

BUGA.U.P.

An interview by Berwyn Lewis

RECENTLY,

I had the pleasure of meeting Fred Cole of B.U.G.A.U.P. notoriety.

He is a surprising character, gentle and sensitive, not at all the street guerilla I had imagined. Our meeting, however, had overtones of the clandestine. We met in a noisy little restaurant where Fred eats, does business and receives all his phone calls and messages. Here is the interview which took place as we ate lunch.

PRICE 35c

U.P.

Question:
Can you tell me how you go about transforming a billboard?

Fred:
It's just making puns on what's there. For example "Why Pay More - No Better Value" All I had to do was cut out the "more". That leaves "why pay" and cut out "better" that leaves "no value".

a personal viewpoint

Branches of BUGA UP are now contactable at:

NSW BOX 78, WENTWORTH BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY UNION NSW 2006

VIC BOX 285 FITZROY VICTORIA 3065

SA BOX 161 TORRENSVILLE SOUTH AUSTRALIA 5031

WA No. 500. KING 174 LAKE STREET PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

COUGH UP C/- A.S.H. Mortimer St LONDON WIN70J U.K.

Q: Well you never know. You might be offered a job when this gets printed.

FRED: I suppose I'd consider it on its merit but I'd never compromise my standards. Words are my first love in life.

Q: What do you think the future of graffiti is? Will B.U.G.A.U.P. become an Australian export concept product? It's unique isn't it?

FRED: It already is. Someone I know just came back from Bali. A Coca-Cola billboard has been B.U.G.A.U.P. there. Wonderful! We're exporting it. Ralph Nader took 50 copies of our Autumn Catalogue back to America when he was here a few months ago. We've had reports that it's underway there. The reason you see no blank billboards here now is because they've had this anti-graffiti campaign for months. But a few months ago in Sydney you'd see 200 or more blank billboards. Now they're losing their contracts because of B.U.G.A.U.P.'s activities. The article in The Herald on Saturday is just a lie—they say we're in difficulties but we're increasing.

"When I was in jail the TV showed Channels 7, 9 and 10 but never 0 or 2."

Q: How could you be in difficulty? You don't have any real assets to lose do you?

FRED: Well I was in jail last month.

Q: Do you see yourself as being responsible for making graffiti a legitimate form of communication? As legitimate as advertising?

FRED: Well you have to interpret that. Yes. We are in the process of changing the public consciousness. The automatic reaction is that property is sacred. More so than peoples' lives. When you think about it and realise the harm they're doing where does the morality lie? You have to change community attitudes and they are changing because they've been made to think about it. It was at that Ralph Nader conference a lady came up to me. She thanked and congratulated me because she said that it helped her so much when she was giving up cigarettes. She'd go past the billboards at White Bay every day and it reinforced her determination to give it up. In turn that reinforced my determination to keep on doing it.

Q: Do you think advertising will have to alter because of B.U.G.A.U.P.?

FRED: They have already adapted billboards with multi-coloured backgrounds making it more difficult to apply one single colour. Furthermore, they came out with a silly billboard "Come on Aussie, come on" with the graffiti already printed on it. Initially it was altered to "come on Kiwi" then again to "come on India come on". Well I simply put "while India starves". It's very encouraging to see people doing billboards. All you need is a spray can. I don't do all of them of course. I try to do about three a day.

How can they win? Advertising people are probably brighter than average but I mean they can't produce an ad with words that we can't transform in some way. It's impossible. If we can't think of something immediately it's a spur to go and think of one.

Q: What are your main targets?

FRED: Cigarettes and alcohol.

Q: Are you against all advertising or just certain types?

FRED: No, I'm not, I'm against billboards because they're a blight on the community. But I only attack the ones which are specifically unhealthy promotions.

Q: What does B.U.G.A.U.P. stand for?

FRED: Billboards Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions. It's very important. The media is allegedly communication. But communication is composed of the word "commune", which means together. There is no such thing as communication which is one-way. One-way communication is giving orders to people. Communication is two-way. Is advertising two-way? How can you answer back to a billboard? The only way is to physically add something to it.

Q: So you're turning advertising into a form of communication instead of a non-communication?

FRED: And against itself. It's simply ordering people to do this and do that. In America the term is known as "engineering of consent".

Q: What do you mean by that?

FRED: People think of propaganda as something invented by the Nazis. In fact it was developed in World War I in America. After the war the Germans look at the American success and Goebbels thought of a big propaganda machine. After the second

"Nicotine is most addictive. Harder to get off than heroin."

world war the Americans looked at the German successful techniques and developed them further. In this way they were able to instill the views they wanted in peoples' minds. Thousands of tax deductible dollars are now spent in America on so-called educational kits for schools indoctrinating the children to think in a certain way.

Q: Were you ever in advertising?

FRED: No.

Q: How did your interest develop in the communications industry?

FRED: I came from England to Australia to get away from world centres of war. I was in Germany in the second world war.

Q: You were? As a child...?

FRED: No. I was fighting.

Q: Well you certainly don't look that vintage. How come?

FRED: My vegetarian diet. But I was so demoralised by the Australian involvement in Vietnam which I consider more immoral than the American because we were just toadying to them that I realised you can change community consciousness as we did during the Moratoriums when civilians walked the streets carrying the enemy flag. It was the first time in the history of the world and we changed the course of history made easier by the fact that they were losing the war there. On the eve of the elections I also put "export Fraser, not uranium" around and I also put "smokers stink". I changed the American slogan which was "smoking stinks". "Smokers Stink" is more personal. People say it's too rough that it's an attack. But we're under attack and when you respond it's defence. You see smoking as a habit has crept up on us. 100 years ago it wouldn't have been acceptable. People had a drawing or with-drawing room to smoke in.

Q: Do you think this is because of advertising?

FRED: No. Initially troops were given free cigarettes during the war. Nicotine is most addictive. Harder to get off than heroin. Two people I know found it harder to get off nicotine than heroin. Mind you they had more help with heroin.

Q: Would you ever take a job in advertising?

FRED: . . . (LONG PAUSE) . . . Would they have me?

Q: What do you have to say about your work from a technical or creative point of view?

FRED: I have a number of good badges related to smoking and B.U.G.A.U.P. I thought I'd do a little billboard badge but I couldn't think of anything to put on that. How do you relate to a billboard in that sort of situation—someone wearing it? Now it's easy to think of something to put on a billboard but a badge is a different matter. Finally I came up with MSS—you know—Metropolitan (In) Security Services (sic) or Must Stop Smoking—that's one of the groups I've started. I've now come up with a cigarette crossed with the diagonal bar for the badge. It took me months to think of that one.

... At this point Fred asked me to turn off the tape and described a situation where a taxi driver had been charged by the police and had his licence withdrawn because he would not permit people to smoke in his cab. The incident ended with the police, under great pressure, being forced to withdraw their charge against the driver. This led to a discussion about the extent of control by advertising, the policing for profit and manipulation of people.

FRED: When I was in jail the TV in the hospital (where I ended up) showed channels 7, 9 and 10 but never 0 or 2. I personally doubt that it was just a matter of our being prisoners or criminals. It was community taste.

Q: Are you implying that commercially oriented stations are part of the social programming process?

FRED: Are they ever! This is how society is manipulated with the aid of police.

Q: Can you give a final word of advice/encouragement or otherwise to the advertising industry at large?

FRED: It needs to provide itself with a set of ethical standards and a morality which they do not have. It's just greed and selfishness. How can you deal with people like that? I'm not saying all advertising is wrong. It's a useful development in this society but enough is enough is enough.

... Finally I was reminded of some famous words by Ogden Nash: "I think that I will never see a billboard as lovely as a tree."

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B.U.G.A.U.P. International Corp. Unlimited, P.O. Box K1380, HAYMARKET 2000.

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