Talking in Organizations: Managing Identity and Impressions in an Advertising Agency*

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Abstract

This paper treats discourses in organizations in relationship to the management of identities and impressions. It is based on an ethnographic study of an advertising agency and explores how advertising professionals describe themselves, their work and organizations, the profession and their clients. Various functions of such descriptions are proposed, from identity work to marketing. The relationship between the level of discourse and deeper cultural levels is investigated through the cultural sociologies of Asplund and Bourdieu. The 'habitus' of advertising workers is discussed and 'anti-bureaucracy' is proposed as a conceptual figure — a basic way of conceptualizing vital segments of one's cultural reality — characterizing the advertising industry (in Sweden), informing the meaning of the particular ways of talk that is typical among advertising workers.

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Introduction

Talk comprises a major part of organizational life. This is especially the case in many forms of professional and semi-professional work within the service sector (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges 1990; Svensson 1990), but also within many other activities where the tasks are uncertain and ambiguous and agreements on problem definitions and solutions presuppose a far-reaching sharing of ideas and negotiations of meaning. Many functions can be fulfilled by talk apart from the obvious ones of providing information, triggering actions and expressing feelings. In this paper, I address how the people in a Swedish advertising agency, regulate their professional identities by means of particular kinds of expressions and verbal symbols as well as support their claims to have a specific competence and orientation to offer their clients.

The paper deals with some of the ways in which advertising people describe their work, the industry, advertising agencies as organizations, themselves as professionals and their clients. I focus on certain peculiarities which appear to be typical of the field and investigate their meaning. My research question — the puzzle towards which, after some time, the ethnographic work led — thus concerns how we can understand the sometimes strange ways in which people talk. In the present study, for instance, clients are described in rather pejorative terms. This leads to an exploration of the relationship between the use of language, the

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015-0019 $3.00

constitution of identities and a basis for impression management, together with efforts to symbolically regulate the interaction between advertising agency and customer.

The paper thus connects with emergent traditions in organization theory and social psychology which focus on the significance of subjectivity and identity formation in work and organizations, as well as on the centrality of language and discourse in this process (Deetz 1992; Knights and Willmott 1989; Shotter and Gergen 1989). I also draw broadly upon a cultural perspective in organizations in which meanings, verbal symbols and the ability of actors to manoeuvre in a culturally competent way is explored (Alvesson 1993a; Bourdieu 1979; Geertz 1973; Swidler 1986).

The paper is based primarily on ethnographic work — a case study of a small Swedish advertising agency. I try to make sense of my material with the aid of two somewhat different theories/ideas: first, a model of the relationship between discourses (including talk), conceptual figure (figure of thought) and the material base, developed by Asplund (1979); second, Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1979), i.e. internalized dispositions associated with the cultural orientations and social practices of a particular field of activity.

The paper starts by referring to these two theoretical ideas. Then follows a very short account of the empirical work informing this paper and, after that, a brief characterization of the advertising work. After these presentations, I treat how advertising professionals describe (talk about) their customers and relate this to their struggle to get recognition and prestige from the environment (the market) and, partly through this, a sense of identity. The habitus of advertising workers is highlighted. Finally, the meaning and role of the conceptual figure which integrates and informs the self-understandings and assumptions that guide various kinds of discourses within advertising agencies is treated. This conceptual figure is interpreted from the point of view of advertising work as an 'anti-bureaucracy'. This notion is explored and related to the ways in which advertising professionals build upon this in their work identity and their struggles for recognition.

Theoretical Inspiration

The two theoretical ideas that are used to interpret — more than strictly guide or structure — the empirical material are loosely coupled in this paper. Within the general understanding of organizations as cultural phenomena — in which subjective and intersubjective experiences, shared and negotiated meanings, centred around the ambiguities of language are seen as crucial — Asplund and Bourdieu point at significant dimensions and themes associated with cultural relativity and collectively shared ideas and dispositions which simultaneously enable and constrain members of a particular community.

Conceptual Figure

Asplund (1979) develops a 'heuristic model for idea-critical research'. Asplund proceeds from a historical research interest, but there is nothing to stop us from being inspired by this model (in a general sense) in organization studies. Asplund separates *discourse*, *conceptual figure* and *base*. He uses the classic Marxist idea of dialectic exchange between the base and the superstructure as a source of inspiration. (This, in itself, is a good example of a conceptual figure.)

The base can, according to Asplund, apart from being 'a totality of production factors, that corresponds with a defined development stage of materialistic production forces', include circumstances such as e.g. material objects, places, buildings and physical distance dimension. The superstructure is made up of non-material institutions, such as specific patterns of emotions, illusions, concepts and attitudes to life. The superstructure corresponds to the level of discourse. Asplund describes the discourse as 'a systematic or step by step process of thoughts (the opposite of intuition)' but does 'not want to exclude a non-systematic thought process from the level of discourse' (p. 149). I will henceforth use the level of discourse in its widest sense, which includes all types of talk recognized to characterize a specific area, which can be related to vital concepts or specific, institutionalized expressions within the area and appears to have a constitutive impact on the subjects involved. (The definition is closer to the one used by Potter and Wetherell 1987 than those favoured by authors inspired by Foucault.) The discourse is not connected directly to the base but 'the exchange between the base and the superstructure is transmitted by conceptual figures' (Asplund 1979: 149). What Asplund means is that in order to understand a discourse one must try to understand which or what conceptual figures (figures of thought) it refers to. It is only then that the content of the discourse becomes clear. He emphasizes that the number of conceptual figures is limited in every particular society. Actually, they are characterized by their limitation. The discourses are, on the other hand, diverse whilst there is only one base.

Childhood, the individual, and mental illness are examples of conceptual figures mentioned by Asplund. These concepts have not always been self-evident, but are now difficult to dismiss. They are ingrained in contemporary thinking. They are also contingent upon the basic social and material conditions that existed when they were developed and implemented. Asplund refers to Foucault's study of madness to illustrate his idea. Foucault suggested (referred in Asplund 1979: 154) that the history of the social definition of madness must be related to the infrastructure that was current in France after leprosy had been cured and one had been left with empty institutions that were soon filled with paupers, beggars, criminals, the incurable and the mad. Later, this group was differentiated and madness as a specific category was singled out. The existence of specific physical institutions provided the base for this

practice and the conceptual figure informing the discourses about the mad.

The relation between the three elements in Asplund's model are described as follows

> 'Seeking the meaning in a discourse is very much the same as seeking the underlying conceptual figures . . . seeking the meaning of a conceptual figure is very much the same as seeking the base; what the conceptual figure stands for' (p. 153).

It must be emphasized that the model is not reductionistic. The dialectic between the three levels is vital. The conceptual figure influences the discourses, but the latter can, in turn, influence the former. A discourse can transform a conceptual figure just as a conceptual figure can transform the base. The model is for heuristic purposes and avoids reifying worlds of thought. The conceptual figure encourages a kind of structuring of ideas that considers material as well as ideational phenomena and the interaction between different levels.

Asplund (1991), in a later publication, develops his ideas concerning conceptual figures and states that

> 'A conceptual figure, on the other hand, is found "beneath" rather than "in" the discourse or text. Its relationship to a discourse is, in this connection, underdeveloped or only hints at a rudiment of the discourse. It is often the case that the underlying conceptual figure is never "seen" within the discourse.'

He also emphasizes that in order to identify the conceptual figure it must be perceived in two specific ways. It is not enough merely to read the discourse in which the conceptual figure evolves into a text; one must also consider the material base or praxis. The idea of the conceptual figure is to inspire creative interpretations of the deeper meaning of the ways of reasoning and expression that are espoused. For Asplund (1970), social science is a creative enterprise, it is about suggesting non-obvious meanings of phenomena that puzzle us. Sometimes a significant step is to create the puzzle, to avoid the self-evident and discover that here an interesting puzzle may be 'solved'. His favourite metaphor for research is detective work. The idea with the conceptual figure is that it focuses on a tricky dimension of cultural ideas and calls for creative interpretations.

The model has parallels with Morgan's idea (1980) regarding metaphors and puzzle solving in social science but differs because the former is directed towards general cultural phenomena rather than being merely an element in theoretical frameworks. The conceptual figure is thus used for the cultural understanding of the ideas of a social group (society) rather than a theoretical framework which can be applied more or less to all social phenomena. The conceptual figure is also materially determined — whilst Morgan's metaphor is free in relation to the material base. Neither does the former give credit to any distinct, explicit meta-

phor but can have a more compact disposition, referring to an integrated set of ideas without any apparent metaphorical quality.
The paper deals with a few discourses (themes of talk) which appear in a specific advertising agency studied in depth, as well as in the advertising business in general, i.e. the meaning of the seriousness of the profession and the character of the customer. It then addresses the level of the conceptual figure in order to understand their peculiarities.

Habitus

A main feature of the *habitus* in response to the demands of the branch or social field is the ability to 'fit in' with regard to conventions and regulations (Bourdieu 1979, 1984). If one has the right habitus — internal dispositions that are applied according to the field's organizational conditions and cultural conventions — this creates the foundation for successful action within the area. The habitus can be seen as the key to the cultural codes of professionalism and authority. Despite a person having obtained the cultural qualifications — including a mastery of language and symbolic behaviour — which are a precedent if one is going to appear credible, there is no guarantee that the environment will extend immediate recognition and admission of success.
Habitus is difficult to identify and make explicit. It is concerned with the qualities acquired over a period of time that become instinctive and habitual. It is typical that such qualities are left unstated. The individual members of the field are, in general, only partially conscious of these qualities — and the actual point of the habitus is that it is not about anything that is easily explained. It is partially connected with the fact that the habitus stands for flexible qualities rather than formal rules — the habitus makes possible the 'correct' usage of conventions and norms rather than the mechanical adherence to them. (The subdivision of these can be just as strong in both cases. The norm to show oneself as being uncompelled can be just as compelling as that of having to carefully follow a particular social convention.) The habitus is also connected with cultural capital and status, and is thereby connected with the power potential that is contained in the competence to act culturally correctly. The specific worth of the latter for the actor and the field is contingent upon the difficulties in copying the correct way of operating. There is, of course, no ulterior motive behind the hidden qualities of the habitus, but it is a matter of social competition and dynamics. In the struggle for position and prestige between and within the different fields, mechanisms of social differentiation and likeness are developed. There are no specific persons behind this even if different actors' strategic actions can marginally influence the dynamics. Within the advertising branch, the latter concerns, for example, the institutionalization of official annual ranking, competition and the giving of awards (e.g. the 'Gold Egg', similar to Oscars and Emmys) which underscore the creative and aesthetic nature of advertising work and increase the cultural capital of the winners.

Bourdieu's concept habitus and the kind of cultural understanding it expresses is used to illuminate the way in which discourse (primarily talk) is tactically and strategically used. It throws light on the level of discourse and encourages a deeper understanding of how language functions in cultural–political contexts. By signifying action and social practices it facilitates an understanding of the connection between discourses (talk) and the conceptual figure. At the same time, the latter provides a general cultural resource — an integrated basic conceptualization guiding the understanding and specific use of discursive elements. The conceptual figure can be seen as a kind of overall framework for the habitus, which synthesizes and guides the symbolic action on a meta level.

I will not, however, overstress the links between what are signalled by the concepts of conceptual figure and habitus. The latter is used in the paper partly to deepen the understanding of talk in advertising agencies and also to illuminate some other dimensions of the cultural operations (use of symbols) of the community of (Swedish) advertising workers which pave the way for grasping the conceptual figure salient in this business.

Briefly, the conceptual figure and habitus thus offer partly parallel, partly mutually supporting and complementing ideas for interpreting the idea-framework, i.e. action-oriented aspects of the culture of the advertising industry and professionals. The habitus indicates how the talk is competently used for specific purposes in 'cultural action'; the conceptual figure explores the deeper meaning of this talk and the 'framing' of the habitus.

The Empirical Study

The paper is based upon an ethnographic study of advertising agencies (Alvesson and Köping 1993),[1] and, in particular, of a small advertising agency, AD AG, employing approximately twenty people. Field observations of a few months' duration, formal (scheduled) interviews and informal conversations form the main content of the empirical work, as is normal for an 'organizational ethnography' (Rosen 1991). In addition, interviews were carried out with a few senior members of other agencies and branch organizations. Branch magazines and similar publications were also studied. The two elements last mentioned were included in order to give a wider profile to advertising agencies and to avoid getting caught in the more idiosyncratic pattern of the agency studied. Most of that which we have observed in this agency has also been found in other agencies. The industry, at least in Sweden, seems to be relatively homogeneous. A large number of themes based on the same empirical study as in Alvesson and Köping (1993) are discussed; for example, the work and procedures of advertising, agency–client relations, germination, demons and myths within the field, gender and sexuality, etc. The part of the study reported here deals with talk (or rather themes of talk) in relation to the regulation of identity and impressions.

The research process was characterized by the interchange between formal (planned) and non-formal (spontaneous) interviews and observations of everyday life at AD AG. Interviews were typically open and encouraged the interviewee to talk about his or her job, the agency, the branch, customer relations. Those themes that emerged as interesting were followed by requests to elaborate on these in interviews. Towards the end of the empirical research process, we confronted respondents with observations and statements from previous interviews and asked them for comments. This method, of course, means that procedural accounts for the generation and processing of empirical material are extremely difficult to obtain, and the material is too multifaceted and 'rich' to be easily categorized or compared. The central element in research then becomes the researcher's ability to interpret the material in an interesting way. This is better indicated by reproducing the text in its entirety. Success must be evaluated by seeing whether the text convincingly provides grounded insights and points, and not on whether the research effort has been guided by methodological conventions.

An important element in research of this type concerns 'surprises' which occur when the researcher's framework 'breaks down' in the face of actions, circumstances and talk pertaining to the framework of the 'natives' (Agar 1986; Schein 1985). However, when studying organizations in one's own general culture there is too great an overlap between the researcher and the natives; the problem then is that no really interesting surprises occur (Alvesson 1993a). This is where the ability to construct a puzzle creatively enters the picture. In the present case there were some elements that spontaneously surprised this researcher, in particular the pejorative talk of advertising workers about their clients. It was these elements that facilitated the creation of the puzzle.

One particular methodological issue calls for specific comments. Many of the statements quoted below are from interviews. There are good reasons to be sceptical about how much interviews can reveal in terms of 'objective conditions' or even 'subjective beliefs and attitudes'. Statements about the latter are situation bound — it is usual for different forms of subjectivity to be expressed in different situations. This is also the case, not only in interviews, but in observed 'real life' situations. In addition, language can hardly mirror exactly what is on someone's mind, and language conventions for expressions easily take over (Alvesson and Köping 1993; Potter and Wetherell 1987; Silverman 1989). In the present case, the interest lies primarily in discourses within organizations, not in what people believe or in what they really are. (Talk has the advantage that it is accessible in research.) I am convinced, for two reasons, that the statements made also tell us something about ways of talking outside interview situations in the organizations studied. The first is that we recognized themes emerging in interviews from observed everyday situations (even though several months of observation lead to notes on a somewhat more general level than to transcripts detailing what people

actually say). In some cases, statements made during everyday interaction are also quoted. The second reason is logical and concerns the nature of the statements in interviews. Many of these concern pejorative evaluations of customers. This is a sensitive matter and it would be highly unlikely that advertising workers talking with a researcher would express themselves in negative terms about clients, but then express themselves otherwise in conversations with insiders. The most likely themes of talk in everyday life are reasonably well reflected in our material. Of course, different contexts lead to variations and just as people vary in the way they make everyday life statements, they certainly vary when they talk with outsiders. The interest in this paper does not, however, concern the specific details of talk (of the kind on which conversation- and discourse analysts focus), but more on general themes of statements significant to the field. Too much attention should not be given, therefore, to the precise contexts of various statements.

A Few of the Characteristics of the Advertising Industry in Sweden

This section provides a general overview of the advertising field. In terms of Asplund's model, it connects the material conditions for the field to the base. Here we can distinguish between the macro base (the capitalistic economy) and the micro base (the specific activities conducted by advertising professionals in the capitalistic economy) and specific conditions for advertising agencies as organizations.

It should be noted that all the empirical material is from Sweden. The debit system concerning the relationship between the buyer (the agency's customer) and the advertising agency differs between Sweden and many other countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom. In Sweden, agencies are paid based on the expected or real amount of hours worked, whilst in other countries agencies receive a provision for the advertising cost. Swedish advertising agencies are, on average, small and have a relatively high turnover of staff, some of whom leave and form their own agencies.

The advertising industry is characterized by work that is hard to specify and a product that is difficult to evaluate. The rate of pay is relatively high, and the initial costs for the establishment of a new agency are low. The fundamental task is to influence customers in an affluent society. The economy of this society is not primarily about increasing productivity to cover demand but is, instead, more concerned with regulating demand in order to safeguard a use for the production, which has an ambiguous and artificial relationship to the 'actual' demands and needs (see Leiss 1978, 1983; Pollay 1986). Marketing is often said to be more important than production in a modern affluent society. Advertising plays a relatively large part in society, although the work itself remains somewhat on the periphery of the market. In Sweden, at least, advertising work

is carried out by specialized agencies which are usually small, seldom employing more than two to three dozen people.

The work of advertising agencies, i.e. the planning, development and implementation of advertisement campaigns and other forms of promotional activities, is ambiguous and uncertain in terms of quality and results, and is thus difficult to evaluate. In addition, advertising people face other difficulties.

> '. . . the advertising agency, as an institution, depends for its existence on selling to institutional clients images and media time and space on the rather weak assumption that they further corporate commercial aims: that is, that in some direct or indirect, mediated manner, advertisements will alter public attitudes or behaviour. The agency exists by claiming to sell a form of power — a most nebulous product, as well as an ideologically fraught and somewhat disreputable one' (Slater 1989: 122).

The advertising professionals, i.e. project manager, art director and copy writer, are well paid and often work with tasks involving large amounts of money. They supposedly have a specific competence and creative abilities. Advertising agencies are built around the competence and abilities of the personnel, which means that they can be said to be 'professional organizations', in the broadest sense. They hardly live up to the traditional criteria of recognized professions. Advertising professionals sometimes claim that they are consultants and experts in communication, but free access to the occupation, beliefs concerning highly varying skills within the industry and the difficulties in evaluating advertising ideas and products tend to make these claims somewhat precarious. Advertising professionals often have difficulties in convincing customers about their 'know-how'. Their abilities and products seldom talk for themselves. This allows the customer ample opportunity to take command of the evaluation processes.

As an advertising campaign normally includes some novel idea, earlier work and experience may be of little help; so accumulated skills and experience matter less in this field than in most others. Within the industry, it is often said that it is difficult to keep up with the trends — considered important in this work — when people get older. There are relatively few advertising workers over fifty, at least not in the more prestigious agencies. Similarly, education and other formal qualifications are not of primary importance. This means that identity formation in the occupation becomes more precarious than in other occupations where experience and career development leads in a more clear-cut manner to improvements of qualifications, whereby higher formal positions increase prestige and a sense of security.

In a modern economy, the 'macro base' of advertising agencies, work and products are often ambiguous, i.e. difficult to evaluate. This is (more or less) general for the service sector as a whole, to which the advertising branch belongs (Grönroos 1984; Levitt 1981; Normann 1983). There are, however, great variations within the sector. Variations are also evident even if one concentrates only on professional service firms (Löwendahl

1992). Advertising work is amongst the most intangible parts of the (professional) service sector. This means that images, i.e. mental pictures of the phenomenon concerned, influenced by particular communicative acts that are intended to affect the perceptions of the phenomenon, become important (Alvesson 1990). (Images differ from the conceptual figures in several ways. For example, they are near experience and superficial, and relate more to perception than to cognition and basic cultural ideas.) It can be said that the economy, transformed from domination by industrial production to domination by service and information work, from tangibilities to intangibilities, moves increasingly from being based on 'substance' to circling around 'images'. The work of advertising, as well as other forms of mass-media, are important in this regard, but such work is in itself highly 'image-sensitive'. This means that the skills and qualities of advertising agencies, professionals, work and products do not talk for themselves, but the subjects must convince themselves, as well as customers, that they have something to offer. One can say that the extremely weak base of advertising work from a material point of view, creates a context which must be carefully managed by means of linguistic and other symbolic means. Advertising agencies share this characteristic with many other organizations in the professional service and knowledge-intensive fields (Alvesson 1993b). As we shall see, the habitus becomes significant in this context.

The Struggle Between Advertising Professionals and 'Amateurs'

The advertising agencies' rationale for existing and economic success are dependent upon the extent to which they can make credible — for themselves, the client and in general — that they have special instincts concerning how they communicate with the consumer and other target groups. The materially and substantially weak nature of advertising work makes this neither obvious nor easy to demonstrate (Slater 1989). The space within which advertising agencies operate must be conquered and defended. Several overlapping elements are considered important in this struggle.

To limit and invest in a particular area. This deals partly with the development of certain basic components and capacities with whose help one can carry out certain jobs that others would have difficulty in managing, and partly the dispersement of ideas to make these claims believable. The most important thing is to find and develop a niche and to specialize in it. The niche must be claimed in the sense that one can make it credible that one has special qualifications and talents above all others. Advertising agencies must therefore be able to work out a basis in terms of capability, habit and craftsmanship to encourage the client to place work in their hands.

To emphasize distance. The creation of ones own space and the collection of a credible capacity for marketing, communication, creativity and

craftsmanship is not enough. The borders with the 'non-capable' must also be defined. To some degree, this can be done by the practitioner's formal qualifications and/or a capacity and result that speaks for itself. With regard to advertising agencies, these assets are not very effective because formal qualifications play a limited role and the result seldom speaks clearly for itself. Another problem is that the boundaries between the advertising agencies' competence and that of the client companies are not clearcut. Once again, it is not the 'real conditions' – if one had the possibility of imagining these – that are as significant as more or less loose beliefs concerning these. According to the article quoted above, *Resumé* 16 (1990), the advertising agencies who deal with companies who have their own advertising department, are often under the impression that the client believes that the adverts can be made just as well by using 'one's own desktop facilities'. Such understandings threaten not only the self-esteem but also the material existence of advertising agencies. Apart from putting forward one's own qualifications, it is also important to counteract the client's beliefs that he or she can also produce adverts. The claim that the judgement of advertising people is superior to the clients is of primary importance. To say that space for various ideas, opinions and proposals is great and that the client has a good professional basis, including a knowledge of their own organization, production and market, in order to be able to express themselves with regard to a good advertising suggestion would hardly be advisable. The underlining of the distance between the advertising people's professionality and the client's orientations help to strengthen the advertising agency's capability compared with that of the client.

Signs of *professionality and authority* are the main features. Because results are not clearly visible, the *impression* of professionality becomes especially important. The success of projecting the special capability of creating a good advertisement and of being able to decide what is right is, of course, completely connected with the other parties, acceptance of this – it is the recognition that one must fight for. Professionality and authority are, of course, always a matter of others crediting these attributes to a particular group. However, in many professions, these attributes are institutionalized and made routine. If one is a researcher, lawyer, nurse, doctor or chartered accountant, the acceptance and recognition is there from the start. This has, of course, not always been the case, but it is not the aim here to delve into the history of the professions. These groups retain control of the access to their work tasks and may attain social closure on formal and legal grounds, thus safeguarding prestige and privilege (Richardson 1992; Selander 1989). Because of a lack of formal education or a career path that will secure professionality in advertising, one must show more personalized qualities (i.e. creative capabilities, a feeling for what appeals, how to influence people's decisions), communicative competences (in a more formal sense) or the ability to systematically follow up campaigns. The former, more personalized, qualities are especially significant because formal methods of communica-

tion and follow-up are not major features of the work of (Swedish) advertising agencies. The concept of habitus indicates the ability to demonstrate the possession of certain personal qualities. Let me now turn to this issue.

Habitus as Practised by Advertising Professionals

The habitus is a very important part of the advertising people's struggle to free and monopolize an area for their own occupation and organizations. Habitus influences their professionality, separates them from advertising clients and what is referred to as 'unserious' amateurism. (More about the latter in the following section.) Habitus has to do with the capacity to express superiority and distinctiveness within a particular field, such as advertising work. Some observations on the habitus of workers in this field are given below.

Advertising persons must have 'good taste'. As shown by Bourdieu (1984) taste is never essentially a question of pure aesthetics, but is socially defined. There is a strong variance of aesthetics between different societies, centuries and social groups. Statements about and demonstrations of good taste are therefore a social phenomenon which follows convention and has a basic social function, e.g. it defines the norms and separates the elite from the rest. Advertising people's claims about good taste is also shown in their product as well as in their interior decoration and physical appearance. Advertising people are usually young (or appear younger rather than older) and are physically fit (Alvesson and Köping 1993; Chap. 6). They are also well-dressed. During our observations at the agency we noted that almost everybody wore different clothes for every new work day and all the components matched in every detail. Sometimes males appeared unshaven, but also here it seemed to be an expression of conscious consideration. The bristles never became too long. We have been led to believe that female advertising people, in particular, should also be attractive (*ibid*, Chap. 8). All ten female employees of the AD AG were young, typically in their mid twenties, and attractive. Looks were a salient criteria in the recruitment of female employees. Being modern and fashionable was also important. That those with the right habitus also have good taste is revealed by the assumption that the 'unserious' people in advertising work do not have good taste. There is a lot of talk about 'unserious' advertising agencies having low morale or less competence. Their vulgarity is insinuated by their 'driving around in flashy cars' and 'thinking themselves cool!', as one interviewee put it.

Good taste must have certain guidelines. The emphasis should be quite liberal and independent. A person shows individuality and independence, comfort and casualness. The style is seen as a symbol of freedom from society and convention, at the same time as that conformity and the bindings of society are a 'negative' basis of the field's orthodoxy, i.e.

those principals, ideas and conventions from which one deviates in a rather uniform way within the occupational community. The undeniable power that leads to an advertising person's habitual show of good taste, independence and casualness is representative of an ingrained conformity. The latter may be expressed in the tendency to show a lack of respect for conventionality as a particular trademark, but in a manner which follows the norms of the sub-group concerned. (The only alternative is that there are no norms surrounding the similarity or dissimilarity of emphasis and that one may choose freely between conformity or 'originality' in e.g. attire.)

The sense of 'freedom' that attire to some extent is supposed to express is also found in various descriptions concerning advertising work. The founder of our field study agency, AD AG, stresses, for example, the creator's need for 'freedom', for breaking away from 'large bureaucratically controlled agencies'.

An advertising person with the right habitus should also be (at least appear to be) emancipated, sensitive and somewhat difficult to control. He/she should appear as an artist whilst being realistic and market orientated at the same time. An aesthetic attitude is vital. According to a well-known Swedish copy writer, Sören Blanking (interviewed in the newspaper DN 7.3.1990), 'advertising is culture'. He underlines that advertising people work with artistic means of expression. A commercially oriented artist seems to be the ideal. This guarantees the right mixture of creativity and ability to subordinate oneself to a goal-orientated business context. An important part of the latter is discipline. A good advertising person is not a free-floating artist but, as one interviewee told us, is one who works hard with analysis and knowledge. Bad advertising people give in to hedonistic impulses, according to the beliefs of 'good' advertising workers (Alvesson and Köping 1993: Chap. 9).

The habitus makes possible a successful use of symbolism. By using style, ways of expression and means of communicating the message, one can imply originality, competence and professionalism. Talk and themes of talk (discourses) are also vital. In the next section, I will look in more detail at this subject, already touched upon above, and will then explore the relationship between the habitus of advertising workers and typical statements about their clients and themselves.

Discourses

In addition to describing some of the discursive material that simultaneously makes possible and presupposes an appropriate cultural competence (habitus), this section also connects to Asplund's model, because it deals with significant discourses in advertising agencies, and provides material for determining the conceptual figure of this industrial and occupational culture, thus providing an understanding of the deeper aspects of the industry and its organizations.

I will first look at some talk about clients (customers), i.e. the buyers of advertising agencies' services, and then talk about the advertising people and agencies themselves.

Representations of Clients: The Customer is Always Wrong

It is striking that advertising people often make rather negative comments about their clients. This was certainly the case with our interviewees, who quite typically remarked about the clients as follows:

'I feel that our clients are sometimes rather careless. They lack stamina, jump from one campaign to another, and their campaigns differ greatly from one another. This means that they can never realize their plans or achieve their goals. This behaviour does not produce faith in the customer.'

'When one finally puts forward an idea that is expressed visually and in writing, one has been thinking so damned long. At least fifty other ideas have passed through one's head so that what one finally presents is enough, because behind it lies a hell of a lot of work and analysis. Besides which, the client pays us 90 pounds an hour. But there is a certain type of client who will suddenly come up with his own idea and wonder if we can do that instead. Sometimes I feel as if I'm having a nervous breakdown. This is because their idea does not fit in our world, it is inconceivable, it was dead and buried years ago. It is therefore necessary for us to sell our product because the client doesn't experience it as clear cut as we do.'

The Swedish advertising branch newspaper *Resumé* 16 (1990) reported the results of a survey in which there were indications that advertising people are extremely critical of their clients. They say, amongst other things, that they are product orientated (rather than market- and communication orientated), unserious and lack a long-term perspective. (The implication of 'unserious' is not explained in the article. It is difficult to capture the Swedish term in a translation into English. Serious here refers in Swedish to a vague combination of commitment, intention to do a good job, trustworthiness and reliability.)

The relationship between the client and advertising people is often brought to a head when a solution is presented for evaluation. The employees of the agency are often in agreement that something 'feels right' but sometimes the client is 'completely lost'. It will then appear as if the advertising people are inclined to attribute every possible negative quality and motive in order to explain the lack of understanding. One can, for example, as quoted above, claim that the client is stupid because he (or she) pays the advertising agency a great deal of money for 'a hell of a lot of work and analysis', and then does not accept the proposal but presents his own idea instead. An interviewee remarked that it is sometimes the boss'es wife's opinion that lies behind what the client says. Yet another popular accusation is that the client lacks courage. One comment made by a well-known professional quoted in connection with the pre-

sentation of the above-mentioned survey was that the clients 'are too cowardly to let the advertising agency go free' (*Resumé* 16 1990: 5).

The advertising people seldom think of the client's suggestions as expressions of knowledge or insightful evaluation. The client is seen as someone who is always wrong, if he is not in agreement with the advertising people. In a meeting where AD AG discussed the strategic situation of the agency and talked about their client base, it was said of one client who they had lost the previous year that 'It was nice to get rid of them'.

Needless to say, there are of course more positive opinions and comments about clients; the agency only expressed dissatisfaction with some of them. Those we heard seem to indicate that the client is seen to be wrong only when opinions differ — which they often do — but there is always the inclination for advertising agencies to express themselves pejoratively about their customers.

The advertising people's comments and concepts concerning the client may be seen as part of a struggle to reach, protect and strengthen their position regarding the 'right to express themselves regarding good advertising'. I will discuss this further later.

Self-representations: Characteristics of the Advertising Workers

When the advertising workers at AD AG are asked to describe themselves, their workplace and advertising work the following themes are salient and, based on observations and impressions, they seem to be part of the way-of-talking and interacting in everyday life. Friendship and 'personal chemistry' are vital. It is important that people are having fun and can laugh; that advertising workers are emotionally involved in their tasks; that they are free, independent, and even a bit lawless. One has to know better than the customer what is good for him or her and one has to be in comparison with some of the other advertising agencies, 'serious' (Alvesson and Köping 1993). There is no space here to illustrate all these discourses but one or two have already been touched upon in the previous section. I will concentrate here on the significance of emotions in advertising work and the importance of having fun in advertising agencies.

Advertising workers emphasize that their product is very emotional and difficult to evaluate or measure. Sometimes agents try to measure and analyze attitudes to, and outcomes of, campaigns but in the end, according to informants, ads. are very much a matter of feelings and sentiments.

'Good advertisement speaks for itself. But sometimes it can be difficult to say why something is good. You are yourself convinced that this is RIGHT. But there are no rational, logical explanations to it. Finally it becomes a matter of gut feelings — you think with your stomach rather than with your brain. It is nothing rational, but emotional.'

Not only is the evaluation and opinion about an ad. said to be a matter of feelings, but advertising professionals often describe themselves as non-rational and emotional in relation to their work tasks and to their general way of functioning.

'Advertising people are normally very outgoing and they are emotionally loaded, because feelings and things like that are the bases of creativity, so to speak. They are often very rich in ideas and can quickly associate with various phenomena. They are normally rather difficult to steer and jump to the roof when they are happy and when they are mad. Their reactions are much stronger than, for example, people working in accounting departments. Advertising people are seldom very systematic or structured . . .'

When listening to how advertising professionals describe themselves, one gets the impression that they are guided by feeling, or — and better — are inclined to present themselves in this way.

According to themselves, it is very important that advertising persons should have 'fun' and be able to laugh. An interviewee stated that those at AD AG 'should be more fun'. This remark indicates the high level of expectation (or the inclination to talk about fun) and the significant measures that were taken to achieve 'fun' situations. A conference trip turned out to include much more entertainment than conferencing. For example, the boyfriend of a female agency member whose birthday took place during the 'conference' was flown by colleagues to the location. They put him in a box, wrapped him up and gave him to her as a gift. It seems that playfulness, a sense of humour, and being relaxed are part of the arsenal of values and norms that are necessary in order to be the 'right material' to become a good advertising person. Serious (in the wrong sense of the word) and boring people seldom fit into advertising agencies according to one of AD AG's staff. At the same time, it is also important that the fun does not take over. It then becomes foolery, which is seen to be 'unserious'.

The Functions of These Discourses

Why are such statements given so much prominence in (Swedish) advertising agencies? A possibility is, of course, that statements reflect 'actual circumstances', either outer, 'objective' ones or ideational ones such as beliefs and values. One could then emphasize, for example, the vital importance of friendship, because 'objectively' social relations has this quality, or that values, beliefs and understandings of organizational members circle around the notion of friendship. I do not doubt that such connections may exist, but agree with discourse analysts that the meaning of how people express themselves about circumstances is not thereby exhausted (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Broms and Gahmberg (1983), for example, draw attention to auto-communication, i.e. communication directed to oneself for, perhaps, ego-enhancing purposes, rather than to an external receiver of factual information. Because it is hard — and for

the present purposes not very interesting — to determine the 'actual' degree of the emotional content in the creation of an advert., or the irrationality of clients, I will not deal with the issues *per se*, but will consider the variety of meanings and their importance as statements concerning the mentioned theme. The section thus elaborates on the diversity of functions of discourses in the context of advertising agencies.

Some statements may function as *conjurations* (Alvesson and Köping 1993: Chap. 9). Conjurations are a verbal means to chase away threats. The talk about seriousness counteracts the suspicion that the work is of an arbitrary character with space for all sorts of proposals and that an intuitional role can lead advertising workers anywhere. Talking about friendship can counteract labour turnover rates, or at any rate reduce the anxiety that (core) employees might leave the agency. In Sweden it is common for people to leave to open their own agency, taking clients with them. This can incur large losses for the previous employer and may even destroy the agency. The stress given to talk about friendship and a positive spirit can influence people in such a way that they believe these qualities to be salient, but it also calms oneself and others into thinking that there is no need for worry.

Statements are an important element of the production and reproduction of the somewhat idealized picture of one's own agency, occupation and branch that people want to emphasize. By means of the statements mentioned, new members of the profession and organization learn how one should relate and express oneself. The statements contribute to *socialization* and *reproduction*, i.e. the process through which the newcomer learns the correct values and attitudes — or at least ways of talking about these — to ensure that the profession and organization is reproduced and maintained without too many drastic changes. They give guidelines for the field's orthodoxy and ease the maintenance and continuance of a certain habitus. However, only a limited contribution is given to the latter — namely the more ideal and positive parts. Those which are explicitly stressed are most often the elements that correspond with current ideals, although not necessarily with all praxis.

An obvious possibility is that the statements express *legitimacy* of the branch. In accordance with other organizations it is important that the organization agrees (or rather appears to agree) with the surrounding values, norms and expectations (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977; Richardson and Dowling 1986). Here, talk is of importance and can be a distinct means to social acceptance (Rombach 1986). Legitimacy insinuates a comparison of the passive and defensive functions — it concerns negative defections and illegitimacy. The advertising branch is worse off than many other branches which have an easier time convincing the public of their value. This makes the legitimacy view more important for advertising people and may explain the inclination to use a rather moralistic vocabulary.

Discourses are also invoked in the struggle to safeguard the uniqueness

and unification of advertising work as well as strengthening the individual and collective *identity* of advertising workers. Identity refers to the experience of coherence, consistency over time and distinctiveness of a person or a group (cf. Albert and Whetten 1985; Eriksson 1968). In modern society identity is often precarious and people have to struggle for it (Lasch 1978; Willmott 1991). There are also, however, great variations within modern working life in terms of how various jobs support the identity of workers. Many of the modern occupations, such as advertising professionals, consultants, personnel specialists, counsellors and psychologists, are particularly vulnerable because of ambiguous work content and performances. By the making of astute assertions concerning the characteristics of advertising people, the threats about a specific competence and identity are counteracted. Self-presentations facilitate 'identity work'. A socially established vocabulary for identity reinforcing work is the right solution:

> 'One's sense of personal continuity is grounded in the continuity created in the self-narratives one generates, reinforced by the stability of one's social network and one's society and its institutions . . . These features of one's life are repeatedly instantiated in the justificatory identity talk in which one mundanely engages, and it carries with it acknowledgements of obligations and responsibilities and claims of privileges' (Slugoski and Ginsburg 1989: 51).

This point may be clarified by examining how the customer and 'the unserious' are characterized by our informants. Advertising people underline their strength in relation to the client by emphasizing the client's inability and irrationality and sometimes even their complete lack of understanding of the advertising production process. The differences between advertising professionals and clients are stressed. This is also the case with regard to the statements about the 'unseriousness' of a minority of advertising agencies and professionals. The competent and moral advertising person then appears against the background of these two negative models. He or she is protected by the uniqueness of his/her own area of competence and special identity, which is made easier by rumours of stupid clients and inane advertising people. An internal mobilization within the occupation creates and recreates the symbolic environment which safeguards one's own identity. An assured identity is crucial for success in this branch (whilst at the same time success, of course, also influences identity).

It should perhaps be added that this does not imply a fusion between talk and identity. Discourses can be flexibly invoked in temporal regulations of identity. Different discourses may be drawn upon (speaking to and through the subject) producing different senses of self and identity, contingent upon context. At one moment one has strong social bonds with fellow workers, at another one is free and eager to break away from established patterns (Alvesson and Köping 1993: Chap. 10).

Identity work is also crucial for the ability to 'sell' one's own profession. The emphasis that is put on advertising people's special characteristics

gives the impression that they have something special to contribute and, in so doing, eases the *marketing* process for the advertising person. The discourses supply the advertising people with linguistic resources for a particular portrait, identity, or style which is controlled by a certain symbolism that enables them to convince clients of their uniqueness and competence. This is partly captured by the habitus concept. As Gergen (1989) maintains, it is about the way in which people account for their own (and others) inner-self, and of how to reach credibility and legitimacy. 'What we take to be the dimension of self . . . are symbolic resources for making claims in a sea of competing world construction' (p. 75).

It seems possible to account for three different types of relations between the habitus and themes of talk (the discourse): that discourses reflect habitus, that discourses produce habitus and that habitus forms the competence base for using the discourse, but without a deeper or contingent relation between the two. For example, when the advertising person often stresses his or her 'individualism' this can, to some extent, be an expression of the actual discourse resource which creates individuality. Demonstrations like these are of special importance to the advertising person. (I am assuming — for the sake of simplicity — that the utterance 'individualism' may have some kind of content.) It can also be assumed that if advertising people are inclined to emphasize the 'individualism' of the people in the profession — because it sounds good or because they wish to meet the expectations of others — in time, the stated orientations will have self-fulfilling consequences. Mills (1940: 908) argued that 'the long acting out of a role, with its appropriate motives, will often induce a man to become what at first he merely sought to appear'. A third possibility is that the talk concerning individualism stands apart, without any clear connection to the actual subjective orientations or practical actions. Those who present their social group in this way probably believe in it, but there is no guarantee that one is or will become more individualistic just because one (sometimes) believes so. (If one were to ask 100 people if they are more individualistic than the average citizen a majority would probably answer yes. Peters and Waterman (1982) refer to some studies in which people (North Americans) were asked to rate their traits and abilities in comparison to the 'average' person. It turned out that a large majority believed that they were better than others on average in most socially valued dimensions, e.g. leadership ability and cooperativeness.)

I propose that all three relations can occur to a greater or lesser extent. One can suspect that discourses about advertising people's individualism may not be fully met by their 'actual' traits and orientations (if one could illuminate these). At the same time, recruitment, (self)choice and socialization may culminate in an increase in the degree of 'individualism' compared with other professions, and it may be that the expressed self-understanding strengthens this. All discourse concerning (various expressions of) individualism can perhaps influence/reflect the subjects, but not

necessarily to the extent that the personalities and orientations are fully in agreement with the claims and statements. Discourses may have some (weak) constitutive powers. The relation between what is said and the subject's 'traits', beliefs and orientations is therefore neither decided nor clear.

The way one's organization and oneself are described can therefore have a moderate constructive effect in the long term. Many authors also stress the constitutive character of discourse and language (i.e. Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges 1990; Deetz 1992; Knights and Morgan 1991; Säljö 1990). As has been said, one should be careful not to give too much emphasis to the similarity between language use and habitus — even if the proposed long-term development is taken into account. Language is not magic, at least not always. The habitus can be said to be about expressing oneself in a certain way, not about a combination of the ways of expression and complete subjectivity. An advertising person — with the right habitus — can be expected to faithfully emphasize (emit signals of) individuality, emotion, longing for freedom, freedom from convention, wealth of associations, sense of aesthetics, creativity and friendship orientation as main traits (Alvesson and Köping 1993). Without drawing any daring conclusions about the 'truth' of these statements or about the firm and consistent belief of spokespersons in them, the unitary set of representations is interesting in itself. They indicate the significance of self-presentations in this kind of business and working life, and contribute to providing the rationale for both the business and the occupation.

The mere stress of these claims on traits and orientations can lead to a constructive usage, i.e. if they appear believable. If we accept that important parts of the discourse in the advertising branch are about the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the people who work at the advertising agency and their work — compared with people in general and with 'ordinary' jobs, then the advertising people's 'normality' is their 'shared uniqueness' compared to other groups. Talk that underlines the advertising persons' uniqueness strengthens their claim to have a special ability; it eases the recognition of professionality and authority and makes it possible to monopolize one's own area of the workload between the different companies and workgroups. The claims should not be seen as a result of calculations. The concepts and representations offered in this cultural context are directed towards self understanding, at least the understanding that shows when one is describing oneself, one's own organization and the clients, for insiders as well as outsiders (although in somewhat different terms). The uniqueness of the people can be seen to be an expression not only of an understanding based upon deep introspection, instinct and a well founded, clear habitus but also as a consequence of an advertising agency's situation and the difficulties which constrain it. The field of advertising — and its conditions (base) — generate dispositions that understand and present the advertising professionals and their work in a particular and favourable way.

Discourses and Conceptual Figure

I will now connect more explicitly to Asplund's model and address the conceptual figure that characterizes advertising people in order to clarify the terms in which the advertising people try to convince themselves and others of their uniqueness and competence.

The Base and Discourses

At the beginning of the paper I accounted for the material base of advertising agencies and pointed out a number of the more explicit statements and themes of talk (discourses) which characterize advertising people (in Sweden at least). These discourses portray advertising persons as emotional, free, individualistic, unconventional and aesthetic. The discourses show seriousness to be a central but varying characteristic among advertising workers and they describe clients as being excessively rational, cowardly, (at other times) irrational and — above all — that they have poor judgement (Alvesson and Köping 1993). According to Asplund (1979), it is the base which partly determines the discourses whilst, at the same time, the discourses influence the base (material structure and social practices). The conceptual figure comprises the link in the middle. It is impossible to understand the relation between the base and the discourses without taking this into consideration. As stated by Asplund they must be seen as discourses pertaining to a particular conceptual figure. They obtain their deeper meaning from the latter. At the same time, the conceptual figure has its impact through the discourse because it is on the level of discourse that the conceptual figure is developed (p. 164). The conceptual figure provides a depth structure of cognition and imagination that can be read or interpreted only through the simultaneous consideration of the material base and the discourses which express and develop it.

Conceptual Figure

Advertising work must, in order to exist, be promoted and appear as something outside that which is, or could normally be made, in companies. As has been shown, uniqueness and a certain distance to the client company is therefore particularly important — for commercial as well as 'existential' reasons (identity work).

Advertising agencies, in Sweden at least, appear to contradict the structure of classic companies. The dominant conceptual figure seems to revolve around the *anti-bureaucratic*. The discourses imply distance when compared with normal bureaucratic features. They indicate the uniqueness that sets them apart from the majority of mass producing service and production companies, as well as (bureaucratic) public-service organizations (cf. Mintzberg 1983; Perrow 1986). (I use the term bureaucracy as a general category and ignore those many companies who

only concur with certain parts of the criteria as stated by Weber. The fact that certain authors emphasize that some modern companies may be described as post-bureaucratic, e.g. Clegg 1990, is not contrary to the statement that most companies can be considered to be bureaucracies in their broadest sense.) A typical bureaucracy represents trustworthiness, predictability, loyalty, conformity, control, career possibilities, justice, impartiality, standardization, formalization, neutral social relations and caution. Advertising agencies' discourses concerning themselves promote the opposite: they are (described as) almost lawless, playful and associative. Advertising workers tend to describe themselves as not especially loyal to the organization, individualistic, eager to avoid control, and with few (formal) career advancement prospects emotional, aesthetic, favouring daring ideas and as having a close social attachment to fellow workers (Alvesson and Köping 1993). Stated virtues within the advertising industry, such as to have fun and the emphasis on personal chemistry, are also anti-bureaucratic. It seems therefore, that a negation of the bureaucratic ideal is of primary importance to advertising people. Of course, there are non-bureaucratic (weakly bureaucratized) companies such as management consultant agencies and others who deal mainly with innovation. However, it is large-scale bureaucracies that dominate the main markets, and these comprise the majority of the clients of advertising agencies. (Advertising is mainly for the mass markets.) Perhaps it is not just a coincidence that talking about management, leadership and strategy — which is common in most companies — is not very typical within (Swedish) advertising agencies. This is certainly partly due to the fact that many (Swedish) advertising agencies are quite small, but this is not a complete explanation. I once participated in an internal conference at a company of consultants employing about 40 people and was struck by how many used grandios management terms when referring to their activities within the company. For example, they spoke about 'The corporation group' and 'subsidiary executive' tasks. Even the attire was 'top managerial', despite it being a small-scale internal meeting.

By way of the anti-bureaucratic metaphor, the advertising agencies' worth and irreplaceability are promoted. They stand for something radically and genuinely different from that of other companies. It is not just a matter of them having a specific competence which makes the difference, but rather that the fundamental direction, organization and 'culture' of the agencies differ, thus supporting their claim to have a unique competence. Style, expression and other symbolism reinforces this claim. By using the negation of bureaucracy as a trademark, the agencies express complementarity — but, at the same time, they create sources of suspicion and conflict. (As indicated above, the relationship between the agency and client is often strained and they have a negative opinion of each other.) It cannot be taken for granted that opposites attract, even if the exchange may appear great.

The conceptual figure is, as stated, partly determined by the material base. The possibilities for creating one's own agency are favourable, and

this contributes to the fact that there are a lot of small agencies in Sweden. This facilitates the anti-bureaucratic conceptual figure in a way that would not have been the case had the economic and juridicial conditions favoured large agencies. At the same time, the conceptual figure affects the material base, which in turn contributes to smallness and a plentifulness of agencies harmonizing with the anti-bureaucratic notion. The conceptual figure inspires and legitimizes defection and the creation of new agencies among agency members. As part of the branch culture, the conceptual figure indicates primary aspects of the logic of advertising agencies: *To think, evaluate and act in a clearly different, counterbalancing and complementary way with respect to the client company.* The conceptual figure lays the foundation of the discourse. It facilitates the integration (joint functioning) of a set of seemingly diverse discourses. What the advertising persons stress when they talk about the business and themselves can be seen to be inspired by the anti-bureaucratic conceptual figure. Because the inclination is to focus on deviation, the normal, bureaucratic company, is sometimes caricatured. The discourses also affect the conceptual figure. In the course of time, ways of talking may modify the depth of meanings. However, the primary influence, if we are using Asplund's (1979) theory (and permit ourselves some reifying expressions), goes from the material base to the conceptual figure and then to the discourse, whilst the opposite influence is somewhat weaker. My impression is that the model is a good illustration of the situation within the advertising branch.

It is important to remember that the conceptual figure is a construction with whose help we highlight certain aspects of the 'cultural logic' of the business, the ways people think, feel and fantasize about their industry, organizations, work, themselves and their clients. The conceptual figure does not capture everything. It should be understood as a loose contour. What the anti-bureaucratic stands for can vary with the specific discourses used. The commercial attitude is primary within the advertising branch. Running parallel with the uniqueness which agencies choose to emphasize is also their adjustment to how the clients wish them to be. They are very protective of their accounts and go to great lengths to avoid losing customers. The emphasis of their uniqueness is countered by the efforts to acquire credit, i.e. to be fully accepted by the market (Berg and Gagliardi 1985). It is enough, I think, to point out that which can be understood as a primary conceptual figure, rather than to insist that this takes up all the ambitions and thoughts of the advertising industry. As I have stated previously there are similarities between the metaphor (as a basic image) and the conceptual figure. A major difference is that the conceptual figure is also more fundamental and not necessarily metaphoric in a distinct way. (Anti-bureaucratic is not a metaphor in the sense of combining two different elements; the central criteria according to Ricoeur 1978.) The conceptual figure is more about understanding (discovering) the dominant ideas within the object of study than a particular theoretical concept (frame of reference) to guide the study. More closely connected

to the conceptual figure are certain metaphors such as those which emanate from the field rather than those from the researcher's frame of reference (cf. Deetz 1986; Gagliardi 1990).

Conclusion and Discussion

In this paper I have studied some aspects of Swedish advertising agencies; those associated with discourses (themes of talk) about advertising workers, the milieu of the agency and the customers. While the discourses provide the raw material for symbolic action, the concept of habitus refers to the dynamic capacity to utilize this material. The discourse provides linguistic material for the formation, as well as the expression, of this set of cultural skills specific to advertising work. A parallel dialectic characterizes the relationship between these elements on the one hand, and the depth structure signified by the conceptual figure, on the other. The cognitions, ideas, feelings, imagination and fantasies associated with the notion of the anti-bureaucracy provide some deeper meaning, loose integration and direction to the diverse discursive elements and the capacity to deal with them. It is through the conceptual figure that surface-level cultural action functions. At the same time, talk and the formation of cultural competencies reflect back onto, refine and — over time — transform the conceptual figure. All these elements are also affected by (as well as affect) the material base. As said before, the model is non-reductionistic.

In advertising agencies, as in many other forms of professional or semi-professional companies, the material restrictions do not determine activities and ways of thinking in the same way as in organizations in which physical conditions are much more salient. The space for a particular conceptual figure is considerable; so is the space for various opinions and evaluations of the quality of advertising work. The core of the work is notoriously ambiguous. Advertising professionals are thus in a difficult situation when it comes to convincing others — and perhaps also themselves — about their general capacities as a profession and as individuals, as well as about the merits of specific advertisement proposals.

Thus, it becomes vital for advertising professionals to draw upon various symbolic resources to convince themselves, customers and other people that they have something specific to offer in terms of expertise, skills and talents and that they have superior abilities when it comes to deciding what is good in terms of advertising and similar forms of communication. The resources are created 'back stage', i.e. the cultural context of the advertising agencies and then utilized in direct, 'front stage' encounters with customers and others. The latter, of course, exhibits quite different types of talk. This paper has basically looked at the back stage resources, e.g. talk about customers rather than with them. The development of an occupational and organizational culture different from, even antithetical to, most ordinary companies, especially those utilizing advertising agen-

cies, provides advertising professionals with a certain credentiality in terms of being able to offer something 'different'. Symbolism in appearance, in style, talk and in espoused values is important here, as are claims that one works in quite specific, anti-bureaucratic organizations. These portraits of organizations signal the need or appropriateness for a different work environment than those provided by bureaucracies for the carrying out of advertising work and indicates that through these work environments, the capacities of advertising professionals are strengthened and allowed to be fully utilized. The organization of advertising agencies is thus invoked into the making of claims for advertising agencies and professionals.

The organization – its form and culture – functions as a *producer* as well as a *signifier* of the specific kind of subjectivity that is claimed to characterize advertising people and make them different from their clients. Organizational and occupational symbolism signify the distinct orientations of the advertising professionals – the workplace is different, therefore they are different. It can be invoked as a credible mechanism through which these orientations are produced – people in such a workplace will develop certain traits and orientations. Advertising agencies as organizations thus negate the symbolism inherent in bureaucracy – subjects in bureaucracies are not likely to be perceived as aesthetic, emotional, original, etc. as a result of the artefacts with which they are associated. Bureaucracies as control arrangements are likely to be perceived as affecting people in a non-creative direction.

A few words are called for about the wider significance of the arguments and findings reported here. Large parts of professional service and similar forms of knowledge- or talent-based work are very hard to evaluate and the success of the practitioners then becomes highly sensitive to, and vulnerable, in relationship to impressions, images and reputation. Language and representation are thus crucial elements in this kind of organization (Alvesson 1993b) as is also often the case in more technically oriented professional organizations such as computer consultancy companies and accounting firms (Alvesson 1994; Mozier 1992). The quality of the employees in a broad sense then becomes important in order to establish credibility. For example, rhetoric about the integrity and trustworthiness of chartered accountants comprises an important ideological tactic for achieving legitimacy (Cooper et al. 1991). The role of discourses at the level of the workplace has not been studied in this regard, as far as I know. In my recent study of a Swedish computer consultancy firm, it was clear that top management made huge efforts to develop certain forms of subjectivity among the employees, going far beyond the technical requirements of the job. A lot of time and effort was also spent trying to convince the employees as well as the environment of the distinctiveness of the corporate culture and of its importance in facilitating consultancy projects. Claims that the company's organization was flat and non-hierarchical, with a corporate culture based on commitment, close social relations, informality, etc. were salient in the market-

ing (externally as well as internally) of the company. As one employee remarked: 'My former workplace was also very social, but there one did not talk that much about it'. The organization as a signifier of the 'right' orientations of the personnel, as well as of the powerful production going on, makes promises to the market, facilitates the impression of management on various levels and to some extent compensates for the non-tangible product that the company offers (Alvesson 1994).

This study was somewhat different from the present one and I will not make further comparisons. There are strong indications, however, that the points made in the present paper are significant in gaining an understanding of a broader set of organizations and occupations than just Swedish advertising agencies.

The argument in this paper is that the level of discourse, at least in occupations and organizations such as advertising (and most probably in professional service companies in general), is significant in itself. The expressions and claims referred to here may reflect 'true' conditions or beliefs of how people become constituted, or it may not. It is very difficult to check this, partly due to the fact that language is only able to represent or mirror complex phenomena to a limited extent. The more ambiguous is 'reality', the greater is the significance of language as an autonomous power. Social reality can be represented, understood and constituted in many different ways. This idea is especially worth taking seriously when it comes to a social reality in which tangibilities and physical conditions are not very salient. Many forms of professional work, and other modern forms of work, lack these features. A key activity for many organizations is thus to develop symbolic resources which can be drawn upon in 'language work'. Here occupational and organizational identities, as well as impressions and images, are constructed in order to enhance their skills and judgement in the eyes of clients.

Note

* The research project upon which this paper was based was carried out together with Ann-Sofie Köping of Stockholm University and is reported at length in Alvesson and Köping (1993). It was supported by a grant from the Swedish Council for the Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

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