Lee McGuigan is a Research Fellow at Cornell Tech’s Digital Life Initiative. He is interested in various entanglements of information, technology, markets, and culture. His ongoing work looks at knowledge infrastructures and logistical processes in advertising and media industries. This research helps make sense of today’s “attention merchants” and “choice architects” by examining how related efforts to predict and influence consumer habits and to package and sell audience attention have collectively channeled and amplified currents in surveillance, data processing, and behavioral science. Lee’s scholarship appears in a variety of books and journals, including New Media & Society, Critical Studies in Media Communication, the Journal of Consumer Culture, Media, Culture, & Society, and Television & New Media. He is also co-editor (with Vincent Manzerolle) of The Audience Commodity in a Digital Age, published in 2014 by Peter Lang.

Abstract
This talk is about the history of a future imagined by advertisers as they constructed the affordances of digital technologies. It examines how related efforts to predict and influence consumer habits and to package and sell audience attention helped orchestrate the marriage of behavioral science and data extraction that defines media and marketing environments today. Across the second half of the twentieth century, the advertising industry reconstructed its information infrastructures around an ambition to account for, calculate, and influence more of public and personal life. This transformation sits at an intersection where the processing of data, the processing of commerce, and the processing of culture collide. The talk will introduce a few key efforts to reorient advertising around a science of optimization, focusing on early designs for hypertargeting—or producing an audience of one.