NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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Advertising

Madison Ave. in a Post-Sept. 11 Era

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words "America the Beautiful."

In another universe, the mood is somber, and no commerce can be transacted without a nod, respectful or unctuous, to the victims of the attacks and their families. "We will never forget," promises a bizarre newspaper ad for **General Electric** by the New York office of BBDO Worldwide, owned by the **Omnicom Group**. The ad shows a defiant Statue of Liberty striding off her pedestal and rolling up her sleeves, as if brought to life by poltergeist in the finale of a movie called "Ghostbusters Go to War."

A commercial by the same agency for **Visa** made a similar point more subtly. Meant to encourage people to resume buying theater tickets, the spot presents an elegiac version of "Give My Regards to Broadway" sung by Judy Collins as scenes appear of actors getting ready for a performance.

In still another universe, doing well by doing good is the operative scheme, centered on pledges to contribute to Sept. 11-related charities and causes. For instance, a print ad for the Discover credit card lists merchandise from coffee beans to garden hose to movie tickets and asserts, "Just by doing what you do every day, you can help the families and victims of Sept. 11."

The ad, by Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco, also owned by Omnicom, goes on to explain that "every time you use your Discover Card" — either the regular version or the "Discover American Flag Card" — the company will donate to "America's relief efforts, until we reach our goal of $5 million." Welcome to Sacrifice Lite: no muss, no fuss, no messy commitment. Discover is a unit of **Morgan Stanley Dean Witter**.

In other instances, it is donor beware, as the budget for self-congratulatory ads to promote the philanthropy can be larger than the actual sum being given away.

In a final universe, the determination has been made to resume the routine as if nothing has happened; ads maintain their normal funny, cloying or annoying attitudes. In this universe, populated primarily by beers, video games, fast food and snacks, the smiles seem forced, the enthusiasm too enthusiastic, not unlike the laughter at a cocktail party to divert attention from a guest's faux pas.

The reason for those confusing multiple realities is not difficult to determine. Never before have agencies and advertisers had to figure out how to aim sales pitches at a public grappling with simultaneous situations of domestic terrorism, recession, biohazards and war.

Moreover, the intertwining of the fate of the nation with the fate of the economy has brought a blurring of the distinction between altruistic public service advertising, which Madison Avenue traditionally produces during national crises, and campaigns capitalizing on Sept. 11 for capitalistic purposes, intended to keep commercial interests afloat.

Take for instance the campaign for **General Motors** carrying the theme "Keep America rolling," which sought successfully to stimulate automobile sales after Sept. 11 with zero-percent loans. The first print ad spent two paragraphs recounting how "the world as we knew it came to a halt" and how the attacks "shook us to our very core."

Then the ad shrewdly took a brisk U-turn: "Now it's time to move forward. For years, the auto industry has played a crucial role in our economy. General Motors takes that responsibility seriously." The ad, by the Troy, Mich., office of McCann-Erickson Worldwide Advertising, concluded with this deft blend of selflessness and self-interest: "This may very well be the most serious crisis our nation has ever faced. In this time of terrible adversity, let's stand together. And keep America rolling."

How? Why, by spending tens of thousands of dollars on a new G.M. car, truck or minivan.

Another unsettling example of this peculiar interweaving of national and commercial interests is a spot from the New York office of McCann-Erickson, part of the McCann-Erickson World Group division of the **Interpublic Group** of Companies, for the Travel Industry Association of America.

The spot, tellingly titled "The President's Own Words," uses film of President Bush addressing a joint session of Congress, much as public service announcements for nonprofit causes from the American Red Cross to the Harvard Alcohol Project feature a president's appearance.

This time, though, the scenes of the president are interspersed with scenes of employees of travel-related businesses — profit-making enterprises — who repeat his words to "live your lives, do your business around the country, take your families." They include pilots, flight attendants, crews of cruise ships, hotel workers and chefs, representing travel industry giants like **American**

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