

# Rationalizing Consumption: Lejaren à Hiller and the Origins of American Advertising Photography, 1913–1924

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The reasons why photographic illustration was generally avoided by American print advertisers before 1913, even though halftone technology had made such illustration economically advantageous, have not been adequately explored. This article explains that art directors initially avoided the medium because of its slavish dependence on material reality. Photography offered too much detail; it seemed incapable of the abstraction or idealization necessary for “capitalist realism.” The change in this outlook can be dated from the work of Lejaren à Hiller, who, borrowing fine art aesthetics and techniques from pictorialist photography, established the medium as suitable for the complex visual and narrative strategies required by the social tableaux advertising of the period.

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By the second decade of the twentieth century, the rationalization of the American economy threatened to founder, not on the shoals of production or distribution, where mechanization and national transportation systems had nearly vanquished challenges to middle-class material abundance, but on those of consumption. As numerous historians

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have argued, advertising matured as a profession in response to a new problem for American business: how to stimulate demand among white, middle-class consumers for the machined cornucopia of standardized products filling the shelves of American retail establishments. Whereas earlier advocates of American productive efficiency, such as the motion-study experts Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, had championed the use of photography in rationalizing the working body in production, by the 1920s the influence of applied psychology had reoriented managers toward an appreciation of the mind as the critical element of rationalized consumption.<sup>1</sup> Achieving greater sales in an increasingly competitive and national marketplace required convincing hesitant consumers that individual difference and personal meaning could be theirs, despite a regularized landscape of standardized goods. Corporations increasingly hired advertising agencies and their creative staffs, in Jackson Lears' phrase, to "surround mass-produced goods with an aura of uniqueness" designed to stimulate consumption through the promise of individuality.<sup>2</sup>

This article addresses the origins of American photographically based advertising illustration in relation to modern consumer culture. The first section concerns photography's problematic status as a medium for mass-market magazine illustration in the years before World War I, despite the medium's availability through halftone technology. As I will discuss, the lag between technological innovation and cultural practice reveals an unwritten history concerning photographic realism and advertising's middle-class audience. As the profile of the implied consumer shifted from that of "rational man" to "irrational woman" by 1915, photography's realist tendencies became a problem for a new school of advertisers seeking to harness the subjective for the benefit of corporate sales. In the second part of the essay, I will discuss how photography's problematic status was resolved by an art-school trained illustrator, Lejaren à Hiller. Hiller successfully introduced fine art principles into his commercial photographs, creating for the first time a national market for photographically based advertising illustrations. His complex photographs, created for national brand manufac-

1. See my essay on the Gilbreths, "The Prosthetics of Management: Motion Study, Photography, and the Industrialized Body," in *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives*, ed. Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Minn (New York, 2001, forthcoming).

2. T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994), 270. For the role of trademark legislation and brand identity in developing mass markets, see Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, D.C., 1989), 29–57; and Richard Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York, 1990).

turers from the mid-1910s forward, severed photography from its slavish dependence on material reality, while at the same time retaining the evidentiary arguments implicit in the photographic medium.

Historians such as Roland Marchand, Stephen Fox, and Pamela Laird have provided us with thorough histories of the emergence of modern advertising, charting developments such as the birth of the advertising agency, the shift from newspaper as client to manufacturer as client, and the increasing reliance in advertising on what William Leach, in a slightly different context, has called “eye appeal.”<sup>3</sup> My focus here is more on the advertisements (rather than on the advertisers) and, in particular, on the role of photographic illustration in engineering the shift to mass consumption. As Neil Harris and Estelle Jussim have discussed, the “ten-cent magazine revolution” of the 1890s ushered in a new technology, destined to redefine magazine illustration. The half tone screen process, gradually perfected between 1881 and 1893, enabled printers to reproduce photographic images with a full range of tonal gradients on the same sheet of paper receiving typeset copy.<sup>4</sup> By 1900, in Neil Harris’s estimation, the halftone process was “firmly established as a major reproductive method for publishers of mass illustrated materials.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the success of the ten-cent magazines and the financial incentive to shift to half tone, however, it was nearly twenty years before most national advertisers were willing to abandon their pen-and-brush artists in favor of commercial photography.

The historical problem I am posing is this: why, given the availability of halftone technology, as well as the reduced costs that it offered, was there *not* a wholesale shift to photographically based advertising illustration in the years between 1895 and 1920? Why was it that “class” magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *The Satur-*

3. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985); Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York, 1984); Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore, Md., 1998); see also William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, 1993).

4. David Phillips, “Art for Industry’s Sake: Halftone Technology, Mass Photography, and the Social Transformation of American Print Culture, 1880–1920,” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996), 54–62. For a further discussion of the technologies and inventions relating to halftone, see Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1983), 66–67.

5. Neil Harris, “Iconography and Intellectual History: The Half-Tone Effect,” in *New Dimensions in American Intellectual History*, ed. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore, Md., 1979), quotation at p. 197.

*day Evening Post* continued to rely on pen-and-ink illustrators such as Charles Dana Gibson, when photography was readily available at a greatly reduced cost?

The problem was simply that most commercial photography failed to meet advertisers' needs: it provided realism but not art, rationality but not emotion. Commercial photographers were aware of the new market, and throughout the years after 1890 photography invaded the small advertising cuts found in the back of popular magazines. Stilted advertisements for canned food, cameras, corsets, and carriages increasingly used photography as a method of showing the products' selling points in realistic detail. Products were displayed with the crisp insistence of edge-to-edge focus; advertisers assumed that photography's ability to reproduce the detail formerly lost with wood engravings or pen-and-ink drawings would persuade the customer of the product's fine workmanship (see Figure 1). Eventually, static product still-lives were infused with "human interest": babies and pretty female faces accessorized machine tools and breakfast foods; inventors' faces, in half tone, smiled warmly over industrious factories.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, as Figure 1 suggests, despite the inclusion of an alluring young woman, the formal aspects of this type of advertising photography stayed safely within the confines of what generations of critics have understood as photography's privileged relationship to the real—defined as the facticity of the material world. These portrait-based photographs, with their faithful recording of each and every tooth (both human and metallic), told—in the words of a contemporary critic— "everything about the facts of nature and left out the mystery."<sup>7</sup> So long as advertising photography worked within a model of rational appeal, rather than emotion, this lack of mystery (referred to elsewhere as "art") was unproblematic; sharply focused, minimally composed photographic records were considered superior instruments of visual persuasion for many products.

6. For a discussion of the advertising approach in personalizing the "soulless" corporation, see Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998), 31.

7. Henry Peach Robinson, *The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph* (Bradford, England, 1896), 70. The definition of realism, especially in relationship to photography, has never been static; the term has been a site of contestation used to define photography's capacities and goals throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. For a review of some of the nineteenth-century debates, see Mary Warner Marien, *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839–1900* (Cambridge, England, 1997). For a discussion of realism in relationship to American culture more generally, see Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989); and David Shi, *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850–1920* (New York, 1995).



Figure 1 Early advertising photography, such as this photographic postcard, accessorized the image's realist detail with what advertisers called "human interest." McCaffrey File Company, Philadelphia, advertising postcard, 1909, Andreas Brown Collection, box 1, Advertising, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, 89.R.46, Los Angeles, Calif.

Early mass-circulation advertising photography corresponded with advertisers' belief that consumers made purchase decisions on a rational basis. The period before 1908 was the era of advertising as "salesmanship in print": the advertisement was a stand-in for the missing sales clerk, whose selling pitch had been based on the "reason why" the consumer should purchase a particular product over others—what became known in the business as "reason-why" copy. A good advertisement was a logical, persuasive argument concerning the product's superior merits; as one advertising executive argued, "True 'Reason-Why' Copy is Logic, plus persuasion, plus conviction, all woven into a certain simplicity of thought—pre-digested for the average mind."<sup>8</sup> Photography would seem to be the ideal medium for selling to an assumed "rational buyer." The faithful reproduction of detail offered by a halftone provided the visual analogue for "reason-why" copy. The early advertising photograph's indexical relationship to the product's material reality convincingly saturated the image with what Roland Barthes has called the denotative message, obscuring its connotative meanings.<sup>9</sup> The halftone became a transparent stand-in for the product itself, in all its superior workmanship.<sup>10</sup>

In an era of "reason-why" copy and efficiency mania, advertisers offered photography as providing an unmediated access to the real, with the 'real' being defined as the product's material reality. Photographs denoted the superior product through the image's "having been there" quality, while photography, as a medium, implicitly connoted the efficiency of American business culture. Photography was the preferred medium in advertising copy directed to an implied rational consumer, usually (but not always) male (Figure 2). Especially in product advertising where the selling argument was based on

8. Quoted in Fox, *The Mirror Makers*, 50. Later, with the shift to emotion and atmospheric advertising, the notion of salesmanship in print was retooled to reflect the "human touch." "When you put salesmanship into print you are trying to make it take the place of a living salesman," argued Herbert N. Casson. "People do not care to read about facts . . . this is especially true of women, and most of our sales literature—fully eighty percent of it—is intended to influence women. Most goods are bought by women." See Herbert N. Casson, "The Human Touch in Printed Salesmanship," *Printed Salesmanship* (Sept. 1926), 27; see also Karl Thayer Soule, "Silent Salesmen," *ibid.*, 32–33.

9. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), 18.

10. As David Nye has discussed, this factual style of presentation was especially attractive in industrial photography. See David E. Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric* (Boston, 1985), 31–58. See also Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996), 26–27.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST MARCH 30, 1919



Comptometer Division, American Express Company, Accounting Department, New York City

## How Comptometers lighten American Express accounting

Employment of hand or head on work that a machine will do quicker and better is a needless waste of human energy. In its place economy at any time; in the present crisis it is inescapable. As a lag to such economic waste the American Express Company established a Comptometer Division in its Accounting Department. How's what Mr. A. R. Marshall, Assistant Comptroller of the Company, has to say of the results:

"Before the war there were no women employed in our Accounting Department—out of fourteen hundred employees several hundred are women, a result made possible by mechanical equipment.

"In the Comptometer Division of our Accounting Department at New York alone, 1,200 girls operating Comptometers are handling figure work that was once done by men. It means a saving of 1,200 clerks, to say nothing of the extra space they would occupy and the supplies and supervision they would need.

"Much handled in this Department includes Distribution of Revenue Figuring Earnings per Mile, the Summarizing of Earnings and the Consolidation of Figures, Auditing of Disturbances and Calculations required in preparing other Statistics."

**Costly errors eliminated**

The saving in labor is apparent—it shows in the pencil. Not so obvious but none the less real is the saving through elimination of costly losses.

Coupled with the Controlled-Key safeguard, the Comptometer has made American Express accounting practically cost-free accuracy.

On this point, Mr. Marshall says:

"The great accuracy of the machine almost eliminated costly mental errors, less than \$20,000 in wasteful accounting during the year, all of which are caught and adjusted."

**Handles every form of figure work**

The American Express Company is a huge concern. Your business may be small and different. But the economy of accounting is the same in both. Whatever the business, in kind or size, Comptometer Speed and Accuracy give equally good results on every form of figure work in accounting.

It was by asking a Comptometer man to call with his machine that the American Express Company learned the facts about Comptometer Service, which they have since put into practice with such splendid results.

There is always a Comptometer man at your service. He will be glad to talk it over with you on your invitation.

Write for free booklet, "Better Methods of Accounting."



**CONTROLLED-KEY**  
**Comptometer**  
ADDING AND CALCULATING MACHINE

Felt & Tarver Mfg. Co.  
1721 N. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Figure 2 The photographic medium connoted the modern efficiency of American business culture and was used extensively in advertisements based on the rational appeals of “reason-why” copy. Comptometer, *The Saturday Evening Post*, 30 March 1919.

efficiency, photography emerged as a favored medium, remaining popular long after advertisers had abandoned “reason-why” copy for most household products.<sup>11</sup> Even in product advertising directed toward women, if the copy was based on logical argument (for example, the portability of a Western Electric sewing machine), then the preferred illustration medium was often halftone. By the early 1910s, photography was widely understood (among advertisers, art directors, and consumers) to connote the logical rationality of reason-why copy. Thus, photographic illustration continued to dominate trade publications directed toward business and professional men, such as the magazine *System*, where the selling pitch was based on rational appeals of price, efficiency, or quality.

Although photography offered a sense of realism, for many years it failed to offer art. Art, however, was becoming increasingly indispensable to advertising, as advertisers shifted from an emphasis on the rational to the stimulation of the subjective. Photography’s value as the preferred medium of efficient rationality became a distinct liability when, in the first decade of the twentieth century, advertisers and psychologists began to shift their model of the typical consumer from a rational to an emotional buyer. As the pioneering advertising psychologist Walter Dill Scott noted, “We have been taught by tradition that man is inherently logical, that he weighs evidence . . . and then reaches the conclusion on which he bases his action. The more modern conception of man is that he is a creature who rarely reasons at all.”<sup>12</sup> By 1910, as Merle Curti has noted, the advertising trade press had replaced the dominant image of man as rational with a new conception of human nature, one based on nonrational impulses. Advertising’s role shifted from educating consumers about a product’s merits to creating desire through the stimulation of impulses, instincts, and emotions. Although advertising never abandoned “rational man”

11. For the connection among photography, efficiency, and reason-why copy after World War I, see “Pictorial Demonstration Instead of the Superlative,” *Printer’s Ink Monthly* (Jan. 1923), 65–66; and K. B. White, “Old Man Specific Gets Direct Sales with Institutional Advertising,” *ibid.* (Jan. 1922), 31–32.

12. Walter Dill Scott, *Influencing Men in Business: The Psychology of Argument and Suggestion* (1911; New York, 1914), 35. Scott’s work on advertising psychology began appearing after 1901, when Thomas L. Banner, western advertising manager for *The Delineator* and other Butterick magazines, asked Scott to give a talk on the psychology of advertising to a group of advertising professionals. Scott’s numerous articles and books helped move advertisers away from reason-why copy to methodologies that are more suggestive. For more on Scott, see Leonard W. Ferguson, *Walter Dill Scott: First Industrial Psychologist* (n.p., 1962); Edmund C. Lynch, “Walter Dill Scott: Pioneer Industrial Psychologist,” *Business History Review* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 149–70.

or reason-why copy completely, the shift to emotion sparked a new style in advertising.<sup>13</sup>

The new advertising featured a heavy emphasis on illustration as a means of connoting the high quality and class on which most advertising of these years depended. Pioneer advertising psychologists such as Scott emphasized the role of mental imagery in awakening the senses, and, as “the printed page cannot appeal directly to any of the senses except the eye,” the role of visual imagery within the advertisement grew in importance.<sup>14</sup> Advertisers of breakfast cereals, soaps, and soft drinks reproduced original paintings, drawings, and sketches, often signed by the artist, as a way of building brand recognition and associating the product with the cultured aesthetic connoted by the featured illustration. The point of the illustrations was not to convince the consumer through logical argument, but, instead, to associate the product with the positive emotional responses triggered by what Roland Marchand has called the “visual clichés” of American advertising: the lovely bloom of American girlhood, the warm security of the family circle, or the small-town comforts of the settled village.<sup>15</sup>

Advertising, as a system of visual communication, is a symbolic language that traffics not so much in things as they are as it does in how (advertisers think) we would like things to be. Early-twentieth-century advertising professionals had begun to understand that consumers preferred an idealized reflection of the social world rather than an image of literal reality. Working in the genre of what Michael Schudson has called “capitalist realism,” advertisers constructed a pictorial universe peopled by abstract types such as the loving wife or the elegant society lady, performing predictable, recognizable tasks

13. Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 70; see also Martha L. Olney, *Buy Now, Pay Later: Advertising, Credit, and Consumer Durables in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), 135. This period also marked the growing recognition among advertisers and consumer advocates that women made the majority of household purchases. See Christine Frederick, “Teach Women What Advertising Does,” *Printer's Ink* (20 June 1920), 177–83.

14. Walter Dill Scott, “The Psychology of Advertising,” *Atlantic Monthly* (Jan. 1904), 34; see also Mary Fenton Roberts, “What the Photograph Means to the Magazine,” *Photo-Era Magazine* (Sept. 1925), 121–26.

15. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 153, 235–84. On this point, see also Ronald Berman, “Origins of the Art of Advertising,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 17 no. 3 (Fall 1983): 62. For a contemporary critique of advertisers' over-reliance on visual clichés, see W. Livingston Larned, “Finding the Theme for the Illustration,” *Printer's Ink* (29 Oct. 1920), 105–9; W. Livingston Larned, “Peopling the Advertisements with Characters That Really Live,” *ibid.* (12 Feb. 1920), 59–64; and W. Livingston Larned, “When Is an Illustration Unconventional,” *ibid.* (7 Oct. 1920), 165–69.

such as picking up a child or enjoying the club—in abstract places easily recognized as Anytown, USA. Like the Socialist realism of the 1930s, Schudson argued, American advertising simplifies and typifies. Individual idiosyncrasies of specific grandmothers (standing, yelling, non-white grandmothers, for example) are smoothed over into an abstracted “type” (seated, knitting, smiling, white grandmothers) that the targeted consumers recognize instantly, thereby expediting the sales message or product association.<sup>16</sup>

Pen-and-brush illustrations, with their signatures and distinctive marks and lines, clearly signaled the individual interpretation that provided one route for advertising’s drive to what Schudson has called abstraction—not in the sense of a loss of figuration, but in the older sense of the word: “considered apart from concrete existence,” or “without reference to a particular instance.”<sup>17</sup> The advertising illustration signaled the concrete existence of the artist, but not the illustration’s subject—which, except in testimonial advertisements, was always an abstract type. Consumers implicitly recognized the illustrations of James Montgomery Flagg or Harrison Fisher as ideal representations of American types, images that occupied the powerful emotional borderlands between the mundane specificity of the known and the alluring abstraction of fantasy. Illustrations acted as psychological handmaidens to consumer desire: they announced their status as idealized abstractions while simultaneously licensing subjective flights of consumer longing.

So where did this evolution leave photography? It seemed hamstrung as a medium: its faithful reporting of material fact, and its overwhelming enthusiasm for endless, superfluous detail, seemed to suggest its unsuitability for idealist representation. Stilted halftones for “Brown’s Jackets” had difficulty competing with the visual sophistication of “Holeproof Hosiery,” and color, though important, was not the only distinguishing difference. As one author stated in 1918, the “almost unavoidable realism of photographic illustrations as usually made killed the effective impression demanded of the picture used to illustrate a story. . . . An illustration must get away from this very definite thing and give to all classes of readers an idealistic vision of the hero or heroine of the book or story.”<sup>18</sup>

16. Michael Schudson, *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion* (New York, 1986), 209–23. Roland Marchand has described advertising as a *Zerrspiegel*, or fun house mirror, which reflects back a distorted image—not wholly fictive, but exaggerated in places. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xvii.

17. *American Heritage College Dictionary*, s.v.

18. “Our Cover Portrait and Hall of Fame,” *Portrait* 9, no. 2 (June 1919): 11–13.

By 1913 it was clear what advertisers wanted of illustrations, and photographers seemed unable to meet the demand. The shift to impressionistic copy required the merchandising, not so much of the product itself, but of the benefit the product offered. Advertisers sought dynamic images marked by both formal and conceptual clarity. They needed to tell a “striking or interesting story” through dramatic lighting, harmonious composition, balanced use of lines and visual contrast, and other formal elements that had been considered more the province of the artist than of the photographer. However, unlike art-school trained illustrators such as Howard Pyle or N. C. Wyeth, few photographers could boast any formal art training; they lacked, as a rule, the knowledge of composition, line, and chiaroscuro learned through academic study in the fine arts.

The problem of how to introduce a more sophisticated photographic practice into advertising illustration was addressed by a Milwaukee resident who moved to New York in 1907. Lejaren à Hiller, a young photographer with three years of formal art training at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, saw himself as an artist, illustrator, and photographer—in that order. Through his innovative use of the camera in both fiction and advertising, Hiller essentially invented modern photographic illustration.

Hiller began his career in 1905 as a commercial illustrator in Chicago, where he worked for J. T. Mitchell, a future partner in the well-known advertising firm Lennen and Mitchell (Figure 3). Arriving in New York in 1907, Hiller soon joined the Society of Illustrators and made his living as a freelance commercial illustrator, producing both pen-and-ink drawings and cover art for *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and other magazines between 1908 and 1913, when he turned to photography. After a period of time competing with the greats of magazine illustration, Hiller began photographing his models rather than drawing them. He developed a portfolio of photographically based illustrations and made the rounds of the New York publishers. After numerous rejections, Hiller succeeded in convincing W. G. Gibson, the editor of *Cosmopolitan* and a prior client, to give him a story to illustrate.<sup>19</sup>

19. Hiller's only illustration (so far as I have been able to find) for *Cosmopolitan* before his photographic work commenced in 1913 appeared in the October 1909 issue, pp. 658–59: a pen-and-ink drawing for Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poem “Lord Speaks Again.” Brief narratives concerning this period of Hiller's career can be found in Joseph Katz, “*Advertising and Selling*” (23 May 1935), 54. Lejaren à Hiller, autobiographical typescript, 2 Feb. 1950, Hiller Archive, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y. (hereafter cited as Hiller Archive, VSW). Hiller claimed that he made his first photographically based illustration for a St. Louis newspaper while working at the Fair in 1902; the images illustrated a story of a farm family visiting the Fair, and he was paid \$1.50 each. Lejaren à Hiller, autobiographical typescript, 25 Sept. 1945, p. 2.



Figure 3 The soft-focus lens, artisanal pose, painter's smock, cigarette, and beret signal Hiller's identification as an artist and bohemian. Lejaren à Hiller self-portrait, c. 1909, Hiller Archive, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.

Anna Katherine Green's short story "The Grotto Specter" appeared in the June 1913 issue of *Cosmopolitan*.<sup>20</sup> The story, about a mysterious murder in a cave-like grotto, was illustrated by six signed photographic illustrations by Lejaren à Hiller (Figure 4). Hiller photographed a street

20. Publishing entrepreneur William Randolph Hearst had bought one of the nation's leading illustrated magazines, *Cosmopolitan*, in 1905 as his first venture into the general magazine market. In 1914, the magazine had a circulation of one million, with each issue averaging 144 pages. In 1912, the magazine dropped its muckraking emphasis and turned to a major reliance on fiction, with an increasing emphasis on sexual or romantic subjects. See Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1885–1905* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 480–505.



Figure 4 This combination print, made from a photograph of an excavation pit and portraits of studio models, represents Hiller's first published photographic illustration. Illustration for "The Grotto Specter," by Anna Katherine Green, *Cosmopolitan* (June 1913), 93. Lejaren à Hiller, illustrator.

excavation pit as a 'cave' background for his fictionalized tableau. The photograph's documentary tendencies were softened through dramatic chiaroscuro: dark tones frame the figures, who emerge, hazily, from dense backgrounds and whose contours, though photographically rendered, remain nonetheless suggestive. The resulting images made a dramatic impact: *McClure's* magazine editors spotted the story and offered Hiller an exclusive contract, but *Cosmopolitan* counteroffered, and Hiller signed a one-year contract with Hearst Publications for \$7,500.<sup>21</sup>

21. Lejaren à Hiller, "Illustrating Magazine Articles and Advertising by the Use of the Camera," *Commercial Photographer* 3, no. 1 (Oct. 1927): 17; "They Chose Photography," clipping about Hiller, Bourke-White, and Platt Lynes, 1941, publication not noted, Hiller Archive, VSW, p. 38; see also Joseph Katz, "Perfect Host," *Advertising and Selling* (23 May 1935), 54.

The aesthetic foundation for Hiller's commercial illustration was pictorial, or artistic, photography. Pictorialism, a popular movement in American photography from the mid-1890s through the 1920s, was built upon nineteenth-century English models that argued for the camera's creative possibilities. The goal of the pictorialists was to elevate photography to the status of fine art by moving the camera away from the tyranny of fact.<sup>22</sup> Deeply influenced by the simplicity of natural beauty, European painting, and Japanese aesthetics, early-twentieth-century pictorialist photographers sought to infuse their work with an emotional and spiritual intensity. The preference for classical tableaux, as well as the allegorical dimensions of the natural landscape, pushed the camera image beyond the mechanical recording of social fact to express intimacy, ecstasy, ambiguity, and revelation—all of which prior generations had considered beyond the capability of photographic representation.

Hiller was an accomplished pictorialist photographer, and his status as an "artist" helped legitimize his use of photography in commercial illustration. Although maintaining his reputation as an artist separate from his commercial work, Hiller also sought to merge the two worlds, and his illustrations for "The Grotto Specter" represented his first halting effort to yoke pictorialist aesthetics to commercial ends. The illustrations launched Hiller on a prominent and lucrative career illustrating fiction, not only for *Cosmopolitan*, but also for *The Saturday Evening Post* and other middle-class magazines. This experience in illustrating fiction, as well as a series of articles about psychic reality and the nonmaterial world, perfectly positioned Hiller for the advertising contracts that came his way after 1913. As he alone among commercial photographers seemed to recognize, selling no longer depended on the verisimilitude of material reality; sales required the motivation of subjective realms of emotion and psychology. Advertisers had begun to recognize the point made by a *Printer's Ink* columnist after the First World War: "the same people who thrill and suffer and cry and grow hot-tempered over the tempests and joys of fiction, further ahead in the same magazines, are touched and influenced by that heart which is put into advertising."<sup>23</sup>

22. Pictorialism has an extensive historiography; as an introduction, see Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession: Steiglitz and the Fine-Art Movement in Photography* (New York, 1978); William Innes Homer, *Alfred Steiglitz and the Photo-Secession* (Boston, 1983); Christian A. Peterson, "American Arts and Crafts: The Photograph Beautiful 1895–1915," *History of Photography* (Autumn 1992), 189–232.

23. W. H. Heath, "Heart Throbs as the Pictorial Theme," *Printer's Ink* (11 Nov. 1920), 157–58.

The visual strategies used to motivate the reader's engagement with works of fiction soon became indistinguishable from the visual strategies used to spark the consumer's desire to purchase. A 1917 advertisement for the Aeolian Company suggests how Hiller's work in illustrating the subjective held direct relevance for advertising work. In this photographic tableau, an old man wears a "rapt expression, sad but very tender" as the phonograph, memory's handmaiden, returned the vision of his lost love, hovering in ghostly lavender outside the open doorway. The advertisement's appeal to memory and the subjective, illustrated by Hiller's montaged and heavily retouched photograph as well as by the copy's fictionalized narrative, demonstrates how the lines between fiction and advertising, between the material and the nonmaterial worlds, were growing profitably indistinct. Aesthetic innovations made in pursuit of the irrational became yoked, through advertising, to the rationalization of consumption. As Hiller pointed out in 1920,

modern advertising, as it is exemplified in the higher class of periodicals, must often possess qualities that appeal to the reader with infinitely more subtlety than a mere statement of such material facts as widths, lengths, weights, colors, and prices . . . there are luxuries of the mind which must be hammered out no less than those for the body.<sup>24</sup>

Hiller's visual strategies relied on illustrating the mind's fictions—through the short story or through the emotional benefit promised by the consumption of mass-produced goods.

Drawing on his pictorialist background, Hiller introduced a number of aesthetic innovations into advertising photography, successfully pushing the medium past the obsessive imperative to record. The soft-focus lens, long familiar to pictorialist photographers, but a new tool for commercial illustrators, enabled Hiller to soften contours. In the darkroom, combination printing allowed him to duplicate the images of a few models at various scales, which he then pieced together and rephotographed. He heavily retouched his images, painting on them to exaggerate shadows, remove unnecessary details, or disguise seams. For grand-scale environments, such as the Egyptian pyramids or a schooner at sea, Hiller constructed toy models, photographed the objects at a comparatively large scale, and then inserted smaller figures made from posing models in the studio. For

24. Lejaren à Hiller, "Combining Brush and Camera," *Printer's Ink Monthly* (June 1920), copy in Hiller Archive, VSW.



Figure 5 As Hiller's business expanded after World War I, he built increasingly complex interior sets for his advertising illustrations. Swimming models and constructed water set, Hiller Studios, c. 1920, Hiller Archive, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.

smaller settings, such as an evening by the piano or a group of bathing beauties, Hiller had the set constructed on site (Figure 5). As his business expanded after the war, his staged tableaux became more complex. By 1918 he had a full-time talent scout, who scoured the streets of New York searching for the perfect social type; contemporary accounts claimed that Hiller had a physiognomic archive of over two thousand models, amateur and professional.

In an advertisement for the Aeolian Company, a sophisticated composition with a full set, Hiller used lighting to discipline the eye (Figure 6). Light cradles the enraptured features of "John Smith, merchant, by day" but "artist, dreamer, poet" while he plays the pianola. The edges of the picture are thrown into darkness, while the image's pyramidal composition and selective illumination send the viewer's eye in two diagonal lines of illuminated points: one commencing at the left sofa arm (where a woman lounges) and ending at the spot of light on the rear windowpane; the other beginning with Hiller's own signature and continuing through Smith's hand (where another triangle is formed with the face, hands, and sheet music) to his face, and then back to the window-

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST September 22, 1917

John Barry  
composer of *Pianola*

A STORY OF AN EVENING WITH  
**The PIANOLA**  
*The great modern pianoforte that all can play*

**I** should not "piano" on my income card, if I could create something of a sensation, wouldn't it? But I have some right to the title, nevertheless.

"The day, however, takes me totally. It isn't simply my head and heart, it's my life. I live it and all the ardor and energy in my nature are concentrated in it.

"But I've learned, as other Americans are learning, that there is something in life besides business—that there is another side to it, that desire, cultivation, and work, if cultured, lead us to make life pleasant and actually make us better human men. That something for me is music.

**The Pianola has granted me an artist's accomplishment**

"While I was enjoying an afternoon cigar and a cigarette article the other evening, Heiber took up my evening paper to read. Fortunately the article, 'John,' he said, 'hasn't you want to give us a little music?'

"Surely! I said, going over to the music cabinet. 'What shall I play? Chopin, popular or what?'

"Oh, play anything, he answered. 'I like it all.

"So I selected my program and carried the rolls over to the piano. Two pieces of Scrievan's, 'A Victorian Love Song' and the Gossard's 'Chopin's Prelude in A Flat,' Liszt's 'The Hungarian Rhapsody,' Beethoven's 'Sonata Pathétique,' the Brahms Movement, a 'Romance' by Paganini, a 'Mollay of

Popular Broadway Hits, and a striking new feature by Ted Kautzner.

"I played the first roll—the 'Victorian Love Song'—put my feet on the pedals, my hands on the respective keys and—ho! The music had me. 'No longer John Smith, merchant—I became John Smith, artist, musician, poet. All the deeper layers of my nature stirred into life. Emotions, dreams and unexpressed art ideas, rose and thrilled me. I felt intensely, and, thanks to modern scientific skill, expressed my feelings.

"The soft, melodious measures poured pleasure in my mind. It is twilight on the Grand Canal. The sweet haiku of evening in the loveliness, save by the tapping of the water against steps worn by the feet of countless generations of Venetian strollers.

"Softly and slowly a gentle approach and in softly brought beneath a latticed window overlooking the Canal. The grandeur lies a giant from reflect custom, seeing the vision over his head, within a soft chord, and to the window above. But the last notes Scrievan's heart gave to the world.

**Personal pleasure—and pleasure for others**

"Then, it is finished. I come back from fancy's world and put to the rest with white marble notes, with a little sigh, 'Wasn't that exquisite?' You played it beautifully.

"Oh by me, I play all the pieces I've selected. Each has its own—each carries me to a fresh and lovely world. Liszt's rugged and wild spirit, romantic me, now swirls in baroque rhapsody, now slowly in waltz measure to wild Romantic places, where Gypsy and Magyar legends, myths, love, and dreams, all in baroque phrases.

"Chopin, subtle, refined, leads me to his world, so low nothing, if more familiar.

"Beethoven—music's greatest tragic master—takes me back to where he holds sway. But all who feel the spell of music, willingly enter his dramatic and unswerving, inexorable, land their souls with the grandness and beauty that were his.

**The lightest as well as the greatest of music**

"And so I come to the lightest pieces in my program, and, clapping, happy Heiber claims me.

"The Brahms 'Wiegenlied' certainly is the lightest piece for piano, down from Chopin and Liszt, but that is not the same. Listen, please before you say, to have gone the farthest. Cling and smiling, the piece leads us to the child's world, but it is not to be taken lightly, as he seems to be. The piece gets anything the heart is able to do, and it is not overdone. That's something good. What is a woman?

"That's the story of her evening in her home of romantic other evening.

**THE AEOLIAN COMPANY**  
PARIS — 10, W. 42nd STREET, NEW YORK — LONDON

Figure 6 As Hiller's advertising work progressed, he relied increasingly on set design and lighting rather than on combination printing to achieve his effects. Ad for the Aeolian Company, Lejaren à Hiller, photographer. *The Saturday Evening Post* (22 Sept. 1917), 78.

pane. The eye moves restlessly between the dramatically lit faces. The compositional tension is held by the absent center: the distance between the two figures is a little too great, the angle of couch and piano a bit too severe. In search of resolution, the eye moves downward to the text, which both anchors the pyramid visually and works to resolve, through narrative, the image's subtle tensions.

In these complex images, lighting, composition, and other formal strategies work together, leading the eye through the image to the product or narrative suggested by the gathered figures. Lighting directs the viewer's attention through the photograph, disciplining the eye's movements on behalf of the product's selling point. As *Printer's Ink* columnist W. Livingston Larned argued in 1925, "Light is perhaps the most potent of all directing and guiding visual influences. It can signpost anything. It compels attention."<sup>25</sup> Lighting, composition, cropping, background, accessories, use of white space—all were formal strategies used to focus viewers' attention on the product or its benefits, while keeping "the eye from wandering from the edges of the picture."<sup>26</sup>

Hiller's work is remarkable not only for his use of pictorialist strategies to overcome photography's realist tendencies but also for how early he came upon these solutions. The few historians who have charted the beginnings of modern advertising photography have focused on the well-known photographers Edward Steichen and Clarence White, and they date the introduction of photography for commercial illustration to a later period, usually the early or mid-1920s. Their interpretations follow the groundbreaking work of Patricia Johnston, whose research on Edward Steichen has helped to complicate historians' understandings of the relationship between art and commerce during the 1920s.<sup>27</sup> Michele Bogart in her work on commercial illustrators, as well as Bonnie Yochelson in her work on Clarence White's students, follow Johnston's lead in marking the 1920s as the origin of photographically based advertising illustration.<sup>28</sup> But the recent historiographic focus on Steichen and White, though a much-needed corrective to generations of scholarship on Alfred Steiglitz and his battle for the aesthetics of photography, understates the degree to which pictorialist aesthetics had become part of advertising photography well before Steichen and White's

25. W. Livingston Larned, "A Little Light on Dark Pictorial Subjects," *Printer's Ink* (16 April 1925), 77–81; see also W. Livingston Larned, "Catching the Eye of the Lazy Reader," *ibid.* (18 Nov. 1920), 150–52.

26. Wilbur Perry, "How Much Should the Advertising Photograph Show?" *Printer's Ink Monthly* 5, no. 7 (Dec. 1922): 35–36. For a discussion of backgrounds and accessories in product still-life advertising photography, see "Hats—And Photographs That Sell Them," *Commercial Photographer* 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1925): 43–47; and D. P. Foster, "Accessories That Make the Half-Tone Interesting," *Printer's Ink* (15 April 1920), 133–36.

27. See Patricia Johnston, "Edward Steichen's Commercial Photography," *Exposure* 26, no. 4 (1989): 4–22; and *ibid.*, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997).

28. Michele Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Border of Art, 1890–1960* (Chicago, 1995); Bonnie Yochelson, "Clarence White, Peaceful Warrior," in *Pictorialism into Modernism: The Clarence H. White School of Photography*, ed. Marianne Fulton (New York, 1996).



Figure 7 By 1919, working from a background in illustrating fiction, Hiller specialized in high-end, social tableaux advertising. Adler-Rochester Clothing advertising booklet, interior page spread, Lejaren à Hiller, photographer, Walter Dorwin Teague, border design and illustration, 1919, Hiller Archive, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.

students transformed the field in the 1920s. By the time Steichen returned to the United States from Europe in 1923, Hiller had been creating photographically based advertisements for ten years.

By 1920 Hiller's advertising work was attracting the most sophisticated of clients and continued to garner national recognition. In 1919, for example, Hiller worked with the illustrator and future industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague on a lush, multipage catalogue for the upscale men's clothier Adler-Rochester (Figure 7).<sup>29</sup> Hiller illustrations were featured in national advertising campaigns for IBM, Arm-

29. For Teague's advertising work before 1925, see Clarence P. Hornung, *The Advertising Designs of Walter Dorwin Teague* (New York, 1991); Clarence P. Hornung and Fridolf Johnson, *200 Years of American Graphic Art* (New York, 1976), 164–65; and Charles Dalton Olson, "Sign of the Star: Walter Dorwin Teague and the Texas Company, 1934–1937" (MA Thesis, Cornell University, 1987), 1–39. Teague worked for Phoenix Hosier, as did Hiller; the borders on the White and Wycoff's calendars seem to be Teague's work as well. Teague worked for the high-quality illustration advocate Ernest Elmo Calkins, in his advertising agency Calkins and Holden, between 1908 and 1912, when he went out on his own as a

strong Linoleum, Corning Glass, Senreco toothpaste, General Electric, S.D. Warren paper, 1847 Rogers Bros. flatware, Victrola, Fatima cigarettes, and Pond's cold cream, among other companies and products—all before 1923 (Figure 8). Nearly every issue of the “quality” magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal* featured his distinctive photographic tableaux, usually signed by the artist. By the later period, Hiller's lighting, set design, and dramatic narratives owed less to pictorialism than to cinema, an interest that he pursued in his own film productions of the early 1920s. Hiller's work was selected for each of the Art Directors' Club's annual exhibitions of advertising art during the early 1920s.<sup>30</sup> After years of skepticism about photography's role in advertising illustration, the editor of the 1924 *Annual of Advertising Art* confidently asserted, “The place of the photograph in advertising is unquestioned. It can accomplish things which no drawing or painting can possibly do.”<sup>31</sup>

Hiller's compositions relied on the aesthetics of pictorialist photography and painting to spark an emotional longing on the part of the viewer, a yearning of the spirit that the product promised to satisfy. As Hiller remarked,

If the maker of a great piano desires to demonstrate the wonders of that instrument to the cultured ones for whom it is specially designed, he does not exhibit a mere photograph of the piano, with a detail of its structure and a statement of its price; he obtains a picture that cannot fail to arouse deep and truly aesthetic emotions in the soul of any clod who may chance to see it.

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freelance advertising artist specializing in decorative design and typography. For further information about Teague, see Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925–1939* (Philadelphia, 1979), 87.

30. These early important commercial photographers need additional research. Hiller's 1921 photographs were loaned by J. A. Migel and exhibited by Street & Finney. The 1922 Royal Typewriter ad was exhibited by H. K. McCann Company, while the Fatima photograph was loaned by Liggett & Meyers and exhibited by the Newell-Emmett advertising agency. See *Annual of Advertising Art in the U.S., 1921*, pp. 5 and 21; *Annual of Advertising Art in the U.S., 1922*, pp. 104 and 109. For further information about these important exhibitions, see “Advertising Art Promoted by New York Art Center,” *Printer's Ink* (10 Nov. 1921), 50–52; “Art Directors' Club Holds First Annual Exhibition,” *ibid.* (10 March 1921), 80–84; “Awards at Art Directors' Club Exhibition,” *ibid.* (30 April 1925), 61–62; as well as Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Border of Art*, 128–32.

31. *Third Annual of Advertising Art, 1924* (there was no 1923 exhibition), p. 122. W. Livingston Larned, noting the advances in photographic illustration, declared as early as 1920 that “the artist can howl the winds down and the fact still remains that there are more photographic illustrations than ever—and they are superlatively better” than painted illustrations. W. Livingston Larned, “The Hidden Beauties of the Photographic Illustration,” *Printer's Ink* (25 March 1920), 57.

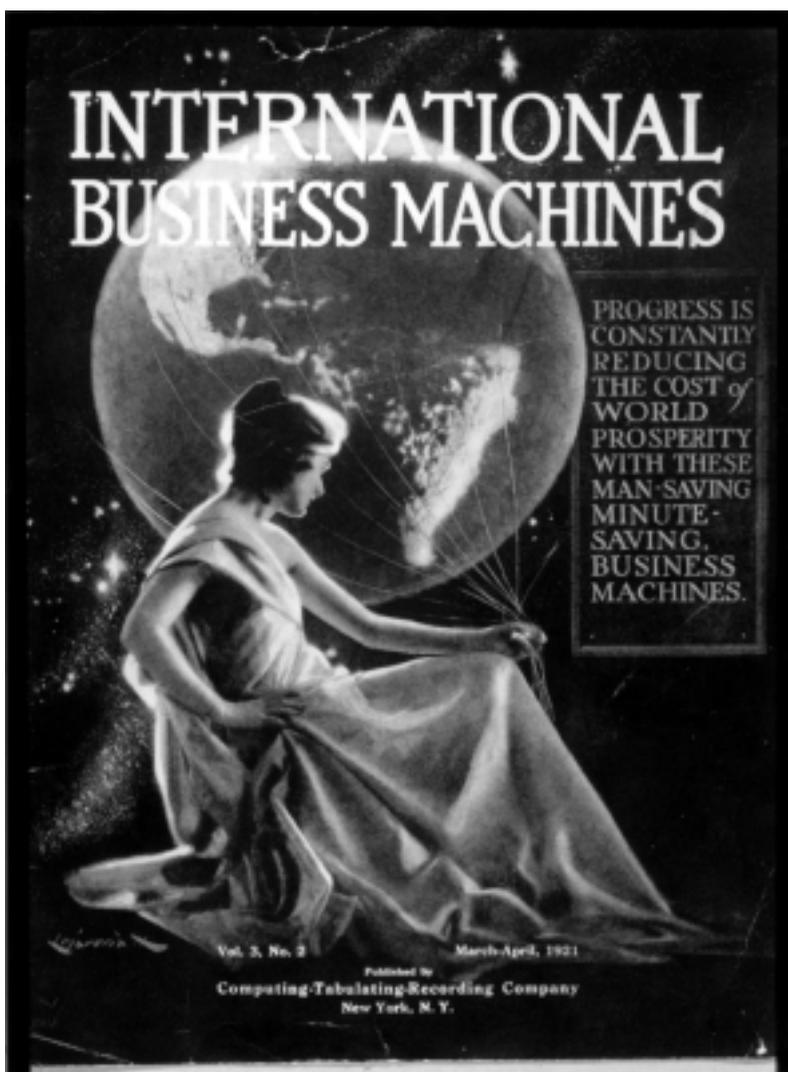


Figure 8 By the early 1920s, Hiller's clients included the nation's largest corporations. *International Business Machines*, house organ, March-April 1921, Lejaren à Hiller, photographer, Hiller Archive, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.

While this aesthetic approach was not especially difficult for the charcoal or pen-and-ink artist, the photographer needed to manipulate his tools to achieve the same effect on the viewer's subjective life. In the shift to emotional copy and advertisers' appeal to the subjective, pictorialism provided Hiller with the tools necessary to move

photography away from its “almost unavoidable realism” to the abstracted idealism necessary to modern advertising.<sup>32</sup> With this shift, which moved commercial photography from the tyranny of fact to the triumph of longing, Lejaren à Hiller launched the photographic revolution of modern advertising illustration.

32. “Our Cover Portrait and Hall of Fame,” *Portrait* (June 1919), 11–15. This article, which appeared in an Ansco company house organ, appeared next to an article by Sadakichi Hartman detailing the compositional structures of master painters such as Botticelli, Raphael, and Boucher.

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