?

Continuous: No, only until I discover what you want.

Ben: I told you, I don't want anything, I'm fine.

Continuous: Now that simply isn't true, everyone wants. They just might not know what they want yet. That's where I come in, I make them want.

Ben: But you can't generate a desire from nothing, they must already want it, on some level.

Continuous: Can't you?

Ben: Well, no, I-

Continuous: What makes you want things Ben? Is it need? Is it greed? Or have you just been convinced that this is what you should desire, what you should want. Have you been convinced that if you had that new phone, or car, or a holiday that your life would be better, you would be happier. It's all about the way you perceive something and the senses are limited and very easily manipulated - I *can* help you.

A woman walks across the stage, Ben watches her pass, and she drops some papers.

Ben: Yes, so you keep saying. Err, excuse me, you dropped this.

Woman: Oh thank you.

Ben: No problem, I mean you're welcome.

The woman smiles

Ben: You work in sales?

Woman: Media. How did you-?

Ben: The papers, TmP? I think we have an account with you, I work for Falcon, the advertising agency.

Woman: Oh.

Ben: Yeah.

Pause

Ben: I've been to your office actually, on business. I think I saw you there. Rebecca right?

Woman: Err, yeah, how did you?

Ben: I think you know my landlady, ex landlady actually. Louise Brown? I saw you guys out drinking.

Woman: I don't drink .

Ben: Oh, right.

Pause

Ben: Well, I was just thinking-

Woman: It was nice meeting you...

Ben: Ben.

Woman: Ben. Thanks, for...

She indicates the papers

Ben: You're welcome.

She smiles nervously and begins to walk off.

Continuous: Ah, I think we may have found our angle!

He claps his hands and the woman freezes.

Ben: What?

Continuous: Love! Such an excellent selling point. Basic fundamental emotion understood and experienced worldwide. Great global campaign.

Ben: Love?

Continuous: You love her.

Ben: What?!

Continuous: You just don't know you love her yet, that is where I come in, I have discovered what you want and now I just need to convince you that you want it, and don't worry about that, that I can arrange. I think a sale is in order!

Ben: A sale? What do you?-

Continuous: I have to sell her to you, make you see what you're missing!

Ben: I'm not missing anything. Look I think you've got the wrong person, I'm happy, I don't need any help, or any advice, you've got the wrong person.

Continuous: Ah, but-

Ben: No, how dare you just burst into my life like this and presume you know everything about me. Just because I've spent my lunch break being kicked out of my apartment doesn't mean I'm some sad lonely guy with nothing in his life!

Continuous: Of course you're not, but that doesn't mean you don't want things. After all, you don't have a baby but you watch adverts for pampers. You don't have a cat but you watch adverts for Iams, you say you're not lonely but I bet you'd watch an advert for Companionship.

Ben: Companionship?

Continuous grins, 1950s advert music starts and showgirls appear they produce a hairnet with rollers and an apron which they put on the woman. Continuous' voice is the typical 1950s showman voice.

Continuous: Are you tired of coming home to an empty house every night? Are you tired of having to cook your own dinner after a long day of work? Do you miss having someone to talk to? Well then have you considered a wife?

Just think! She'd be here to cook and clean and look after the children when you have them. She'd maintain your house and make sure that your dinner was on the table when you got in. Just see how she could change your life, so be smart, get a wife! *(He grins, as the music fades out.)*

Ben laughs

Ben: This is ridiculous.

Continuous: I'm sorry?

Ben: Well this isn't the 1950s, wives aren't like that anymore. Most women work now, and besides that is definitely not what I want, especially not right now.

Continuous: Ah I see! Modernise it, no problem!

He snaps his fingers and music starts again, this time much more modern and sexual. His voice this time is obviously a woman's soft, slow and sexual, the showgirls remove the hairnet and apron from the woman, they then remove her clothes until she is just in her underwear, then they push her onto a bench arranging her body into a provocative pose. When she is in position they slide her slowly forwards.

Continuous: Soft, calm, beautiful. There for you when you need her. Warm, sensual and passionate, just waiting for you to come back home. And she doesn't have to just be your girlfriend. She could be...your wife.

Hold as the music fades out as it ends Ben regains his senses.

Ben: *(laughs)* Yeah that's more like it. Looks like you need *my* help with the whole advertising business not the other way round.

Continuous: Mmm perhaps. So, you want her?

Ben: Want her? I...No...

Continuous: Very well.

Continuous gives a slow grin and disappear. Throughout Ben's speech the mishmashed advert music builds up until he finishes when it suddenly, abruptly stops.

Ben: You don't know what you just saw; it must have been the shock of being kicked out playing on your mind. You turn your steps back to work, the journey seems to take longer than usual, the surrealism of the last few hours replays in your mind. It's just the pressure of the new assignment and losing your home all in one morning. You need a holiday, to relax, chill out, but there's no time for that yet. You have to get back to work because the designated twenty five minutes, that you're not really supposed to take, has already elapsed and you know there'll be trouble if you are much later.

Ben turns around and is in Michelle's office, she doesn't look up from her work.

Michelle: Well? Are you just going to decorate the doorway all day, or are you actually going to do something useful.

Ben: Sorry.

Michelle: Did you get something?

Ben: No. there wasn't time to / get anything, I –

Michelle: Why not?-

Ben: I got...distracted. It doesn't matter, I'm not hungry anyway.

Michelle: What's all that? Going away?-

Ben: No, I got kicked out. I was staying with my cousin but his girlfriend decided that I don't live there anymore.

Michelle: Ah, two's company, three's a crowd? Well if you need a place to stay, I know some people in the property market that could help you out.

She hands him a card

Ben: Thanks.

Michelle: Well we can't have you setting up camp here. Right, shall we get started then?
Art have been briefed on the initial idea, they've got some of their team working on the print and digital so that should be up and running in time for the actual pitch. All that's left is the television campaign. I've asked Steve to come up to run through it all with us; he should be here in about 5.

Ben: Right.

Michelle: We need to contact Barry and get him to trawl through his directory and find us some faces for this campaign. We'll need a kid and a parent.

Ben: The more ASBO the kid the better, then we can play up the silencing them angle, a mum, a dad and two or three kids? / I'm kind of feeling two.

Michelle: No, no Dad. Too many single parent families now. If we leave the Dad out it's up to them to decide where he is. He could be non-existent or he could be in the next room. Makes it more relatable.

Ben: Ok, so a Mum and-

Michelle: Three kids, less manageable, more than she has hands, makes it more believable that they're out of control.

Ben: Do you think we can get the same people from the Snax campaign? I mean since it's a brand extension it makes sense right? That 'family' are already affiliated with the Clarity name, showing them with a new product will give it a sense of continuity, a narrative. Reinforce the brand etc, etc.

Michelle: Good idea, I still think we should leave the dad out, after all breakfast isn't exactly a family affair anymore is it?

Ben: Right, sure, ok, no old man, cool. We could show the mum smiling and sitting back relaxed while the kid wanders about trying to speak, clutching his throat. Or she could even give a sly little smile or something I don't know, could be quite funny.

Michelle: We need to book a singer to record the jingle properly which means we'll have to book a studio as well, that needs to be done today really.

Ben: Today? I didn't know we'd move this fast, it's a good job you're so organised.

Michelle: Is that a complement Benjamin?

Ben: God no, I wouldn't dare. I'm still pretty intimidated by you, if I'm honest.

Michelle: Intimidated?

Ben: Well yeah. You're one of Falcon's top copywriters; you're like Howard's right hand man or something. Woman, sorry.

Michelle: You didn't seem intimidated before.

Ben: When?

Michelle: When you were convincing me to let you stay on the project.

Ben: Well, it's a big step up; I figured it was worth a fight.

Michelle: Are you trying to work your way up then?

Ben: Who isn't?

Michelle: Good point.

Ben: It's just something I've always wanted to do, you know? All my mates at school wanted to be footballers or video game designers, but I wanted to go into advertising. I had an Uncle who worked for DDB, and his job just seemed so, cool, so different. And I always remember how great it felt to be able to point to something on the TV and say my Uncle did that, my Uncle made that up. I wanted to be able to do that too. Have my words on the screen, my ideas.

Michelle: Well if we get this campaign sorted that might just happen.

Ben: Do you think I'll get more campaigns like this if this one goes well?

Michelle: Maybe.

Ben: I just want a chance to get people to see my work. I want to leave my mark. My Uncle worked under the legendary Bill Bernbach, I'd love to be as great as him. To change the way we see advertising.

Michelle: Alright Che, hold your horses. We need to secure this campaign before you can start changing the world. So how about we take a look at the-

Steve enters without knocking reading from a document.

Steve: TV, radio, digital and print. Full scale operation then?

Michelle: And here's Steve. *(To Steve)* Yes, well, you know what it's like. Established market, utilizing every contact point etc.

Steve: Yeah I get you.

Michelle: Do you think you can get that Tom kid on the digital campaign? He seems to know what he's doing in that field.

Steve: Are you trying to say I don't.

Michelle: Of course not Steve, but you're going to be swamped organising this campaign so I'm introducing you to the art of delegation. Get him to update the Twitter page with the new info.

Ben: We have a Twitter page?

Michelle: Lots of companies have them now, so that people can follow what they're doing. It's supposed to make the company more relatable.

Ben: Is it working?

Michelle: I haven't the faintest idea.

Ben: Oh.

Steve: I doubt it, we've only got seven hundred followers, and I think that's our own employees at the moment. Quite good for internal marketing but other than that....

Ben: Well I'm sure it'll catch on soon.

Steve: I doubt it, it's mainly celebrities.

Ben: Oh?

Steve: Even that bloody meerkat has more followers than us.

Ben: Meerkat?

Steve: Thirty seven thousand? The thing isn't even real! Perhaps we should make one of our characters a twitter page? What do you think? Do you think that friendly bacteria we had for the health drinks is popular enough?

Michelle: I don't know.

Steve: No, probably not. You thinking of having a character on this campaign?

Michelle: No.

Steve: Fair enough. Why is this one so big anyway?

Michelle: Clarity's first cereal, they're big money.

Ben: And it's a real bitch of a cereal.

Steve: Oh yeah? Not got enough pop? Doesn't turn the milk chocolaty? Not Grrrrreat-

Michelle: Yeah alright Steve.

Pause

Ben: They just went for a really odd angle, that's all.

Steve: Oh I see, they want to do something and you can't say no, so you're going to just flood the market with it. It doesn't make sense, it probably won't be wanted, but if it's everywhere they can't avoid it, that kinda thing?

Michelle: In layman's terms yes.

Steve: Quite the flatterer today aren't you Michelle? What's up? Getting stressed over a cereal? That's unlike you.

Michelle: No, I just have a lot to do. Now if we're quite done?

Ben: We've got every port covered right?

Steve: Almost.

Ben: Almost?

Steve: Yeah, almost.

Pause

Michelle: Well are you going to tell us what we've forgotten or are you going to keep playing the enigmatic Media twat?

Steve: Aw, I knew you still loved me. Right, yeah, so, you've got the basics covered, all the standardised tested shit, but there's this new stuff they've been testing, it's in the trial period, but they're looking for new products to try it out. Automated Advertising, triggered by signals sent from body scanners.

Ben: Huh?

Steve: Yeah, a spin off from the terror attacks.

Ben: I don't get it.

Steve: Ok, so, right. You know how after the terror attacks they started bringing in body scanners at the airports yeah?

Ben: Yeah.

Steve: Well they're thinking about having them for other places like the underground too, coz like, it was a risk area. So obviously the brains have been looking at these scanners and thinking about how they can capitalise on it. Basically they found that as well as scanning a body for weapons, they could calibrate the machines to scan the emotional, physical state of the body going through it. Which meant that, the scanner could read how you're feeling, and then, right, and this is the best bit, and then it would suggest products. It's the ultimate targeted marketing.

Ben: Isn't that a bit intrusive?

Steve: No it's brilliant right. Think about it, ok, so everyone who's hungry, even just the tiniest bit would go through and would be told where the nearest MacDonalds was, or Prêt-a-manger, or who ever had bought the food slot. Like your cereal, it would get them at exactly the right time, it's genius.

Ben: But-

Michelle: Is this up and running yet?

Steve: Nah, well not completely, like I said it's being trialled-

Michelle: Where?

Steve: Jubilee, Central and District lines.

Michelle: Right, sign us up. I want every commuter to know about *Tranquillity*.

Steve: Alright, you still want the other stuff too?

Michelle: Yes, of course we want the other stuff too.

Steve: Cool, alright, I guess I better get on that. Unless you still want me up here?
For anything?

Michelle: No.

Steve: Suit yourself.

He leaves

Ben: You don't like him, do you?

Michelle: We have our differences.

Ben: I thought he was alright. Bit of a laugh.

Michelle: Yeah, he's funny alright.

Ben: You two got a history or something?

Michelle: I don't think that's any of your business.

Ben: You've slept with him haven't you? Aw come on fill me in, I like a bit of gossip.

Michelle: And I like to keep people guessing.

She leaves. Again the mishmashed advert music builds up throughout Ben's speech and cuts as he interacts with Continuous.

Ben: You nod and smile, smile and nod, and pretend like you don't mind when she dodges the questions, avoids the answers and generally blocks you at every turn. You work quietly, diligently, following her lead, and slowly, the campaign began to emerge. The whole over awing spectrum of angles, digital,

print, billboards, television, radio, internet all of it begin to come together, and the task you thought was impossible suddenly seems as though it is within reach. There's still plenty of work to do, but it begins to seem just a little bit more achievable, and before you know it the deadline is dawning and it's the final push. The afternoon shadows grow long and distorted, everything grows dark, and eventually, eventually you both call it a day, although it is in fact night. And everyone is home already, but it's done, finished, and you can go home, you should go home, you would go, if you still could.

So you walk through the streets, the icy air of February filling your lungs and making your breath steam.

Continuous: Pound-yer-lot, pound-yer-lot. Evenin' Mister. Can I interest you in some batteries? No? How about a Hoover bag? A duster sir?

Ben: No. Thank you.

Continuous: There must be something you *want*.

Ben: Oh, it's you again.

Continuous: Really? Completely content are we? Well I've never heard that before. Not a worry in the world have we? Well aren't you the lucky one, nothing to want.

Ben: There's nothing *here* I want.

Continuous: You sure?

Ben: Of course I'm sure.

Continuous: Why you down a market then?

Chorus enter to create the sense of a busy market.

Ben: I don't know, I was walking. I was just walking, I didn't intend to end up here.

Continuous: Maybe not intentionally, but unintentionally you intended to end where you ended non?

Ben: I don't understand you. I didn't come here for a particular reason. I'm just on my way home, to find a home.

Continuous: Ah but I can help you my friend.

Ben: I don't need help.

Continuous: I can help you get what you want.

Ben: Really.

Continuous: Oh yes, lookee here, I sell things that people want.

Ben: Right. Good. But I told you I don't want anything you sell.

Continuous: I wouldn't be so sure. It's all about the spin you put on things. Look at this. It may look like an ordinary duster to you. But to the paranoid housewife, it is the protection against a thousand germs, armies of viruses hidden in the dust and dirt of her home. And this, this will protect her. I simply have to tell her the fibres are dust attracting, or germ disabling, or that the whole thing was dipped in a new kind of disinfectant that rids the home of disease for a week and she's falling over herself to buy it. *(Someone buys it)* Funny that. And this? *(An adapter)* a guarantee that you can carry on working wherever you are

in the world. *(He makes another sale)* This? *(He picks up a toy car)* an extension of a mother's love, *(Someone else buys it)* this *(a phone charger)* assurance that you'll never be alone. *(He makes a final sale and the customers begin to move away)* You can make them want anything you have, if you know what their worries are. *(V/O Continuous' voice becomes Ben's voice)* It's not just a product it's a promise.

Ben: Hey, I've heard that before.

Continuous: Do you want my help or not? What is it you want?

Ben: I don't think you can help me.

Continuous: Try me.

Ben: Anything?

Continuous: Anything your heart desires.

Ben: What about if I said I wanted to be better at my job...I mean, not have to work so hard at it. I'd like to stop thinking about it all the time.

Continuous: Ahhh escapism. The most sought after activity in the twenty first century. Funny we bang on and on about making life better and most of us can't wait to slip into an alternate reality. Because this one just doesn't quite cut it.

Ben: You can't do it?

Continuous: Voila.

He produces a newspaper.

Ben: A paper. Great. Thanks.

Continuous: Read, read and your mind will leave this tormented reality and take on the reality of the text, sink into the woes of others, read about their troubles and be glad that you aren't them.

Ben: That isn't really what I meant.

Continuous: Ah?

Ben: I want people to notice me for my work, for what I have to say. I want to be able to make a difference, to make people look at things differently, to expect the unexpected. I want people to turn to me, I don't want to just be following someone else all my life, I want to lead the way, I want to be able to do something new and exciting, do you know what I mean?

Continuous: Ah.

Pause as he takes the paper back and folds it

Continuous: Well, that is a whole other sort of want altogether.

Ben: Is it possible?

Continuous: Oh my yes. And I've already told you how, if you were listening my boy. It's just a case of working with what you know. You can sell them anything if you know what their worries are, then it's just a case of making whatever you have sound like the solution to those problems. Now I really must be getting back, this stuff won't shift itself.

Ben: But you can't just leave like this. Life isn't like this. You can't just shoehorn a meaning onto something because you want to...

Continuous: Move along sir, I've got others that need my persuasions.

Ben: ...it would diminish the meaning of other things, important things, meaning shouldn't be arbitrary, it should have meaning.

Continuous: Pound-yer-lot, pound-yer-lot, come and get them while they're hot!

Ben: But...but

Ben backs away from the stall and into an old Tramp she is dressed in many layers of clothes the top most of which is a coat covered in adverts ripped out of magazines and newspapers.

Tramp: Spare some change?

Ben fishes in his pocket and retrieves some change.

Tramp: Thank you.

Pause

Tramp: I wondered when you'd turn up. I've been waiting for you. I thought you'd be easy to spot, we don't often see professionals down here you know.

Ben: I didn't mean to come down here, it just happened.

Tramp: Normally your sort stays well away from places like this.

Ben: What do you mean, your sort?

Tramp: Well, you know? Ad men, Business men, *(she whispers)* Suits!

Ben: People who wear suits don't go to the market?

Tramp: Oh no. The market is a place for the more simple folk, people who don't think in double meanings and clever sayings.

Ben: Is that what you think advertising is like?

Tramp: That's what I know it's like. I've seen plenty of examples.

She shakes her coat.

Ben: Are they all...Is it just...

Tramp: Just adverts.

Ben: Nothing else?

She smiles at him

Ben: But why?

Tramp: They keep me warm. The words they use are so full. They create more bulk than your average article or newspaper story. They never mean just one thing, do they? There's always a word play, or an alternative message, and all those meanings pile on top of each other and create the thickest padding I could ever need.

Ben: But it's just paper.

Tramp: Is it? I thought you of all people would be able to understand.

Ben: It's not that I don't understand, I just don't, don't...

Tramp: Don't worry yourself over it. You'll understand, one day, your time will come, sooner than you think by the looks of things.

Ben: What do you mean by that?

Tramp: There's an air of change about you, beware of that.

Ben: Beware?

Tramp: Now, shall we get on with it? Like I said I've been waiting for you.

Ben: You've been waiting for me?

Tramp: Yes, of course. After work you said, down the market you said.

Ben: I don't think we've spoken before.

Tramp: Of course we have, you are looking for a place to stay aren't you?

Ben: Well yes...how did you?...I need to rent somewhere.

Tramp: Well then look no further.

Ben: You?

Tramp: The very best this side of London. I can show you some lovely places you know, what kind of price range were you thinking?

Ben: But, but...I mean no offense, but you don't even have a home yourself.

Tramp: Exactly, who better to show you the places to stay than someone who stays in them all. I'm not preoccupied with maintaining my own place, I'm watching other people maintain theirs. I've tried out hundreds of locations and I know what will suit your needs.

Ben: But, I really think-

Tramp: Look, do you or do you not need a place to stay.

Ben: Yes, but-

Tramp: Did you or did you not ring the letting agency?

Ben: Letting agency? What *(he fishes out the card Michelle gave him earlier)* that was you? You know Michelle Taylor?

Tramp: Did you or did you not ring the letting agency?

Ben: Well, yes but-

Tramp: Well then I fail to see your problem, you want to find a place I can help you find one. So where would you like to start?

Ben: I...

Ben's phone goes. The mishmashed adverts begin to play as the scene begins to fade.

Ben: I have to go.

Tramp: Until next time then.

Ben: You get a phone call. Something's wrong, you need to go back.

Scene fades into:

Howard: We have a major problem. It seems as though there is a huge controversy over the ingredients listed in *Tranquillity*.

Ben: But you said it had passed the EU standards.

Howard: It has, but that isn't going to stop people talking. The healthy eating nutcases have started blogging about the chemicals used in it. It's the same old debate about the chemicals being detrimental to health. They are calling for it to be removed from the shelves and banned from sale in the UK.

Michelle: But if it has been through the EU testing's it's been deemed as safe surely.

Howard: It has, Clarity used a form of Methylphenidate to create the calming effect in their cereal, but since -

Ben: Methylphenidate?

Michelle: Isn't that?

Howard: Yes, it's a form of stimulant, the same kind as Ritalin and other behavioural control drugs.

Ben: Behavioural control?

Michelle: You know, kiddie coke. They give it to the brats that they can't control to shut them up.

Ben: That's in this cereal?

Howard: Only as a means of creating the calming effect. The dose is incredibly small and the drug itself is legal. The problem that has just been uncovered lies with the basic design of Clarity foods. Since they have been created to pass through the body without depositing fats and other harmful elements, the methylphenidate was being passed through with everything else. So they introduced a chemical that makes it stick, so that they could guarantee that *Tranquillity* would have the calming effect they claimed it would. But it seems

this chemical acts as an amplifier making the actual strength of methylphenidate much harder to calculate, all we know is that it is much stronger than they ever intended it to be.

Ben: It actually shuts them up? But I just meant it metaphorically, I didn't think it actually did it. Why are we affiliating ourselves with that? That can't be good can it? Pumping it full of all that?

Howard: How else could you get that affect? It doesn't appear naturally.

Michelle: Probably for a good reason.

Ben: But who gave the go ahead to this project? If it's harmful we shouldn't be trying to associate with it-

Howard: Let's not turn this into a blame-storming session. It's not our place to question it, we just have to sell the damn thing. Now I have not been head of Creative for seven years just to have my career destroyed by a cereal. Not that it would be my career per se. But if it bombs management will be on the warpath and I will be their first port of call.

Ben: But it's due to air tomorrow, it's too late to re-do it. The Art department have all gone home already, and Media will kill us if we have to withdraw it.-

Howard: Yes, thank you Ben. There must be a way to sell this thing, everything can be sold, you just have to find the right angle.

Michelle: Why don't we just have Clarity make an announcement about the additives?

Howard: No good, announcements always sound like apologies. The truth isn't the truth until everyone believes you and they won't believe that.

Ben: But it is true you said-

Howard: I know what I said Ben. But the public won't understand that, stimulants and chemicals have all got themselves bad names and additives of every kind are being frowned upon. You just can't make giving a kid drugs pc, It won't wash, we're good, but we're not that fucking good.

Ben: Well maybe we should just pull out, you know, refuse to do it.

Howard: And loose Clarity altogether? No chance. I'd rather lose my wife.

Ben: What are we going to do?

Howard: How does the advert stand at the moment?

Michelle: Well we went with the whole shutting your kids up idea. Distract them with the cereal. Art played up the whole muting idea, the advert shows the family eating then the voices and noises of the kids are cut and the posters have a kid with its tongue tied up by cartoon characters of the cereal.

Howard: Which will reinforce the reputation of the chemical added. People won't buy it if it highlights the idea of controlling kids.

Ben: I didn't know it actually controlled them. I just thought it would keep them quiet; they can't talk if they're eating right? It was meant to be funny.

Howard: It doesn't *control* them; it's not a conspiracy Ben.

Ben: I didn't know it was so dangerous, I thought it was supposed to be good. Didn't all those students take it? So they could study longer? People got angry then, but that was because they thought it was giving them advantage.

The phone rings Howard answers it

Howard: What? Oh hello Maxine, no of course it's not a problem-

Michelle: What was that?

Ben: I don't know. Michelle, that number you gave me, for a letting agency?

Howard: We're discussing the options right now and I think we're-

Michelle: What?

Ben: To help me find somewhere to stay?

Howard: Of course you're upset Maxine, we're all upset; it really is very...upsetting.

Michelle: What about it?

Ben: Are they...Who....Is it a big company?

Howard: I'm not sure I understand what you're asking me.

Michelle: It's one of the largest letting companies in London, I'm surprised you hadn't heard of them already their head office is just down the road. I know their CEO, is this really relevant right now Ben? Don't you think we have more pressing matters?

Ben: Yeah, I suppose....sorry.

Howard: I understand that you're angry but we're doing our best to resolve the issue here, we think that-

Michelle: What were you saying about the students?

Ben: I don't know. Students take any old crap nowadays, anything they can get their hands on, apparently it meant they could study longer, stop getting distracted by facebook or something like that.

Howard: It was one of the social networking sites. The young people use it to blog. Blog? It means to- look it doesn't matter, what is important is that we're trying to find a solution.

Ben: I had no idea that it has this affect on kids. What are we going to do? It's going to air tomorrow and-

Michelle: Oh shut up Ben.

Howard: I understand that yes, but you see the problem is that they believe that it *is* dangerous.

Ben: I knew something like this would happen. I knew it! My name on the most lethal cereal around.

Howard: No / know it's not dangerous. I said other people think-

Michelle: And you've already found a way to market it, so we're fine.

Ben: I have?

Michelle: The students used it to concentrate right? So why don't we sell it as a focusing drug. Say the cereal helps kids focus. We don't need to re-do it. We just need to re-edit it. The opening can stay the same, we'll have the same kids being annoying, play it up even more, have the volume louder, but just not cut the noise when they eat it. Have a voice over explaining that it helps focus all their energy, still have the end shots of the happy parents, play up the idea that

it helps their kids, it gives them an advantage over the others. Something like that.

Ben: But will it help them focus, doesn't it just shut them up?

Howard: Of course we care Maxine.

Michelle: Who cares what it does, so long as it sells right?

Howard: Yes, of course Maxine, yes ok nine o'clock, I'm looking forward to it, Ok, goodbye! *He hangs up.* The vicious bitch is boiling over. She's threatened to pull her entire account unless we find a solution. She's coming here at 9 to hear what we've come up with.

Silence

Howard: Oh, don't all rush at once! Don't worry, I'll find a solution, that's what I do, find things. I find you annoying, see?

Michelle: Howard.

Howard: Don't Howard me Michelle. This ad is doing a Titanic and I'd really rather not go down with the ship, so I think you both better pull your acts together and-

Michelle: Ben had a great idea.

Howard: Brilliant. Well?

Pause

Ben: I...err...

Michelle: Go on. Tell him about the idea.

Ben: Err, we could say it's a focusing drug? Like how the students use it to focus, we could say it gives kids an advantage.

Pause

Howard: That....That just might work.

Michelle: Of course it will work. Who wouldn't want to help their child focus and achieve things? We could do a follow up ad later; link it to their performance in school, shots of happy children putting their hands up in class, learning instruments, winning medals in sport. Obviously the posters-

Howard: Scrap 'em. There's no time to re-do them now but we can get Art to sort them out ready for next week. They're not our main priority tonight.

Michelle: And I think we should suggest that we downscale the campaign, just for the time being. Make it a test ad for the South East only, just so we know how it is received, just as an added precaution before we launch it nationwide.

Howard: Good idea. Minimising damage, I like it. It'll buy us some time to really polish the final campaign as well.

Michelle: Ok I'll call production and see if they're still in. Ben do you still have the prototypes we drew up for the original.

Ben: On my external hard drive.

Michelle: Good, we can still use those with a bit of tweaking.

Howard: Well done Ben, focusing their attention, brilliant! That is what our job is all about. Working with what we've got, drawing their attention to it and making

them want it. We are the stick in the swill bucket summoning the swine of the world. I knew we could make them want this. It's just the spin you put on things isn't it; you can sell anything when you know what their worries are!

Ben: I...yeah, I suppose so.

The mishmashed adverts play throughout Ben's speech as before.

You heard that before, you know you have, the whole world shivered as he said it, the confusing slowness of a Déjà vu. Where have you heard that before? You rack the corners of your mind but you just can't think. That was too close this time, this advert isn't as simple as the last ones, she saved it, saved you. You still can't stop thinking about the drugs in the cereal, your head aches and you want just to stop, just time to think for a minute, a second, but there isn't time like that to spare, so instead you take a painkiller and try to focus.

Ben is in the toilets of the company. There is a condom machine on the wall with a picture of a man, Continuous materialises out of this picture.

Continuous: Do you believe me now?

Ben jumps

Ben: Jesus Christ.

Continuous: Not quite.

Ben: Do you have to sneak up on me like that?

Continuous: My apologies.

Pause

Continuous: Well?

Ben: Well what?

Continuous: Do you believe me?

Ben: About what? I'm sorry, can't this wait, I mean I am trying to, you know.

Continuous: You didn't strike me as someone who suffers from stage fright.

Ben: I'm not, I mean I don't, I mean, do we have to talk about this? Why are you here?

Continuous: I wanted to see if you'd changed your mind. Now that you've seen what I was talking about in practice.

Ben: What do you-

Continuous: The cereal, your cereal. After that awful leak it's close to a miracle that you managed to find a solution.

Ben: Wait, how do you know about that?

Continuous shrugs

Continuous: I know about a lot of things. As I think you should be able to appreciate now. After all, I was right wasn't I? It is all about perception and perception can be manipulated. You can sell them anything if you just know what their worries are.

Ben: You!-

Continuous: These bloggers were worried about the health of their children. They want them to be healthy. So you made it seem like this cereal will help them, will give them an advantage. They will be focused. All their abundant energy will be calmed right down into a focused force which can help them to achieve anything. It's really very clever.

Ben: Ok, so maybe you were right.

Continuous: Yes.

Ben: Thank you.

Continuous smiles

Ben: Could you? Give me a minute?

Continuous: But what about everything else you wanted? The respect? The admiration of your work? People turning to you? I thought you wanted to be the best?

Ben: Well if this campaign works then-

Continuous: If, it's a pretty big if.

Ben: What do you mean?

Continuous: Surely you should be doing everything in your power to make it work.

Ben: I am, we are.

Pause

Ben: Aren't we?

Continuous: So you do want my help?

Ben: Can you really make that happen?

Continuous: I helped you out of this mess didn't I? You may not have noticed it but I put the idea into your head, I made you look for their problems. I made you see them in another light.

Ben: But how do I get everything else?

Continuous: You have to make sure this campaign is the biggest success of them all, you have to use it to build a name for yourself. Then you can do whatever you want.

Ben: But I don't want people to like what I do just because I'm famous or whatever. I want them to like it independently, because it is good. A genuine reaction, you know?

Continuous: You want to be listened to? To be heard.

Ben: Yeah, I guess, in a way.

Continuous: The only way people will listen to you is if you earn their respect and the only way you can earn their respect is by proving yourself first. So you have to make sure this campaign is the best it can be. I would suggest taking it further. Think how far you could make this go, cereal bars, breakfast shakes, snack foods on the go. Parents could maintain their child's 'focus' by giving them a snack bar in their lunch, or a healthy soup for dinner. There could be a whole range of foods.

Ben: I don't know...isn't that a bit extreme? I mean –

Continuous: That depends, do you want to get what you wanted? Or do you **not**?

Fade into

Michelle: **Not** to alarm you but Maxine is in Howard's office, and she wants to speak to us both in about 5 minutes. He's just filling her in on our plans so far then we have to go and pitch the new ideas, ok?

Ben: Ok. Michelle are you sure this isn't, dodgy. I mean it's not harmful or anything-

Michelle: It's fine Ben, it's no more harmful than a happy meal or a turkey twizzler.

Ben: Those got banned!

Michelle: Ben! Will you calm down? Look, in this business you can't keep letting your morals interfere with your work. They are irrelevant here. No one cares if you do or don't agree with it; all they care about is that you sell. I've done campaigns for gambling, for porn, for all sorts of things I don't agree with, but I did them, because it's my job. You need to learn to toughen up. Now, Maxine's quite a formidable character, are you going to be alright?

Ben: What's so bad about her?

Michelle: Just older generation working woman. Had to fight her way to the top and proud of it, believes she has to keep fighting to stay there. She's not an easy sell.

Ben: Ok, well what do you think? Get our facts out? Show her some of the research, hit her with some figures, then bring it to a close with the story boards art sent up?

Michelle: No, slow it down, seduce don't sell. She may be a client but she's a woman first.

Ben: You want me to seduce her?

Michelle: Just a little, she likes to think she can get any man, so play hard to get, charm her a bit, once she's interested it won't be hard to get her to bite.

Ben: Something about the way you talk always sounds so reassuring.

Michelle: I do my best. Now, I'm going to have to take a backseat on this one. She won't like it if I'm selling to her, direct competition and all that. She likes thinking she's equal to all these men, that she has the upper hand on them.

Ben: So you want me to do it?

Michelle: I have every faith in you.

Ben: I haven't pitched to a company as big as Clarity alone before.

Michelle: You'll be fine Ben, just use that charm of yours. Sit her down

Michelle pushes Ben into a seat and walks behind him, her hands on his shoulders.

Michelle: Flirt with her a little, make your voice slower and deeper (*Michelle does this as she is speaking*) compliment her, but not too much, and then feed her the story, slowly bit by bit, until she's just longing for the pitch. Unable to resist any longer, putty in your hands, then she'll buy anything.

Ben: I don't know...

Michelle: You'll be fine, besides, I'll tell you what to do. Are you ready?

Maxine enters, Ben stands, Michelle stands behind Ben for the duration of the scene.

Ben: As I'll ever be.

Michelle: Ok, first you have to greet her. Be sure to use her surname, never her first name, offer to shake her hand.

Ben: Maxine. May I first say what an honour it is to be working with you.

Maxine: Benjamin.

Michelle: She won't shake hands; it's her first display of power. Tell her you are excited about the new campaign.

Ben: We have been thrilled that Clarity have chosen us to produce its first cereal. It really is an exciting venture and we are expecting big things from this.

Michelle: Don't overdo it.

Maxine: Yes I'm sure you are. Now stop this idle flattering and get on with it, there has been a serious leak and I expect to hear what you are going to do about it. Is this going to take long? I have to get back across town by ten for a late dinner with a very important client.

Ben: No, of course not.

Michelle: She'll ask for a drink. She enjoys seeing you serve her, reinforces the idea of status and power, play along.

Maxine: Are we going to be drinking tonight?

Ben: What could I get you?

Maxine/Michelle: Whisky, with ice.

Michelle: A man's drink.

Ben makes her the drink and gives it to her.

Maxine: Thank you.

Michelle: Start slowly, don't jump straight in, sooth her ego a bit, it's an embarrassing leak but show her you still have confidence.

Ben: Clarity is a very impressive brand Maxine, well recognised, well respected.

Maxine: We are. We work hard to maintain our reputation, a reputation that is hanging in the balance Mr Baxter.

Ben smiles

Ben: And, of course, we want to help expand that brand image. Have you got any children Maxine?

Maxine: I'm sorry?

Michelle: Too fast. Slow down, remember seduce don't sell.

Ben: I mean you don't really look old enough, you're so vivacious, so full of life...

Michelle: Good.

Ben: ...but do you? Have children?

Maxine: No, I have been rather busy with my career.

Ben: Aren't we all? And yet, your target market...

Michelle: Our

Ben: ...Our target market, is the family, children predominantly. Correct?

Maxine: Mr Baxter, we have had a very serious leak, the future of *Tranquillity* rests in your hands, and you are still trying to confirm the target market?

Michelle: Don't answer that.

Ben: Maxine, you saw our last concept, the idea of shutting the kids up. Getting some peace and quiet for mum and dad in the morning, distracting them with cereal.

Maxine: Yes.

Ben: You liked it.

Pause, she doesn't reply.

Ben: You agreed to it. It was all set to go ahead, and then this leak happened, the campaign was in danger.

Maxine: Your point?

Ben: And yet, all these things, all these additives, the things the parents are worried about *are* in the cereal. They are on the ingredient list and any self respecting mother can see for herself that they are there.

Maxine: Are you trying to suggest that we are somehow an unethical company? That we have not paid attention to our corporate responsibility?

Michelle: Careful.

Ben: Of course not. We understand the long process you must have gone through to create *Tranquillity*. But the additives and chemicals are still in it, and there is nothing we can do to change that. So it made us see this whole thing in a new light. Why were these parents, bloggers, getting so angry? The chemical you used to make sure the calming sensation was felt has been given to kids to regulate behaviour for years. But giving drugs to kids is bad, it suggests that you are a bad parent, or that something is wrong with your child.

Michelle: Get to the point.

Ben: BUT giving your child an advantage over other children is good. It is desirable.

Maxine: What is your point?

Ben: How can we make it seem as though this cereal gives your child an advantage?

Michelle: Good, you have her attention. Close the deal.

Ben: Focusing. The cereal focuses the kid's energy and helps them to achieve their potential. The slogan "tie up their tongues with *Tranquillity*" becomes "Let your child realise their ability, with *Tranquillity*", and the stigma of the additives is reversed on itself.

Pause

Maxine: Realise their ability?

Pause

Maxine: I don't know...it's a bit-

Ben: It reinforces Clarity's image of being a brand that is good for you. A brand that helps you get the best for your body. It ties in with your other ranges and works on a metaphorical, literal and linguistic level.

Maxine: But doesn't it sound a bit cheesy?

Ben: Cheesy? All ads sound cheesy, they all work on mnemonics and semiotics and that's why people like them!

Maxine: I know, I was just trying to say that-

Ben: What you were trying to say was that you don't have faith in our campaign, you don't believe we can produce an advert that will sell.

Michelle: What are you doing?

Ben: Yet we've produced hundreds of campaigns which have been memorable and generated results. You employed us for our knowledge and now you're questioning it? It doesn't matter to you that we've learnt how to market a product and find out how to play to its strengths. We've worked out a way to market *Tranquillity* that will sell. And this (*he indicates the storyboards*) will sell.

Pause

Maxine: It's different, I'll give you that. Alright, we'll see what happens. You think this will sell, so we'll see if it sells.

Ben: Thank you.

Maxine: Not as funny as the last one though.

Ben: Sometimes you have to sacrifice a laugh or two.

Maxine: I suppose.

Ben: Now, we've also decided to downscale the campaign to the south east only as a precaution just until we can guarantee the sales we expect.

Maxine: I'm not sure I agree with-

Ben: It is just a temporary precaution Maxine and we have already started research into possible options for extending the campaign, think cereal bars, think meal replacement plans. *Tranquillity* could be an all day food, not just a breakfast one.

Maxine: I see. Well I'm still not happy about the downscaling, but you've obviously got our best interests at heart. You're a good one Benjamin, you're going to go far in this line of work. Now I have to get to that dinner.

Maxine leaves.

Michelle: Ben! That was a risky move. I thought you'd lost her, don't take a gamble like that again.

Ben: You said to toughen up.

Michelle: Well that's not exactly what I meant, but well done I suppose! You're turning into a fast talker. You'll be in Howard's office in no time.

Ben: Thanks, I couldn't have done it without your help though.

Michelle: Don't get all sentimental on me Ben, I've just had this suit dry-cleaned.

Ben: No, but you really helped me out.

Michelle: We make a good team.

Ben: And that was it, it was edited and approved and out there, launched like a ship into the sea. You can't believe you did it, managed to create a campaign, you just have to wait to see whether or not it sells. Days, into weeks and before you knew it, it's been out for a month, sales increasing (*the mishmased jingles quiet*) The pilot advert sees sales in the test area increase dramatically. (*Jingle again, still quiet*) Now that you've proved yourself the work is in increasing. When you go home, if you go home, you're there for a few hours at the most then you're back, (*jingle again*) back to the grindstone, to the drawing board to the endless work, and you cannot find the end. (*Just the end of the jingle mishmash played,*) The piles get bigger, (*from here on the end of the jingle mishmash plays as though a record is stuck, and two children walk on and stare at Ben silently.*) The lists get longer and the nights get later... (*he notices the children, and begins to stagger back away from them*)... You feel as though you... no longer sleep.... You want to sleep.... You should be asleep. ... You..... Shouldbe... at... home. (*The last line is gasped, cut jingle*)

Black out

Ben's office, Ben is stood by the window looking out, Steve is sat on the desk.

Steve: Big fat waste of time. Just a bunch of arrogant fuckers who think they know everything.

Ben: That good was it?

Steve: Trying to tell me about break through online software that over-rides popup blockers or creates popunders that you don't notice until you go to shut down. It's all stuff we were researching last year.

Ben: Nothing of interest?

Steve: Well Tom-Tom have finally sold out. They've brought out a new consol, works the same as the old one right, you enter a destination, calculate route blah blah, but then it suggests things that might be of interest on route. You know like "there's a MacDonalds in 0.5 miles. Turn into MacDonalds" that kinda thing.

Ben: That sounds...

Steve: Horrific? Yeah I know. But it weren't all bad, there was something that caught my eye.

He walks over to Ben and shows him something down the front of his t-shirt.

Steve: It's top of the range.

Ben: Seriously?

Steve: Yeah all the celebs are having it done now. It's like wearing a designer label, except a bit more permanent.

Ben: A lot more permanent.

Steve: Well no, it still wears off, eventually. I mean you can still see here it's a bit-
He lifts up his shirt revealing a very orange tan with the words St Tropez in untanned skin across his chest.

Ben: But a designer tan? I thought the whole point in fake tans was that they weren't supposed to look fake. Kinda defeats the point doesn't it?

Steve: Nah coz it's not actually about the tan is it? I don't want it to look real. I want to be able to boast about it. It's a way of saying I have more money than you.

Ben: Oh, right.

Pause

Steve: You alright mate? You seem a bit distracted. I thought you'd be over the moon at the news?

Ben: Hmm?

Steve: The sales figures? Clarity's through the roof, they've trebled their income and it's all down to you, and your advert.

Ben: Yeah.

Steve: Ben?

Ben: Sorry, yeah, no I know, it's great, really great. This last six months have just flown by. Did you hear? They're thinking of releasing the rest of the range soon. Euphoria, Sensuality and Bliss.

Steve: Bliss?

Ben: Yup, manufactured satisfaction. You'll never hate your job again.

He turns back towards the window

Steve: Sounds expensive.

Ben: Yup.

Steve: So why aren't you more excited?

Ben: What? Sorry. Sorry, there's just this kid down there. In the park opposite. He's just there staring. He's sitting on a swing but he's not swinging, he's been there an hour, not moving.

Steve: So?

Ben: I don't know, it's strange. Kids normally play in the playground, they don't just sit and stare. But he's the only kid I've seen all day, and he's not doing anything. It creeps me out.

Steve: So stop looking out the window then.

He pulls Ben away from the window laughs then exits.

Ben: Yeah, I guess you're right.

The mishmashed advert music begins to play as before.

Ben: But the kid won't leave your mind. Each time you back to the window he's still sitting there, staring. Not once do you see him swing, not once do you catch him doing anything other than staring at the building, as though he can see right through its walls. You can't concentrate on the campaign, all thoughts of selling narratives and pitches leave your mind and you find yourself leaving your office and crossing the street to find out if he's ok.

Ben walks across the stage to a small boy sat on a swing.

Ben: Hello.

The boy doesn't respond.

Ben: It's a nice day isn't it?

Pause

Ben: What's your name then?

Pause the boy just looks at Ben

Ben: My name's Ben. You see that office over there? I work in there, up near the top.

Pause

Ben: Do you like this park?

Pause

Ben: I like it, I used to come here when I was at school. I'd look at those offices and I'd try and imagine what went on inside. I never got it right though. Life would be a lot more interesting if the things I'd thought were happening actually happened. Sometimes I think life is more interesting when you imagine things anyway. What do you think? Do you like imagining things?

Continuous: Sometimes. But mostly I like making the things I imagine a reality.

Ben: Where did you come from?

Continuous: You know I find conversations usually work best when the other person responds as well, otherwise it all gets a little bit dull.

During this speech Continuous walks behind the child and swings the swing. Just one push, the child stops looking at Ben, looks straight forwards and sits still to wait until the swing stops swinging. Ben and Continuous watch him.

Continuous: Hmm. They usually enjoy it more than that.

Ben: Why are you here?

Continuous: Charming, don't sound too excited to see me you might make me feel wanted!

Ben: You're not wanted, you just show up.

Continuous: I show up when people want something, so I suppose, in a way, I am wanted.

Ben: Well I don't want anything, so you've come to the wrong place.

Continuous: No I know, I'm here to take you to the ball Cinderella.

Ben: What?

Continuous: The party, you're going to be late for the party.

Ben: But what about...

He gestures in the direction of the child.

Continuous: What about him?

Ben: Well, I can't just leave him here, I mean I came out to see if he was alright.

Continuous: He's fine.

Ben: How do you know?

Continuous: Because I know, now we need to get a move on or else you're going to be late.

Ben: Late? What are you talking about? Where are you taking me?

Continuous: You don't listen much do you? You have a party to go to. A party in your honour no less.

Ben: My honour?

Continuous: Well that's what we would have said back in the day. I don't know what you'd call it now. Basically the party is for you. To celebrate the success of the last six months. You really need to start paying **attention**.

Howard: Could I have your **attention** please. Now as you know, we are a hard working company here at Falcon, we strive to succeed and despite the fact we are not as big as some other companies, despite the fact we don't have as many staff, despite the fact that we don't have a star studded client base. We do succeed and that is something that should be commended. We recognise success in this company and a bigger success couldn't be imagined. Therefore, I propose a toast, to Michelle and Ben for all their hard work these past few months. *Tranquillity* has barely been out for six months and yet it has already been deemed the best television commercial of the year! It just goes to show what you can do when you put your mind to it, and I couldn't be prouder of the both of them. Michelle and Ben.

Crowd: Michelle and Ben!

The next scene is a split scene. Only Ben is aware that he is talking to two people at once, and he tries to cope with it as best he can.

Michelle: Well done.

Ben: Thanks, you too.

Continuous: You know Benjamin, this doesn't have to be it. I mean after all, we haven't got exactly what you wanted. And you know what they say, desire breeds desire, making the demands get higher, you could be even more successful.

Michelle: It's weird isn't it? The way it's just taken off, I mean, I don't think we ever thought that it would be as successful as this.

Ben: What do you mean?

Continuous: Your desires?

Michelle: The campaign?

Ben: Right.

Michelle: But, six months down the line and here we are. The creators of the year's best ad.

Continuous: I mean this is all very well and good but it's not enough is it.

Ben: It's an achievement.

Continuous: Oh yes. I'm not doubting that, no, not at all. But it's not what you *wanted* is it? You wanted to get people to listen to you, to hear what you had to say, you wanted to make a difference.

Michelle: I think we both thought it was a hopeless case didn't we? Originally I mean, but we managed to do something with it.

Ben: We are making a difference.

Michelle: Yes, people forget that sometimes, they don't think about the people behind the adverts, but at least it's nice to know it's not all over.

Continuous: But surely you should be trying to reach more people. I thought you wanted to change the way people think about these things? Or was it just about the money? Is this it? Is it over?

Ben: It's not over?

Michelle: No!

Continuous: No?

Michelle: I think we might be working together again Ben. Howard seems to like our work, he was hinting at another project earlier.

Continuous: Then you want my help?

Ben: I...

Michelle: Isn't it exciting?

Continuous: Ben?

Michelle: Ben?

Ben: Wha-...I...Yes.

Continuous gives a long slow smile

Howard: Ben! Congratulations! It's good to see you! I'm glad I caught you actually, I'd like you to meet someone really important. Someone who has been integral in getting the campaign off the ground. The star of our advert, Charlie.

The boy from before steps out from behind Howard, he stares like the children before, he makes no sudden movements and has no facial expression. Ben steps back a few steps.

Howard: Charlie is the focus child in the TV campaign and the face of the posters, he really is a rising star, and so well behaved! Charlie, this is Ben, he was the one who created the advert you were in, he was the one who made you what you are today, say hello.

Charlie steps forward one step he turns his head towards Ben without any other movement.

Howard: Aren't you going to say hello Ben?

Continuous: Ben?

Charlie steps forwards

Michelle: Ben?

He steps again

Ben: Err, yes, sorry. Hello Charlie.

Pause Charlie doesn't speak

Ben: Are you enjoying the party?

Pause Charlie still doesn't respond.

Ben: How old are you then?

Charlie takes Ben's hand and leads him away from the crowd.

Ben: You want me to follow you? Ok, I guess I could...

Charlie turns and tries to communicate to Ben. His facial expression stays neutral but he opens and closes his mouth silently.

Ben: What is it? Are you trying to be a goldfish?

Charlie shakes his head, and repeats the action from before this time pointing at his mouth.

Ben: Are you hungry? Well I think there's some canapé's somewhere, do kids like canapés?

Charlie shakes his head again.

Continuous: There you are. Well, are you enjoying the party?

Ben: Just hang on a second. I think he's trying to tell me something.

Continuous: What's that?

Ben: Well if I knew I wouldn't be crouched here trying to work it out would I?

Continuous: Why don't you just ask him?

Ben: I don't think he can speak.

Continuous steers Ben away from Charlie

Continuous: Too much shouting on the advert I expect. I wouldn't worry about it Ben, he was probably just trying to tell you about his new computer game or something. They're all the rage at the moment.

Ben: But....but....he didn't seem...right. His face....he couldn't even smile.

Continuous: No, most of them don't these days.

Ben: But...but-

Continuous: But, you should be enjoying your party, not worrying about some kid. Ok?

Why don't I get you a drink?

Continuous pours a drink

Ben: Woah, how did you do that? The writing, in the drink?

Continuous: Oh, yes clever isn't it? Well we've been branding food for years, it was only a matter of time before drinks caught up.

Ben: But how do they do it?

Continuous: With a lot of money.

Ben: There's so many people here.

Continuous: All celebrating your success. It is a wonderful achievement.

Ben: Well yeah, I suppose...there's Steve, hey Steve!

Steve starts to walk towards them.

Ben: Hi! How's it going? Are you having a good time?

Steve walks straight past him without acknowledging him.

Ben: Steve? Did you see that?

Continuous: I know, some people eh? Ah well such is life, perhaps we should try mingling over here.

Ben: But it was like he didn't even see me.

Continuous: Yes, well, shall we-

Ben: He's usually so loud, did he seem ok to you?

Continuous: Yes, fine, same as usual. Now I think we should head over here, towards the –

Ben: No, stop, I'm sorry, I... I think I need to just go outside for a bit, fresh air you know? I'll...I'll be back in a bit.

The mishmashed adverts play as before.

Ben: You have to leave, to get some air to just have some time to think about it all. You head out, through the thronging mass of people and into the street, it's warm, the muggy August heat making people heady in the twilight. You find a bench and gather your thoughts, something wasn't quite right, something didn't fit, but you can't put your finger on it, you can't-

The Woman from before has entered the space, Ben suddenly becomes aware that she is there.

Ben: Oh, hi.

He stands up.

Ben: Hello. Rebecca wasn't it? You were the lady, from before? In the street? You dropped your papers, we spoke.

She still doesn't respond, she looks at Ben.

Ben: Would you like to sit down? I mean it's a nice night and-

Woman: Yes. It is nice.

She sits, Ben eventually sits next to her.

Ben: It's weird how things like this work isn't it? I mean I know they say it's a small world and whatever, but it's odd that we'd bump into each other like this again isn't it?

Woman: Yes.

Ben: I mean so much could have changed. We could have moved, or well, you know.

Pause

Ben: Has much? You know changed?

Pause

Ben: Do you still work for TmP?

Woman: Yes.

Ben: Right.

Pause

Ben: I thought it was odd you know. A sales woman out of the office at lunchtime. I thought they all ate their lunches at their desks. I thought only the secretaries and receptionists went out at lunch.

Woman: Receptionist yes.

Ben: You're a receptionist? But I thought you worked in sales?

Woman: Sales yes.

Ben: Oh I see, a sales receptionist. Wow, TmP must be bigger than I thought if they need a receptionist for each department.

Pause

Ben: I'm sorry about this, I'm just rambling really. We're having a party you see, I guess I must have just had a bit too much to drink or something.

Woman: Drink?

Ben: Yes, you know, one too many I guess, I haven't asked you about-

Woman: Yes please.

Ben: Sorry.

Woman: Drink?

Ben: I thought you didn't drink.

Woman: No, I don't drink.

Pause

Ben: Are you ok?

The woman looks at him

Woman: I'm ok.

Ben: Are you sure?

Woman: Sure.

Ben: Because you seem a bit strange, almost as though you're agreeing with everything I say. As though you've lost your ability to think for yourself –
Continuous!

Continuous materialises out of an advert on the street.

Continuous: You bellowed?

Ben: You're behind this aren't you?

Continuous: Well of course.

Ben: What do you-

Continuous: Well it's what you wanted isn't it? You wanted people to listen to you, to what you had to say well now they're in a state where they can listen. A state, where you could persuade them to do anything.

Ben: That is not what I wanted. I just wanted to make a difference, to show them-

Continuous: They will listen now.

Ben: No, not like this, how did you do this to them?

Continuous: I didn't do anything Ben. You did.

Ben: I did? What? I haven't done anything!

Continuous: Haven't you Ben? I thought you'd been finding ways to get your voice heard, to tie up other peoples tongues so your own could have free reign.

Ben: The cereal? It's doing this? But, but...this isn't what I wanted, it's not- I want,
I want, I want to start again.

Mismashed advert music plays, and chorus act out Ben's speech as before.

Monday. Meeting with Michelle at 10. Up at 6, drag self out of bed and into a damp bathroom.

Shower, shave, botched job, blood spots, look a state. Grab some toast, out the door.

Forgot lunch, no time to go back.

Travel:

Commuters enter and 'travel' with Ben as before.

Bus, train, tube, train, bus: Pushed, shoved, hustled, bustled, ignored, overlooked, unseen.

Work:

Commuters become Falcon's employees when Ben says "Work".

Computer on, inbox 108 messages. Junk, Junk, Junk, Junk, Junk, Junk – cut short time for a meeting.

The other chorus members leave.

Alexander: Miss Taylor, Mr Baxter.

Michelle: Ben, this is Mr Alexander Heeley from the Department of health.

Alexander: Thank you Michelle. Ben, what I'm about to tell you must remain strictly confidential, do you understand?

Ben: I think I understand what confidential means, yes.

Alexander: The Department of Health would like to offer you the chance to join our team working on the Active4Life healthy eating campaign.

Ben: Is that the one with those plastercine men?

Alexander: Well, yes, the early adverts did feature a plastercine family but we are intending to broaden the campaign, re-invent the adverts to keep everything fresh and new.

Michelle: I didn't like those much.

Alexander: Nor did most people, but the government has got to be seen to be advertising these things. Thanks to Obama we are entering an era of responsibility. We need to be seen to be pulling our weight or else we could get voted out next election. We want to re-invent the old adverts; they were seen as too prescriptive - preachy almost. This is where you come in. We've seen the latest advert launched by Falcon and we were impressed, and so we'd like to offer you a place on our campaign.

Ben: I'm not sure I understand what this means.

Michelle: It means we're being headhunted stupid.

Ben: I know that, I meant I don't understand why this has to be confidential?

Alexander: That advert made people buy like nothing we've ever seen. There is barely a house in the south east that hasn't heard of *Tranquillity*..

Ben: Yes, but-

Alexander: And that is an achievement.

Ben: I'm sorry I still don't see what this has to do with confidentiality.

Alexander: Yes, it was a success, a huge success and it was down to you, and that creative brain of yours. So now we want to take that brain and apply it to our latest campaign. Breakfast: The most important meal of the day. We're launching a whole new campaign whose initiative is get people to eat breakfast. We've planned it to co-inside with the preliminary dates for the move of the *Tranquillity* advert nationwide.

Ben: But it hasn't been decided that *Tranquillity* will go nationwide yet.

Michelle: How can it not? Come on Ben that was the most successful ad Falcon has ever seen. Of course Clarity are going to want to take it nationwide, how could they not.

Ben: But the chemicals, the children, there are side effects.

Alexander: Yes.

Ben: You know?!

Alexander: Of course we know Ben, do you really think the behaviour of the kids in the south east has completely slipped the attention of everyone? They've changed and we think it is brilliant. Which is why we want you to help us tie together

these two campaigns. We want to push the *Tranquillity* ad nationwide, get the whole country aware of this product and tie it in with a government campaign designed to encourage people not to skip breakfast and to eat healthily. Like I said redesign them to sound less preachy, more like “the power to live a healthy lifestyle is in your own hands”, more freedom, more independence, it ties in with our other policies giving the general public more say over what goes on. Hopefully the combination of the two will lead to everyone enjoying *Tranquillity* for breakfast.

Ben: You want everyone to eat *Tranquillity*?

Alexander: Think how many problems it would solve Ben! The Education department would be happy; calm obedient kids attending schools, not questioning everything. And just think, if we can get mum and dad eating this too it might have similar effects, we would be able to manipulate them more effectively; assure ourselves of those votes.

Ben: But this is a democracy, I don't think I-

Alexander: And now you see why we have to keep this strictly confidential, most people would be of the same opinion as you Ben. But this has been going on for years. This is how it *works*. The government are elected by the tax payers; they then spend the tax payers' money convincing the tax payers to do all sorts of things. It's all propaganda really; stop smoking, don't drink drive, don't abuse alcohol, join the police force, use this website, vote for us.

Ben: But what about human rights? You can't take away someone's freedom like that.

Alexander: We're not going to spoon feed it to them Ben. It's their choice, although hopefully with your help we'll be able to influence that choice a bit...

Ben: But I still don't see why it has to be me?

Alexander: Because you sold the unsellable. People knew what was in *Tranquillity* before it came out. They knew about the additives, the chemicals and yet they still buy it. You made it work, and you could make this work too. The Government spends over £200 million on advertising a year and some of our highest earners are the copywriters. You could be one of them Ben.

Ben: I don't know that I want-

Michelle: And, if it's as successful as *Tranquillity* was you wouldn't ever have to worry about getting work ever again.

Ben: Yes, but-

Alexander: Your work would be admired by the entire nation.

Ben: Alright, ok...I just need some time...to think it over. I need time to think.

The mishmashed adverts play as before.

Time to unravel the tangled thoughts in your mind, crashing like waves into each other and getting completely mixed up in the process. There is no time to sort them out, to find it, rediscover what it is, what it was you believed in.

This was not what you wanted, not what you dreamed of when you saw your Uncle's adverts dancing on the screen. You wanted to make the next big thing, to take things further, but not like this, never **like** this.

Tramp: **Like** what you found?

Ben: I'm sorry?

Tramp: You're place. Do you like it?

Ben: My apartment? I...yes, I like it.

Tramp: Good. I am glad. I told you I was the best didn't I?

Ben: But you didn't...I wasn't...I found it through the newspaper.

Tramp: I know.

Ben: Look, I'm sorry. I don't really understand.

Tramp: That's ok dear. You will soon.

Ben: Why do you keep saying that? What do you mean?

Tramp: I mean what I say. You will soon. Anyway I just wanted to check that you were happy with your new place, I didn't want to cause a fuss. I'll just be on my way now, though, I don't suppose you could spare any change could you? It get's awfully cold these days.

Ben fishes in his pocket and gives her some change.

Tramp: Much obliged. Until next time then.

Ben: Are you planning on seeing me again then?

Tramp: I'm not planning on anything, I never do. It's just an expression Ben, it doesn't mean anything, you need to relax, after all. I'm not the one who talks in riddles am I?

Ben: I don't talk in riddles, I don't use double meanings or clever sayings or whatever it was you accused me of last time. I just sell things. That's what I do, as simple as that, people can buy them if they want or they can ignore it if they want.

Tramp: Can they?

Ben: Of course they can.

Tramp: If you say so dear, If you say so.

The mishmashed adverts begin to play again, she turns and walks off as she does so we can see that there is a new Advert on the back of her coat, larger than all the rest it is the printed Tranquillity poster, complete with the slogan "Let your child realise their ability, with Tranquillity."

Ben: No...It can't be...I didn't...this isn't what I wanted! Continuous! Where are you? Come on, I know you're here. You're always here somewhere. Come out. Come on! I want to ask you something. You hear that? I want you.

Continuous: Oh it's so nice when people finally realise that.

Ben: I want you to sort this out. I want you to stop all this, the cereal, the effects everything.

Continuous: But I thought this was what you wanted.

Ben: You know this is not what I meant.

Continuous: You said you wanted them to listen to what you had to say. You said you wanted to change them. I merely helped you to put them into a state where

they would be ready to accept that change. They're listening now Ben, all they do is listen.

Ben: I meant listen out of respect for the things I had to say, things that were already good or right, things that were inherent in their nature. I wanted to leave my mark like Shakespeare or Dickens not like Hitler!

Continuous: My dear boy, in that case, you really should be more specific with your desires.

Ben: Don't tell me what to do, just sort this out.

Continuous: But I couldn't possibly.

Ben: What do you mean?

Continuous: I mean I can't, they've already ingested the chemicals, they'll be like that until it wears off, unless they keep eating it that is.

Ben: But how do I stop them eating it?

Continuous: I have no idea, how did you make them eat it in the first place.

Ben: Why are you being so difficult? I want you to help me stop them. I want you to help me sort this out.

Continuous: Now, you see I know that's not really true is it?

Ben: It is true!

Continuous: Ah ha! You think you want to stop them eating *Tranquillity* and start going back to normal, but only because you feel guilty about the state they're in now. What you in fact want is to stop feeling guilty, and there I can help you, I

have lots of things that help you to forget about guilt, have you thought about indulging in a nice new suit? It will make you feel better about yourself and lord knows it will do wonders for your silhouette.

Ben: No, you're wrong. I want to stop all this. This was never what I wanted. You think you know what I want but you don't, you never did.

Continuous: Do you know what you want Ben? Really? Does anyone ever really know?

Ben: Stop talking like that, of course people know. I know. I know I don't want this. I want you to go away. I want to stop this campaign, to make people see the truth, I want to make it all go away, the advert, Clarity, *Tranquillity* everything. I'm going to stop it.

Continuous: Mmm you see Ben, it's not that simple. This isn't something you can just walk away from. After all, we're everywhere now, there really isn't any escape, we can reach you wherever you are. In your car we're on the radio. In the street we're on the side of the buses or in shop windows or on billboards. In your home, we're on the TV, or the internet or coming through your letterbox. You cannot avoid us Ben. You'll see, soon enough, you can't run forever.

The mishmashed advert music begins to play, Ben starts to walk away from Continuous, until Continuous is shouting the speech after him.

Ben: You know that's not true, there has to be a way to end the campaign. You try to find your way out of the bathroom, out of the office, but the corridors all blur into one long stream of repeating magnolia. You try to think of a way to end this, to escape from it all, thoughts of the children fill your mind and you know you need to act fast, if only there was a way to just make them see the

truth behind it all. Something, anything that sounds credible to make them believe...then you get it. Your mind pings like a typewriter starting a fresh thought and the light comes on and you know what to do.

Ben runs to Michelle

Ben: Michelle!

Michelle: Ah good you're here, right, you ready?

Ben: No, look I'm sorry Michelle, but I've decided I don't want to do it. It's not right. I think it's having a terrible effect on everyone especially the children, I don't want to be part of it any longer.

Michelle: So? The kids aren't our problem. Our problem is how to carry on selling this product.

Ben: But this government campaign would mean it would be all over wouldn't it? Millions of kids would see it, what if it happens to all of them? What if we have a whole nation of zombie children?

Michelle: They're not zombies Ben. They're just focused, that's what you said wasn't it?

Ben: But it's not true, you know it's not. I didn't know the effect it had!

Michelle: What difference does that make?

Ben: I wouldn't have done it if I'd known. It isn't right.

Michelle: Well it may not be right. But it's not wrong. It's not illegal. It passed the standards.

Ben: Cigarettes passed the standards, alcohol passed the standards, they're both harmful.

Michelle: It isn't harmful.

Ben: According to who?

Michelle: According to the standards, standards set to protect people. Are you trying to say the whole system is wrong?

Ben: If it's having this effect then it is.

Michelle: Well it's too late, they want it now, so it's our job to give it to them, to show them what a wonderful product it is and where to get it.

Ben: I want to get off this campaign. You're the one who said it was focusing. You told them that it would help their kids, you-

Michelle: But it's your name on the campaign Ben.

Ben: But it wasn't my idea!

Michelle: Maybe not, but you agreed to our little deal, and besides you're too far in now. You don't have a choice.

Ben: Yes I do, I'm leaving.

He goes to leave

Michelle: No, you're not.

She stops him.

Michelle: You're not going anywhere, you're going to come and sign this deal with me. Because if you don't I'm going to go public with the Methylphenidate info. I'll tell them what it's really doing to their kids, you won't be able to cover it over with any focusing ideas, however amazing. It'll all come crashing round your ears.

Ben: Not if I tell them first.

Michelle: You can't Ben, you signed a waiver. The whole campaign is in your name, you took complete responsibility for it all.

Ben: But, you helped, you-

Michelle: But it's your name on the campaign Ben, it's you they'll blame, and you can sure as hell bet that Howard will claim he knew nothing about it. The contract removes Falcon of any responsibility they'll cast you out like a leper and you'll be all alone.

Ben: I thought you might say that, so I've had an independent study done into the nature of *Tranquillity* and the results show that it is damaging when ingested regularly. It doesn't need to be me who reveals it. This will be enough to stop people eating it.

Michelle: They won't believe it.

Ben: Why not?

Michelle: Because you're not the only one with access to professionals Ben. I've done some research of my own, only my results show that *Tranquillity* helps

maintain a calm and relaxed state of mind, significantly lowering the risks of heart disease, raised blood pressure and lots of other nasty illnesses.

Ben: So it's my word against yours.

Michelle: In a way, although we both know that the first report always has the most credibility.

Ben: But why do you want to work for them? The children-

Michelle: Aren't my problem. I'm stuck in a job I've already got as much out of it as I'm ever going to. I'm not going to get anywhere here, I want to move on, I want to be the best.

Ben: But, you could do that without this campaign, you're an amazing copywriter. You don't need this. Think about what you're doing, think about the effect it has on the kids.

Michelle: It doesn't hurt them...So they're a bit quieter for a while....that's not going to hurt them, is it? They don't have to eat it anyway, I can't force them to. It just calms them down, numbs them to the stresses of modern life.

Ben: To the point where they're vulnerable to the influences of anybody.

Michelle: To the point where they can forget about their troubles.

Ben: And the things that are trouble. It's dangerous Michelle and you know it. You planned this didn't you? Right from the start.

Michelle: Not exactly, I was going to just do it alone, but you showed me that there was always a risk something could go wrong, someone who'd point fingers, or

accuse me of covering up the truth, or what was it? “Abuse of creative licence”, but with you on board I had someone who could take the blame. You made it an entirely risk free venture. It always pays to plan ahead. Now if you don’t mind, I have a report I need to get publicised.

Ben: I’m not going to let you do this Michelle. It’s a dangerous product, regardless of what the standards say and it needs to be stopped.

Ben grabs his report and leaves the office, the mishmashed advert music begins to play softly throughout the next scene slowly building until the blackout.

Ben: You can’t believe what you’ve heard. You can’t believe she would do that, anger, disbelief and fear dance a wild samba inside your head as you try to think about what to do next. You do not want to be on this campaign. You know that for certain, you want to just get away, to just drop it all and run, run! You sprint towards the underground, getting swept down into the muggy underworld with all the other commuters.

Continuous: You can run Ben but you can’t hide!

Ben: Thoughts of the children fill your mind.

Continuous: Thirsty? Have you tried Shakeaway? Hundreds of different flavours and your choice of combinations.

Ben: Blank staring eyes and mouths opening and closing but making no noise.

Continuous: Tired? Try Premier Inn, everything’s premier but the price!

Ben: You can’t believe what you heard.

Continuous: It's a great deal easier with Moneysupermarket.com

Ben: That they want this to happen. They see it as an advantage.

Continuous: Neurofen targeted pain relief.

Ben: A whole nation of kids reacting the same way.

Continuous: Taste the difference at Sainsbury's.

Ben: Mindlessly doing what they are told without questioning, without freedom.

Continuous: For instant relief: Canastan once.

Commuters stop, the commuter who triggered this slogan looks embarrassed then everyone carries on commuting at a higher speed.

Ben: It's not right, they're not happy. This isn't what you meant, what you wanted, you want to just get away from it all, forget all about it and leave....

Continuous: Stressed? Get away from it all with Thompson, built with you in mind.

Ben: ...pack up and go. Leave the campaign, the cereal the whole lot behind because you don't want to work on it any more you don't want to **be part** / of it anymore.

Continuous: **Be part** of the action. Sign up for the royal navy today.

Ben: But you know you / have to go **back** you don't have a choice.

Continuous: Multibionta puts **back** what life takes out.

Ben: She's trapped **you**...

Continuous: **You** could learn Spanish today with Rosetta Stone.

Ben: ...**Whatever** happens / she'll make sure that it looks like it's your fault.

Continuous: **Whatever** the weather your one stop shop for holiday information.

Ben: **There just isn't** a way out.

Continuous: **This isn't just** food!

Sudden black out and noise of confused commuters. We can hear people moving around on stage, trying to figure out what has happened, suddenly the lights flicker and we see Ben centre stage, they flicker again and we see a small boy, he is smiling at Ben. The flickering becomes more frequent and we see more and more children and adults enter the stage approaching Ben. Suddenly a spotlight on Ben alone.

Continuous: Realise your ability with *Tranquillity* now scientifically proven to benefit your body.

Ben: No!

Blackout.

END