

Oral History Interview

with

TOM ANDERSON

November 14, 1984

at

New York City

By Scott Ellsworth

For the "Pepsi Generation" Oral History Project

Archives Center

National Museum of American History

Smithsonian Institution

TAPE ABSTRACT AND INDEX

Anderson, Tom New York, New York, November 14, 1984. Interviewed by Scott Ellsworth.

Tom Anderson was the musical director and a producer for Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn (BBDO) in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After a five-year stint in California working in the motion picture industry, he returned to BBDO in 1970, where he worked as a producer on the "Live/Give" campaign. At the time of the interview, he was president of RC Communications, a BBDO subsidiary.

The major subjects discussed in the interview include: the role of the producer in television advertising; the emotional nature and impact of the "Come Alive" campaign; selected accounts of Pepsi commercials Anderson directed; working conditions at BBDO; technological developments; the shooting of commercials; and the nature of youth-oriented advertising. Other subjects include: the selection of Joanie Sommers as a singer; use of blacks in Pepsi commercials; the near loss of the "Generation" concept to RC Cola; the entrance of gay men in advertising; the artistic influence of British cinema; a consideration of the common Brooklyn roots of Anderson and his peers; and the psychological dimensions of advertising creativity.

The interview was conducted in Mr. Anderson's office in New York City.

Tom Anderson
President
RC Communications Inc.

Tom came to BBDO directly from Pratt Institute, beginning a twenty-five year career that involved him with almost every creative discipline -- art director, copywriter, television producer, executive producer, creative supervisor, and even music director for the agency.

He's also worked on almost every kind of account, from DuPont to Lever Brothers, and from the Wall Street Journal to Pillsbury, Pepsi, General Electric and more.

His work has brought him multiple awards, although Tom's personal favorites are probably the Clios he received for writing and producing the "Thomas Edison" commercials for General Electric, and the whole series of awards for the "Pepsi Generation" campaign he helped to create.

Based on a long record of achievement, in 1980 BBDO asked Tom to become President of the then RC Studios. Within two years Tom had altered and expanded the structure of RC, creating RC Communications, a full service Advertising/Corporate Agency with offices in New York and Stamford.

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Abstract of interview with Tom Anderson, November 14, 1984
New York City
Interviewer: Scott Ellsworth

Tape 1, Side 1

1:40

RESUME

He had been with BBDO for six years when the agency got the Pepsi account. Before that he had worked as a television producer. Anderson was the music director at BBDO, and was responsible for finding Joanie Sommers, who first sang in "Think Young" commercials. Sid Ramin (who had won an academy award for "West Side Story") wrote the music for "Come Alive! You're in the Pepsi Generation." BBDO auditioned several women to sing the jingle and Sommers again was selected.

6:40

PRODUCER'S ROLE IN COMMERCIAL MAKING

The producer is responsible for every level of the production: casting, sound track, wardrobe, product shots, and choreography. Claims Pepsi commercials were different from others, citing "Parade" as an example (writer: Phil Dusenberry). In the commercial two teenagers come upon a parade and join it, winding in and out of the musicians and parade participants. As the producer, Anderson came up with the idea while on location.

8:50

CASTING

Do not normally decide upon exactly which kind of people you want when the commercial is written, just the "look" they want. The producer, along with the other creatives, decides whether there will be Blacks in the commercial and other similar questions. For the "Parade" commercial they used local people in the background.

12:00

PEPSI EXECUTIVES INVOLVED IN ADVERTISING

Alan Pottasch and Phil Hinerfeld worked closely with the Pepsi account team at BBDO. The 1960's were a time for creative experimentation. Clients were usually very flexible with advertising budgets--something which enhanced the opportunities for artistic experimentation.

13:55

ESPRIT DE CORPS AT BBDO

There was an extremely strong bond between the people at BBDO during early 1960's. They knew that the "Pepsi Generation" was going to be a big success. The driving force behind the project was John Bergin, who was uncompromising in his demands on the people working on the campaign.

17:35

"PEPSI GENERATION'S" EMOTIONAL ASPECT

This was an emotional campaign, both in terms of the ads appealing to the emotions, and of the excitement generated among the creators of the ads. Part of this creative explosion was possible because of the advances in technology, primarily in development of color film. The people making the ads knew so little about color film processes that they felt comfortable doing a lot of experimentation. Anecdote of shooting "The End of the Line" commercial in Maine. To shoot this advertisement they used an innovative technique just recently developed in California by Nelson Tyler. This new equipment allowed vibration free filming from helicopters. The general attitude of the clients at that time was, "Do what you have to do."

24:20

"COME ALIVE" ON TV

They knew that the campaign appealed directly to the emotions and that it had to be primarily television-based.

25:20

NEAR LOSS OF THE "GENERATION" CONCEPT TO ROYAL CROWN COLA

Advertising executives had to be careful not to let ideas leak to other agencies, especially with the "Come Alive" campaign. RC Cola attempted to steal the "Come Alive" jingle.

27:20

ANDERSON LEAVES BBDO

He left BBDO at the end of 1965 to open a film company in California. He did not have as much freedom as he thought he would, became unhappy and returned to BBDO.

28:05

PHILIP HINERFELD

Phil Hinerfeld was Anderson's mentor. Phil Hinerfeld and Alan Pottasch were both supportive of him.

Tape 1, Side 2

:40

YOUTH TARGETED ADVERTISEMENTS

Anderson introduced subtle changes in Pepsi's musical style: with the "Now Its Pepsi For Those Who Think Young" campaign they began to use a more modern sound. Intense personal ambition and drive propelled the revolution in the advertising business. John Bergin had a personal struggle regarding the youth orientation of Pepsi advertisements.

4:25

TELEVISION'S ROLE AT THIS TIME

In 1964 BBDO had a programming division actively involved in producing television shows. Many of the people working on these programs were "theater rejects and gay men."

7:05

WAY COMMERCIALS WERE SHOT

They shot a large amount of footage that was unstructured and experimental. Because they were not shooting the traditional wide shot to medium shot to close-up, the key to the success of the commercials was the skill of the cameramen and the editor. Anderson wanted people who were the most creative and rebellious against the industry's norms.

11:50

BBDO MOVES INTO PACKAGED GOODS ADVERTISING

BBDO was known for its work in corporate advertising. Tom Dillon made extra efforts in the 1960s to attract package goods companies. He acquired both the Campbell Soup and the Pepsi-Cola accounts.

13:30

INFLUENCE OF MOTION PICTURES

Movies were a central artistic influence on Anderson--particularly British films, such as "The Knack" and the Beatles' first film, "A Hard Days Night." Both he and Dusenberry were avid moviegoers. There was a general feeling in the country of optimism and hope.

16:00

BROOKLYN ROOTS OF HIS PEERS

Anderson, like many of his peers in advertising, is from Brooklyn, New York. The intense desire to escape spurred people from that area to do extremely well in creative endeavours. Anderson remembers looking across the river at Manhattan and feeling a desire to conquer it. Brooklynites have a clear sense of self identity and a lot of self confidence. They had easy access to movies and art schools.

18:35

FAMILY BACKGROUND

His parents are immigrants from Norway. They never understood his choice of advertising as a career, but allowed him to find his own way. His father worked in the Brooklyn shipyards.

Graduated from the Pratt Institute in 1954 and went directly to work in the mailroom at BBDO.

20:20

"COME ALIVE"

This campaign influenced advertising immensely. It probably caused the extreme preoccupation with youth that is so evident in advertising today. In the late sixties Anderson felt guilty about this.

22:15

BACKGROUND (CONTINUED)

Anderson left BBDO to work as film director in California. He found that as a film director he had to abide by every instruction from clients, and as a result could not make any creative contributions.

23:45

THE "LIVE/GIVE" CAMPAIGN

In 1970, Anderson went back to BBDO to work as the producer on the "You've Got A lot to Live and Pepsi's Got A lot to Give" campaign. Anderson felt there was a big difference at BBDO in 1970 from 1964. Technically they were more sophisticated, but there was a lot of political infighting.

27:40

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF CREATIVITY IN ADVERTISING

Alan Pottasch refers to the "Live/Give" campaign as an attempt to heal a nation torn by social unrest and the Vietnam War. Part of the creative process is intensely personal and serves to help one deal with disturbing and irrational societal forces.

Anderson Index

"A Hard Day's Night" film 7:1:2 13:30
Advertising, youth-oriented 7:1:2 :40
Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn advertising agency 7:1:1 1:40, 7:1:1
13:55, 7:1:2 11:50,
Beatles, The 7:1:2 13:30
Bergin, John 7:1:1 13:55, 7:1:2 2:40
Blacks in advertising 7:1:1 8:50
Brooklyn, N.Y. 7:1:2 16:00, 2:1:2 18:35
Casting commercials 7:1:1 8:50
Color in advertising 7:1:1 17:35
"Come Alive You're In the Pepsi Generation" advertising campaign 7:1:1
24:00, 7:1:2 20:20
Dillon, Tom 7:1:2 11:50
Dusenberry, Phil 7:1:1 6:40, 7:1:2 13:30
"End of the Line" ["Motorbike"] commercial 7:1:1 17:35
Helicopters 7:1:1 17:35
Hinerfeld, Phil 7:1:1 12:00, 7:1:1 28:05
Motion pictures-English 7:1:2 13:30
"Now Its Pepsi For Those Who Think Young" advertising campaign 7:1:2 :40,
"Parade" commercial 7:1:1 6:40,
Pottasch, Alan 7:1:1 12:00, 7:1:1 28:05
Producer, role of 7:1:1 6:40
Psychology of creativity in advertising 7:1:2 27:40
Ramin, Sid 7:1:1 1:40
Royal Crown Cola 7:1:1 25:20
Sommers, Joanie 7:1:1 1:40,
"The Knack" (film) 7:1:2 13:30
Tyler, Nelson 7:1:1 17:35
"West Side Story" (musical) 7:1:1 1:40,
"You've Got A Lot to Live Pepsis Got A Lot to Give" advertising campaign
7:1:2 23:45, 7:1:2 27:40