

**Workstyles in Advertising:
On the Organization of Creativity
in Agencies and Firms**

Working Paper

Author:

Mark Deuze
Indiana University & Leiden University
Department of Telecommunications
1229 East 7th St
Bloomington, Indiana 47405
USA

Phone 1-812-856-5884

Fax 1-812-855-7955

Word count (incl. abstract, notes and references): 8,816

Dated: August 9, 2007

Note: This manuscript is based on research that is part of a broader project on the working conditions across the contemporary media industries. References to that project are available from the author.

Author information

Mark Deuze (Ph.D., University of Amsterdam), joint appointment at Department of Telecommunications, Indiana University, and as Professor of Journalism and New Media, Leiden University, mdeuze@indiana.edu.

Workstyles in Advertising: On the Organization of Creativity in Agencies and Firms

Abstract

For a media profession so central to the contemporary global economy, it is of crucial importance to understand the influences of changing labor conditions, professional cultures, and the appropriation of technologies on the nature of work in advertising. In this paper, the various strands of international research on the changing nature of advertising as a profession are synthesized, using media logic as developed by Altheide and Snow (1979 and 1991) and updated by Dahlgren (1996) as a conceptual framework. The theoretical key to understanding, explaining and perhaps predicting creativity in advertising is to focus on the way institutional, technological, organizational, and cultural trends are embedded in the creative process of advertising agencies and firms.

[BODY TEXT]

Advertising is a form of creative labor. Creativity is organized in different ways, but primarily thrives upon the ways of working and being at work – the “workstyles” – of professionals in the advertising, marketing communication and public relations industry.¹ It is in this context that research on creativity may find fertile, yet also problematic soil for thinking about (the future of) advertising. Consider the following quote from an August 6, 2006 report in the *New York Times* on the acquisition, earlier that year, of digital ad agency Digitas by holding firm Publicis: “The plan is to build a global digital ad network that uses offshore labor to create thousands of versions of ads [...] Beyond the growth potential, Publicis executives see [China, India, Russia and Brazil] as important sources of low-cost labor [...] the Publicis Groupe will benefit from the global talent pool — and perhaps create more demand for advertising in those countries.”² If anything, this reference exemplifies a labor context for advertising that is anything but stable, permanent, or predictable. To adequately assess the near-future potential of advertising in meeting the challenges of a “glocal” and digital age successfully, a holistic view on the trends and developments currently co-determining work in the field is needed. For a media profession so central to public discourse, the free market, and the business of enterprise, it is of crucial importance to understand the influences of changing labor conditions, professional cultures, and the appropriation of technologies on the nature of work in advertising. In this paper, I synthesize the various strands of my own and other research on the changing nature of advertising as a profession, using media logic as developed by Altheide and Snow (1979 and 1991) and updated by Dahlgren (1996) as a conceptual framework.

MEDIA LOGIC

The average media worker operates in a complex environment, somewhere between the splendid isolation of one's individual creative endeavors and a constantly changing transnational context of ties, relationships, demands, and pressures of colleagues (especially team members), consumers, employers, and clients. Account managers, creatives, and media planners are no exception to this general observation. Such an acknowledgement of the broader advertising field must be the point of entry to discuss the infrastructure, trends and developments affecting individual practitioners in (and outside of) media companies (Jones 1999; Grabher 2002). The creative process of work in the media industries is a fascinating object of study, as the production of culture is in itself a cultural process. This means that neither the individual, nor the company completely controls the production of culture – elements of social structure (the organization of work, the parameters set by time, budget and space, media ownership, and so on) and the norms, values, and ways of doing things of the professionals involved mutually influence each other (Lampel, Lant and Shamsie 2000). Indeed, cultural and economic determinants of media work are not necessarily different, but rather must be seen as what McFall calls “constituent material practice” (2004, p.18): the combination of specific technical and organizational arrangements as these influence and are shaped by the generally idiosyncratic habits of individual media practitioners. An emphasis on the individualistic and idiosyncratic nature of media workers suggests that contemporary trends such as workforce casualization, technological and cultural convergence, and flexible productivity not only mean different things to different people, but are also differently articulated in the context of specific media products, genres, and organizations because of the ways in which departments, teams and individuals work together (Deuze 2007).

Surveying the landscape of cultural production, Hesmondhalgh (2002, p.171) concludes that a rather loose control of creativity is at the core of managerial practices in media companies. Yet Curran, in an overview of case studies on different organizations, signals how “individual autonomy has in fact declined for many people working in the media industries” (2000, p.33). It must be clear, that autonomy is an important, individual-level and thus particular concept in media work: it both refers to the level of control over one’s career, and the (real or perceived) ability one has in making more or less independent decisions in the creative process of producing media. McFall (2002) argues how in this way the meaning of media work can be understood as based both in semantics and pragmatics – in what certain ways of doing things mean to the professionals involved, and how things are done in certain ways to achieve specific goals and objectives. Considering these remarks I thus describe, analyze and interpret the organization of creative labor in advertising from the perspective of the individual media practitioner, looking at the organization of the creative process in agencies and firms in terms of how this determines the workstyle of each manager, planner or creative within the industry.

Media work in general and advertising in particular takes place both within and outside of institutions (including salaried employees and an army of stringers and freelancers), by both professionals and amateurs (including word-of-mouth marketing), both within and across particular media (especially considering full-service agencies). In order to describe and analyze the various ways in which practitioners in advertising are affected by and give meaning to such a complex environment of cultural production, one needs a holistic, integrated perspective on the nature of media work. In this context I use the concept of

“media logic” as originally introduced by Altheide and Snow (1979 and 1991), and recently taken up and developed by Dahlgren, where he refers to media logic as “the particular institutionally structured features of a medium, the ensemble of technical and organizational attributes which impact on what gets represented in the medium and how it gets done. In other words, media logic points to specific forms and processes that organize the work done within a particular medium. Yet, media logic also indicates the cultural competence and frames of perception of audiences/users, which in turn reinforces how production within the medium takes place” (1996, p.63). Media logic can be discipline-specific because it primarily relates to production patterns within a given technological and institutional context.

Media logic is an useful perspectival tool to overcome what may be the most crucial problem in a discussion of what it is like to work in the media: the notion, that what someone in advertising does is guided by distinctly different ideas and factors of influence than what informs the work of a game developer, television producer, or journalist – and vice versa. One thing all these fields have in common is the fact that journalism, advertising, broadcasting, film, and game development are all examples of the production of culture. The stories told in the news, in the movies and in games or advertisements all built upon and contribute to the collective memories, traditions and belief systems of a community or society. This means I wish to move beyond implicit normative concerns about the distinctions between different kinds of media content to focus on what people actually do when they work in the media, and how they give meaning to their actions and beliefs. In turn I presuppose that this process of giving and articulating meaning has consequences for the way media are made.

Applying media logic as a mapping tool, means I examine the [1] institutional, [2] technological, [3] organizational and [4] cultural features of what it is like to work in contemporary advertising, marketing communication, and public relations. First, I discuss the field in terms of some of the particular developments in recent years, using media logic to flesh out more detail about what it is like to work in the ad industry. In doing so, I do not assume that the key issues affecting (and indeed: explaining) the work of contemporary advertising professionals are particular to the ad industry. Please note: I am not saying that neither the different media nor the work that media workers do is becoming similar or the same. I am arguing, however, that what typifies media professions in the digital age is an increasing complexity and ongoing liquefaction of the boundaries between different fields, disciplines, practices and categories that used to define what media work was. Ultimately, this approach may be a useful way to consider advertising as part of (and tied into) a broader media ecosystem, as operating in a wider context of social, economical and technological forces, and as a profession that has its own unique ways of dealing with such influences.

Although people in advertising can be among the most creative media workers and their work is sometimes more a part of a community's collective memory than the information coming from politicians or journalists, they tend to be quite anonymous when compared to their colleagues in print journalism (who compete for a byline), television, film, or game design (who get their name on a credit roll). This kind of frustration has a tendency to creep into a practitioners' sense of professional identity. In the context of the emergence of a global convergence culture (Jenkins 2006) and increasing pressures on media workers to interact and co-create with their intended audiences (Deuze 2005), there is potential for an

unprecedented new visibility for advertising practitioners – all the more reason to carefully map the media logic of the industry. Using this approach means investigating the institutional, technological, organizational and cultural features of what it is like to work in the advertising industry.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

On an institutional level, two developments run throughout the advertising industry: business fragmentation and concentration. These trends must be seen as co-constituent: many professionals in advertising, marketing and PR start their own small-scale enterprises, while at the same time the existing conglomerates keep expanding their reach by acquiring certain successful or specialized smaller companies in the field. Large investment networks have been gobbling up agencies worldwide in an accelerated pace since the 1980s in an attempt to become transnational full-service companies: businesses that offer clients and advertisers a wide range of products and services, including advertising, marketing, and PR. Of the top twenty agencies in the 1980s – as reported by industry magazine *Advertising Age* – seventeen have been swallowed up by four major agency holding companies. In 2006 six large advertising companies accounted for about sixty percent of the total advertising revenue.⁴

Facing increasingly bigger challenges in understanding and enacting the management of these big transnational corporations, the 1990s saw the emergence of a popular concept among practitioners as well as academics: integrated marketing communications (IMC). The IMC approach was largely aimed at breaking down the boundaries between different above

the line (advertising, media planning and production) and below the line (sales promotions, public relations and other marketing services) disciplines within companies – largely in response to a worldwide shift in spending on traditional advertising campaigns to (new media-based) marketing services (Cornelissen 2003). Professionals would also use the traditional boundaries between advertising, marketing and PR as an instrument in articulating status, expertise, and allocating prestige within and between (divisions of) companies. Beyond such cultural turf wars, it is crucial to note that “each discipline had its own compensation structures that resulted in different objectives and practices, and there was generally little contact between the different disciplines” (De Mooij 2005: 234).

On an institutional level, IMC is a practice that seeks to coordinate the work of practitioners at different levels and disciplines within the firm. The assumption is, that by facilitating so-called “through the line” communication the traditionally insular and thus unwieldy nature of work within large full-service organizations becomes more flexible and, particularly, more consumer-focused. In doing so, IMC shifts the emphasis on what advertising, PR or marketing is from a producer point of view to a consumer point of view – in part motivated by research showing how media users do not see distinctions between advertising and promotions, PR, and other forms of marketing communications. De Mooij considers IMC in this context as a practice that puts the wants and needs of a carefully defined market segment – up to and including an individual consumer – first, which on a practical level means that much time and money gets spent on researching the consumer, developing databases, and coordinating contacts with the consumer. Jones (2004) suggests that such a “customer first” attitude does not necessarily mean that advertising and marketing professionals really pay all that much attention to consumers, as in everyday

practice they tend to be more concerned with their competitor-colleagues (as their fellow media workers are, see Tunstall 2001). The mergers and integration practices of the 1980s and 1990s continue into the 21st century. As Cornelissen (2002 and 2003) analyzes, in some companies disciplinary integration has led to a strict emphasis on standardization and strong centralization of responsibilities for communication functions (advertising, product publicity, sales promotion, packaging and direct marketing) with an individual marketing manager (i.e. brand manager, marketing communications manager or advertising director). On the other hand, the same business practice inspired some corporations to decentralize their production and decision-making processes across individual managers of collaborative teams, each responsible for a project-based IMC plan.

The integration of companies, agencies, departments and their practices is not a seamless process - especially considering the at times carefully cultivated conflicts between different disciplines, such as the work of creatives versus the activities of account planners and media buyers. The latter group is generally considered to be representative of the rational, quantitative, and economic side of the business, as their functional specialisms involve managing client relationships, providing consumer and product research, and the planning and buying of space and time across different media deployed in the advertising campaign. Lash and Urry consider these professionals and their work “emblematic of the implosion of the economic, advertising as a business service, into the cultural, advertising as a ‘communications’ or ‘culture’ industry” (1994: 140). Based on historical research on the emergence and growing importance of media planning, buying and account management, McFall (2004) notes that these functional specialisms in advertising involve complex decision-making processes about how people use and understand media, what associations

people have with certain brands or specific symbols, and about competing advertisements. Some of this work clearly involves rigorous and rationalized research based on quantifiable outcomes, yet much of it is also based on instinct, gut-feeling, casuistry (that is, whatever was decided last time a similar situation was encountered), and all kinds of other distinctly cultural factors – not in the least including the personal consumptive preferences of the professionals involved. Hackley (1999) further notes – based on interviews with practitioners in various departments at a leading UK advertising agency – how decisions about a campaign emerge through complex negotiations involving the client, account managers and creatives and other interested parties, each deploying their own highly subjective discursive tactics to accomplish their particular goals. Beyond articulating power struggles and work pressures, this kind of communicative complexity (Louw 2001: 65), and cultural and economic fluidity also contribute to making the work in advertising seem quite diverse and not so repetitive.

The ongoing consolidation of advertising agencies in large holding firms coincided on the workforce with the ascension of the work of consumer researchers, media planners and buyers in office hierarchies. “For decades the industry has been dominated by the creatives [...] who came up with ideas that were translated into television, print, radio, and billboard ads. Beneath them toiled the media buyers, who wore suits and purchased television and radio time, magazine pages, and billboard space for clients. Now the buyers are calling the shots” (Andrew Leonard in *Fortune* magazine of 28 June 2004).⁵ Such departmental “King of the Hill” struggles have been supercharged by the prospect of the disappearing media consumer (Jones 2004). With growing numbers of media consumers combining ad-avoidance behavior like zapping (channel surfing during commercial breaks) and zipping (fast-forwarding through ads in recorded media content) with spending their precious time

making their own media (on websites like *Blogger*, *YouTube*, and *Flickr*), the power of the creative has shifted. This shift does not occur equally in all agencies, nor does it happen without a fight. Research among account planners in the U.S. and the U.K. by Hackley (2003) for example shows a distinct cultural and cognitive distance between them and the executives in charge of certain campaigns, whereas the practice of account planning – which may involve anything from conducting or interpreting market research up to and including developing brand strategy – still elicits mixed feelings on the workforce, ranging from passionate advocacy to open cynicism. Discussing how people responded to the restructuring of work in the organizations involved, Hackley notes how “changing the way people work in advertising agencies is a far from easy matter. Moving desks around is sometimes seen as tokenism, as likely to exacerbate differences as to dissolve them” (2003: 239).

Power struggles affecting the organization of creativity must also be seen in the context of a decline in global ad spending at the start of the 21st century, during which time the largest agencies laid off almost a quarter of their workforce in the United States alone (in which context the quote opening this paper becomes particularly ominous). This came after an initial internal reorganization process in transnational agencies, concentrating their services geographically in urban centers like New York and London, and cutting back or outright closing regional offices. Leslie (1995) documented the direct influence mergers and acquisitions have on the working lives of advertising professionals, signaling people’s frustration about a growing emphasis in many newly transnationalized agencies on modifying and adapting campaigns from other branches for local application: “many creatives complained that they had less creative work to put in their portfolios” (1995: 415). Leslie

found that the supposedly integrated and “glocalized” practices for many advertising professionals meant having to collaborate with colleagues across countries and disciplines, each informed by generally substantially different characteristics and histories of their respective local markets.

In recent years, the focus in global advertising has shifted somewhat to an acknowledgement of cross-cultural complexities. McDonald’s received the 2004 *Advertising Age* Marketer of the Year award because of the way it organized its “*I’m Lovin’ It*” global marketing campaign. The campaign was unique for the company in that it united and aligned all McDonald’s enterprises around the world behind a single theme and brand direction, while at the same time allowing local agencies to create their own adaptations and interpretations of the campaign slogan. The McDonald’s case can be seen as an example of contemporary transnational advertising and marketing practices, where local bureaus get more creative freedom while operating within certain parameters – like a key message, a specific slogan, or a target brand identity – set by the client or the advertising agency’s head office.

Considering the future of advertising, Cappo (2003) sees a less rosy future for global holding firms and agencies, predicting that such companies cannot remain intact because of the fact that they are made up of dozens of different companies of different sizes, different cultures, and different personalities. Grabher (2002 and 2004) remarks how the affiliation of local advertising agencies with global holding firms tends to be limited to financial control only, which if anything suggests that situated work practices tend not to experience central steering, and experience and knowledge gathered locally does not seem to be flowing

upstream (to corporate headquarters) or to other agencies in the network. In an effort to counter such concerns, the WPP group and the Publicis Groupe of agencies are examples of global holding firms that have started all kinds of (top-down organized) programs and initiatives to encourage more inter-institutional exchange and learning.⁶

The perceived and often celebrated variety of agencies and agency cultures within these groups limits the scope of attempts to either standardize the firm's practices, or effectively manage cross-agency collaboration. The reluctance and frustration experienced by creatives, planners and managers in agencies that end up having to collaborate with agencies elsewhere within their owners' holding firm is not just an indicator of the limited and sometimes ineffective nature of such practices, it even gets celebrated by the practitioners involved as a sign of independence – which in turn is a unique selling point for the agency when soliciting new clients. This institutional arrangement reveals an ironic contradiction in the work of advertising, marketing and PR agencies in the context of the ongoing concentration of media ownership and the standardization that this process to some extent involves: “although agencies seek to differentiate themselves from their main competitors through a particular esthetic and a specific ‘way of doing things’, they somewhat paradoxically also desperately endeavor to avoid a particular ‘house style’. The aim is to be distinct and yet not predictable since this would inevitably limit the market” (Grabher 2004: 1498). It is safe to say the current changes in the industry are met with excitement as well as resentment on the workforce – which response colors the success or failure of media concentration and integration as Mower writes, “such processes require a collaborative – even collegial - workplace, where no single mode of communication is considered to be more desirable than another. Too often, advertising agencies do not accomplish this collegiality” (1999: 27).

The second institutional trend in advertising, in part produced by the first, is one of increasing fragmentation and specialization. The recent history of the industry is rife with stories of both beginning as well as seasoned professionals branching off and starting their own agencies, initially positioning themselves against the bigger corporations by focusing on a specific niche (skillset, expertise or market), or simply by publicly stating they are different. Research by Nixon (2006) into the workplace cultures of advertising agencies suggests that especially younger practitioners (such as art directors, writers, and creatives) can be seen as actively engaging in a Freudian narcissism of minor differences in which creative teams try to stand out in the advertising they generate without really deviating from conventional standards.

Some professionals consider the increasing differentiation in the industry an example of “agency wars”, where the ambition to be different and to stake a claim based on such different-ness can have dire consequences. Cappo suggests that the large holding firms experience splintering and defections as much as they are buying agencies. “Many of the largest clients in the business still assign various projects and products to smaller agencies as they look for new ideas and strategies [...] And, of course, there are thousands of small to medium-sized clients [...] that don’t want to deal with a huge ad agency” (2003: 17). A key motive for advertising professionals to break away from holding firms of large network companies is their real or perceived lack of creative freedom in pursuing different, innovative or experimental forms of advertising, and what can be described as an increased emphasis on annual returns on investment and shareholder value. However, this does not mean smaller agencies do not benchmark their employees on a financial bottom line, nor

does this suggest that small or medium-sized bureaus are conflict-free working environments. Indeed, international research suggests that conflict and rivalry are intrinsic if not essential ingredients in the way teams in agencies large and small do their work (Deuze 2007). In dispensing advice on how to get a job in advertising, Vonk and Kestin (co-Chief Creative Officers at Ogilvy & Mather Toronto, one of the larger agencies in the business) remind us that the size of a company does not necessarily explain how it organizes creativity: “some big agencies (like ours) are nurturing and positive, while some of the smaller ones are the worst offenders” (2003: 70).

There is perhaps a significant difference in a company’s ability to handle today’s era of profound and “*discontinuous change*” in media (Edelman, 2005). The institutional characteristics of smaller agencies allows them to position themselves more flexibly vis-à-vis new trends in the industry, for example regarding the emergence and adoption of new marketing techniques, new technologies, and new managerial styles. It must be clear that on an institutional level the experiences of practitioners in advertising, marketing and PR are influenced by similar processes in large and small businesses alike: a highly competitive work culture, characterized by discourses of integration and convergence (of media, of disciplines, and of divisions) in a context of ongoing power struggles and an increasing interdependence between the creative, managerial, client and consumer sides of the industry.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

As with all media work, advertising and technology are interdependent. According to Rust and Oliver (1994), technology is the skeleton around which advertising has formed,

linking contemporary technological developments to transformations of advertising and marketing practices. Considering how technologies develop side by side social trends, and weighing the scholarly evidence that shows how new media tend to be used in organizations to fit or reproduce existing patterns of work, our understanding of the role of technology in shaping advertising must look at processes in the workplace where technologies reinforce or amplify organizational changes already underway. The popularity of IMC as a strategy for intra-organizational integration in the 1990s for example can partly be explained by the availability of interactive and networked communication technologies, leading to the establishment of video conferencing, company intranets, and other computer-mediated communication tools that enabled organizations to communicate across time and place. By implementing all kinds of cross-company software tools, technology serves as a standardization instrument in the industry, supposedly facilitating faster and more efficient media work as well as assisting top-down implementation of management strategies that privilege integration and central control (and environmental scanning) of workplace practices.

In her analysis of the diffusion of technologies in public relations, Johnson (1997) has noted that the introduction of all kinds of new technologies – desktop publishing, company intranets, computerized databases and file management systems, and so on – went hand in hand with a downsizing trend in the PR industry, forcing practitioners to be more productive and do more with less time and staff. Through a series of in-depth interviews with PR professionals, she also found how they saw themselves in the midst of a learning curve about new technologies: “all the respondents admitted to knowledge gaps about various technologies and their self-identity as a professional was dependent on reducing the

gap. This attempt to live up to what one ‘ought’ to do and ‘ought’ to know caused considerable stress among practitioners. If they were not using certain technologies yet (particularly the Internet), they felt behind their contemporaries in other organizations” (1997: 226).

The production of advertising – particularly the work of art departments, creatives, brand managers and strategists – is changing because of new technologies too, as the internet increasingly becomes integrated in all kinds of networked devices. This means that advertising, marketing and PR are increasingly expected to be produced across different media platforms (with multiple tie-ins), while professionals in these industries additionally find themselves having to partly outsource their control over the message to consumers online via viral, “buzz” and other types of interactive advertising and marketing techniques (Leckenby and Li 2000). This kind of interconnectivity – between different media, between media makers and media users, and among consumers – can be seen as a direct exponent of the potential of new media. As more and more people immerse themselves in all kinds of networked, portable and personalized media, the consensus in the advertising industry sometimes seems to be that the age of mass advertising is over. Campaigns consisting of a single medium (a magazine spread or a 30-second television commercial) are considered to be less successful because of the “hyperfragmentation” of mass audiences across multiple media, and partly because of a credibility crisis advertising is experiencing, especially among those growing up in the media-saturated lifeworlds of the 1980s and 1990s. The new media environment certainly contributes to this trend, as people increasingly multitask and divide their time across different media and media use becomes highly individualized.

The industry's framing of this empowered consumer is not without problems. Turow for example considers the construction of 21st century media users by marketers, advertisers and consultants as chaotic, self-concerned, and willingly contributing to a pervasive personal information economy as only serving an emerging strategic logic of mainstream marketing and media organizations "to present their activities not as privacy invasion but as two-way customer relationships, not as commercial intrusion but as pinpoint selling help for selling help for frenetic consumers in a troubling world." (2005: 120). Using interviews with advertising professionals in Finland, Puustinen (2004) adds that the contemporary mainstream in marketing views the consumers and target groups as "unpredictable masses", which perspective allows marketers to both aim at taming the consumer mass into controllable segments, lifestyle groups or sub cultures, as well as interacting with consumers as active agents. In this context Puustinen and other researchers suggest that the primary function of advertising and marketing is to reduce the advertisers' anxieties, lack of knowledge and imagination regarding the consumer.

The restructuring of business and management practices in large firms, the "glocalization" (combining global advertising with local adaptation and customization) of advertising production, the changing realities of the media marketplace and the reliance of the industry on technology to facilitate all of these processes cannot be seen separately. For the practitioners in the industry this particularly means that there are more options for advertising than ever before, to be produced using increasingly sophisticated devices, with growing pressures from both markets and clients to provide compelling content, engaging connectivity, platforms for participation and, ultimately, significant returns on investments. However, such a conclusion perhaps misrepresents the growing creative interaction between

media professionals and different individuals in society (Balnaves et al. 2004), which in the case of public relations has meant a shift from the idea of PR professionals as spin-doctors and outsourcers of trust towards a “dialogic” theory of public relations (Kent and Taylor, 2002). This theory is articulated with an international shift in thinking towards PR practitioners as facilitators and moderators of a dialogue between companies, consumers, interest groups and other stakeholders in their clients’ environment (Van Ruler *et al.* 2004).

Although none of these trends are new in the sense that they were coined or introduced well before the 1990s, it is important to note that late 20th century technological developments such as the World Wide Web and the multimedia cell phone have greatly contributed to their currency throughout the industry. The reported changes in advertising, marketing and PR because of new technologies do not just neatly fit the corporate agenda, but also pose significant challenges to the way professionals do their work, and the way creativity is organized.

THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Advertising agencies tend to cluster in certain regions around the world. Among the top urban centers where creative talent and potential project partners are concentrated are cities like Tokyo, New York, Frankfurt, Paris, London, Los Angeles, Milan, São Paulo, Amsterdam, and Madrid. The organization of work in advertising, PR and marketing firms centers almost exclusively on a project-by-project basis. Project-based work has become the dominant feature in the new economy, as it is considered to possess the required flexibility to meet constantly changing customer needs, shifts in the composition of businesses,

markets and clients, and it provides a strategy to cope with a continual rearrangement of employers and employees within the firm (Sennett 1998). Additionally, a largely project-contracted workforce is cheaper, easier to control, and less likely to collectively organize or oppose increasingly “post-national” business practices (Bourdieu 1998; Habermas 2001).

The literature recognizes two types of project organizations relevant to the advertising industry, one within firms constituted by employees from different departments, and one based on temporary cooperative efforts across firm boundaries. Research in Denmark by Brandt Husman (2006) suggests that interfirm projects are in fact quite rare, and professionals in such teams tend to get selected on the basis of agency ownership. This for example means that co-operative partners, if any, are to some extent forced onto the project team structure of an agency that is part of a larger holding firm. Several studies also conclude that in a project team between an advertising and media agency not much knowledge is transferred as they do not have the time nor strong incentives to learn what the other knows. Similar research in Germany by Jentsch (2004) reveals a slightly different picture, as she finds that agencies in Frankfurt engage numerous external services and professionals in their projects, which selection process primarily is based on the activation of latent personal networks. These ties between different practitioners both within and outside of agencies and bureaus blur (or even hijack) the domains of public and private life, as the superficial yet intense networking that underscores such open project organization of media work is primarily driven by professional motivations while utilizing personal affinities. Grabher (2004) emphasizes that this kind networking is instrumental in building “know-whom” rather than “know-how”, which is indispensable for the relentless rewiring of ties and recombination of teams. Jentsch further notes how reputation and trust are key determining

factors in selecting teammates and project partners, which in the case of small agencies means they tend to fall back upon a relatively stable set of professionals they have had good experiences with in the past. Larger firms generally rely on their own in-house specialists when assembling project teams. Jentsch notes how this referring to known external partners contributes to the main difference between the adlands in London and Frankfurt, as the British agencies are much more likely to solicit the services of a constantly changing range and variety of professionals moving in and out of the “ad village” that is Soho.

The architecture of advertising work can be best understood as one of what Grabher calls back-to-back (and, for some, simultaneous) project-based “ecologies of creativity” (2001). The concept of the project ecology, argues Grabher, comes closest to the lived reality of everyday work in the advertising industry, as it allows for “interdependencies between projects and as well as other more traditional ‘permanent’ forms of organization” (2002: 245). Based on rich empirical work done among advertising practitioners and agencies in New York, London and Hamburg, Grabher finds that the organization of work in advertising indeed is project-based, but includes a wide variety of forms and templates, including agencies, firms, clients, and freelance talent, where people are engaged in an almost constant competitive dance around the table of media production. Key to understanding project ecologies in advertising is their heterarchic character: project teams are networks of professionals (temporarily) sharing common goals in which each participants shares more or less the same horizontal position of power and authority (Grabher 2001). This does not necessarily mean all participants in the team are equal. Part-time, flexitime and freelance workers involved in these teams have less securities and benefits than the professionals employed by the agency, firm, and client involved. When it comes to actual decision-making

in the creative process, however, teams in project ecologies tend to function on the basis of heterarchy. Project ecologies are different from a pure projectization of work – which implies a complete shift from stable firm-based work to flexible project-based work – as Grabher concludes, “project ecologies provide the organizational arena in which incongruent physical and organizational layers are ‘stapled’ for a limited period of time – just to be reconfigured anew in the context of subsequent projects” (2002: 259).

Let me emphasize that elements of chaos, bureaucracy, uncertainty and procedural repetitiveness are all part of the organization of media work, which elements contribute to as well as are strategies to avoid stress factors in the workplace. The literature does not suggest a specific predictor of either one of such elements to dominate, whether it is working for a large or small agency, in Amsterdam or Johannesburg, providing integrated brand and marketing communications, or specialized services. The organization of work in advertising is context-driven, based on the specifics of the project at hand, which creates both opportunities and uncertainties for the workers involved – which tend to get articulated and negotiated through professional networks and clusters of contacts primarily based on previous experiences and personal affinities.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

The culture of advertising agencies, media bureaus, PR and marketing firms is first and foremost determined by the profile of people working there – which in terms of their own description of markets and consumers can be determined by looking at the demographics and psychographics of professionals in the industry. Unfortunately, the few studies among

advertising practitioners in for example the United States, France, Finland or England rely exclusively on qualitative interviews emphasizing cultural specificities, and therefore cannot be generalized across the industry. It is interesting to note that in the other media professions – game developers, journalists, workers in film and broadcasting – the situation is notably different (Deuze 2007). However, it is possible to get some idea of who advertising people are by looking at implicit references in the scholarly and trade literature, and by explicit figures mentioned in the annual reports of public holding firms like WPP or Publicis. In 2005 the Publicis Groupe reported 38,610 employees in 104 countries overall, with 8,900 employees specifically in their key advertising agencies such as Saatchi & Saatchi, Leo Burnett and Fallon Worldwide, distributed across 251 offices in 82 countries. At the same time the WPP Group employed 70,396 people in more than 100 countries, including its flagship agencies Grey Worldwide, JWT, Ogilvy & Mather, and Young & Rubicam. In 2005 these firms shared almost the exact same figures regarding their workers: overall, 54 percent of all employees are female, although women are still a minority in executive positions and management teams (30 percent at Publicis, 33 percent at WPP).

The numbers of minorities are still extremely low in the industry. U.S.-based agencies owned by Publicis and WPP participate in the Minority Advertising Internship Program (MAIP) of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), which program encourages African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, and Native-American college students to strongly consider advertising as a career and places them at agencies throughout the country. In a 2006 study by New York City's Human Rights Commission, only 2 percent of the upper echelon of the advertising industry was found to be black.⁶ South Africa is one of the few countries that has an explicit Black Economic Empowerment policy, requiring

companies to establish a 30 percent level of black ownership for advertising and communications companies. The 2005 report for the WPP Group in South Africa claims its companies “are on track” (p.112) to reach this percentage without mentioning specifics. As these firms are among the largest on the planet with a worldwide reach, there is no reason to assume these statistics are significantly different across the industry as a whole.

Nixon suggests that the various ways in which the creatives in advertising agencies give meaning to what they do is “built right into the kind of training these practitioners received en route to becoming advertising creatives” (2006, p.95). Yet there are no specific entry-level requirements for the advertising, marketing or PR industry. Several reports document how professionals come from a wide variety of disciplines. Grabher (2004) finds that advertising practitioners in Germany and England are recruited from a broad range of educational and biographical backgrounds, claiming that further training seems to be the strongest influence on introducing discriminating effects between occupations in the industry. Differences in this pattern internationally tend to be seen as minimal, or waning. In an overview of advertising and public relations practices around the world, Newsom (2004) notes regional differences, but also sees a growing role for the globalization and international cross-fertilization of standards and traditions. Employers reportedly increasingly turn to specific programs for education and training in advertising and PR to recruit graduates directly into their ranks as “there is little time today for on-the-job training” (2004: 96).

Advertising professionals are generally described as an unique occupational group: a “predominantly young, well-resourced, well-educated and fashionable, urban elite” (McFall 2004: 22). Advertising practitioners certainly seem like a youthful, fun bunch of people –

who by all accounts work and live in a conflict-ridden, extremely stressful environment. “It’s a job that comes with one form of rejection or another built into every day. You’re either naturally resilient or learn quickly to become so, rolling with the punches” (Vonk and Kestin 2005: 163). The stress also relates to the phase before getting into the industry and becoming a known participant in professional networks. In a study among professionals working at Scottish advertising agencies Crosier and colleagues (2003) found that the often mentioned rivalry between (and within) creative teams and those responsible for strategic planning was in fact seen as a productive tension, stimulating certain aspects of the work while still enabling some kind of pragmatic collaboration. If anything, the real conflict was felt between account planners and those in the parallel discipline of media planning. Although several authors confirm that rivalry and conflict are the key values and emotions that drive the work in the industry, this does not mean that anything goes and everything can be said. Using interviews with advertising practitioners at all levels in 29 agencies in eight American cities, Drumwright and Murphy (2004) found high incidences of what they describe as “moral myopia” and “moral muteness” across the board. Advertising professionals apparently only rarely talk about moral issues, and are particularly hesitant to actively question or critique the values and practices of clients. Drumwright and Murphy signal how “please-o-holic” tendencies and a general avoidance of criticism in fact keeps agencies in a subordinate position vis-à-vis their clients.

Jones (1999) argues that an agency’s culture has important influence on its stability and productivity, and consists of a *social* culture – the type of people an agency recruits – and a *philosophical* culture – the agency’s attitude toward the advertising enterprise. The best agency cultures, according to Jones, are successful because of their effective management and

encouragement of the intuition and imagination of their workers. “Advertising agencies have a patchy record of success in producing effective campaigns, but good agencies get it right more often than they get it wrong. Their successes are due to their culture” (2004: 201). The culture of working in advertising, marketing and PR certainly differs from agency to agency, and from region to region (Taylor *et al.* 1996). However, it is possible to identify some key characteristics of the way people in these industries collectively work together, relate to each other and outsiders (clients, consumers and critics), and give meaning to these competences. The corporate culture in advertising is particularly colored by idiosyncratic personal constellations, focusing heavily on (stories about) the “stars” and agency founders - after whom many agencies are indeed named. If anything, argues Grabher (2004), these kinds of stories and of more or less codified ways of doing things are among the few elements of an agency’s culture that are repetitive. On the level of the core team within an agency – generally the only workers that enjoy permanent employment – Grabher signals a conscious cultivation of cognitive distance between the different participants in a project: the core team, the client, the external partners. By emphasizing each and everyone’s particular role in the daily routines of working on a certain project, a delicate balance between the overlapping but at times different needs of clients, management and the creative process can be upheld. This careful dance leads the professional identities of advertising practitioners to “crystallize into ‘creeds’ whose distinctiveness is reiterated through organizational practices, professional styles, and distinct dress and language codes” (2004: 1495). This finding is mirrored in the organization of creativity and the management of authenticity in other cultural industries (Jones, Anand and Alvarez 2005).

DISCUSSION

As argued earlier, it is crucial to note here how the personal and professional lives of practitioners in the field converge in the ways the work gets performed, organized, and evaluated (Grabher and Ibert 2006). This in turn signals the important role personal networks play. Personal networks in advertising are ephemeral and powerful, formed through professional as well as private ties, and are governed by reputation. The focus of these networks is almost exclusively career-oriented, as they are constructed around what Grabher calls professional complementarity: “relationships with practitioners who, potentially, could complement a core team or a supplier network in a future project” (2004: 1504). Jentsch (2004) finds that because of the high mobility of advertising practitioners both formal and informal professional networks extend across the country and cannot be seen to be particular to any specific city or region. She concludes that the personal networks so emblematic of the organization of work in these industries are indeed based on mutual sympathies, previous collaborations and word-of-mouth recommendations of friends – which process of networked hiring over time creates so-called “communities of practice” consisting of both permanent and non-permanent workers located across the country and participating in many different projects throughout their careers. In order to stand out and get noticed, Sean Nixon notes, “young creatives would ally themselves with ‘newness’ in order to challenge more established colleagues. We might read into this pursuit of newness and creativity, then, a strategy of distinction and position taking by differently placed practitioners over the accumulation of recognition and status and its conversion into tangible economic rewards” (2006: 92). Again one can note the fascinating tension between the primacy of being different and unique versus the necessity of consistently participating in more or less cohesive networks that runs throughout the accounts of what it is like to work

in advertising. What this suggest for creativity research, then, is how any assumptions we may have about creative work in advertising must be considered within their thorough yet complex embedding in informal practices, heterarchic networks, and semi-permanent constellations of people, places, processes both inside and directly outside of agencies and firms. A situated and systematic appreciation of such ecologies of creativity would do justice to any kind of analytical approach when tackling the thorny issue of what can or should constitute creative work in the field.

Notes

1. I borrow the term “workstyle” from several professional agencies in the field of management and human resources, see for example the site of a British professional coaching agency called The Results Agency (at URL: <http://www.theresultsagency.co.uk>), Dutch agency Bureau Eveleens (URL: <http://www.workstyle.nl>), German workstyle-management consultancy D@ccord 4u (http://www.daccord4u.de/dienstleistungen_workstyle.htm), and Australian coaching agency MerryMentality (URL: <http://www.merrymentality.com.au/workstyle.html>).
2. Louise Story, It’s an Ad, Ad, Ad, Ad World, *New York Times*, August 6, 2007. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/06/business/media/06digitas.html?_r=2&ref=business&oref=slogin&oref=slogin.
3. One such request list is at URL: <http://dev.magicosm.net/cgi-bin/public/corvidaewiki/bin/view/Game/SubservientChickenRequestList>. On an interesting sidenote, this site is based on the ‘wiki’ concept, which means anyone can edit,

modify and add information to the list. See the original chicken video at URL:

<http://www.subservientchicken.com>.

4. Reports available at URL: <http://www.recma.com>; see agency overview for 2006 as reported in *Advertising Age*, May 1, at URL:

<http://adage.com/images/random/FactPack06.pdf>.

5. Sources: WPP annual report 2005 at URL:

http://ww2.wpp.com/WPPDocuments/WPP_AR_2005_How_we_behave.pdf; Publicis annual report of the same year is at URL:

http://www.finance.publicis.com/en/60000/pdf/2005_annual_report_en.pdf.

6. Diane Cardwell and Stuart Elliott, Ad Firms to Hire More Black Managers in City. *New York Times*, 8 September 2006. URL:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/08/business/media/08ads.html>.

References

Altheide, David, Snow, Robert (1979) *Media logic*. London: Sage.

Balnaves, Mark, Mayrhofer, Debra, Shoesmith, Brian (2004) Media professions and the new humanism. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 18(2), 191-203.

Brandt Husman, Tina (2002) *Organisational capabilities, competitive advantage & project-based organisations - the case of advertising and creative good production*. Frederiksberg: IVS.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1998) *Acts of resistance: against the new myths of our time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cappo, Joe (2003) *The future of advertising: new media, new clients, new consumers in the post-television age*. McGraw-Hill.

- Cornelissen, Joep (2002) Academic and practitioner theories of marketing. *Marketing Theory* 2(1), pp.133-143.
- Cornelissen, Joep (2003) Change, continuity and progress: the concept of integrated marketing communications and marketing communications practice. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 11(4), pp.217-234.
- Crosier, Keith, Grant, Ian, Gilmore, Charlotte (2003) Account planning in Scottish advertising agencies: a discipline in transition. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 9(1), pp.1-15.
- Dahlgren, Peter (1996) Media logic in cyberspace: repositioning journalism and its publics. *Javnost/The Public* 3(3), pp.59-72.
- De Mooij, Marieke (2005) *Global marketing and advertising: understanding cultural paradoxes*. 2nd edition. London: Sage.
- Deuze, Mark (2005) Towards professional participatory storytelling in journalism and advertising. *First Monday* 10(7). URL:
http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue10_7/deuze/index.html.
- Deuze, Mark (2007) *Media Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Drumwright, Minette, Murphy, Patrick (2004) How advertising practitioners view ethics: moral muteness, moral myopia, and moral imagination. *Journal of Advertising* 33(2), pp.7-24.
- Edelman, Richard (2005) Is Public Relations Ready for Discontinuous Change? 6 A.M., posted 21 November 2005. URL:
http://www.edelman.com/speak_up/blog/archives/2005/11/is_public_relat.html.

- Grabher, Gernot (2001) Ecologies of creativity: the Village, the Group, and the heterarchic organisation of the British advertising industry. *Environment and Planning A* 33(2), pp.351-374.
- Grabher, Genot (2002) The project ecology of advertising: tasks, talents and teams. *Regional Studies* 36(3), pp.245-262.
- Grabher, Gernot (2004) Temporary architectures of learning: knowledge governance in project ecologies. *Organization Studies* 25(9), pp.1491-1514.
- Grabher, Gernot, Ibert, Oliver (2006) Bad company? The ambiguity of personal knowledge networks. *Journal of Economic Geography* 6(3), pp.251-271.
- Habermas, Jurgen (2001) *The Postnational Constellation*, translated by Max Pensky. Boston: MIT Press.
- Hackley, Christopher (2000) Silent running: tacit, discursive and psychological aspects of management in a top UK advertising agency. *British Journal of Management* 11(3), pp.239-245.
- Hackley, Christopher (2003) Account planning: current agency perspectives on an advertising enigma. *Journal of Advertising Research* 43(2), pp.235-246.
- Hesmondhalgh, David (2002) *The cultural industries*. London: Sage.
- Jenkins, Henry (2006) *Convergence culture - where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jentsch, Caroline (2004) Projektorganisation in der Frankfurter Werbeindustrie. *Spaces* 2004-03, URL: <http://www.uni-marburg.de/fb19/personal/professoren/bathelt/forschung/spaces>.
- Johnson, Melissa (1997) Public relations and technology: practitioner perspectives. *Journal of Public Relations Research* 9(3), pp.213-236.

- Jones, Candace, Anand, Narasimhan, Alvarez, José (2005) Manufactured authenticity and creative voice in cultural industries. *Journal of Management Studies* 42(5), pp. 893-899.
- Jones, John Philip (ed.) (1999) *The advertising business*. London: Sage.
- Jones, John Philip (2004) *Fables, fashions and facts about advertising*. London: Sage.
- Kent, Michael, Taylor, Maureen (2002) Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review* 28(1), pp.21-37.
- Lampel, Joseph, Lant, Theresa, Shamsie, Jamal (2000) Balancing act: learning from organizing practices in cultural industries. *Organization Science* 11(3), pp.263-269.
- Lash, Scott, Urry, John (1994). *Economies of signs and space*. London: Sage.
- Leckenby, John, Li, Hairong (2000) Why we need the Journal of Interactive Advertising. *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 1(1). URL:
<http://www.jiad.org/vol1/no1/editors/index.htm>.
- Leslie, Deborah (1995) Global scan: the globalization of advertising agencies, concepts, and campaigns. *Economic Geography* 71(4), pp.402-426.
- Louw, Eric (2001) *The media and cultural production*. London: Sage.
- McFall, Liz (2002) Advertising, persuasion and the culture/economy dualism. In: du Gay, Paul, Pryke, Michael (eds.), *Cultural economy: cultural analysis and commercial life*, pp.148-165. London: Sage.
- McFall, Liz (2004) The culturalization of work in the 'new economy: an historical view. In: Elgaard Jensen, Torben, Westenholtz, Ann (eds.), *Identity in the age of the new economy: life in temporary and scattered work practices*, pp.9-33. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Mower, Eric (1999) Agency management: some secrets. In: Jones, John Philip (ed.), *The advertising business*, pp.17-28. London: Sage.

- Newsom, Doug (2004) *This is PR: the realities of Public Relations*. 8th edition. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Nixon, Sean (2006) The pursuit of newness: Advertising, creativity and the 'narcissism of minor differences'. *Cultural Studies* 20(1), pp.89-106.
- Puustinen, Liina (2004) *The most desirable target group: an analysis of the construction of gender and age in advertising business*. Paper presented at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference of 25-28 June 2004, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.
- Rust, Roland T., Oliver, Richard W. (1994) The death of advertising. *Journal of Advertising* 23(4), 71-78.
- Sennett, Richard (1998) *The corrosion of character*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Taylor, Richard, Grubbs, Marica, Haley, Eric (1996) How French advertising professionals develop creative strategy. *Journal of Advertising* 25(1), pp.1-14.
- Tunstall, Jeremy (ed.) (2001) *Media occupations and professions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Turow, Joseph (2005) Audience construction and culture production: marketing surveillance in the digital age. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 597, pp.103-121.
- Van Ruler, Betteke, Vercic, Dejan, Buetschi, Gerhard, Flodin, Bertil (2004) A first look for parameters of public relations in Europe. *Journal of Public Relations Research* 16(1), pp.35-63.
- Vonk, Nancy, Kestin, Janet (2005) *Pick me: breaking into advertising and staying there*. Mississauga: Wiley.