

JOHN B. WATSON AT J. WALTER THOMPSON: THE LEGITIMATION OF "SCIENCE" IN ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT: This article, a cultural history, attempts to answer the question of how John B. Watson's presence at J. Walter Thompson "made sense" from the standpoint of the actors involved. At the time Watson joined the agency, he had achieved a national reputation as a psychologist, a researcher, and the leader of behaviorist psychology. His doctrine, which recognized prediction and control as the goal of psychology, meshed well not only with broader Progressive concerns of social control, but more particularly with the goals of the business community, and at J. Walter Thompson, with the goals of Stanley B. Resor. Watson's presence at the agency became a "mechanism" through which Resor could implement his philosophy into advertising practice. Watson's work was to help rationalize the advertising process, but at the same time, spoke directly to the admirers of science, legitimating a reality in which decision making based upon "scientific" methods assumed a role of prominence

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