

Katrin Umlauf  
Matrikelnummer. 13646  
5. Fachsemester  
kumlauf@web.de

# Discourse and Counter – Discourse

## About the Negotiation of Meaning or ABSOLUTe arbitrary access

Research Paper

MEDIA WORLDS: Introduction to Discourse Analysis  
Felicitas Macgilchrist  
Professur für Vergleichende Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie  
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## 1. Introduction

This paper is part of a collective<sup>1</sup> comparative study in media content analysis using mainly tools and theoretical frameworks provided by the sociological approach of critical discourse analysis. Main object of interest are the advertisement strategies of Absolut and Skyy Vodka, a Swedish and a North-American Vodka producing brand. The aim was to examine, by what means the firms manage to attract their customers. How socially desirable concepts like “life-style”, “fun”, or “coolness” were connected to the Vodka brands via subliminal signs in intensive advertising. Therefore a variety of mostly print media ads were studied and subjected to analysis. In a second analytical step, it was to explore how a counter discourse to the alcohol praising selling-campaigns was constructed through the production of advertisements, intended to have the exact opposite effect of alcohol promotion, which is to keep people away from alcoholic beverage or to warn them of negative side effects of alcohol consumption.

The following thesis deals with the question, whether the counter-discourse regarding alcohol indulgence as constituted by i.e. the Adbuster Media Foundation actually works. The Adbuster Media Foundation modelled their anti-alcohol campaign ads after the fashion of the “Absolut Vodka” marketing strategy. I intend to discuss to what extend the anti-alcohol campaign by Adbuster succeeds or fails. Drinking as a social act is generally accepted, so that people who drink will not see themselves as endangered by the seriously health damaging effects heavy alcohol consumption can have. It seems to be a question of identification with the activity of drinking and concepts associated with that activity. The Adbuster Media Foundation has, among other aims, the goal to un-cool brands and certain social practices. The question deriving from that notion is: Who wants to be un-cool? People try to belong, that is to gain access to prestigious groups because thereby they will obtain social and economical resources. In other words, most people strive to belong to “cool”, “hip” “In”-groups. Furthermore, health problems conditional on alcohol usage are often associated with alcoholism, which is considered to be totally different and autonomous from social drinking and hence not regarded as a problem of one’s own life. Here two discursive formations meet because they share the same central theme, which is the drinking of alcohol. One party,

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<sup>1</sup> Co-authors of the entire work providing the other three parts of the paper are: Tim Dörflinger (*The Power of Words and Images – A Discourse Analysis of Vodka in Advertisement*), Noémie Causse (*Absolut Counter-Discourse – A discourse Analysis of the counter discourse to Absolut vodka advertising*), and Martin Begoll (*Absolut Ads. A critical analysis of an advertisement phenomenon*). For content related questions please read the abstracts provided by each individual author.

,including the alcohol producing and promoting firms, regards drinking of alcohol as enhancing the individual quality of life, whereas another camp argues that habitual drinking of alcohol is in fact damaging and dangerous.

After a brief introduction of the Adbuster Media Foundation some their ads will be analysed in relation to the Absolut Vodka marketing strategy. Investigating the social understanding of alcoholism and drinking as a social act, the question, whether this specific strategy works as a deterrent or whether it is rather co-opted by the original marketing strategy and thus supporting it, will be examined.

## 1.1. Methodology

Fairclough's (1989,1995) model for critical discourse analysis<sup>2</sup> will supply the overall theoretical framework for the following analysis. Fairclough's model, which considers the object of analysis, the production process of the object, and the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes, interlinks various levels of analysis along the line of reason: description – interpretation – explanation. Thus embracing a wide scope of points of contact Fairclough' theory is very versatile. All following considerations have been made with his model in mind. Supplementary, additional theories and models from other researchers working in the field of discourse analysis and discursive psychology will be used in order to complement or elaborate certain points of the analysis.

Hence, Edley's (2001) work on the self-concepts of masculinity will be used regarding the relations of the addressee with the ads or ad-spoofs he<sup>3</sup> meets with. Here, the concepts of subject positions, ideological dilemmas, and interpretative repertoires will be useful, when examining the situation the addressee encounters, when he is confronted with the social practice of drinking recontextualized from two very different perspectives. Furthermore, van Dijk's (1998) notions on In-Group and Out-group, in combination with Hall's (1980/94) model of encoding and decoding of messages will be applied to the analysis, therewith to show that messages might be understood by people but not result in any effect because the addressee, although being hailed and approached by the message, might not identify with it. Apart from the authors already indicated, further theories and authors will, when necessary, be taken into consideration in the course of the development of this work.

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<sup>2</sup> As understood and cited by Hilary Janks (1997) pp. 26.

<sup>3</sup> The usage of the masculine form "he" instead of the "he or she", when in fact enclosing both sexes to the same extend, is due to the fact that otherwise the flow of the text would be continuously interrupted. Nevertheless, the author wants it to be understood that she is sensitive and aware of the wording in her thesis and did not intend to offend anybody by her choice of words.

## 2. About Absolut Vodka<sup>4</sup>

The production of Vodka in Sweden dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Absolut Vodka is produced by the Swedish firm Vin & Spirit Group and sold under the name of Absolut, since 1879. That year, the inventor Lars Olsson Smith devised a method, called rectification, by which the vodka could be cleared of the impurities that were the inevitable by-product of the distillation process. Smith called his vodka: absolute pure vodka, and thus coined the brand.

In 1970 the firm decided to try to expand to the North-American market. For the United States, where mostly low priced American products and the imported Russian vodka Stolichnaya were dominating the market, an advertisement strategy had to be found that distinguished Absolut vodka from its competitors and emphasized its best-of-category claim. TBWA Advertising, since 1995 TBWA/Chiant, came up with an award winning marketing strategy that has been running non-stop from 1981 until today. Being presented solely in print media (i.e. billboards, posters, postcards, magazines and newspapers) over 1400<sup>5</sup> individual ads have been produced, extending the campaign from North-American to a global scale.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1. The Advertisement Strategy

“Readers enjoy a relationship with this advertising [...]. They are challenged, entertained, tickled, inspired and maybe even befuddled as they try to figure out what’s happening inside an Absolut ad.”<sup>7</sup>

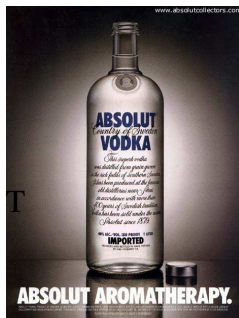


Fig. 1

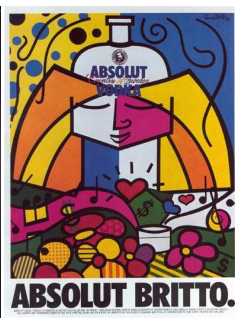


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

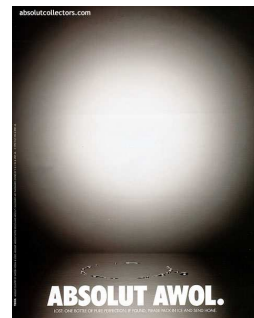


Fig. 5

(Examples for Absolut Vodka Advertisements<sup>8</sup>)

Part of the marketing campaign was a newly designed bottle, whose appearance differed significantly from all other bottles on the market. Instead of the familiar bottle shape of liquor bottles, which had long necks, square shoulders, and a paper label the Absolut

<sup>4</sup> See: Lewis, Richard W., *Absolut Book: The Absolut Vodka Advertising Story*, Boston, Journey Editions, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://absolut.pinknet.cz/gallery/view.php?news=7&lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://absolut.com/>

<sup>7</sup> See: Lewis, Richard W., 1996, p XI.

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.absolutgallery.com/> (each individual link can also be found in the bibliography)

Vodka bottles had short necks, round shoulders, and the label information printed directly on the bottle in distinctive prominent type. Thus, an unmistakable bottle was created, which also would be the central point of the marketing strategy. The strategy's motto is and was: the Absolut bottle is the hero. Therefore, the bottle or bottle shape is, with the exception of some special collections, present in each ad. Furthermore, the bottle is always paired with the brand name "Absolut" and either a noun or adjective that would either flatter the product or the consumer. These adjectives and nouns, by being positive categories, would either modify Absolut Vodka or would be modified by it.

The Swedish word "absolut" is written and spoken nearly the same in all major languages spoken in the western world. The word translates into "absolute" in English, into "absolut" in German, "absolu / absolue" in French, and "absoluto / absoluta" in Spanish, which could be utilized for the promotion of the bottle. The brand name would trigger the association with the brand and be used synonymous with the adjective absolute, the significance of which will be discussed later on.

The campaign started with ads that were predominantly black, blue and white in colour, featured the bottle and the word pairing "Absolut – noun/adjective" (i.e. as in fig. 1). The bottle would be positioned on a flat mirroring surface, while being illuminated from behind, by the means of what appears to be a diffuse cone of light, reminding one of a spotlight.

The concept worked and became very successful, so that the ad designers dared expanding the campaign. 1984 a first ad was created, in which the Absolut bottle was not made from glass but was represented by another object that resembled the bottle in size and shape and thus came to be the Absolut bottle (i.e. as in fig. 3). By this means, the Absolut bottle could be transformed in virtually any object and placed in any possible circumstances, which meant that the vodka could be incorporated into every aspect of life. Thus the bottle and the vodka with it became universally adaptable. Among the great variety of ads, there would be something for everyone, no matter how diverse the living conditions, interests or life styles. The message was Absolut Vodka fits everyone, which means reciprocally that the vodka is all-inclusive because everyone is a potential customer.

In 1985 Andy Warhol creates a painting of his perception of the Absolut Vodka bottle, which would result in the ingenious idea to connect the increasingly fashionable brand with the art world and society, in other words the cultural elite, in order to promote it. Painters were searched out and asked to create a painting for Absolut Vodka, with no other limitation

than that the Absolut bottle had to be included somehow (i.e. as in fig. 2). In the years to come the campaign included artists from every field, i.e. fashion designers, comic writers, sculptors, furniture designers, computer designers and so forth, whose names would appear next to the word “Absolut” in the text of the ad. In most of the fashion ads the bottle itself is absent and only the type of Absolut or the word “Absolut” remains (i.e. as in fig. 4).

By and by, through its continuous run the brand and the advertisement strategy became so well known, that ads could be produced, in which the bottle was completely absent and people still would connect the ad with the brand (i.e. as in fig. 5). With exception of some of the Absolut fashion ad collections, the great majority of posters show the specific and unvarying type of Absolut either at the bottom part of the poster or somewhere else within the picture. After (now 25) years of continuous Absolut advertising, people<sup>9</sup> instantaneously connect the Absolut bottle shape and the word “Absolut” printed in the specific Absolut type with the vodka brand Absolut.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2. The word “absolut”

As mentioned above, the Swedish adjective “absolute” translates into English as “absolute”. In order to understand, why the Absolut vodka campaign has been able to be so very successful and to actually engrain itself durably into North America’s culture and consciousness, it is interesting to examine the meaning of the word “absolute”. According to the Columbia Encyclopedia

“in philosophy [...] [the word means] the opposite of *relative*. The term has acquired numerous widely variant connotations in different philosophical systems. It means unlimited, unconditioned, or free of any relation; perfect, complete, or total; permanent, inherent, or ultimate; independent, or valid without reference to a perceiving subject. In epistemology, absolute means certain or indubitable as opposed to probable or hypothetical. As a substantive, the absolute is the ultimate basis of reality, the principle underlying the universe. Theologically, it is synonymous with, or characteristic of, God.[...]”<sup>11</sup>

The viewer of an Absolut ad is encountering in the word “absolute” a superlative and an imperative that expresses unquestionable certainty. There is an emphasis on whatever declaration made by the use of this adjective. In the ads there is no invitation for discussion

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<sup>9</sup> This is especially true for the people in the United States and Canada, for whose markets the campaign was originally launched, but increasing numbers of people all around the world can identify Absolut advertisements.

<sup>10</sup> For detailed analysis of specific Absolut vodka ads please check paper part by Martin Begoll.

<sup>11</sup> See sixth edition of the Columbia Encyclopedia, Columbia University Press, 2006.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-absolute.html>.

but for acceptance. Of course, the producers of Absolut vodka are aware of this and are using the very fact to sell their brand.

Since the ads are very cleverly made, it might take the viewer a moment to understand, what is going on in an Absolut ad. (see quote chapter 2.1.) That means they have to engage with the ad and feel amused and pleased when they deciphered the message. But to decipher the ad means to understand the allusions made, based on previous experience with ads of that kind and thus renewing ones awareness regarding the product.

Adorno and Horkheimer in their works came to the conclusion that: “Vergnügtsein [...]Einverstandensein [heißt].”<sup>12</sup>, which translates into “being amused equals agreeing”. Even though, the viewer might not agree to the claim that Absolut Vodka is the best vodka brand available, the reading position of the recipient will be engaged rather than estranged.<sup>13</sup> People will thus be less likely to look critically at the content of the ads they engage with. Questions like “Is it right that an alcoholic beverage claims to be the ultimate right choice of drink in all circumstances of life?”, “Why do artists of all disciplines create advertisement for a alcohol brand?”, “Does the fact that artists create advertisements for alcohol influence the wider acceptance of drinking alcohol in society?”, “Would I like it, if I/my kids/my friends would consider every aspect of life an opportunity for drinking alcohol?” and so forth, would generally not surface in the viewers mind. This has various reasons, one being that the general accepted practice in advertising consists of promoting the good, without mentioning i.e. negative side effects<sup>14</sup> or unfavourable production circumstances. Another reason is that one does normally not dedicate a lot of time studying advertisement<sup>15</sup>. Although, we understand the messages that ads convey, we do not subject them to conscious examination during normal life conditions.

### 2.3. ABSOLUTly everywhere

While doing online research in order to find Absolut vodka related articles, I came across a vast number of pages and web links that, although not being related directly to the Absolut

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<sup>12</sup> See Horkheimer, Max/Theodor Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung, Philosophische Fragmente*, frankfurt/M., 1994, p. 153.

<sup>13</sup> Compare Janks, H. Critical Discourse Analysis as a research tool, In: *Discourse: Studies in the cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1997, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> With the exception of a few products, i.e. drugs or cigarette advertising, which, in consequence of long public debates, have been forced to mention the negative side effects of their products in their advertisements.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Dörflinger Tim, *The Power of Words and Images – A Discourse Analysis of Vodka in Advertisement*, 2006, p. 3.

Vodka campaign, used its advertisement strategy and filled it with various individual contents.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12 →

In its years of continuous running, it seems that the Absolut Vodka campaign formed something of a common standard people started to refer to. The campaign was designed to be all-inclusive and to fit every aspect of life, thus making it reciprocally possible to be accessed by everyone to use it for their own purposes. It would be rewarding to analyse each of these examples individually in order to examine the relationships the creators of these work might have with the Absolut vodka campaign. What meaning these people derive from the campaign, how they transform it and what they seek to express. However, because I am limited in space, these pictures<sup>16</sup> only shall serve to high light the fact, that the Absolut vodka advertisement strategy has thoroughly permeated the (not only but mainly) North-American culture. I will have to leave it to the reader to follow up these links individually.

Stuart Hall's notions on encoding and decoding can be used to examine the process of communication. He describes the communication process as a structure that is produced and maintained, including linked but distinctive moments. These moments are production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction. An event or a message becomes only communicable, when it is described via language or other sign systems. "Reality exists outside

<sup>16</sup> The web links referring to the pictures presented above are listed in the bibliography. Some pages I found are very interesting, but could not be presented because they are of interactive character, have the form of articles etc. some of these web links I listed in the bibliography under the headline: further.

language, but it is constantly mediated by language. What we know and say has to be produced by and through discourse.<sup>17</sup> Knowledge-in-use, production techniques, traditions, world views, values, and ideas are involved when events are transformed in discursive events, which means evaluated and described by means of language. Being evaluated they become a meaningful or carry a messages, which circulates in society, to which it is distributed by different means like, i.e. TV, newspapers, pictures etc. The recipient translates the discourse back into social practice again, while drawing on the same knowledge-in-use, values, traditions etc. that a society shares, which thus closes the circuit.

Since, words are signs, which are inherently ambiguous and in a society diverse ideologies, values and worldviews compete, the communication process is a difficult one. The meaning structures<sup>18</sup> employed to encode a meaningful discourse, might not be the same meaning structures used to decode the message. The codes of encoding and decoding might not be symmetrical. Understanding and Misunderstanding depends on the relations of equivalence between the codes of producer-encoder and receiver-decoder.

Applied to the phenomena of the Absolut Vodka campaign, which has permeated American culture, it seems as if the campaign constituted a common point of reference. People draw on its form, knowing that their message will be evaluated in reference to the Absolut Vodka ads and thus “piggy-bag” the popularity of the campaign. It is, as if a higher degree of symmetry between the codes of encoder and decoder and thus a higher degree of understanding is achieved by drawing on a familiar code as a starting point. The word “absolut” seems to play an important role within this set of signs. In some of the pictures above (i.e. fig. 7, 11, 12), the word transmits certainty and expresses the individual message with emphasis and also urgency. One group, the Adbuster Media Foundation in Vancouver, Canada used the style of the Aboslut advertisement campaign for its own purposes, which to un-cool the consumption of alcohol by the means of anti-alcohol ads and to contribute to the counter discourse regarding alcohol consumption.

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<sup>17</sup> See Hall, S., Encoding/Decoding, In: D.Graddol/o.Boyd-Barrett (Eds.), Media Texts: Authors and Readers, Clevedon, Open University Press, 1980/94, pp. 200.

<sup>18</sup> See Hall, S., 1980/94, model on page 203.

### 3. A notion regarding counter-discourse

The concept of counter-discourse has been accurately described by Noémie Causse<sup>19</sup> as a positional category in tension with another positional category, that refer to the same issue from different points of view. Which point of view is dominant and which is resistant is a matter of constant negotiation through public discourse. Counter-discourse however, is dependent on the existence of the discourse it opposes because it is the matter the counter-discourse puts itself in relation to, whereby both discourses are not fixed but evolve in time<sup>20</sup>.

In relation to the issue at hand the Absolut Vodka advertisement campaign could be seen as a discourse and a hegemonic discourse at that because it conforms to the global standards of practice, by which firms advertise their goods in order to attract customers. In order to do so they have the right, which is seldom questioned, to publish their ads via mass media (mainstream media) as i.e. television, in newspapers, through product placement, on billboards, in the Internet etc.. The product, which is to be sold, is linked with positive attributes and thus made desirable, whereas possible negative side effects or issues are not mentioned. Alcohol producing firms, including the Absolut Vodka producing firm Vin & Spirit, tend to depict the drinking of alcohol as cool. In the case of Absolut Vodka, painters, sculptors, photographers, fashion designers helped to link the brand to the cultural elite by designing ads for the vodka. These cultural elites functions as opinion leaders and thus promote the brand because people aspire to reach a social position similar to this elite's favoured social position and identify the brand as a part of that life-style.

Anti-alcohol campaigns can be regarded as a type of counter-discourse, which tries to inform people about the negative effects of drinking alcohol. Some of these campaigns are officially commissioned government sponsored actions with financial resources and media support at their disposal. Other campaigns are launched by grass-root groups, which are less supported by the official media, as in the case of the Adbuster Media Foundation.

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<sup>19</sup> See Causse, Noémie, *Absolut Counter-Discourse – A discourse Analysis of the counter discourse to Absolut vodka advertising*, 2006, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> I find the term "counter-discourse" somehow problematic. It evokes the picture of position and opposition and thus of a bipolarization including a negating and affirmative side. Discourse however is by definition open and polyphonic, including numerous positions towards an issue which are by no means either black or white. Maybe it would be more to the point to speak of an alternative-discourse rather than counter-discourse, in which the alternative-discourse of course could have an opposing point of view.

## 4. The Adbuster Media Foundation

The Adbuster Media Foundation, which was founded in 1989/1990<sup>21</sup>, is best explained by its activities and agenda, as described in the book “Culture Jam”<sup>22</sup> by the founder of the Media Foundation Kalle Lasn<sup>23</sup>. Culture jammers, are a loose global network of media activists, which consider themselves as forerunners of the most significant social movement of the next twenty years. The culture jammers feel, that there are a great many things at loss in America but also the rest of the modern western world. There is, for example, a public information void on all levels of mass media. It means that normal people can not access the media to broadcast their messages. The mass media influences people’s lives to a great extend, yet people can not participate actively by creating their own news and messages. When the media foundation intended to buy air time for the “Buy nothing day”, which encouraged people not to buy a thing for one day, as to become aware how they consume, the North-American TV network CBS answered “this commercial is in opposition to the current economic policy in the United States”. Corporations are allowed to broadcast their pro-consumption ads but ads with alternative messages are not easily permitted<sup>24</sup>. Corporation’s main aim is to sell their products and they do it via the promise of belonging. If you buy that product you belong to that cool group. “Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us to ourselves”<sup>25</sup>. In other words, ad campaigns link a product with basic human desires, like i.e. to belong, to be accepted, to be loved etc.. Mass media circulates and distributes discourses but jealously guards the access to their means of production and distribution, which means that only a minority of people has the power to decide which messages are distributed and what meaning is encoded. Noam Chomsky (1994) argues that “the political economy of the mass media prevents certain topics from being discussed for fear of invoking the wrath of proprietors, editors and advertisers.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I found different answers to the question, in which year the media foundation had been founded.

<sup>22</sup> See Lasn, Kalle, Culture Jam: How to reverse America’s suicidal consumer binge – and why we must, New York, Quill/Harper Collins, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> For biographical information on Kalle Lasn please check, <http://www.rj.ca/issue/1997/summer/248/>.

<sup>24</sup> The example given is only one of a great many incidents where the Adbuster media foundation or other grass root groups had trouble to access the public mass media. The media foundation went to court several times trying to sue the TV stations because they violate the right of free speech, which ought to include the right to make your opinion public. See <http://adbusters.org/metapsycho/mediacarta/legal/inthenews.html>.

<sup>25</sup> See Williamson (1978) as cited in Dörflinger, Tim, The Power of Words and Images – A Discourse Analysis of Vodka in Advertisement, 2006, p.3.

<sup>26</sup> See Chomsky, Noam as cited in: Atton, Chris, News Cultures and New Social Movement: radical journalism and mainstream media, In: *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Routledge, 2002, p. 494.

The Media Foundation aims at changing these power relations. The activists want to change the way information flows, alter the way institutions wield power as much as alter the way we live and think, and way we interact with mass media. The Media Foundation is a Non-profit ad agency which produce a quarterly magazine called Adbuster Magazine with an estimated circulation of 120 000 copies<sup>27</sup>. They believe in civil disobedience as practised by Ghandi or Martin Luther King Jr because they consider society as it works as being undemocratic and in need of change. They encourage readers to become actively involved by providing how-to guides for "culture jamming" in the magazine. Culture jamming can be understood as subverting the big-budget mass media that keeps a consumer culture going.

“Culture jamming,” then, is interfering with the messages produced by communication industries like advertising. “The culture-jamming technique is like a judo technique,” says Lasn, making martial-arts movements with his hands. “Instead of using your own power and meeting people head-on, you use their momentum. We’re using the momentum of the consumer society against itself.”<sup>28</sup>

By the means of culture jamming, the activists wish to raise awareness regarding the way people behave in our consumption orientated culture. The next step would be to get active and involved in the ongoing discussion as to provoke a power shift. This power shift would lead to more responsibility for each individual but also to more control regarding vital components of our society, like i.e. information delivery system, nutrition habits, transportation infrastructure, or economical practices.

#### 4.1. A notion on radical journalism

The Adbuster Media Foundation can be routed within the tradition of radical media as described in detail by Atton (2002). According to Atton<sup>29</sup>, radical media is characterized by numerous features concerning aims, self-conception, and organisation. First of all, they authorize themselves to speak. Radical media groups address topics untouched by mass media and create a platform for their own voices. They construct their own news based on alternative values and frameworks, and offer alternative interpretations of events – in other words, they recontextualize an issue. In doing that, radical journalists recognize that “news [...] [are] not a natural phenomenon emerging from facts in real life, but socially and

<sup>27</sup> See [http://adbusters.org/network/about\\_us.php](http://adbusters.org/network/about_us.php).

<sup>28</sup> See: <http://www.rj.ca/issue/1997/summer/248/>.

<sup>29</sup> See Atton, Chris, *News Cultures and New Social Movement: radical journalism and mainstream media*, In: *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Routledge, 2002, pp. 491-505.

culturally determined.”<sup>30</sup> According to Caldas-Coulthard, news is a partial, ideologically framed report of an event. By speaking or writing about an event or a social practice one is recontextualizing and transforming it. It is important to keep in mind, that recontextualizations include evaluation; hence the event itself has no meaning, it just happens. Meaning is created through recontextualization, which is its representation through language. Consequently, radical media, in establishing a counter-discourse in relation to presentations of the main stream media, challenges the prevailing hierarchy of access to media.

Radical journalism has at its heart transformation of social relations, roles and responsibilities, attempting to free themselves and others of the power of dominant institutions and practices. They reason that, informing people about alternative points of view, will make it possible analyze their own situation, which in turn leads to consciousness and the will to change things. Hence, radical movements are radically democratic in terms of access and political aims while. On an organisational level they embrace autonomy, local activism, absence of any centralized power or hierarchical organisation. They rather prefer anarchic models like i.e. affinity groups or horizontal communication.

Comparing the aims and the self-conceptualization the Adbuster Media Foundation clearly meets the criteria of radical journalism. As for the internal organisation structure of the Media Foundation, no statements can be made because I could not find any material relating to the matter. Yet, being a non-profit organization, it seems safe to assume that the organisational structure of the media foundation would fit the criteria exemplified by Atton.

## 4.2. ABSOLUT Spoof

One strategy of culture jamming is called “demarketing”, where a parody of a well-known advertisement campaign is created, which serves to un-cool the brand. Since, a hegemonic discourse – as .i.e. the-drinking-alcoholis-cool-campaigns of alcohol producers – have continuously renewed, recreated and defended because they have to react to changes in culture and society. By the same token these discourses can be challenged and modified.<sup>31</sup> One of these challenging demarketing campaigns was created around the Advertisement strategy of Absolut Vodka. Please note, that efforts to obtain information regarding the

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<sup>30</sup> See Caldas-Coulthard, Carmen Rosa, Cross-Cultural Representation of „Otherness“ in Media Discourse, In: Weiss Gilbert /Ruth Wodak (Eds.) *Critical Discourse Analysis – Theory and Interdisciplinarity*, Hampshire/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 274.

<sup>31</sup> See Atton, Chris, News Cultures and New Social Movement: radical journalism and mainstream media, In: *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Routledge, 2002, p. 493.

Absolut Spoof campaign from the Absolut Media Foundation did not yield any results. I have been receiving the reply, that the Media Foundation does not keep an overall index of past issues and that there was nobody available to assist me or to answer my questions. They suggested to try to find older versions of the Adbuster website online. All information to be presented has been gathered through various internet sources and might by no means be complete or perfectly accurate. I have been able to find some of the spoof ads or “subvertisements” as the Media Foundation calls them. However, most questions regarding the production process, distribution manner and reactions to these Absolut spoofs remained unanswered. To have answers to the following questions, which I put forward to the Media Foundation, would have been useful for the analysis. I still would like to know, when the single spoof ads were created and published; how many of these ads in total Adbuster has produced; whether, these ads had been published somewhere else than the Adbuster Magazine; had these spoofs been accompanied by articles dealing with the issue of alcohol consume and what the public response to those ads was.

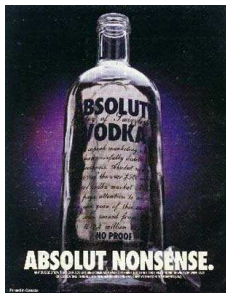


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

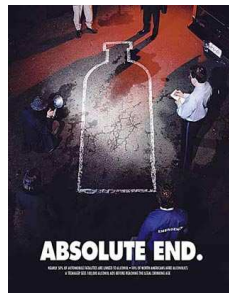


Fig. 15

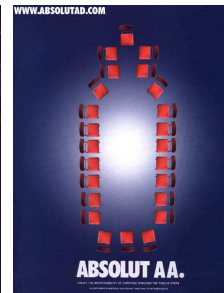


Fig. 16

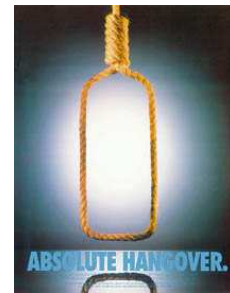


Fig. 17

The copyright status of ads is questionable because they are in the public domain, which is a fact the Adbuster Media Foundation used to create alcohol and cigarette ad spoofs<sup>32</sup>. In 1991 the Adbuster Media Foundation published the first Absolute spoof called “Absolut Nonsense” (Fig. 13), which showed the Absolut bottle and this print message beneath the main title of the ad: “Any suggestion that our advertising campaigns have contributed to alcoholism, drunk driving or wife and child beating is absolute nonsense. No one pays attention to advertising.”<sup>33</sup>. In response to the Foundation's spoof ad, Absolut Vodka threatened the Media Foundation with a lawsuit in February 1992. Absolut Vodka claimed that the ad had caused “irreparable damage” to its reputation and threatened legal action against the Foundation unless the media organization surrendered the remaining copies of the magazine, published a retraction, and agreed never again to publish similar material. Adbuster

<sup>32</sup> See [http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~faigley/work/material\\_literacy/literacy.html](http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~faigley/work/material_literacy/literacy.html).

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.rj.ca/issue/1997/summer/248/>.

refused to meet these terms, being prepared to take the matter to the court to defend their right to comment on the issue of alcohol presentation, since it is a matter of profound social concern. Furthermore, Adbuster released a press release titled “Absolut Vodka Tries to Censor Magazine.”, and challenged Absolut Vodka to a public debate about alcohol advertising and its impact on society<sup>34</sup>. Adbuster felt that there was another important underlying issue, which is the “ability of large private corporations to censor and control public debate, to stifle free expression and to dominate our mental and cultural environments with their marketing and public relations agendas”<sup>35</sup>. Absolut Vodka, however, did not go to court. A brand that needs a positive image because it sells their product through its connection with life style, can not easily effort bad publicity, which most court cases are. Adbuster kept producing Absolut spoofs the next in line being “Absolute Silence”.

### 4.3. Analysis of Spoof Ads

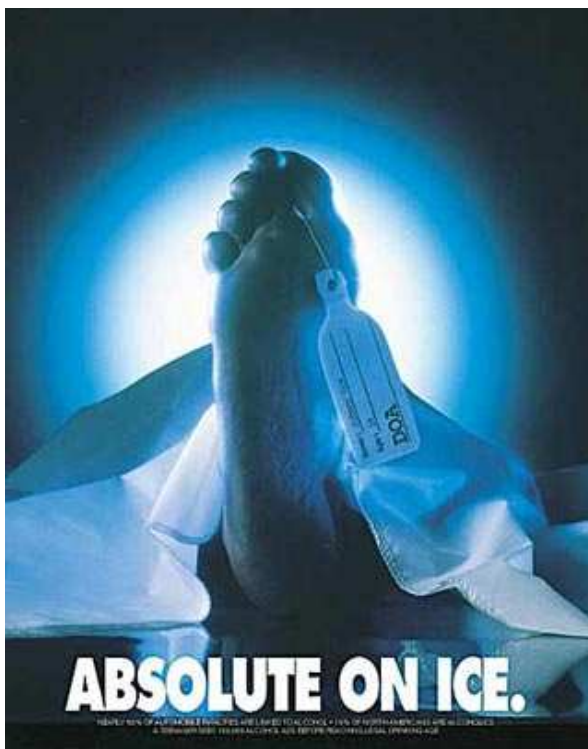


Fig. 18



Fig. 19

After having investigated the production circumstances as elaborate as under these circumstances possible, one Adbuster Absolut spoof “Absolute on ice” (see fig. 18) shall be analyzed in greater detail while using a second spoof ad “Absolut Impotence” (see fig. 19) for

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/mm10worst92.html#n8>.

<sup>35</sup> Kalle Lasn as cited in the Multinational Monitor’s Corporate Rap sheet <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/mm10worst92.html#n8>.

comparison. When looking at the ad spoofs in general it quickly becomes apparent that those spoofs would make no sense without the original Absolut Vodka ads, which illustrates the fact that counter-discourse can not exist without the discourse it counters. At first sight, the spoofs (see fig. 13 – 19) compared with the originals (see fig. 1 - 5) seem to have come from the same mould. The spoofs closely copy the layout, the print type, and the partitioning of the page. Also Absolut Vodka's unmistakable bottle shape and word pairing "absolut(e) - noun/adjective" are used in the spoofs. However, after taking a closer look differences become apparent. Content wise the spoofs carry a completely different message, which is: alcohol is bad for you rather than drink alcohol. The printing type of the spoofs, although mimicking the original type closely, is not the same as in Absolut Vodka ads. In some spoofs, the word "absolut" is used in the English diction "absolute" rather than following the spelling of the brand "absolut".

#### 4.3.1. Absolute on ice

On a textual level we are presented with a presented with a multimodal "text"<sup>36</sup> consisting of an image and words. The image shows in its centre a lying person's right foot. The big toe has an empty name tag attached and the rest of the body is covered by a white sheet. The body is lying on a mirroring surface. The foot is lightened from behind by a white-blue circular source of light. The bluish-white tint of the light in connection with the title, which includes the word "ice", reminds one of light filtering through the ice of glaciers. Above and beyond that, the picture evokes associations to dead people lying in the pathology waiting for autopsy. Pictures like that are familiar to the viewers from a great range of TV criminal series or movies, where doctors are shown who try to find indications for the cause of death by doing an autopsy. People in these scenes usually lie on tables and are covered with sheets and having name tags attached to their bodies. Furthermore, people in morgues have to be kept cool, which is also inherent in the usage of the word "ice" in the text of the ad. The predominant colours of the ad are black, blue and white.

The text of the ad is arranged at the bottom of the page. The title of the ad, which is "Absolut on ice", is written in big capitalized letters. The sentence "Nearly 50% of automobile fatalities are linked to alcohol. 10% of North Americans are alcoholics. A

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<sup>36</sup> "Text" meaning here any occurrence of human culture and society in the form of any perceivable medium from abstract idea to concrete object, which is to be subjected to analysis. Hence, attitudes in fashion, architecture, proverbs, photographs, movies, books etc. can be read as a text, meaning as an expression of a culture's way of thinking and behaving, and thus be analysed in order to find out what these manifestations can tell about society and people.

teenager sees 100,000 alcohol ads before reaching the legal drinking age.” is printed in much smaller type beneath it. The letters are printed in white on the darker background of the picture.

The valuing aspect of the ad is somehow cold, which is achieved through the used colour scheme and the word “ice”. In addition, the ad is serious, definite, sober, and clinical. Death is definite, since in most cases the dead do not come back to life. Death is also a serious matter, which has a sobering effect on most people. The clinical aspect originates from the association with hospital, morgue and autopsy. The reflecting ground on which the body is positioned reminds one of shiny medical instruments and clean hospital surfaces.

Alcohol thus is represented as potentially dangerous. Underestimating the effects of alcohol can lead to serious health damage and even death. The message is reinforced by the play on words in “Absolute on Ice”. Absolut Vodka as an alcoholic beverage can be enjoyed with ice - on the rocks but in this ad the word “absolute” refers to being irrevocably dead. Dead bodies turn cold and are also kept cold “on ice” in morgues. The producers of the ad would like the viewer to relate this ad to his own drinking behaviour. The ads have to be related to the original Absolut Vodka campaign in order to be understood by the viewer. The sentence beneath the title informs about social problems that are linked to alcohol. The ad aims at raising awareness in the viewer. It is a non-product ad, which does not try to sell a product but to get the viewer to think. As for the identification aspect of the ad, it rather has a counter-identification effect. No one would like to identify with the dead person on the picture who probably died because alcohol abuse and no one wants to end up like it either.

The spoof ads link the drinking of alcohol to negative effects like Impotence (see fig. 19) , death (see fig. 14, 15, 17) , car accidents (see fig. 15), and alcoholics anonymous (see fig. 16)<sup>37</sup> the message in opposition to the original ads intention, which is promoting alcohol usage, seems to be stay away from alcohol. The question deriving from that counter discourse is: Does it work? Do people, when encountering anti-alcohol campaigns like the one of Adbusters, feel inclined to change their drinking behaviour or to drink less alcohol as a result of having seen these ads?

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<sup>37</sup> For detailed analysis of that ad check paper part by Noémie Causse, *Absolut Counter-Discourse – A discourse Analysis of the counter discourse to Absolut vodka advertising*, 2006, pp. 10 – 12.

## 5. Social drinking vs. alcoholism

Anti-alcohol campaigns depict the negative side effects alcohol consumption, which are i.e. reduced capacity of reaction and sight, which usually plays an important role in alcohol related car accidents, to overestimate oneself, and to suffer from disturbance of



Fig. 20

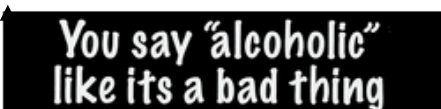


Fig. 21



Fig. 22

memory and equilibrium. In addition habitual drinking can lead to addiction to alcohol. Heavy drinking can lead to i.e. impotence, cardiac infarctions, epilepsy, and deterioration of organs.<sup>38</sup> Different countries have different guidelines of maximum amounts of alcohol that safely can be consumed by people.<sup>39</sup> Yet, health problems conditional on alcohol usage are often associated with alcoholism, which is considered to be totally different and autonomous from social drinking and hence not regarded as a problem of one's own life. People see themselves as going out and having a fun night with friends and a couple of beers. Yet there seems to remain a certain uneasiness regarding the issue.

When examining the statements and the picture above the ambivalent feeling people seem to have towards alcohol becomes apparent. The statements are a T-shirt slogan (fig. 20) and a sticker slogan (fig. 21). Obviously, something is problematic in relation to alcohol because, if it were otherwise, there would be no need to disassociate oneself from one category "alcoholic" in favour for another category "drunk". There is a sort of defiance in those statements, as if there was a necessity for people to justify their enjoyment of alcohol.

<sup>38</sup> See [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alkoholismus#Symptomatische\\_Phase](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alkoholismus#Symptomatische_Phase).

<sup>39</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholic\\_beverages\\_%E2%80%94\\_recommended\\_maximum\\_intake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholic_beverages_%E2%80%94_recommended_maximum_intake).

### 5.1. Does the counter discourse work?

Edley's concepts of ideological dilemmas, subject positions, and interpretative repertoires are useful tools to examine the circumstance at hand. I would argue that people encounter ideological dilemmas when dealing with alcohol. These dilemmas may not become apparent until a person is directly confronted with the question of how he or she relates to the consumption of alcohol. Ideological dilemmas arise if competing or contradicting "lived ideologies" meet. "Lived ideologies" are beliefs, values, and practices of a given society or culture. They are not coherent or integrated, which means they are no fixed positions. They rather are an inconsistent and fragmented parts of common sense knowledge, which is shared by society. In a society, beliefs, values and practices compete<sup>40</sup>. What is appropriate for a situation is context bound. There are different interpretive repertoires relating to the same object. In other words, contradictions arise because competing points of view recontextualize an issue in different ways.

In our case, it means that people do not normally think about the way they drink alcohol. They go out and have fun and that's it! That alcohol has negative effects is usually associated with drunkards. Alcoholics are the poor bastards that look in rubbish bins for empty bottles, which they bring to the supermarket, where they buy new booze of the refund. Alcoholics are regarded as pathetic and showed as in a pitiful way funny in all kinds of movies and TV series. The figure 22 shows a picture from the U.S. cartoon series "The Simpsons". Some members of the community are sitting in a circle of chairs, whereas in the background the 12-step programme of alcoholics anonymous is pinned at a wall. The circle of chairs and the twelve-step programme are well known features of the alcoholics anonymous organisation. The Simpsons is a cartoon series which satirically depicts North-American lifestyle. Most characters and events are highly exaggerated parodies. However, it is also a funny cartoon and people watch it to have fun, not to think of possibly underlying serious social issues. Nothing is taken seriously in the Simpsons and thus alcoholics anonymous and alcoholics are ridiculed in the cartoon.

All the same, people are aware of the negative effects of alcohol, as figures 20 and 21 implicate, they just don't connect these effects with themselves. It is somehow a question of In-group and Out-group identification<sup>41</sup>. We, that is my friends and I can control our behaviour relating alcohol but the others i.e. alcoholics can not and thus suffer from negative

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<sup>40</sup> See Edley, N., *Analysing Masculinity: interpretative Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject Positions*, In: M. Wetherell/S.Taylor/S.J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as Data*, London, Sage, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> See Van Dijk, T.A., *Opinions and ideologies in the press*. In: Bell A./P. Garrett (Eds.), *Approaches to Media Discourse*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, p. 33.

effects. Anti-Alcohol campaigns are aimed at them not at me. A series of interviews, as done by Edley on the concepts of masculinity, would yield very interesting results as how people relate to alcohol.

Edley's subject positions can be understood as similar to Fairclough's ideal subject<sup>42</sup>. According to Fairclough, media discourse has a subject position for an ideal subject build into it. Actual viewers or listeners then have to negotiate a relationship with that ideal subject. Messages delivered to us are not neutral but demand a reaction of us. To express it in Hall's words: the discourse must be transformed again into social practice. The ideal subject in Absolut Vodka advertisement is a person who acknowledges the product as being good, buys it, relates to it in positive terms in the company of others, identifies with it and keeps buying the product. The anti-alcohol campaign of Adbuster on the other hand, might envision an ideal subject that sees the ads, recognizes the danger that lies in the consumption of alcohol, modifies the own behaviour and influences others to modify their behaviour. Roland Barthes introduced the concept of "anchorage", which means that linguistic elements can serve to "anchor" (or constrain) the preferred readings of an image<sup>43</sup>. The titles and captions in the campaigns by Adbuster and Absolut thus serve to reduce the number possible ways to decode the message. Real persons however, are no ideal subjects and behave not necessarily as wished by the people who encode the message. There is a multitude of competing offers, ideas, values, meanings, and practices in society and people chose their interpretative repertoires from the variety offered and additionally create their own meanings.

Still the question remains whether Adbuster spoof ads function as a deterrent or not. One of the aims of the Adbuster Media Foundation is to un-cool brands and consumption. There ads depict the drinking of alcohol as un-cool and ask people at the same time to identify with their position. The consumer culture promotes the identities of inclusion. You are cool when you conform to a standard - high standard of course, like drinking good vodka like Absolut. People are considered cool when they wear and consume certain brands. They join a club of cool people, which constitute an In-group. No-one wants to be un-cool. Everybody strives to gain access to prestigious groups and the social privileges connected with their social status. Exactly by that token the alcohol industry sells their products. The public is constantly flooded with ads from alcohol manufacturers selling the image of life-style, success, and fun along with their products. The Absolut Vodka campaign is well known, has

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<sup>42</sup> See Fairclough, N., *Language and Power*, London, Longman, 1989, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> See Barthes, Roland as cited in: Chandler, Daniel, *semiotics for beginners*, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem09.html>.

been running for 25 years and is very popular. The Adbuster ads are modelled after their fashion, trying to deconstruct the coolness of the brand. But who wants to be uncool and not any longer belong to that prestigious group that consumes a certain brand?

Who is actually seeing these spoof ads? Of course the people who read the Adbuster Magazine. People who purchase a magazine can be seen as agreeing with its overall line of presenting issues. Thus the readers of the Adbuster magazine would tend to have an engaged reading position rather than an estranged one. They might agree with the media foundation about the fact that drinking alcohol is damaging and might as well transform the message back into social practice, which does not necessarily mean that they would change their drinking behaviour but they might discuss the alternate view with other people.

Another way of distributing the spoofs is the internet. I have found the spoofs on many sites along side the original Absolut ads. People seem to find both equally entertaining. Absolut Vodka is part of a hegemonic social discourse and practice, which encourages social drinking. In fact, going out and have fun can be used synonymous with drinking alcohol. People have fun with their friends. They constitute a group by sharing experiences and conforming to the same social practices - thus they belong. I, myself, am not much of a drinker because I do not like the taste of alcohol at all times. Since, I am not a person who never drinks, even my closest friends still hesitate and ask why not each and every time I decide to have a coke instead of something alcoholic in a bar. This example illustrates as well how much social drinking is engrained in the culture of the western world.

Lets have another look at the Adbuster spoof “Absolute on ice” As established before the Adbuster ads are mimic the look of Absolut ads very closely. If I had found the ad online on a page with other Absolut ads, without having known anything about the Adbuster media Foundation and the existence of spoof ads, I might have taken the ad for a real advertisement. Since, the attention span regarding ads is very short and the pictures one can find online sometimes very small I might have either overlooked the small caption beneath the title or not been able of reading it. Thus all I would have seen would have been the picture and the title. The strong identity and marketing concept of Absolut Vodka would be able to override the intended critical message. Thus I would have read the ad as not compromising on Absolut Vodka until the bitter end. The original marketing strategy would co-opt the spoof and thus enforce the message that Absolut Vodka should be consumed. The viewer of the ad is confronted with a person who is dead but has been strong willed and not compromising on his ideals which means drinking Absolut Vodka.

The other spoof ads are not as ambiguous. Regarding the ad “Absolut Impotence” for example, which is presented by a shrivelled Absolut bottle whose neck is tilted to one side, it was impossible for me to combine it with a positive drinking experience. Masculinity as a concept is so tightly interwoven with the attribute of virility that impotence is a taboo in our society. Equally, I could not positively link the remaining Adbuster ads with Absolut Vodka’s cool life style. Nevertheless, these spoofs too, are co-opted by the Absolut marketing strategy because people find them funny and cool and ultimately link them to the Absolut Vodka campaign they mimic. The reading position of the viewers again is an engaged one, engaged with the Absolut Vodka marketing campaign. At this point it would be easy to conclude that thus the Adbuster spoof ads do not work. That they hardly will get anyone to modify their drinking behaviour but that is only one level of these ads.

## 6. Conclusion

The Adbuster Media Foundation is a radical media group, which has to be taken into account when evaluating these ads. Lets repeat what has been already stated above: Radical journalism has at its heart transformation of social relations, roles and responsibilities, attempting to free themselves and others of the power of dominant institutions and practices. They reason that, informing people about alternative points of view, will make it possible analyze their own situation, which in turn leads to consciousness and the will to change things. Thus the Adbuster spoofs are not most and foremost a request to quit drinking and modify ones drinking behaviour. In connection with the very powerful marketing strategy of Absolut Vodka, which has been consciously chosen for that purpose, it rather is a request to think about the way big private corporations control cultural environments with their marketing strategies. It is a demand to think who is producing meaning and lifestyles and whose interests are served by selling these lifestyles and which power structures are enforced by that. Adbuster thus wishes these ads to raise awareness and people to develop a consciousness regarding their own situation in a consumer society. To become aware would be the first step to become more questioning, which in turn could lead to social changes as in the case of the tobacco industry. After some decades of fighting, the tobacco industry was forced to include the negative side effects of smoking cigarettes in their ads and by now smoking has been banned in public places in several countries like i.e. Italy or Ireland.

In that sense, the spoofs of the Media Foundation might be effective. Texts in discourse never stand alone. They rather are types of a genre defined by their function and by

conventionalized boundaries. The specific genre provides a person with the context within which a text has to be evaluated. Each text has attributes it shares with other examples of its genre. Advertisement is such a genre. Having seen many examples of Absolut ads a person knows how to contextualize a new example of advertisement. Maybe a lot of campaigns do not work because they work in ways people are having habitual attitudes towards. They expect of news to inform, of ads to sell products, of insurance companies to warn of hazards and so forth. The Adbuster spoof blur the boundaries of the different genres. This is best expressed when using the term “subvertisements” rather than “spoofs”. To disrupt the habitual way of seeing things, leads to new perspectives. The non-product ads of Adbuster are ads in appearance and content but not in function. They use a well known marketing strategy but they try not to sell a product, which is why they disrupt the habitual flow of perception. These ads alienate us from the perspective that we have come to understand as natural and open the eye for alternatives. They do not only carry the surface message of an anti-alcohol campaign but try to modify the way social reality is perceived. Chandler cites further word creations, which exemplify that we live in a mediated reality whose rules we impose ourselves. Those word constructs, which are defined individually by function, form and content, reveal when merged a completely different perspective on social practices and afore hidden power structures which lead us to question the existing order of things. Some of these words are: “advertorials”, “infomercials”, “edutainment”, “docudrama”, and “faction” (a blend of “fact” and “fiction”)<sup>44</sup>.

In this paper I have investigated, whether the counter-discourse established by the Adbuster Media Foundation in relation to the Absolut vodka campaign works. Both companies have been introduced and their agendas and working styles described. Furthermore examples of Adbuster ads and Absolut ads have been described, compared and analysed, before I turned to the question how people might relate to both campaigns. While accepting the boundaries of each genre and its function I came to the conclusion that the counter-discourse established by Adbuster does not work but reinforces the original power structure. As soon as I re-examined the aims of the Adbuster Media Foundation I found that the counter-discourse they establish works after all because it shifts perception and thus produces a consciousness in the viewer. One could say that where “spoofs” did not work “subvertisements” might work. Kalle Lasn held this year's opening speech at the trade fair for

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<sup>44</sup> See Chandler, Daniel, semiotics for beginners, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem09.html>

communication design TYPO in Berlin, Germany on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2006.<sup>45</sup> I suppose, that can be interpreted as a sign that more and more people become aware of his or the media Foundation's critical perspective of the social world, which might eventually lead to a broader shift of perception in society.

## An afterthought

The issue of alcohol consumption here presented, was dealt with from two quite polarized points of view. Discourse however, is polyphonic and apart from the advertisement discourse and here discussed, there are still a great many other discourses regarding alcohol. The understanding of drinking of alcohol as a socially accepted outlet for negative feelings and tension for example is another discourse all together. The dichotomy do this – don't do this does not directly apply in this discourse. People have to behave civil most of the time with self-constraint, self-control, politeness being key words by which the social cooperation works. Drinking alcohol then removes barriers which allow a person to express attitudes, feelings and thoughts otherwise suppressed, which in turn might help that a person functions normally in society further on. Society in general accepts drunkenness as an outlet. Drunks are not taken seriously. The attitude towards them is rather: let them rant and then send them home to sleep. Some proverbs express that connection, like i.e. "what soberness conceals, drunkenness reveals" or "A drunken man's words are a sober man's thoughts".

### NOTES:

1. - Please note that the web links referred to in this article, are in the following, structured in theme clusters, rather than listed in order of their appearance in the text, as to provide a better understanding and to simplify follow up research.
2. – Please note also that the web pages referred to in this paper concern their content during the period of time from June 2006 until September 2006. Since the Internet is a fast changing medium, it is possible that the content of some pages used as reference will change in future.

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<sup>45</sup> See <http://openpr.de/news/78730/Design-Anarchist-Kalle-Lasn-eroeffnet-TYPO-Berlin-2006-Bonus-Session-mit-David-Carson.html>.

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**Internet Links:**

## Absolut Vodka:

1. <http://absolut.com/>
2. <http://www.absolutgallery.com/> → Figures 1 - 5
3. <http://absolut.pinknet.cz/gallery/view.php?news=7&lang=en>
4. <http://www.absolutcollectors.com/gallery/ad.cgi?b=category&c=Standard%20Ads&a=aromatherapy>
5. <http://www.absolutcollectors.com/gallery/ad.cgi?b=category&c=Standard%20Ads&a=awol>
6. <http://www.absolutcollectors.com/gallery/ad.cgi?b=collection&c=1991%20Womens%20Fashion%20Collection&a=piccone>
7. <http://www.absolutcollectors.com/gallery/ad.cgi?b=category&c=Miscellaneous&a=breeze>
8. <http://www.absolutcollectors.com/gallery/ad.cgi?b=category&c=Artists&a=britto>

## ABSOLUTly everywhere:

9. [http://dart.fine-art.com/aqd-asp-i\\_55250-buy-artlistinginfo.htm](http://dart.fine-art.com/aqd-asp-i_55250-buy-artlistinginfo.htm) → Figure: 6
10. <http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.graffiti.org/index/off-frontflyer.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.graffiti.org/index/history2000.html&h=311&w=520&sz=35&tbnid=tx8iUvQXDI9sBM:&tbnh=76&tbnw=128&hl=de&start=92&prev=/images%3Fq%3DArt,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D80%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN> → Figure: 11
11. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://circusfiretragedy.com/FanArt/absolutOC.jpg&imgrefurl=http://boards.theforce.net/fan\\_fiction\\_resource/b10304/21265079/p76/&h=574&w=383&sz=62&tbnid=A2fd01qWpHMjUM:&tbnh=132&tbnw=88&hl=de&start=41&prev=/images%3Fq%3DArt,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D40%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://circusfiretragedy.com/FanArt/absolutOC.jpg&imgrefurl=http://boards.theforce.net/fan_fiction_resource/b10304/21265079/p76/&h=574&w=383&sz=62&tbnid=A2fd01qWpHMjUM:&tbnh=132&tbnw=88&hl=de&start=41&prev=/images%3Fq%3DArt,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D40%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN) → Figure: 7
12. <http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.pixelpixie.net/vega/vegaimages/absolut.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.pixelpixie.net/vega/absolut.htm&h=250&w=399&sz=23&tbnid=-6Es62epb4ncaM:&tbnh=75&tbnw=120&hl=de&start=20&prev=/images%3Fq%3DArt,%2BAbsolut%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG> → Figure: 10
13. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://i1.trekearth.com/photos/14737/absolut\\_stencil.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Oceania/Australia/East/photo241608.htm&h=600&w=402&sz=181&tbnid=vG-8BQI\\_4lnoTM:&tbnh=133&tbnw=89&hl=de&start=32&prev=/images%3Fq%3DArt,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://i1.trekearth.com/photos/14737/absolut_stencil.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Oceania/Australia/East/photo241608.htm&h=600&w=402&sz=181&tbnid=vG-8BQI_4lnoTM:&tbnh=133&tbnw=89&hl=de&start=32&prev=/images%3Fq%3DArt,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN) → Figure: 12
14. <http://www.ericblumrich.com/jpg/a2.jpg> → Figure: 7
15. [http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/xconnect/v2/i2/Art/hr\\_absolut.html](http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/xconnect/v2/i2/Art/hr_absolut.html) → Figure: 9

## Adbuster Media Foundation:

16. <http://openpr.de/news/78730/Design-Anarchist-Kalle-Lasn-eroeffnet-TYPO-Berlin-2006-Bonus-Session-mit-David-Carson.html>
17. <http://adbusters.org/metapsycho/mediacarta/legal/inthenews.html>
18. <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/alcohol/> → Figures 15 - 19
19. [http://www.adbusters.org/network/about\\_us.php](http://www.adbusters.org/network/about_us.php)
20. <http://www.rrj.ca/issue/1997/summer/248/>

21. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://members.chello.at/udo.walder/TN\\_absolut%2520silence.JPG&imgrefurl=http://members.chello.at/udo.walder/link14.html&h=96&w=75&sz=2&hl=de&start=19&tbnid=hxIIIIMewQRhKBM:&tbnh=76&tbnw=59&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dabsolut%2Bsilence%26start%3D18%26ndsp%3D18%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://members.chello.at/udo.walder/TN_absolut%2520silence.JPG&imgrefurl=http://members.chello.at/udo.walder/link14.html&h=96&w=75&sz=2&hl=de&start=19&tbnid=hxIIIIMewQRhKBM:&tbnh=76&tbnw=59&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dabsolut%2Bsilence%26start%3D18%26ndsp%3D18%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN) → Figure 14
22. <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/mm10worst92.html#n8>
23. [http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~faigley/work/material\\_literacy/literacy.html](http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~faigley/work/material_literacy/literacy.html)
24. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.mousemultimedia.com/ricardo/absolut/TN\\_nonsense.JPG&imgrefurl=http://www.mousemultimedia.com/ricardo/absolut/page\\_02.htm&h=96&w=74&sz=3&hl=de&start=7&tbnid=4bNqGrTDGGwkBM:&tbnh=81&tbnw=62&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dabsolut%2Bnonsense%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.mousemultimedia.com/ricardo/absolut/TN_nonsense.JPG&imgrefurl=http://www.mousemultimedia.com/ricardo/absolut/page_02.htm&h=96&w=74&sz=3&hl=de&start=7&tbnid=4bNqGrTDGGwkBM:&tbnh=81&tbnw=62&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dabsolut%2Bnonsense%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG) → Figure 13

miscellaneous:

25. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-absolute.html> → Oxford Encyclopedia
26. Chandler, Daniel, Semiotics for beginners, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem09.html>

alcoholism / anti-alcohol campaigns:

27. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://uloc.nerdtank.org/screenshots/e/eabf06\\_25\\_anonyme\\_alkoholiker.jpg&imgrefurl=http://uloc.nerdtank.org/cgi-bin/wiki.pl%3FScreenshots/Eabf06\\_25\\_Anonyme\\_Alkoholiker&h=240&w=352&sz=29&hl=de&start=24&tbnid=\\_N8PEta0OewftM:&tbnh=79&tbnw=116&prev=/images%3Fq%3Danonyme%2BAlkoholiker%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://uloc.nerdtank.org/screenshots/e/eabf06_25_anonyme_alkoholiker.jpg&imgrefurl=http://uloc.nerdtank.org/cgi-bin/wiki.pl%3FScreenshots/Eabf06_25_Anonyme_Alkoholiker&h=240&w=352&sz=29&hl=de&start=24&tbnid=_N8PEta0OewftM:&tbnh=79&tbnw=116&prev=/images%3Fq%3Danonyme%2BAlkoholiker%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG) → Figure 22
28. <http://www.bist-du-staerker-als-alkohol.de/>
29. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.t-chest.co.uk/2005/images/alcoholic.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.t-chest.co.uk/2005/index.php%3Fmain\\_page%3Dindex%26cPath%3D4&h=249&w=250&sz=19&hl=de&start=10&tbnid=gYDcxnQBGHUyMM:&tbnh=105&tbnw=106&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dalcoholic%2Bkids%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.t-chest.co.uk/2005/images/alcoholic.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.t-chest.co.uk/2005/index.php%3Fmain_page%3Dindex%26cPath%3D4&h=249&w=250&sz=19&hl=de&start=10&tbnid=gYDcxnQBGHUyMM:&tbnh=105&tbnw=106&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dalcoholic%2Bkids%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG) → Figure 20
30. <http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.stickergiant.com/Merchant2/imgs/250/fcc21.gif&imgrefurl=http://discount-sticker-online.ishopengine.com/&h=250&w=300&sz=7&hl=de&start=26&tbnid=rrvsv3WbcRpFhM:&tbnh=92&tbnw=111&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dalcoholic%2Bkids%26start%3D24%26ndsp%3D24%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN> → Figure 21
31. [http://www.kmdd.de/xist4c/web/Keine-Macht-den-Drogen\\_id\\_41\\_.htm](http://www.kmdd.de/xist4c/web/Keine-Macht-den-Drogen_id_41_.htm)
32. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.magda.de/gif/kmdd1.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.magda.de/keine\\_ma.html&h=267&w=200&sz=47&hl=de&start=5&tbnid=sTyeQsEQjtxjsM:&tbnh=108&tbnw=80&prev=/images%3Fq%3DKeine%2BMacht%2Bden%2BDrogen%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.magda.de/gif/kmdd1.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.magda.de/keine_ma.html&h=267&w=200&sz=47&hl=de&start=5&tbnid=sTyeQsEQjtxjsM:&tbnh=108&tbnw=80&prev=/images%3Fq%3DKeine%2BMacht%2Bden%2BDrogen%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG)
33. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholics\\_Anonymous](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholics_Anonymous)
34. [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alkoholismus#Symptomatische\\_Phase](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alkoholismus#Symptomatische_Phase)
35. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholism#Stereotypes>

36. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholic\\_beverages\\_%E2%80%94\\_recommended\\_maximum\\_intake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholic_beverages_%E2%80%94_recommended_maximum_intake)

**Further links:**

37. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.theculture.net/2003-works/images/absolut-stencil.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.theculture.net/2003-works/pages/absolut-hypocrisy.htm&h=430&w=573&sz=28&tbnid=Z\\_7aMeJLKkR2wM:&tbnh=98&tbnw=131&hl=de&start=6&prev=/images%3Fq%3DVodka,%2Bart,%2BAbsolut%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.theculture.net/2003-works/images/absolut-stencil.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.theculture.net/2003-works/pages/absolut-hypocrisy.htm&h=430&w=573&sz=28&tbnid=Z_7aMeJLKkR2wM:&tbnh=98&tbnw=131&hl=de&start=6&prev=/images%3Fq%3DVodka,%2Bart,%2BAbsolut%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG) → film / artwork Absolut hypocrisy
38. <http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.mazemaster.com/MazeMaster/img/artwork/mm-absposter04.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.mazemaster.com/MazeMaster/artwork/commercial.html&h=170&w=160&sz=4&tbnid=tosDhDUWahHpCM:&tbnh=94&tbnw=88&hl=de&start=8&prev=/images%3Fq%3DVodka,%2Bart,%2BAbsolut%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG> → Absolut vodka maze / game
39. [http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.santarosa.edu/art/art18/absolut-web/images/obsession.jpg&imgrefurl=http://alphonsevanworden.blogspot.com/2005\\_01\\_01\\_alphonsevanworden\\_archive.html&h=450&w=338&sz=32&tbnid=o\\_GAShF\\_ibS4cM:&tbnh=124&tbnw=93&hl=de&start=29&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dart,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http://www.santarosa.edu/art/art18/absolut-web/images/obsession.jpg&imgrefurl=http://alphonsevanworden.blogspot.com/2005_01_01_alphonsevanworden_archive.html&h=450&w=338&sz=32&tbnid=o_GAShF_ibS4cM:&tbnh=124&tbnw=93&hl=de&start=29&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dart,%2BAbsolut%26start%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Dde%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN) → absolute Auschwitz / article

## Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled:

Discourse and Counter-Discourse

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About the Negotiation of Meaning or ABSOLUTe arbitrary access

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is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given in the bibliography.

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Date 30.09.2006, Berlin

Signature: Katrin Umlauft

### Abstract:

Diese Arbeit ist Teil einer Gemeinschaftsarbeit, im Bereich Medien Analyse, die mit Hilfe von Theorien und Modelle der kritischen Diskurs-Analyse, die Werbestrategien der Firmen Absolut Vodka und Skyy Vodka untersucht. Das Ziel war es herauszufiltern auf was den Konsum dieser Produkte für Kunden attraktiv macht. Daher wurden eine Reihe von Werbebeispielen studiert, um festzustellen in welcher Weise, in der Gesellschaft positiv belegte Konzepte, wie z.B. „Coolness“ oder „Spaß“ mit den Produkten verbunden werden. Auf einer zweiten Analyseebene wird der vor Alkohol warnende Gegendiskurs untersucht.

Dieses Paper untersucht ob der Gegendiskurs in der Art, wie die Adbuster Media Foundation ihn konstruiert, funktioniert. Die Antialkoholplakate der Adbuster Media Foundation benutzen den Werbestil von Absolut Vodka aber warnen inhaltlich vor den gefährlichen Nebenwirkungen von Alkohol. Hauptsächlich wurden Faircloughs Drei-Stufen-Modell für die kritische Diskursanalyse, Edleys Konzept von ideologischen Dilemma und Subjekt Positionen, sowie Stuart Halls Theorie zum Enkodieren und Dekodieren von Botschaften benutzt, um das Verhältnis des Empfängers der (Anti-)Werbepotschaft zu den vermittelten Inhalten der Botschaften zu untersuchen. Das Trinken von Alkohol ist eine gesellschaftlich anerkannte soziale Aktivität, die mit Geselligkeit und Entspannung verbunden wird. Zusätzlich verbinden die Produzenten des Alkohols durch gezielte Werbung individuell noch weitere Konzepte, wie „Coolness“, „Lifestyle“, „Erfolg“ usw. mit ihren Produkten. Die Werbepotschaft lockt den Kunden auf diese Weise mit für ihn attraktiven Inhalten. Jede Person möchte prestigereichen gesellschaftlichen Gruppen angehören und die Alkoholwerbung verspricht mittels des Konsums ihres Produktes Einlass in diese Gruppen.

Demgegenüber versucht die Adbuster Media Foundation den Genuss von Alkohol von Konzepten wie „Coolness“ zu trennen. Ihr Ziel ist es nicht nur vor Gefahren des Alkoholkonsums zu warnen, sondern ein Bewusstsein für den gesellschaftlichen Umgang mit Alkohol und insbesondere für die Funktion von Werbepotschaften zu wecken. Dabei hinterfragen sie existierende Machtstrukturen und versuchen darauf aufmerksam zu machen, dass der Genuss von Alkohol an sich nichts mit „Lifestyle“ zu tun hat, sondern dass diese Konzepte sozial konstruiert sind, um bestimmte Verhaltensweisen in Menschen zu provozieren, die den Interessen von Alkoholproduzenten dienlich ist. Dieser Umstand ist eng mit einem Machtungleichgewicht zwischen Firmen, Sponsoren und Werbeträgern, also Institutionen und „einfachen“ Leuten verbunden. Institutionen, wie Alkoholfirmen haben

jederzeit zugriff auf die Medien, in denen sie ihre Werbebotschaften platzieren können, während einzelne Personen aber mitunter auch Verbände so gut wie keine Chance haben sich der Massenmedien zu bedienen, wenn sie eine (konsum-)kritische Botschaft senden wollen.

Dem Gegendiskurs der Adbuster Media Foundation mittels der Absolut Vodka Spoofs gelingt es nicht den Konsum von Alkohol als uncool zu etablieren, vielmehr unterstützen die Spoofs die Werbestrategie von Absolut Vodka noch. Die Spoofs unterscheiden sich zwar inhaltlich von den Werbeplakaten, bedienen sich aber der äußeren Form der Selben, so dass die Beliebtheit der Absolut Werbung auf die Spoofs abfährt und kein Abschreckungseffekt eintritt.

Auf einem anderen Level allerdings, überschreitet Adbuster etablierte aber ungeschriebene Grenzen von Genres, da es sich des Formats der Werbung bedient aber die Funktion von Werbung, nämlich den Verkauf von Produkten unterlässt. Wir alle sind an bestimmte Abläufe und Erscheinungen gewöhnt. Werbung ist dazu da etwas zu verkaufen. Nachrichten sollen mich informieren und die Vorabend Comedy Sendung soll mich unterhalten. Wenn solche Erwartungen an Genres nicht erfüllt werden, dann muss man sich zu dem abweichenden Vorkommnis neu positionieren und es vor seinem Erfahrungshintergrund neu evaluieren. Die Adbuster Spoof Ads funktionieren auf dieser Ebene, da sie das habitualisierte Verhalten durchbrechen. Hier kann man die Spoofs und damit auch die Werbung, zu der sie in Beziehung stehen, hinterfragen, wodurch sich ein Bewusstsein für die involvierten Abläufe bilden kann. Sobald man sich eines Umstandes oder Verhaltens erst einmal bewusst geworden ist, kann man seine eigene Position nach eigenen Maßstäben modifizieren. Aus einem habitualisierten unbewussten Verhalten wird dadurch ein bewusst entschiedenes und gesteuertes Verhalten, was bedeutet, dass das Individuum die Macht erhält sich bewusst z entscheiden. Auf diese Weise funktioniert der Gegendiskurs, wie ihn die Adbuster Media Foundation etabliert doch.