Handbook of Brand Semiotics

George Rossolatos (ed.)

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edited by
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

George Rossolatos

1.1 Memoirs of a long overdue project

This Handbook has been a wonderful journey all along; a journey into the vast self-looping fields of tautology. How else could someone speak of Brand Semiotics without at the same time being cognizant that at least one of these two words could be dropped without changing the intended meaning? Let me restart and rephrase: This is a Handbook of Signs' Signs. But is this repetition a typo? Or does it reveal an underlying difference within the self-sameness of the '*tauto*-' that precedes and conditions 'logos' in a *tauto*-logy? Is the repetition of the word Sign an unadulterated recurrence of 'its' first incidence? Peirce would assure us that this is far from the matter of *fact*. Or, that the fact as foregone incidence is always different from 'its' initial condition that spurred the second as re-marking of a presumed first. Resuming: This is a Handbook about *firsts* and *seconds*, about brands as signs as marks and re-marks in a Cultural (dis)Order where the Same may only be affirmed through infinite refractions. Brands are mirrors whereby selves are impossibly recuperated as seconds or refractions of the echoing first. And maybe a bit more…

      The American Marketing Association assures us that a brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". Surely there is nothing flawed about this definition. It is just that it is too functional for semiotics and far *two* removed from the actual role performed by brands in cultural economies that are regulated by a Stock Market of signifiers, signifieds, symbols, icons, expressive units, elements of the plane

of content. Insisting that this definition includes the word 'sign', and hence is an attestation of the very semiotic foundation of branding would be a far *two* easy and simplistic comment in the face of how brands have been and may be conceptualized through clear and distinct semiotic perspectives, and, concomitantly, how they may be managed. This Handbook, then, is not a "reference point" for scholars interested in brand semiotic research (who may be said, *otherwise*, to constitute our primary target group), but a symbolic gesture for research to come, while retracing brands as repetitions of firsts that are bound to be absent from any second, third and so on Volume may be produced in an attempt to encapsulate them.

We, that is the contributing authors of this Volume, would like to think of this endeavor as a set of memoirs of a long overdue project, a project that has not been finalized precisely because it never kicked off as it should have: which explains, pretty much, why this Volume is not a reference point, but a retracing of foundations that have been laid long ago, yet which have not been recorded as such, and, hence, remain un-re-cognizable by a scholarly community. Our task, then, is to re-port on these foundations, that is on the semiotic foundations of branding research as re-marks of what has already been laid, yet not re-ported as such, with a view to forcing the *seconds* and *thirds*, that are bound to follow, to return to the suppressed re-marks *on* unreported foundations that make up this Volume.

1.2 The scope and aims of this Handbook by way of debunking 4 popular myths about brand semiotics

Against the background of these "pre-cursory re-marks", then, it may be worthwhile to resume this Introduction by dispelling some popular myths about brand semiotics, thus positioning the Chapters that make up this Volume on a firmer ground with regard to their intended contributions.

Myth no.1: What can semiotics teach us about how brands work in an era of highly technologically advanced perspectives such as neuro-marketing?

Debunking myth no.1: First and foremost, questions in academic research are hardly ever framed in such generic terms. Second, I can hardly recall of any discipline (or, more aptly, perspective from a discipline) among the plethora that have made inroads to branding research (from cultural anthropology to symbolic interactionism) that has been burdened with the onerous task of providing answers in the face of ever more fanciful comparisons between as distant disciplines/perspectives as neuro-marketing and brand semiotics. Notwithstanding that the 'neuro' prefix has been attached to semiotics (inasmuch as anywhere), and without having the least intention in this Introduction to explore the robustness of such amorous attachments, suffice it to point out that the real problem in such comparisons is not the perspective with which semiotics has been 'chosen' to compare, but the treatment of semiotics as a uniform discipline, rather than a multivocal landscape with as many variegated and clearly differentiated perspectives as sociology, anthropology, politics, etc. The uncritical devaluation of semiotics lies precisely in its treatment as an over-loaded mass noun: that semiotics, and by extension brand semiotics, is one amorphous mass of concepts that merits being referred to as such. This is the myth that merits debunking behind the manifest expression as above formulated, and, subsequently, a key objective of this Handbook: to restore the conceptual richness of semiotic perspectives that have been proliferating since the beginning of the last century in the 'intentional horizons' of branding researchers, while justifying why such distinctive conceptual apparatuses are still relevant for various streams within the broader field of branding research.

Myth no.2: Semiotically informed research about brands may be undertaken regardless of relevant advances in the marketing discipline.

Debunking myth no.2: It should become very clear that claiming to be conducting branding related research regardless of advances in the marketing discipline (where this research field was born and has been steadily flourishing over more than 100 years) is like claiming to be conducting bio-semiotic research without knowledge of biology. This myth may be attributed to linguistically oriented research output against the background of interpretive excursions in advertising language that, for some reason, has been identified, overwhelmingly so, with branding. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that advertising is the most manifest interface between a brand and its audience, and, on the other hand, to a lack of literacy on behalf of researchers who have been propagating this unsubstantiated myth about the more or less clearly segregated research fields of advertising and branding in the marketing discipline. This does not imply that such silos pay heed to the actual relationship between branding and advertising, but that conflating these two research fields without having undergone a process of explicitly challenging why they should be viewed as being inter-dependent (which, occasionally, tends to be forgotten in published research), is an attestation of ignorance, rather than of correctly informed positioning of a research piece. In broad terms, when someone is laying claim to be conducting branding research within the marketing discipline, he is probably referring to areas such as brand image measurement, brand/corporate/employee equity, brand architecture, brand extensions, brand portfolio management, corporate branding, and a whole host of adjacent fields that may be gleaned by looking attentively into the pre-coded research categories in journals, such as the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. In contrast (where, more pertinently, we should be talking about complementarity), when someone is laying claim to be conducting advertising research from within the marketing discipline, he is probably referring to fields such as moderating factors that may influence advertising effectiveness, different

sorts of appeals of ad messages, differences among variably defined target-groups in responses to ad stimuli, experimental designs aiming at demonstrating the relative impact of creative/executional elements on salient response criteria (e.g., likeability, intention-to-buy, recommend, etc.), and many more that would require a book in their own right to detail. Does this imply that the branding related research fields are, in principle and in essence, cut off from advertising research fields? Not at all, and it would be absurd to make such a claim, both in theory and, even more so, in practice. The point of convergence between these two streams, anyway, is most notable in the by now recognized research field of Integrated Marketing Communications (Schultz et al. 1992; Schultz and Schultz 2004; Kitchen and De Pelsmacker 2005; Pickton and Broderick 2005; Kitchen and Schultz 2009).   What is alarming, though, and, moreover, a key reason for perhaps considering semiotic perspectives as being 'antiquated' in the light of advances in as diverse and micro-segmented research fields as those indicatively referred to in the above, is the pretension of semiotic accounts to be offering nuanced accounts of branding-cum-advertising phenomena, where, in fact, they merely offer (far *two*) macroscopic accounts of very specific research areas that are constantly scrutinized from considerably microscopic perspectives within the marketing discipline. And this pretension is the outcome of ignorance which works to the detriment of brand semiotic research. This is a very sensitive point that can only be addressed superficially in this Introduction. At least, it should be rendered clear that if someone wishes to conduct robust brand semiotic research, then the active engagement with the extant marketing literature is inevitable. We have tried to incorporate this dual view on brand semiotics as extensively as possible in this Handbook, that is by engaging dialogically with the marketing literature, although, admittedly, there is still ample scope for semiotic concepts to gain a foothold in discrete branding (and consumer research) fields.   Again, a key objective

behind the collective endeavor at hand has been to provide extensive input to interested scholars about the state-of-the-art in specific brand semiotic fields, however premised on the more foundational objective of consolidating what has been thus far a considerably fragmented stream. Surely such a consolidation may not be accomplished in a single Volume, but requires ongoing effort and persistence by committed scholars who are eager to carve new research horizons, rather than ruminate/recycle basic concepts. It is precisely in such a forward-thinking and moving milieu that this Handbook is situated.

Myth no.3: Brand semiotics has been terminally squeezed ever since Floch's applications of Greimasian structuralism. Beyond a string of basic and substitutable (from other disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication theory, cultural studies) concepts bestowed to the marketing discipline from key structuralist thinkers and Peirce, there is not much left to contribute to branding research.

Debunking myth no.3: Resuming the "pre-cursory re-marks" and, thus, hopefully justifying what may have come across to some readers as a self-complacent and deconstructively inclined involutionary path to the silent and genealogically suppressed underpinnings of the meaning of 'brand', the fact that advances in specific semiotic schools have not been reflected in branding research simply points to the absence of re-cognition (on behalf of a scholarly community), and not to the subject matter that screams for re-cognition. It is not so much a case of not being blatantly obvious that a handful of gatekeepers have been, perhaps not intentionally, slowing down the rate whereby semiotic research might have been applicably reflected in a timely fashion in marketing research, as why marketing journals have been unwilling to catch up with such advances. This is far from a simple topic and by no means one that may be even scratched in this Introduction. Nevertheless, a topic that must be expressly stated as thoroughly as possible as it points causally not to inertia or unwillingness on behalf of researchers who may have flirted

with brand semiotics, only to abandon the ship in the face of closed doors from major journals and blatantly biased and uninformed feedback, but to 'social forces' that have silently impeded such advances from being adequately reflected in marketing research. It is at least unacceptable that despite proclamations on behalf of marketing journal editors about openness to inter-disciplinary research, the majority of papers that have been appearing, even as scarcely as is the case, in marketing journals, are informed by second-hand adaptations of introductory semiotic concepts, while, in instances where innovative thinking has been evidently promoted in inter-disciplinary research between marketing and semiotics, editors' feedback has tended to discredit such endeavors by recourse to empty signifiers such as 'jargon' or 'too technical for marketing researchers and not very relevant'. The 'jargon' *jargon* may be effortlessly rebutted by posing the following question to the concerned 'citizen': Could you fly an airplane by calling the engine Popeye and the cockpit billiard table (provided, of course, that such idiosyncratic antonomasias are in fact idiosyncratic and not shared by a social group)? In the most likely scenario that the 'citizen' will not affirm this probability, then it is equally evident that by refraining from renaming a biplanar approach to signification as strawberry fields forever one is merely safeguarding the integrity of an evoked perspective, rather than seeking to tell a bedtime story. Not only is this an utterly un-scientific attitude, but demonstrable of a state-of-affairs where a positivistic 'wall of research' has become an omni-devouring Leviathan that seeks to devalue the advances that are constantly being achieved in various semiotic perspectives by confining the acceptable scope of brand semiotic research to compulsory repetition. In short, it is not that semiotic schools have not been advancing, and that such advances are not relevant to branding research, but that such advances have been cunningly left un-re-cognized. This is another crucial area where this Handbook seeks to contribute, that is to re-ignite interest among scholars by

drawing on standard concepts and applications in brand semiotics (for the sake of consolidation and historical continuity), however balanced against advances that have been taking place over the past thirty years, either as regards new semiotic schools of thinking, or new perspectives and concepts in existing semiotic schools of thinking, that have passed under the radar of the marketing discipline. This frail balance, as we progressively came to realize while composing this Volume, might be aggravated by shifting attention partially towards latest advances, while leaving groundwork terms relatively unaddressed. Again, the decision as to what level constitutes "groundwork" is highly dependent on each researcher's familiarity of and expertise in both discrete semiotic perspectives and branding ones (from a marketing point of view). Some readers may be aggravated because they would expect basic terms, such as 'sign' or 'commutation test', to be defined (anew), while others may experience grievances precisely because they would expect such terms to be common places among the readership. This is even further compounded by the fact that we are appealing to an inter-disciplinary audience, that is both to semioticians and to marketing researchers. Far from laying claim to having discovered this much craved golden mean (which may also be read as a flawed and not-that-golden positioning strategy of 'being stuck in the middle'), we made a conscious decision to, at least, refrain from re-stating very basic terms, in line with our fundamental belief, as per the above, that such ruminations should be avoided at all costs. Hence, the reader should not expect to find extensive expositions of basic terms and concepts, such as what is a sign, or what is denotation/connotation, for which there are ample introductory references.

In a similar fashion, significant semiotic advances and brand semiotic research that have been produced locally (where by 'localization' I am referring to research produced within specific state boundaries), in non (natively) English-speaking contexts, has largely passed unnoticed from the top 50 marketing

journals. We strongly believe that bringing such advances to the limelight of attention will at least stimulate interested researchers to delve further into the massive conceptual armory that has been produced by distinctive semiotic schools of thinking over the past thirty years and which awaits its due fair-share in branding research.

Myth no.4 (and meta-branding mythopoeia comes to a preliminary close at this point): Brand semiotic research is applicable only in packaging, brand naming, logos and advertising design.

Debunking myth no.4: Again, this is the outcome of semiotic perspectives' enforced territorialization in strictly demarcated research fields in the broader marketing discipline. Semiotic perspectives are fully equipped with specific and mutually exclusive (hence meriting being called 'schools of thought') epistemological and ontological premises. Only a handful of basic concepts have been applied in branding research thus far, and in a very constrained fashion. In reality, conceptual models and constructs in all branding and advertising related fields may be edified purely on semiotic concepts. Even more encouragingly, semiotic schools of thinking have been edified on the core premise and promise of an inherently inter-disciplinary orientation, starting with Saussure's vision of semiology's constituting a branch of social psychology up to Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics that has been proven to be particularly well suited for inter-disciplinary applications in conjunction with variegated social sciences and humanities perspectives in addressing distinctive social practices.

We anticipate that by opening up the conceptual horizons of distinctive semiotic schools to branding related research fields in this Volume, scholars will be motivated to explore facets that not only have not been lying dormant all along, but, on the contrary, have been thriving in all sorts of disciplines, but marketing.

1.3 Chapters' overview

Pursuant to the above re-marks as re-cognition of brand semiotics' relative un-recognizability in the wider branding literature, let us proceed with an overview of the Chapters that comprise this foundational Volume.

In **Chapter 2**, Gianfranco Marrone and Dario Mangano recruit a wide gamut of largely structuralist concepts for analyzing the advertising language of brands in three product categories, that is cars, sports and sparkling water. Their analyses are premised on concepts and methods from structuralist semiotics, mainly of Greimasian persuasion, but also as developed by post-Greimasian (and contemporary to Greimas) scholars, such as Eric Landowski. It merits noticing that Landwoski, a student of Greimas, developed his own branch of sociosemiotics (cf. Landowski 1989) by drawing on Greimasian concepts (not to be confused with the sociosemiotic branch that grew from Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics) which constitutes one among many answers that have already been provided to critics of structuralist semiotics who have been drawing one—sidedly on strucuralism's binarist reductionism, and regardless of the perspective's far richer theoretical, methodological baggage and breadth and depth of applied research. The sociosemiotic extension of Greimasian structuralism is one among the various advances of which brand semioticians should be aware, highly under-rated due to the (recurrently relevant) lack of re-cognition by the brand semiotic community (which also holds in the case of the Anglo-Saxon branch of sociosemiotics as we shall see later on). Not only structuralist semiotics has spawned a sociosemiotic branch, but Anglo-Saxon sociosemiotics, contrary to popular misconceptions, shares fundamental epistemological assumptions with structuralism, most notably as regards their mutual constructivist orientation: "Language does not merely refer to pre-existent entities, but names things, thus construing them into categories; and then, typically, goes further and construes the categories into

taxonomies to provide a theory of human experience" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2006: 29).

Each part of Marrone and Mangano's analyses focuses on a specific concept and method of analysis. In a bottom-up reading, they draw on almost a century's worth of advertising materials from the two dominant players in the Italian sparkling water market (Ferrarelle and Lete) in order to show how Floch's universal axiological map may be applied, in continuation of Floch's (1990) seminal reading of car advertising. Importantly, in terms of a most insightfully contributing territory for structuralist brand semiotics, the authors highlight how the concerned brands become valorized communicatively through the narratives they employ in different parts of their history. The diachronic evolution of the valorization of these two brand discourses, then, is plotted on a set of interlocking axiological squares.

In their reading of sports shoes brands advertising, they still dwell on brand axiology, while shifting perspective. Instead of looking into the diachronic evolution of brand axiology through multiple ad executions on an intra-brand level, they adopt an inter-brand viewpoint. This perspective culminates in plotting the distinctive axiology espoused by each of the four key brand players in the concerned category on the respective four territories of the universal axiological map.

Finally, by adopting a trans-media storytelling approach, they examine how different ad texts in different media (print, TV ads) complement each other in the deployment of different phases of Renault Clio's narrative. Most remarkably, the fresh and vibrant interpretive procedure they follow, in a sense simulates the abductive hypotheses that consumers tend to form while synthesizing stimuli (or, more aptly, expessive units) both from the same, as well as across ad texts, thus, in a way, responding to Eco's call for abandoning the standard communication model proposed by information theorists, insofar as "what one calls "message" is usually a *text,* that is, a network of different messages depending on different codes and working at different

levels of signification" (Eco 1979), while latently assuming a reader-response theoretic, and far from linear decoding, approach to "message" elaboration that "highlights the role of the recipient as a co-creator of meaning" (Stern 1994: 10).

The trans-medial synthesis of this expressive inventory, coupled with the progressive abductive elimination of hypotheses about their semantic content, eventually shapes up the brand's discursive universe. Indeed, it is like Marrone and Mangano play the role of 'talking heads' where they are 'overhearing' consumers' inner stream of consciousness as it stretches over a noematic horizon.

Chapter 3, by Xavier Ruiz Collantes and Mercè Oliva, constitutes the most varied and multi-disciplinary contribution to this Volume, by virtue of the sheer complexity and the disciplines involved in the subject matter it tackles, that is narrativity approaches to branding. The Chapter is divided into five Sections, starting with an overview of storytelling perspectives on brand communications that have been largely developed from within the marketing discipline. The authors critically discuss these perspectives based on the degree to which they have sufficiently incorporated and operationalized the rich and multifarious heritage of narratology. The second Section dwells on the narratological, so to speak, prong of Greimasian structuralist semiotics, while emphasizing the role that the mid-level (semio-narrative) stratum performs in the generative trajectory of meaning, alongside integral components such as the actantial model and the canonical narrative schema. The implications of the structuralist semiotic approach to narrativity for the construal of brand identity are extensively addressed in the face of relevant studies from Greimas's time until today. In this context, a critical eye is cast against piece-meal adaptations of the Greimasian trajectory, which mitigates the possibility of reaping full benefits from its full-fledged adoption as a blueprint for managing holistically brand meaning, rather than a toolbox with 'apps' on demand. Moreover, the authors consider the as yet

unexplored in a branching context concept of 'passion' that was developed in Greimas and Fontanille's *Semiotics of Passions* (1991), which is not reducible to either the 'emotional' side of a brand structure (e.g., emotional benefits) or to emotive appeals of ad messages. It should also be noted that developments in structuralist semiotics have been made in directions that address issues of discursive grammar, such as Fontanille's *Semiotics of Discourse* (2006) and his generative trajectory of the plane of expression (cf. Fontanille 2007, 2010), which have not gained as much popularity as other developments in the discourse analytic research stream. Again, such advances in structuralist semiotics have hardly been reflected in brand semiotic research and constitute significant untapped opportunities going forward.

It merits noticing at this juncture that narrativity, according to Greimas, is primarily a mode of organizing and accounting for human action, a fundamental tenet that reflects the sociosemiotic orientation of Greimasian structuralism. And Greimas (1989), but also Courtés (1991), have illustrated amply how social practices as varied as the preparation of a basil soup based on a recipe and a funeral oration, may be organized in a chain of narrative programs that manifest a latent canonical structure which permeates invariably literary texts inasmuch as ordinary practices (whence stems the adoption of a pan-textualist approach in social theorizing).

As mentioned earlier, despite *en masse* proclamations about the abandonment of structuralism across diverse disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences, largely due to a disillusionment with the perspective's proclivity for binarist reductionist readings of social/textual phenomena, and in the light of post-structuralist advances, it has survived and mutated both in semiotics, but also in marketing. For example, as noted in Rossolatos (2014), Keller's cognitivist model of brand knowledge structures has inherited basic assumptions of structuralism, such as the formation of brand-related memory as varying layers of abstraction amongst hierarchically structured components, albeit

'structured' in different to binarist modes, such as according to the popular (in branding research) associationist rationale of connectionism (see Rossolatos, Chapter 12, this Volume). Thus, it is not a matter of structuralism's abandonment, but of a change of rhetorical locus by dint of a shift in researchers' focus from textual structures to structures of the mind (cf. Rastier 2006) which is not really a disjunction, and even less a paradigmatic shift, but an instance of re-framing and re-contextualization. As noted by Stephen Brown in *Postmodern Marketing 2* (1998: 154): "Let's be honest…marketing is a structuralist academic discipline, or semi-structuralist at least". What are the implications of this shift from structures of the text to structures of the mind? Some of them are described in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Differences between semiotics and marketing in the light of the shift from structures of the text to structures of the mind

	Semiotics	Marketing
Minimal units of analysis	Elements of the expression/content planes, abstracted from any sensory substratum	Stimuli as sensory manifold
Memory formation	Concept formation is not the outcome of mental processes, but of habituation in social/cultural practices in distinctive domains that endow perception with meaning. The subject is the outcome of discursive practices	Cognitive psychological paradigm emphasizing mental processes (attention, selection, perception, concept formation [brand associations])

	and not discourse the outcome of a cognizing subject.	
Interaction among units of analysis	Gestaltic: the interaction among expressive units produces a meaning effect in excess of the additive impact of individual modes/semiotic resources	Atomistic-additive: decomposable into individual units whose relative additive impact on memory formation and brand aasociations may be measured and accounted for through cognitive processing mechanisms
How meaning is produced in the face of the interaction among modes	Through embeddedness in textual structures, demonstrable with the aid of tools such as system network maps that combine the planes of expression with content	Through the spreading activation of nodes/links in the mind/brain
Other epistemological assumptions	Meaning is produced through the interaction of social actors in situated social settings; dependence of the individual on group	Meaning is produced through the distributed processing of stimuli in the brain- the individual is an

	meaning-making practices; signs over signals (stimuli)	information processing unit; signals (stimuli over signs)
	Interpretive outlook that seeks to account for ad hoc meaning structures, not necessarily replicable; highly context dependent semantization	Explanatory outlook that presumes the replicability of quantitative findings

The differences highlighted in Table 1.1 are far from sufficiently nuanced as regards specific semiotic schools of thought and marketing research strands. Rather, they are intended as thought-triggers regarding fundamental issues that are bound to emerge while translating terms from one discipline into those of a dominant perspective of the other (i.e., cognitive psychology), in which instances (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1999: 40) assumptions about a latent isomorphism between sensory stimuli and expressive units should be placed under the epistemological microscope and approached with caution prior to incorporating them uncritically in experimental research designs (whose output may still turn out to be validating ill-formed assumptions). It is precisely such subtle details that should be attended to while opening new conceptual and empirical horizons in brand semiotic research, rather than regurgitating basic concepts that are reflective of a very small portion of the prolific output of key semiotic thinkers such as Greimas. And this call for attention to conceptual detail is also made by Ruiz Collantes and Oliva in their attempt to highlight that the Greimasian conceptualization of narrativity is far richer both in conceptual terms and as regards

the scope of potential applications in branding research than has been realized until now.

In the third Section, Ruiz Collantes and Oliva scrutinize the psychoanalytical and anthropological origins of archetypical and mythic perspectives in branding research respectively. Myths and archetypes constitute an integral aspect of cultural branding (cf. Holt 2004), and, hence, are bound to attract increasing attention as this research stream grows. By pursuing a grass-roots approach that features not just a discussion of brand storytelling models that have been edified on the Jungian psychoanalytical model of archetypes, but, most importantly, of aspects of the Jungian theory that have eschewed the attention of researchers, they open up new horizons in the theory's applicability to brand identity and personality creation. At the same time, the occasionally uncritical perpetuation of the innatist aura that surrounds archetypes (inasmuch as any myth of origin) in the marketing literature, is critically addressed with reference to the Jungian theoretical contours. This should be extended to any endeavors that set out to reify metaphorical constructs, such as the unconscious, and to transform them from heuristic principles and rhetorical topographical mechanisms, into innatist and localizable canonical structures.

In the fourth Section, the authors extend their focus to encompass how consumers employ narratives while building their relationships with brands, by drawing on the disciplines of anthropology and cognitive psychology. In this context, they discuss the popular strategy of anthropomorphism, while explaining how the narratively mediated consumer understanding of their relationship with brands has resulted in the common place that advertising that tells stories is highly effective. "As cultural constructions, these stories are full of mythic archetypes; they make use of culturally familiar symbols and carry along mythic meanings reflective of cultural values" (Kniazeva and Belk 2014: 46). The final Section engages in a critical comparison between the various approaches that were laid out throughout

this Chapter, with an emphasis on the relative merits of narratively informed semiotic research.

In **Chapter 4** Carlos A. Scolari explores the challenges that lie ahead for branding research in the light of advances in the burgeoning field of transmedia storytelling. The concept of transmedia, in broad terms, surely is everything but alien to branding. The concept and the philosophy of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) that constitutes the (marketing discipline's) antecedent- at least in outline- of what became widely known (in the media studies 'sister' discipline) as transmedia storytelling, was put forward in 1992 by Schultz et al., and, ever since has become entrenched in the marketing vernacular as standard research currency (cf. Kitchen and Schultz 2009; Rossolatos 2013). The fundamental hypothesis of IMC is that the maximization of the synergistic effects among media in an integrated brand communications plan will lead to enhanced bottom-line results. This simple hypothesis is coupled with considerable levels of complexity in practice that are over and above media planning considerations. IMC is a 'holistic' (that is more comprehensive than usual) and iterative brand planning methodology that is particularly relevant in a fragmented mediascape characterized by proliferating and decentralized communicative touch-points across various technological platforms. The major difference and at the same time area of indispensable 'synergy' between transmedia and IMC is that whereas the latter considers mostly media budgeting, buying and performance monitoring aspects under the rubric of 'integration' (with message performing a recognized, yet operationally more peripheral role), the former considers media and message structure as equally important (albeit not considering media from a marketing-related media planning point of view). Moreover, transmedia storytelling, by virtue of integrating theoretical components from disciplines such as semiotics and narratology for managing the transformations of the narrative 'fate' of TV series, cinematic films, or advertising personae, is by definition

more minutely attuned to the exigencies of what is called in IMC lingo message integration.

Another critical area of complementarity concerns the increased consumer empowerment in a participatory media cultural setting, in which context, as noted by Scolari, consumers have become prosumers, while actively participating in a narrative process by providing new texts that expand the transmedia narrative world. In these terms, we are not concerned merely with maximal integration in a brand-controlled environment where media have been planned a priori to work in a synergistic fashion, but with integrating potentially dissonant narrative elements (compared to brand intentions) in a non brand-controlled environment where prosumers' imaginary dictates the potential meaning directions towards which an initial story or set of stimuli (expressive units) may be channeled.

By imagining the market as a symbolic space where each company tries to establish its own storytelling and values, Scolari envisions transmedia storytelling as a useful tool for positioning a brand and retaining customers by offering a set of shared values. In this context, new brand communications vehicles emerge, while existing ones are redefined. The transmedia perspective actively urges brand management to think 'message' first, in terms of the inter-textual embeddednes of brand messages. This perhaps dissonant with IMC's priorities radical shift in perspective (at least as we know it) turns out to be a most potent resource for invigorating and re-thinking bottom-up how specific brandcomms vehicles work. A remarkable example in this direction is reverse product placement as a commercial form of paratextuality, as discussed by Scolari. This notable shift becomes a full-fledged U-turn if we consider, from a transmedia point of view, that whereas in traditional communicative vehicles, such as product placement, brands appear in films, for example, in strategically pre-planned arrangements, in a media convergent culture films *are* the brand. In other words, the transmedia storytelling perspective urges brand planners to shift attention

from what associations consumers form of a brand to how a brand culture is situated and constantly transformed in a wider cultural milieu that is populated by artefacts that inform its narrative universe and which are no more directly controllable by a centralized team. The above are illustrated by recourse to vivid case-studies from *Lost* to *Harry Potter* and from *Batman* to the *Matrix*.

A peripheral field in (marketing) branding research, but of paramount importance for what has been considered until now as brand semiotics, is the area of logos design. In **Chapter 5**, Francesco Mangiapane explores facets of logo design from various structuralist semiotic angles. The Chapter kicks off by situating brand identity and logos as expressive manifestations of brand identities in a wider textuality paradigm. As against a conservative, sign-orientated perspective according to which "logos are examples of legi-signs or symbols […] agreed, general typifications" (Lury 2004: 65), a textuality-orientated perspective views logos as integral cultural artefacts of a brand's evolving narrative in inter-textual relationships that are multi-layered and deeply articulated in a cultural software. The pursued analytical path is aligned with the general mission of this Handbook, that is to consolidate the state-of-the-art and to move forward by considering more recent advances. Hence, the analytic draws on and extends Floch's insights from his seminal book *Visual identities*, by examining the figurative constitution of competitive brands, such as Apple vs. IBM, McDonald's vs. Burger King, McDonald's vs. Slow Food. The offered analyses indicate that in order to unearth the design rationale of logos we must first understand the competitive dynamics and the language system that makes up each product category. Thus, the analysis of the first competitive pair demonstrates that the two leading computer manufacturers built their logos through a reversal of their plastic traits. By adopting a more expansive angle, the analysis shows that the logos of the largely oppositionally placed in both design and axiological terms   McDonald's vs. Slow Food reflect two

opposing *forms of life,* fast versus slow food that are, in turn, reflected in the wider retail environment of the competitive food chains. This mandate for semiotic coherence as a prerequisite for building and maintaining brand identity urges us to consider logos as synaesthetic machines that translate different aspects of a brand's aesthetic identity from one sensorial mode to another. Post-Flochian advances are extensively reflected in Mangiapane's design roadmap, while considering the 'sensorial turn' that has been taking place in structuralist semiotics ever since the release of the *Semiotics of Passions* (1991) in the analysis of the sensory appeals of Apple's different logos by following the emotional relational paths prescribed in Boutaud's communication model.

Chapter 6 deploys alongside a similar structuralist semiotic path, while Ilaria Ventura considers packaging design issues, as an essential complement to the analysis of logos design that preceded it. The expository path follows a similar rationale to Chapter 5, by applying and vividly discussing semiotic concepts in various areas of packaging design through specific case-studies. The main line of thought that permeates the entire Chapter is that packaging, over and above the functional tasks it is summoned to accomplish, performs an indispensable communicative function. Thus, packaging merits being considered a brand communications vehicle in its own right. Packaging does not simply envelope objects, but translates products in different expressive substances that furnish a communicative contract with consumers, a meaning proposal that is embedded in value-based exchanges. By situating the role of packaging design for brand identity within a wider context of cultural signification, Ventura recruits time-hallowed concepts, such as Greimasian semi-symbolic structures, in order to demonstrate how salient design categories at the plane of expression, such as typeface, graphics, colors, texture, shapes, that have been classified under the ubiquitously applicable tripartite schema of chromatic, eidetic, topological categories, are variably drawn upon by competitors, often in markedly

oppositional manners (as also shown in the case of logos, in Chapter 5) with view to carving a distinctive identity. The interpretive methodological framework adopted by Ventura features three categories from Greimasian semiotics for analyzing objects of value, viz. *configurative, taxic and functional*. Moreover, the relative benefits of employing the evoked semiotic perspective are highlighted in terms of managing diachronically the communicative function of packaging, rather than obtaining an isolated snapshot of how design variables interact syncretically in the communication of the intended brand values. The way brand values, in turn, are communicated through brand packaging, or their mode of valorization, is illustrated by drawing on Floch's universal axiological map, as already shown in Chapter 2.

Chapters 7-9 address in different ways and by engaging with various perspectives the subject of multimodality that has become a priority research area in social semiotics, but also in discourse analytic strands over the past years.

In **Chapter 7** John A. Bateman ventures into a thorough comparative re-reading of Floch's seminal case-study of the NEWS cigarette print ad from three semiotic angles, that is from the original structuralist one, from a Peircean point of view, and from a sociosemiotic one. The main objective behind this re-reading lies with highlighting the comparative advantage of adopting a sociosemiotic perspective, inspired by Hallidayan SFL, in addressing methodological issues that are identified in the other two semiotic schools of thought. By offering thought provoking analyses of the concerned ad, Bateman issues a plea for enhancing the robustness of traditionally interpretive semiotic analyses by bringing to the forefront of attention methodological issues of reliability and replicability. According to the avowed sociosemiotic perspective, what is identified as lacking from Floch's otherwise most insightful analyses is a methodical roadmap for analyzing and building brand communications. Thus, although it is recognized that a structuralist perspective does

address issues of multimodal interaction and semantic coherence among the expressive units of NEWS' verbo-visual structure, these considerations are not grounded in a robust methodological framework. Due to the absence of such a framework issues of replicability and reliability that plague semiotic analyses are bound to remain unresolved. Consequently, Bateman outlines a framework for addressing artefacts (including brand discourses) in variable and inter-locking levels of abstraction, comprising issues of genre, media, metafunctions and modes.

Still within a sociosemiotic/multimodality terrain, but with a different thematic orientation, Kay L. O'Halloran, Peter Wignell and Sabine Tan in **Chapter 8** furnish an in-depth analysis of the diachronic evolution of Curtin University's brand identity, involving various rebranding attempts and addressing distinctive student segments, as fleshed out in different web-site designs. The offered multi-semiotic analysis adopts a methodological framework that is underpinned by the authors' multimodal analytics software. By segmenting the verbal and visual resources utilized on the university's successively revised websites into navigation zones, with a focus on the landing page and on key pages that are hyperlinked either visually or verbally with the landing page, the authors scrutinize how different meanings are afforded alongside the four main sociosemiotic metafunctions for distinctive student segments. This particularly nuanced analytical approach is informed both by traditional systemic functional linguistic concepts (e.g., Halliday 1978; White and Martin 2005), as well as by their multimodal extensions (e.g., the various ways whereby the web-site visitors' gaze is engaged through distinctive spatial arrangements of key visual elements, *pace* Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). In addition to the university's web-site as integral brand identity multi-semiotic resource, the authors furnish an in-depth analysis of the university's logo, again from a diachronic point of view, while highlighting how different meanings are afforded before and after a rebranding process.

By opening up the boundaries of multimodal semiotic research to critical discourse analysis (CDA), Per Ledin and David Machin, in **Chapter 9**, examine at length the fascinating case of the Orebro University rebranding. In line with the mission and the fundamental premises of CDA, that is to demonstrate how sociocultural practices are shaped through discursive practices and how the latter are inscribed in textual practices (Fairclough 1993: 98) with an ulterior motive to unearth institutional chains through textual chains and how power relationships work in sustaining such institutional/textual chains, multimodal discourse analysis (MCDA) examines multimodal textual structures with view to unearthing the latent discourses that undergird their coherence and cohesion. MCDA is informed by CDA, which by now has been firmly entrenched in discourse analytic approaches to organization studies (Fairhusrt and Putnam 2004), inasmuch as by sociosemiotics, and particularly by Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. Ledin and Machin delve extensively and intensively into a wide gamut of multimodal texts that were designed in the context of the university's rebranding, for both internal and external stakeholders, such as the Vision brochure, the university magazine, strategic planning documents. By casting a critical eye on the employed semiotic resources in the selected texts, they lay bare how the intended changes in the identities and roles of the academic staff are represented and re-imagined. In this process of 're-imagining', which the authors call re-contextualization, where MCDA's contribution shines forth at its most conspicuous, massive gaps open up between actual and feasible social practices and how they are envisioned through discourses that tend to level off inequalities and irreducible differences, primarily of qualitative nature. The selection of visuals and particular expressions, their specific modes of arrangement and co-ordination, their presentation in varying degrees of modality (from realistic to technical), are shown to constitute a multimodal rhetoric that communicates directly management objectives in such a fashion as to render these

objectives shareable among all stakeholders within the examined organization. Ultimately, the adopted MCDA perspective presents a unique and quite compellingly so take on how a university as brand is shaped in terms of goals, objectives and how such objectives are reflected in internal branding documents that may and may not be aligned with actual perceptions and practices within the represented organization. These gaps are critically brought to the surface by the MCDA perspective.

Semiotic cultural analysis constitutes the focus of **Chapter 10** by Jennie Mazur. By adopting an inter-cultural perspective on brand communications, Mazur demonstrates lucidly how IKEA managed to take by storm its intended target-audience in the German market by leveraging its concept of "not really" Swedish swedishness. While drawing on Sonesson's model of Ego, Alter and Alius culture and on an extensive list of analytical categories for dissecting ad texts, she demonstrates how the company's indubitably clever advertising strategy built on embedded cultural mores, but also invented a notion of swedishness. It is this invented notion of swedishness, along with a set of novel stereotypes that was subsequently recognized, and most effectively so, by the brand's intended audience in Germany, and through which it attained to become entrenched in the existing consumer ethos through a humorous and occasionally self-ironic discourse. An intensive analysis of 48 IKEA commercials are reduced to three communicative territories that correspond to different phases of the deployment of the brand's communication strategy in the German market. The analysis highlights, most interestingly, how the invented stereotypes in IKEA's ad films not only managed to catapult the brand to a leadership position in the German DIY market, but to create a whole new ethos, including the adoption of the cultural practice of throwing Christmas trees off windows during St. Knut's day.

Chapter 11 is still situated in the broader cultural branding territory, while seeking to disentangle the concept of brand image from a non-semiotically informed spider's web. In

this Chapter, George Rossolatos draws on the multifariously defined and operationalized concept of iconicity while addressing critically definitions of brand image that have been offered by marketing scholars. This cultural bend, in conjunction with the concept's semiotic contextualization, are aimed at dispelling terminological confusions in the either inter-changeable or nebulously differentiated employment of such terms as brand image, symbol, icon, as well as at addressing the function of brand image at a deeper level than a mere construct that is operationalized in quantitative studies of purchase drivers. This shift in focus is dovetailed with a critical turn from the cogito-centric view of the consuming subject through the cognitivist lens of the AI metaphor as decision-making centre at the origin of largely conscious meaning-making, in favor of a psychoanalytically informed approach that considers figurativity as an essential process whereby brand image is formed. In these terms, brand image is intimately linked to brand images as figurative multimodal expressive units and rhetorical tropes, as figurative syntax, that are responsible for shaping an idiolectal brand language, as well as to distinctive levels of iconicity as textual condition of possibility of a brand language. In order to understand the role of iconicity as fundamental condition of brand textuality, rather than just a procedure for spawning brand images, the discussion is contextualized in a wider framework involving the culturally situated source of brand images, how they become correlated with brand image concepts and how correlations between brand images and brand image result in brand knowledge structures (Keller 1998). This opening up of the discussion on iconicity is enacted against the background of the Brand Imaginarium which involves: (i) a critical engagement with the dominant cognitivist perspective in branding research that prioritizes individual memory in brand knowledge formation, through a cultural branding lens that involves two additional types of memory, viz. communicative and cultural (ii) a critical engagement with the cognitivist perspective on brand knowledge

formation that prioritizes conscious processing of stimuli (as 'brute facts', rather than as already semiotized expressive units) in a cognitive mechanism from which the faculty of imagination has been expelled, by restoring the importance of imagination in brand knowledge formation, and, concomitantly, by showing that the highly figurative language of brands may not be researched thoroughly unless imagination is posited anew as processing correlate (iii) the adoption of an expansionist approach to the role of the imaginary in brand knowledge formation, from cognitive (or psychic) faculty, to a more sociologically inclined process of inter-subjective mirroring, and concomitantly as imaginary social significations (Castoriades 1985) that are shared by culturally conditioned and habituated subjects that engage in meaningful cultural practices, rather than individual processing monads. Brakus (2008) contends that despite interpretivist consumer researchers' recognition of cognitivism's limitations in the application of a mechanistic step-by-step view of the information-processing paradigm, they have not provided viable alternatives that might explain marketing phenomena. The generalist orientation of this counter-critique notwithstanding, the Brand Imaginarium is intended as an outline in lieu of a more comprehensively formulated 'viable alternative', while taking on board Levitt's dictum that imagination is the starting point of success in marketing (cf. Brown and Patterson 2000: 7).

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CHAPTER 2

Brand language: Methods and models of semiotic analysis

Dario Mangano and Gianfranco Marrone[1]

2.1 Introduction: Brands and society

There are several reasons why scrutinizing brands from a semiotic point of view is mandatory. Some of them are technical, and relate to the fact that brands are above all pieces of communication; others pertain to a recent and pervasive cultural phenomenon whereby brands have migrated from marketing to everyday social life.

A brand is a mark, a sign that, by producing various possible meanings, generates pragmatic effects on subjects and objects: it identifies, transforms and gives them value(s). A wide roster of social phenomena are rooted in brands as signs: communication strategies, production and reception of discourses, inter-subjective dynamics, changes in a collective imaginary, identity construction processes, forms of life.

The history of branding, although tied up with specific economical, social and cultural changes, seems to follow a unique path. Brands were born during the Industrial Revolution: trademarks for recognizing geographical origins, producers and distributors of goods; but their pre-history lies in cattle and outlaws' fire-marking, indelible signs that appear to be reproduced in contemporary practices, such as the tattooing of companies' logos (e.g., Apple and Nike), although in an inverted fashion, since people nowadays mark themselves to signify their belonging to one or more brand-tribes, rather than the contrary (Maffesoli 1988; Cova et al. 2007).Thus, it appears that a

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[1] The outline of this Chapter was thought through in co-operation between the two authors; Sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 were written individually by Gianfranco Marrone, and Section 2.4 by Dario Mangano.

constitutive ambiguity is inscribed in trademarks: we do on objects what we used to do on bodies, managing things as people by giving them a name and an identity.

Although the logic of branding was initially economically rational, based on calculated needs and their satisfaction potential, it soon became something else: from mere "subject", in structuralist semiotic terms, that used to function as a mediator between a company and its consumers, to a catalyst of transformation of the relations between these two actorial figures (companies and consumers). Contemporary brands do not merely provide guarantees for product quality, but also for social values that become clearly perceivable only once they are embedded into products. Especially in the case of postmodern brands (e.g., Apple, Muji, Google and many others), the relationship with products has been overturned, while freeing themselves from the yoke of materiality and starting to live their own life by directly relating with imaginaries and values. Contemporary social actors construct their patchwork identity through surfing from one style to another, from a system of values to another. In this framework, brands do not reside in the functional aspects of products but, on the contrary, the product has become the textual manifestation of the brand.

In this Chapter, we are not dealing with social and cultural aspects of branding in general. Instead, we focus on methodological aspects of semiotic models for understanding and managing the language of brands. These models are applicable throughout product categories and media. We illustrate our approach by recourse to brand communications from three product categories: automotive, sports and food/ beverage.

2.2 Brand discourses in car advertising

Since semiotics is a highly text-oriented discipline ("out of the text no salvation" as Greimas [1970] used to say), the starting point for analyzing brand language could not be anything other than advertisements. The ad by Renault Clio RS 200 CV (Fig. 2.1)

allows us to address various compelling questions. The main visual in this ad portrays the back of a car that is darting along an empty road. The car goes literally through a street bump, while crushing it in order to make us perceive not only its speed, but also the grip of its tires and the amazing solidity of its suspensions. It moves as if the bump did not exist. The *hyperbolically* expressed advantage of the product is clear: if the car passes through such an obstacle without damages, it will move effortlessly on the flat, smooth and unobstructed metropolitan asphalt. In rhetorical, Aristotelian terms, it is the *topos* of "who can do more can do less".

Figure 2.1: Renault Clio RS 200 CV Italian advert, 2004

For a long time scholars have been propounding that advertising is about adapting persuasive techniques from ancient oratory to

visual communication in order to embellish products by exalting the features that differentiate them from competing products in the market. Our advertisement, however, is demanding on further grounds.

First of all: why such a gloomy atmosphere? These dark and threatening clouds… And then: what is that austere, white and angular building on the background? And what about that long fence that stretches over the left and right-hand sides of the page, in such a manner as to delimit the horizon of the visible? Why is there nobody else on the scene? Why don't we see the driver or anybody else in the car? And why there are no pedestrians?

One of the possible reasons why this ad may be said to convey a certain melancholia is the absence of human beings. There are only things, buildings and technology, no trace of humanity or nature. In addition: why is the car running on the left-hand side of the road? Is this attributable to the scene's location in England, for example, or might there be other reasons? Given that the solid white line is on the right-hand side of the moving car, we may surmise that the car has crossed it illegally, thus resulting in darting on the wrong side of the road. The impressive number of violations of the traffic code - the car crosses a solid white line, it moves in the wrong direction, it doesn't reduce speed near a bump (accelerating up until its destruction instead) – prompts us to think that these cannot be mere coincidences. In other words: Who is driving the car? What is he or she doing? Where is he or she heading? Where is he or she coming from? And why is he or she doing this? The advertising claim – "extra full of life" – could give us a cue, but does not persuade us (in the strict sense): does "living life fully" entail driving as fast as you can on the wrong side of the road under a grey sky?

Trying to answer these questions implies the ascription of *pertinence*, that is rendering them relevant, interesting and useful in order to fully comprehend the text, but also to delimit it:

constructing the object to be semiotically analyzed is a function of the goals of its description. This is the role of semiotic analysis, from a structuralist point of view: not a reading grid to interpret "hidden meanings" of a communicative process (the hermeneutic way), but a way to diligently reconstruct a web of relations that characterize an object of communication, thereby affording its interpretation and (potentially) its explanation. If structuralist semiotics studies the relations between signifiers and signifieds (in Saussurean terms) or elements of the planes of expression/content (in Hjelmslevian terms), then it needs to reconstruct the actors, objects, phenomena and processes that characterize a given cultural artifact, like an ad, as relational structures and not as ontological data. As regards our case-study, we should ask ourselves if such an ad may be considered as a *text*, and thus analyzed as such, on the basis of its internal constraints and of the external borders[2] that mass-media culture has assigned to it; or if it should be decomposed into smaller elements (signifying units) related to specific semiotic codes (visual, verbal, stylistic etc.); or, again, if such a *text* should be considered as part of a larger one or as an element of a *discourse* that transcends it and whose partial manifestation it facilitates. The answers to these questions and, subsequently, the identified interpretive routes, depend on the adopted theoretical semiotic framework. We consider the sociosemiotic perspective[3] that is

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[2] See ft 4.

[3] The evoked sociosemiotic perspective stems from Greimasian semiotic theory. The "socio-" prefix undelines the need for considering semiotic phenomena and meaning production processes as strictly related to society. It is important to note that, for Greimasian sociosemiotics, society itself is a meaning effect [*effet de sens*]. So, there is no opposition between sociosemiotics and textual semiotics as concerns topics and methods. On the contrary, these two perspectives complement each other: while sociosemiotics deals with the social aspects of texts, textual semiotics studies the textual dimension of the social system. Vice versa, sociosemiotics analyses the conditions of

possibility of the social system by assigning them an intrinsic textual, narrative and discursive dimension, and textual semiotics retraces the conditions of possibility of texts, by assigning them an intrinsic social, strategic, pragmatic, and cultural dimension (Fabbri 1973). Jean-Marie Floch and Eric Landowski have made clear the link that binds textual and social studies. Floch (1990, 1995) emphasised the implications of Greimas's slogan 'outside the text no salvation!' for the analysis of advertising campaigns and marketing mechanisms, design objects and fashion strategies, spatial organization and proxemic structures, comics and Russian icons, architecture projects and artistic images. Landowski (1989) underscores that "the reality sociosemiotics takes as an object of study, that can be identified as the socially constructed conditions of the signifying capacity of our discourses and our actions, is to sociosemiotics nothing else but another form of textuality". According to sociosemiotics, then, the text is not an object of analysis, but a model for analyzing any sort of social phenomena.

The task of sociosemiotics is closely aligned with cultural studies, by offering robust conceptual frameworks for interpreting and understanding a variety of social phenomena, from food to television, from publicity to internet, from politics to fashion, from architecture to journalism and design. Sociosemiotics deals with the mechanisms of production and articulation of meaning, thus positioning itself at the level of *critical examination* (as understood by Kant) of social sciences and the humanities, while attending to the formal conditions of possibility of sociality as such. For the sociosemiotic perspective, as above-mentioned, the social dimension is not a string of empirical facts, whose hidden laws await to be unveiled, but a constructed *effect of meaning* whose generative procedures it studies. Landowski (1986: 207, my translation) writes: "In its own way, general semiotics never actually stopped dealing with reality and, *a fortiori*, with sociality, both conceived as effects of meaning. In short and deliberately naive terms, the great issue the sociosemiotic scholar has to face is to account for 'what we do' in order for sociality to exist for us as such: how do we construct its objects and how do we play our part in it, as talking and acting subjects. The empirical object of sociosemiotics can be defined, in this sense, as the set of discourses participating in the construction and/or in the transformation of the conditions of interaction between (individual and collective) subjects".

adopted in our analysis as the most effective one for analyzing brand language (Landowski 1989; Marrone 2001, 2014).

Now, a more fundamental question emerges: is it possible to analyze the Clio RS 200 CV advertising by itself or do we also need to take into consideration the *context* of the campaign, where by context we mean other print ads, TV commercials, posters, sponsorships, public relations, POS (point-of-sales) advertising and whatever could be considered to be part of a new product's communication mix? Additionally, why should we take into consideration only the Clio RS 200 CV campaign and not the long, intriguing history of Clio's communication, of which this is a recent manifestation?

When we examine brand language, the analytical scope eschews the strict confines of individual campaigns (Marrone 2007). The *discourse*[4] is not only that of a single advertising campaign, whose goal is to inform and persuade ("the new,

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For sociosemiotics, in sociality there is nothing patent or immediate, but the very fact that sociality itself builds its own patency and immediateness, presenting as obvious and 'natural' what is actually the manifested result of immanent processes of signification.

[4] Quite often, the concepts of text and discourse are used interchangeably, thus giving rise to several definitions, both internally and externally to semiotics. Both concepts concern aspects that override the utterance, that can be used also for non-verbal communication, that relate more with the processes of communication than with systems and that overcome the dichotomy between collective code and individual linguistic production. In order to assume operational and methodological value, however, these two notions must be thoroughly distinguished. If text is above all a product, discourse has to do with its production that relates directly to the act of enunciation: by producing discourses, languages render possible the construal of subjectivities. Discourse, then, is both a linguistic entity and a social process. "Therefore, the existence of discursive models underlying the text guarantees its circulation within the cultural sphere, but it also guarantees the autonomy of the meaning of the text and its relationships with other texts" (Marrone 2014: 25-26).

totally renewed Clio is amazingly powerful and safe, very different from other versions of the same car!"), but of the entire brand language instead, whose goal lies beyond promoting a specific car model, and towards the examination of the relationship between brands and identity in contemporary consumer culture. By considering *brand discourse* as the main frame and advertising as one of its elements, the issue of persuasion and of the techniques that are used for its achievement become secondary. On the contrary, of primary importance is the phenomenon of *valorization* of objects,[5] goods and services, that is of the *stories* whereby values are first

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[5] Valued objects in semiotics are abstract entities that can be defined as the "intersection points of bundles of relations". Textual relations confer existence to an object for a subject who invests it with one or more values. From such a simple assumption we infer that: i) objects are not necessarily "things", ii) values are never intrinsic to objects, but attributed to them by subjects and, hence, they are variable. It is important to recall here the notion of actant in Greimasian semiotics. Greimas and Courtés (1979) contend that actants are the figures of a narration that "perform the action", thus "participating in the process" and bringing the story forward. Actants must be distinguished from actors, with respect to which they must be considered at a more abstract level (and deeper, in terms of the trajectory of meaning, where actants constitute syntactic placeholders of the semio-narrative syntax; also see Ruiz-Collantes and Oliva, this Volume). The notion of actant substitutes the term character in the process of reduction from surface discourse to the semio-narrative level, as well as the Proppian *dramatis personae*. It includes not only human beings, but all kinds of entities (animals, objects, society as a whole) that can assume such a role. The main actants (cf. Gaudreault 2008; Marrone 2011) of a narration are: the *Object of Value*, the *Subject* (that can be either an *Operating Subject* or a *State Subject*, depending on whether it already possesses the *Object of Value* or pursues it), the *Addresser* (in his dual role, as *Manipulating Addresser*, who at the very beginning of the narration introduces a system of values to it and as a *Judging Adresser,* who at the final stage of a narrative's deployment judges the actions that were undertaken by the *Operating Subjects* in order to meet their goals).

introduced in consumers' lives, then associated with products, and subsequently leveraged for realizing identities. It is in advertising stories that brand discourse emerges first and foremost, that is in narrations where consumers valorize objects, while creating relations with them (and through them).[6] Brand discourse emerges at the very moment that values are focused upon (in the utterance) and positively valorized (at the level of narrative enunciation[7]). This is also the moment where a brand's

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[6] According to Marrone (2007), it is important at this point to distinguish the notions of narration and narrativity. Narration concerns all those textual products that in our or other cultures are considered to be stories (tales, legends, novels etc.) or that tell stories (epic poems, but also movies, comics etc.). Narrativity concerns all those constant, essential, formal and abstract features of narration. A philosophical treatise, a painting, a building, a ballet, as well as a company's document, an advertisement or a whole city can be considered form a semiotic point of view as narrative texts. Where narration is an intuitive, concrete and time changing notion, that of narrativity is to be considered a formal one, abstract and scientifically constructed within a paradigm to explain how texts communicate. Narrativity, then, is an organizational principle, by virtue of which the semiotician may construe formal constants and common structural grounds beneath variegated discursive phenomena (Greimas and Courtés 1979: 248). Subsequently, narrativity is a regulative hypothesis for reconstructing the deep structure of any cultural artefact as textual manifestation.

[7] If an enunciatee is the producer of a communication act ("l'énonciataire correspondra au destinataire implicit de l'énonciation" [Greimas and Courtés 1979: 125]), enunciation should be considered as the communication setting that logically precedes and conditions the enunciatee. For a semiotician, thinking in terms of enunciation entails reconstructing *a posteriori* those virtual structures of a language that a specific discourse actualises. Every communicative predicament, in fact, presupposes a linguistic instance of production – or *enunciaton* – and an instance of destination – or *enunciated*. Furthermore, enunciator and enunciatee are not merely physical entities, who engage in concrete talk, but logico-semantic simulacra at the semio-narrative level that can be reconstructed starting from the text itself. If somebody utters "I

contract with consumers[8] enters into force, and those forms of life that they claim as their own appear. The various questions that arose at the very beginning of the analysis of this ad (as to who acts in the picture, which existential project he or she undertakes, about the values that characterize this subject) now become pertinent, while the ambivalences concerning the textual value of the ad itself and of other possible texts that may contribute to the clarification of its complex structure are dispelled. As the reader will come to realize, the reconstruction of the story that the advertising-text tells will force us to *recall other texts in order to be completed and fully understandable* (that is to say, to retrace its *semantic* and *discursive* coherence) (see Marrone 2014).

Let us now return to our ad. Are we certain that there are no humans in the picture? The fact that we cannot see them does not imply they are not part of the story. We cannot say anything concerning the passengers of the car except for the fact that there must be a driver: there is somebody inside the car who is driving like mad, while violating some rules of the traffic code. We are not certain of his motives; all we know is that he is running fast in the wrong direction, while crushing that bump in front of which he should have slowed down. It is a very precise action whose meaning can be reconstructed only if considered in

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order to you to close the window", the subject of "I" is establishing in the enunciatee an enunciator who has the authority to give orders but also an enunciatee (the "you") who has a different communicative status. If, for Austin (1962), the felicity conditions of such an illocutionary speech act are to be considered as being external to the language (Austin 1962: 14), and then related to the ontological status of the actors who take part in the conversation, for Benveniste (1966, 1974) those conditions are internal to language. The sociosemiotic approach to signification phenomena has adopted the second perspective, while extending the felicity conditions of speech acts to all possible languages that co-exist syncretically within communication.
[8] See ft 10.

relation with other actions within the same story that antedate and follow those performed by the driver.

In order to search for these further actions, we can describe some other elements present in the picture, starting from the bump (see Latour 1992). What can we say about it? If at first sight we consider it as a common object, among the numerous inanimate things that populate our world, it performs a very specific function: it "says" to drivers that they must slow down near residential areas, schools or hospitals. But a bump is not a simple traffic sign. It doesn't just say something, pointing out an obligation or a prohibition; *it is* the prohibition itself as it posits an actual barrier to drivers. Not slowing down entails breaking the suspension of the car and probably the vertebral column of those inside it. Whereas a policeman would have used a whistle to remind us of a pending violation, implicitly threatening us with a fine, the bump behaves in a more radical and obstinate way. It commands us to do what it says, imposing a duty under the risk of some kind of pre-enlightenment corporeal penalty and of a serious damage to our car. It is not by chance than in various languages the bump is metaphorically called "policeman" (*gendarme couché, sleeping policeman*): it performs the same social role as a policeman. Bumps, therefore, are *non-human social actors* that take the place of a human policeman by working harder and better than the latter. Bumps cost far less than policemen, they are always present, but also they are more "rigid", both ethically and physically. Bumping into a bump is like running into an inflexible and threatening policeman: it makes us walk the line. At least in theory.

But what actually happens in everyday life with artificial bumps? In some countries, nearby objects such as bumps, peddlers sell lighters or pineapples, thus taking advantage of drivers' slowing down. In other cases, if the bump is situated in a rarely visited non-urban street, a viable solution is to increase speed. Sometimes, if these "sleeping policemen" are bigger than usual, they can be used by scooters for climbing onto (or getting

out of) sidewalks. Moreover, in neighborhoods with a bad reputation bumps are frequently eradicated during the night from people with low tolerance levels.

The story "under" the Clio ad emerges now in full view. As is the case with similar stories, there are two subjects that meet and collide, thus engaging in a polemical relationship, until one prevails over the other. The first subject is the bump, a non-human actor that plays the role of an authoritative policeman, suggesting to passers-by to pay attention and to slow down. The second subject is the driver, who doesn't accept what the bump-policeman orders, thus not only refraining from slowing down, but, on the contrary, pushing on the gas pedal, and running through the bump while destroying it.

But why was the bump there? We know that usually bumps are located close to specific premises and areas, such as schools, public or corporate buildings, that is to say exactly the type of premise in this ad which we still need to identify. We should also notice that the bump is placed on the left-hand side of the street, so we can presume it is near the entrance of the building; most likely an entrance from which the Clio exits, by crushing the bump itself. If we add the gloomy atmosphere that is conveyed by the dark cloudy sky, the long fence that stretches beyond the visible horizon and the austere and colorless building, we can abductively infer that what we are confronted with is an escape from a prison. We are experiencing the quick and desperate escape of somebody who stole a black car, went through the entrance gate (killing the bump-policeman) and is now quickly running away to nowhere. The quest for liberty – a very common theme in advertising – is expressed here in a series of visual stereotypes that circulate in literary and cinematic discourses. In this discursive configuration the Clio RS 200 CV is at the same time original and unusual: if it is true that there are no prison breaks without cars, in this case the car is a shining powerful black one that accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in less than 7 seconds, equipped with an innovative "rear extractor" that

stems from Formula 1 (as suggested by the explanatory text in the upper right corner of the ad).

Generally speaking, car advertising presents some recurrent traits. Cars are usually "change operators" (they perform actions with or in place of subjects), or "passional shifters" (they produce or transform subjective feelings), or "spatio-temporal shifters" (they designate or redefine places and chronologies) (see Cavicchioli 1994). Sometimes they represent all of the above: they engage in actions, they represent mostly passionate people and they designate spaces/times. What is certain is that in advertising cars cannot become the manifestation of a brand without signifying the spaces with which they relate. Curves, mountains, holes, borders and all kinds of obstacles are regularly overridden by cars that vectorize spaces and lands, thus rendering them flat and uniform. The profound action that cars perform is to negate the discontinuity of spaces, often rendering them undifferentiated, uninteresting and senseless. Semiotically speaking, the spaces in car ads are non-discontinuous. Also, time contracts and expands in the face of speed that originates from the absence of obstacles, thus becoming a precious moment or an infinite duration, but never articulated as a simple sequence of commonly perceived moments.

The Creative Directors of the Clio ad have learned the lesson well: what should be depicted is the crucial moment of every story, the *performance* of a Subject against an Anti-Subject, that is the moment where the car has just defeated its enemy by rubbing out the street's discontinuity. The point is that the story is far from being edifying. Here, the quest for liberty leads to breaking the rules of the traffic code, but also of "civic living". In the end, it is a policeman who is "run over" by the car, which is the main character of the story.

However, another interpretive approach opens up, by looking at the inter-textual and inter-discursive relations of our ad text with other executions in the same advertising campaign,

such as the below shots (Figs. 2.2-2.3) from the Clio "Bullet" commercial that was aired during the roll-out of the same campaign as the Clio bump print ad for the Clio RS 200 CV model (2004). The visuals portray a desert, a cloudy sky (but with a rising sun), and a black, shining car that is darting along an anonymous road. The background music (a waltz by Strauss) connotes a cheerful atmosphere that is disturbed from time to time by a strange metallic noise. It is only by paying attention to the images that we understand the origin of this sound: it comes from a bullet that moves menacingly alongside the car, on its left-hand side. The driver – a handsome young man dressed in black – notices it but doesn't stop running. For a while, the car and the bullet maintain the same frantic speed, while moving in parallel (Fig. 2.2), in which sequence Strauss alternates with the metallic, sinister noise. At a certain moment the young man sees a crossroads and performs a bold and dangerous move: he opens the left-hand side windows of the car, thus letting the bullet into the car; then, he steers a little to the left, while affording to avoid the bullet; and finally, he opens the other window, while steering a little, in order to force the bullet out of the car (Fig. 2.3). At the very end of the commercial, and while standing in front of a junction, he firmly turns left while the bullet follows its trajectory along the way. Danger is thus avoided thanks to the amazing speed that Clio RS 200 CV can reach ("it bolts away like a bullet"), but also to its grip and to the cold-blooded temper and ability of the driver.

Figure 2.2: Frame from Renault Clio RS 200 CV TV commercial, 2004 (the bullet moving in parallel to the car)

Figure 2.3: Frame from Renault Clio RS 200 CV TV commercial, 2004 (the bullet is now inside the vehicle)

The question that should be posed at this juncture is where does such a cold-blooded temper come from? It is obvious: the driver has just escaped from prison and he is now running at full throttle while prison guards, concerned by the "killing" of the bump, try to chase him while shooting. Freedom is guaranteed, but morality is in danger. Additional questions may be posed, such as "where is the bullet"? Lost in the middle of nowhere in the desert? Perhaps not. If we look carefully at the X in the claim ("eXtra full of life", Fig. 2.1) we notice that what we may have considered at first sight as merely a logo, actually looks like the hole of a bullet in a glass. Might the prison guards have caught the fugitive at last?

texts	picture of print advertisment	TV commercial	X in the print ad picture

discourse	escaping and "killing" of the sleeping policeman	→ chasing with the bullet	→ the bullet that hits the glass
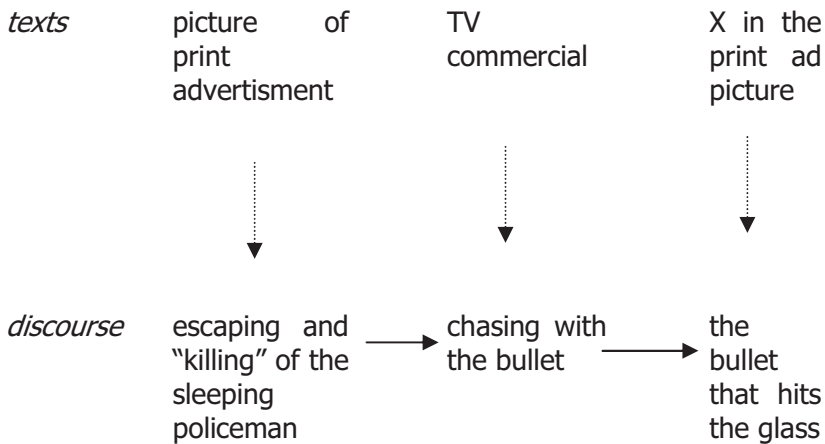
Figure 2.4: How different textual units contribute to the formation of a single discourse about the advertised product

2.3 Values and valorization in sports brands

What is the meaning of sports? A fleeting glimpse at relevant brand communications is suggestive of the complexity of sports. Sports brands tend to *neutralize* the opposition between professional and recreational practice, but also that between doing sports and living everyday life. By analyzing semiotically the brand communications of Adidas, Arena, Asics, Champions, Puma and Nike in this Section, we seek to demonstrate how thematic boundaries are frequently crossed, while presenting sports (and bodies) as the main dimension of human and social experience.

Jogging lies at the very heart of this thematic *mélange*. It is not a specific discipline, but moving in a "pure" sense; it is a physical effort but also a lifestyle; it is willingness to improve one's performance without necessarily competing with someone else. More than victory as a result of competition, what counts above all (as Nike has taught us) is *willingness to be winners*. It

is a way of looking at life that starts from the body and stretches over to desires, values and entire life projects.

Almost all sports brands make explicit mention of running and running shoes, while highlighting different aspects of this thematic in varying figurative constellations. Adidas zooms in shoes in various ads (every year numerous new models are launched, of which quite a few are explicitly compared in advertising), while Champion tends to focus on shoes in running, basketball and rowing activities (Fig. 2.4). Asics closes-up on the product – long-lasting professional shoes for amateurs who want to improve their performance by following a specific program (Fig. 2.5) – while Puma creatively speaks of running as an indispensable activity for losing weight (Fig. 2.6). In a series of commercials that were staged in Jamaica, Puma shoes are portrayed as "magical objects", thanks to which jogging establishes relations with music, dancing, golfing and playing cards (Fig. 2.7). Nike, due to a brand identity that is strongly tied up with jogging, rarely talks about running, while opting for references to athletics, swimming, basketball, but also to the sheer idea of "playing". Additionally, shoes advertising of this mega-brand occasionally underline special features that are useful in extreme circumstances (e.g., high altitude or humidity).

Figure 2.5: Champion's ads frequently feature basketball (2003)

Figure 2.6: An old pair of shoes in Asics advertising (2003)
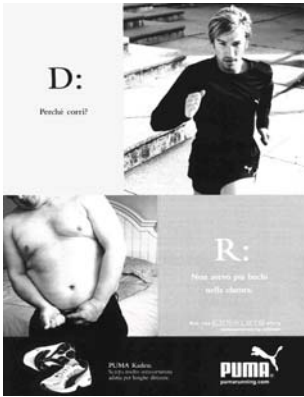
Figure 2.7: Losing weight is the focus of Puma advertising (2003)

Figure 2.8: Frame of a Puma TV commercial with Usain Bolt that was shot in Jamaica (2003)

Figure 2.9: Nike advertising often does not address a specific sport, while opting for talking simply about "playing" (2003)

Each brand tends to demarcate its thematic territory by representing a *sports experience that is not just about physical effort, but also something spiritual, a life experience*. In a nutshell, let us summarize the discursive level in the following themes that are typical of specific brands' advertising:

Adidas	Succeeding in accomplishing the most extreme and apparently impossible trials
Asics	Commitment, willingness to improve one's results
Arena	Winning, challenging
Champion	Being true to oneself, progressing within a tradition
Nike	Searching for oneself, discovery of uncommon traits
Puma	Conviviality, ethics and exoticism

In the following, we shall address this list of themes from a semiotic point of view, by looking at a deeper level of narration (in terms of the generative trajectory of meaning).[9] The actions on which each of the six brands focus become meaningful within the structure of a presupposed canonical narration that can be semiotically reconstructed. This narrative scheme consists of four steps: in the first step, a subject is presented with a narrative program that consists in acquiring an object of value (*Manipulation*); in the second step, the subject is equipped with the requisite skills for carrying out the program (*Competence*); in the third step, the subject performs the necessary actions to acquire the object of value (*Performance*); and in the final step, the subject receives social recognition for accomplishing the task

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[9] The *Generative trajectory of meaning* postulates that meaning is the result of a generative process whereby elementary structures based on simple relations (see *Semiotic Square*) become manifest at the surface of texts (see also Ruiz Collantes and Oliva, this Volume, for an exposition of the *generative trajectory of meaning*).

(*Sanction*).[10] Asics, for example, emphasizes the issue of right training for improving one's performance; the professional shoes,

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[10] More formally, the *Canonical Narrative schema* (CNS) consists of four phases and two dimensions that account for the organization of any narrative text. The first phase, called *Manipulation*, is the moment of the narration when a *Manipulating Addresser* (mA) inscribes a value into an object (thus introducing a value system to the narration) that will be pursued by the *Operating Subject* (oS), thus modalizing its action by a *having-to-do* or *wanting-to-do* modality (so called *virtualizing modalities*). This first moment, along with the final one (*Sanction*), are considered as the cognitive moments of the CNS, in contrast to the second and third moments which are thought of as pragmatic. The second phase, called *Competence*, is the moment when the *Operating Subject* acquires the *knowing-how-to-do* and *being-able-to-do* modalities (so called actualizing modalities) that are required for performing the main action of the narration. It often occurs in tales that such modalities are incorporated in objects such as magic swords etc. In this phase, the *Operating Subject* establishes contact with another actant called *Helper* (H). The third phase, called *Performance*, is the moment when the clash between *Operating Subject* and *Anti-Subject* (anti-S) takes place. This clash concerns the conflicting (or contractual) system of values on which these two actants base their actions. Finally, in the *Sanction* phase, the *Operating Subject* (oS) is evaluated by a *Judging Adresser* (jA) who must decide whether the former's actions are consistent with a given system of values, thus granting (or not) rewards to the hero. As Propp (1928) underlined, tales never end with the final battle, but with what he used to call the *Wedding* function (the one in which the Hero gets his reward).

Cognitive moments	Manipulation mA-oS (wanting-to-do, having-to-do)			Sanction jA-oS

then, become the magical object for overcoming such a mythical *Qualifying Trial*. Adidas focuses on the moment where the requisite skill-set has already been acquired and the subject is ready to act ("Impossible is nothing") (Fig. 2.9). From a different angle, Champion portrays people who engage in actions – running, playing basketball, rowing – while focusing on the crucial moment of performance, that is when the subject has acquired the object of value pursuant to a trial. Arena concentrates on Sanction, speaking of successes ("I made many people cry, this way they learn to challenge me", "the rest is gold, silver and bronze", Fig. 2.10). For Puma, performance is not an issue, as competing is not a value in itself, but a way to socialize. In a TV commercial from the Jamaica series, we witness a runner who constantly jumps into unusual settings – a Jamaican dancehall, a golf-field, a table where two people are playing cards, a recording studio – while passing a baton to a team-mate. At a certain point, quite unexpectedly, the shoes magically change into a pair of sneakers, while the team-mate starts running in the place of the runner (Fig. 2.7). It is the moment of the hero's social sanction, of the *Qualifying Trial*.

The role of Nike in the attainment of sanction follows a more complex pattern. In its ads there is almost no action while, at the same time, nobody stays still. We see bodies reproducing the pure forms of moving (Fig. 2.8), forms that do not necessarily refer to a specific sports discipline. Even when somebody is seen running (Fig. 2.11), what is emphasized is not the goal of jogging or the pleasure that stems from the physical effort, but the plastic forms that bodies acquire when the perfect equipment

Pragmatic moments		Competence oS-H (being-able-to-do, knowing-how-to-do)	Performance oS-anti-S	

(i.e., Nike shoes) is used. In this manner, Nike appears to be overcoming the narrative universe that is canvassed by other brands, without abandoning it completely; a way of positioning at a "superior level". It responds to the narrative role of the Addresser, the character that, at the very beginning of a story, provides the hero with the essential value(s) that motivate him to perform an action. At the end of the story, we encounter a Judging Addresser who evaluates the actions undertaken by the hero. As we saw earlier, Nike's narrative universe is different from its competitors in terms of thematic orientation. It doesn't lay claim to competition for winning, of performance improvements, of challenges to be overcome, but of a profound quest for a particular brand user personality. Semiotically speaking, Nike does not communicate values, but valences, that is valorization of values.
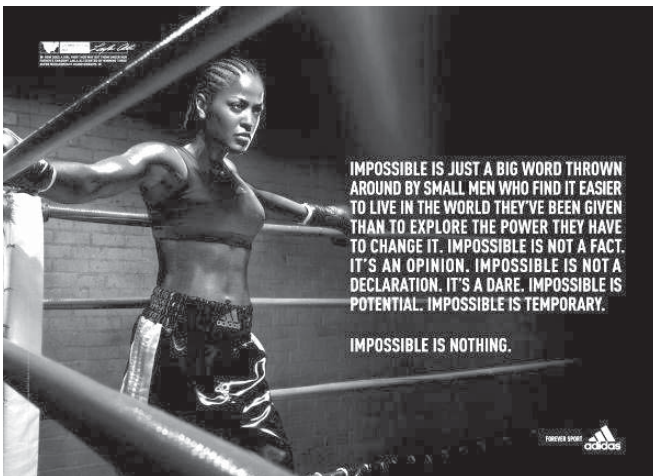
Figure 2.10: "Impossible is nothing", Adidas print ad (2003)

Figure 2.11: Arena print advertising: "Humans are 70% water, the rest is gold, silver and bronze" (2003)

Figure 2.12: Plasticity of movement in a Nike print ad (2003)

The relations between the narrative approaches of the six sports brands and the phases in a Canonical Narrative Schema are evinced alongside both chronological and logical dimensions in a narrative's deployment, by capitalizing on sequences with distinctive meanings and, hence, by occupying specific positioning territories in the sports discursive universe.

Table 2.1: Brands focus on different moments of the narrative scheme in their advertising

Manipulation	Competence	Performance	Sanction
Nike	Asics – Adidas	Champion – Arena	Puma – Nike

We may now proceed with a further reduction of our semantic universe by drawing on the "axiology of consumption values" (Floch 1990). Two approaches may be identified in these terms:

on the one hand, the concept of intending *sports as a goal to be accomplished* with the right means; on the other hand, the concept of sports as a *form of life* that transcends the practical side of sports, while opening up a discovery path of rich and intense interiority. The former axis is that of critical and practical valorizations, whereas the second that of utopian and ludic ones.

Asics speaks of training as a way to improve performance, but first speaks of shoes that last long and of caring about the anatomy of the feet they have to fit into. Adidas conceives of sports as an extreme and constant challenge, but also as willingness to change the world. In the ad pictured in Fig. 2.9 we read: "Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing." It is not difficult to discern in these words the echo of the values that years ago Nike, one of the most important Adidas' competitors, leveraged in its communications, that is a sort of omnipotence, coupled with a transformative goal. What is interesting is the idea of an impossible challenge that someone is able to accept in every situation. In one of its commercials, Adidas tells the story of a man who used to practice acrobatics and dangerous sports ever since he was a child (with excellent performance, of course) and later, despite being immobilized in a wheelchair, risked his life by sliding on a toboggan. Another commercial of the same brand insists on the same themes: this time the protagonist is Cassius Clay's daughter whose impossible enterprise is to challenge and beat her father on the ring. This impossible challenge becomes victory in Arena (Fig. 2.11), where the subject realizes his potential thanks to the narratively attained goals, as well as in Champion's advertising where practicing sports is part of a history that is geared towards new accomplishments without forgetting the past.

Consumption in the sports category is not just a desired purchase act, but an ongoing practice whereby the subject constructs his individual and social identity. If Adidas insists in positioning itself in the sports universe by paying attention to the company history ("Forever Sport"), Champion transcends the category's boundaries, while evoking a wider space: that of a generic tradition ("the story goes on"). Puma recovers ethnic values by placing its commercial in Jamaica, thus semiotically transforming its products in intercultural activators, that are evocative of a playful and cheerful atmosphere. Finally, Nike takes the place of what is semiotically called "complex term".[11] It is the synthesis of practical and utopian values that transcends the terms of the binary: the perfect performance that most advanced technology can guarantee, coupled with soul-searching and spontaneous constitution of a community of users.

Nike
(complex term)

Adidas   Champions, Arena
Practical valorization   Utopian Valorization

Critical valorization   Ludic-aesthetical
                                        valorization
Asics   Puma

SPORT AS A GOAL   SPORT AS A FORM
                                        OF LIFE
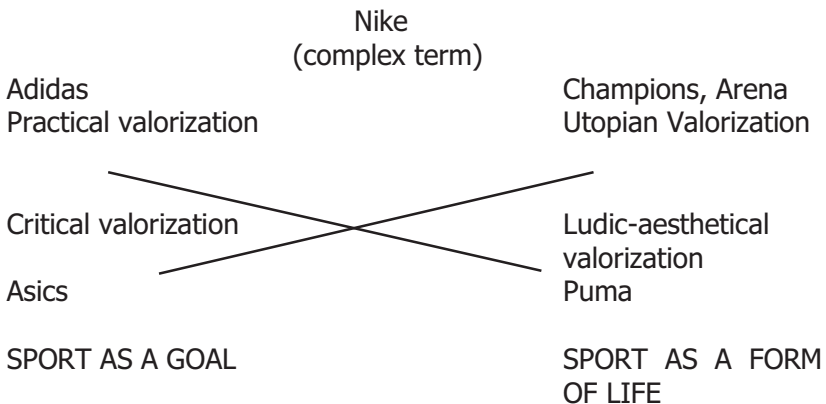
Figure 2.13: Valorization of shoes brands advertising (2003)

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[11] See ft 12.

The above analysis of the peculiar relations each of the six sports brands maintains with each other can be summarized against the background of Floch's (1990) universal axiological semiotic square[12] as per Fig. 2.13.

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[12] The *semiotic square* (cf. Greimas 1970) is a logical model for articulating the depth semantic structure of cultural artefacts, including brands. With the aid of the square, the logico-semantic relations from which meaning originates can be defined and visualized, thus articulating the semantic micro-universe on which every text is based. If we consider white vs. black as a semantic category, the ensuing model based on the semiotic square is articulated as follows:
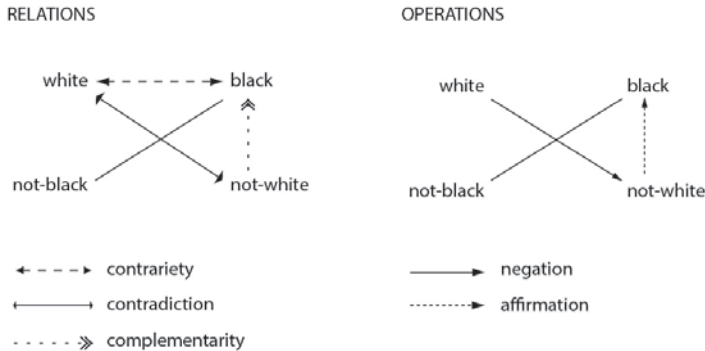
A semiotic square, then, represents the logical relations that can be obtained starting from any semantic category – contrariety, contradiction and complementarity – but also visualizes two main operations: negation and affirmation. Two more logical positions may be obtained thanks to the square, viz. the complex term and the neutral one. The complex term stems from the possible co-existence of both contrary terms of a category in one entity. If it is hard to think of something that is at the same time black and white, it is intuitive to think about the complex term of the category that opposes masculine to feminine, and is identical to the category "hermaphrodite". The neutral term stems from the co-existence of contrary terms' contradictories instead. In the case of sexuality, the typical example is that of the angel, whose gender is undetermined.

2.4 Sparkling communication

The product category of mineral water is a peculiar case in the food/beverages sector. It is not a beverage (in the usual sense), it does not have nutritional value and, according to a well known definition, is tasteless, odorless and colorless. Notwithstanding this peculiarity, water is necessary for human life, while it is part of all daily meals. Commercially, water is a very profitable product, but also, from the point of view of marketing, a very problematic one, because of difficulties with brand differentiation. If a consumer isn't capable of perceiving the differences between two products he or she will likely choose the less expensive one, thus resulting in commodification and price-wars.

The idiosyncracies of this market present unique exigencies for brand communications in terms of helping consumers recognize and appreciate the characteristics of distinctive product offers, while guaranteeing brand recognizability. It might be assumed that in the absence of flavor water is simply a "scientific product" (in terms of H_2O), without considerable scope for brand differentiation. This is not true, though, in gastronomic terms. Not only there are significantly different types of water, but in certain cultures flavorlessness is considered as the sublimation of the concept of flavor itself and not as its negation. As François Jullien (1991) underlines, for the Chinese, flavorlessness frees people from the excitement of ephemeral sensations, while reuniting them with the deepest roots of feeling itself, to the undertones – at the same time physical and mental – of a sign in subtle equilibrium between being and not being.

Despite the consistent advertising and marketing efforts at making consumers appreciate the differences among mineral water brands, this has never been an easy task. This is why effervescent waters (or natural sparkling) were introduced in the market, complementary to sparkling and still. Natural sparkling water is characterized by lower values of carbon dioxide and an increased quantity of dissolved minerals that result in a strong

sensation on the palate. In Italy, several companies have marketed this type of water, under brand names such as *Sangemini*, *Uliveto*, *Ferrarelle*, *Lete.* However, only the last two survived, only to compete ferociously. The communicative exigencies for Ferrarelle and Lete are very delicate: on the one hand, they need to highlight what they have in common, that is the fact of being effervescent within a market populated by competitors that mostly market still and sparkling waters; on the other hand, they both need to find points of differentiation between them that will be recognized as such by consumers. The unique communicative exigencies in this category have resulted in different modes of valorization, regardless of similarities in packaging (both brands use the colors of the Italian flag), fonts and even shapes. In order to understand how product valorizations can change over time, as well as how variations may become part of specific commercial tactics that are implemented in reaction to competitors' moves, we will reconstruct the diachronic evolution of these two brands' advertising campaigns.

When, in 1920, Ferrarelle started to advertise its product, it pursued a media strategy that consisted mostly of print ads in medical magazines. Effervescent water was presented as a cure for several diseases (Fig. 2.14), exactly the same strategy that was adopted by Lete at that time. After all, mineral water consumption was not compatible with contemporary perceptions and usage habits. Only the wealthiest consumers could afford drinking non-tab water, an expense that they tended to justify strictly on medical grounds. It took another ten years in the category's learning curve before Ferrarelle suggested a more hedonic product usage. An advert from the 1930s presents mineral water as the "best table water", while portraying the bottle on the table of a luxury restaurant (Fig. 2.15). Thus, from a practical valorization Ferrarelle moved to a ludic-aesthetic one.

Figure 2.14: One of the first ads by Ferrarelle in a medical magazine. Water is presented as a cure for various diseases. Practical valorization

Figure 2.15: In 1930s Ferrarelle ads start positioning mineral water as a hedonic product. Ludic valorization

During the Second World War, mineral waters experienced a steep sales decline. As a result, companies stopped advertising: there was no space for such a luxury good in a war economy. When the war ended and the economy started recovering, water companies made a new start. During the 60s, Ferrarelle presents natural sparkling water as a cure for several pathological conditions, and as a need, rather than a caprice. The payoff is "remember health", while those who drink water in the adverts are usually young people, even babies.

During the same period, Lete is less active in advertising. It wasn't until 1980 that the company launched its first commercial. In the meantime, in 1975, in a commercial that was broadcast during a famous advertising show in the Italian television named *Carosello*, Ferrarelle introduced a slogan that

characterized its advertising campaigns for years to come: "still, sparkling or Ferrarelle?" (Fig. 2.16). This commercial features, again, a luxury restaurant setting. After a long list of French dishes is read by the waiter, the only Italian element that is mentioned is Ferrarelle. By association, it is recommended that only Ferrarelle deserves being mentioned alongside the distinguished dishes. The mode of valorization in this case was ludic-aesthetic, the same route that led a few years later to the invention of "Frrrrr" (Fig. 2.17), an onomatopoeic construct that is evocative of how water sounds when poured into a glass. The indication of "natural sparkling" subsists at the bottom of the advert, a reference to authenticity that, depending on the occasion, will be explicated or not.

Figure 2.16: The launch of one of the most famous slogans in Ferrarelle's history, as well as of Italian advertising: "still, sparkling or…Ferrarelle?". Ludic valorization

Figure 2.17: A less fortunate slogan by Ferrarelle: "still, sparkling or…Frrrr". Ludic valorization

Figure 2.18: A famous Ferrarelle campaign with Leonardo Da Vinci's Gioconda. Ludic valorization

1980 is the year when "still, sparkling or...Ferrarelle?" explodes thanks to a very famous advertising campaign that was rolled out in both newspapers and television (Fig. 2.18). In our example, there are three different versions of Leonardo Da Vinci's Gioconda, the first one with straight hair (the copy says "still?"), the second one with curly hair (the copy asks "sparkling?"),and

the third one with the correct haircut, accompanied by the copy "or Ferrarelle?". It is during the same years that Lete produces its first commercial (Fig. 2.19). It shows different life moments: a young girl walks with two bottles in her hands, a bride comes out of a FIAT 500, a young soldier returns home with his backpack, an old man greets a baker. Very few words are uttered, but music is very suggestive of the adopted valorization: the song (in English) repeats "acqua Lete is my sun, my life", clearly suggesting a utopian valorization. The message is that water is related to consumers' identities, it nurtures their growth and helps them realize their potential.

Figure 2.19: Three frames from the first Lete commercial (1980). Utopian valorization

Figure 2.20: Ferrarelle commercial from the 70s. The slogan reads: "Everyday Ferrarelle: to live naturally, to be effervescent, to help digestion. Ferrarelle: light, effervescent, natural". Utopian valorization

Figure 2.21: Another approach to Ferrarelle's utopian valorization.

Ferrarelle's reaction came a few years later. In the 90s, the commercials moved from the ludic territory of "still, sparkling or Ferrarelle" to a utopian one (Fig. 2.20): water is presented as a life companion, an identity that is embodied in a specific character: a woman with neither straight nor curly hair, who loves moving around the city and ends up at the table of a classy restaurant. The tablemates (male for the most part) seem to have eyes only for her. After exiting the restaurant (alone) she grabs a bunch of balloons that subsequently float away, while the image fades to a glass of sparkling water. The slogan says: "Everyday Ferrarelle: to live naturally, to be effervescent, to help digestion. Ferrarelle: light, effervescent, natural". The music was created specifically for the brand.

A few years later, the same valorization was adopted in a different manner (Fig. 2.21), while Ferrarelle is not incarnated in a character anymore. This time the protagonist is a beautiful and ethereal girl who is found by a barman inside his pub during opening time. This is what she says, while addressing the men who are staring at her: "I was just checking if this water was as perfect as nature created it thousands of years ago. Men always ruin everything…". The main argument that is put forward here is not the taste of the product, its gustative identity, but the transcendent and absolute transparency as a definitive trait of being "Natural". "We did nothing", the barman retorts.

During the following years, Ferrarelle will valorize utopically its product in different ways, by drawing sometimes on subjectivity and sometimes on naturality. In all cases, water is the final goal – materially or metaphorically. In certain commercials the slogan reads "there isn't a single thirst" (meaning that there are different modalities of being thirsty), whereas in others the main characters of a long lasting advertising saga, Guido and Cristina, are seen grabbing the same Ferrarelle bottle, after having finished running a marathon, while uttering: "we are different…so what? Ferrarelle!" (Fig. 2.22).

Figure 2.22: A famous advertising saga by Ferrarelle featuring the characters of Guido and Cristina. Utopian valorization
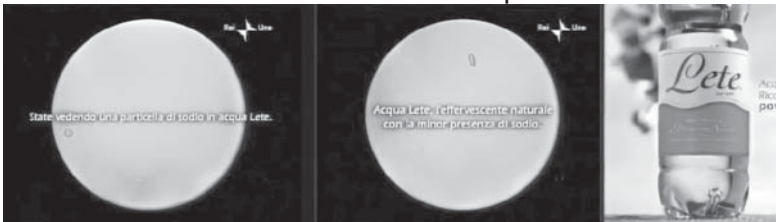
Figure 2.23: In 2000 Lete launches a very effective campaign based on the character of the sodium particle. Practical valorization

Figure 2.24: A fetus becomes the protagonist of a commercial by Ferrarelle. Critical valorization
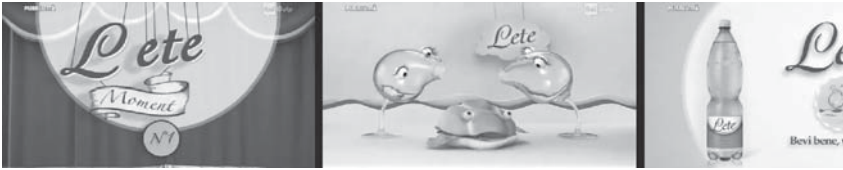
Figure 2.25: In 2010 Lete abandons the sodium particle without changing its practical valorization route

Figure 2.26: In 2012 Ferrarelle returns to practical valorization with the young actor Robertino. The slogan is "Drink, digest and taste"

Figure 2.27: In 2014 Lete introduces "Lete family", thus returning to utopian valorization

It is in the new millennium that the conflict with Lete becomes tougher. In 2000 Lete introduces a series of commercials based on the character of the sodium particle (Fig. 2.23) that will bring the brand to a new valorization territory. In the first of these commercials, the camera frames what seems to be just water, while the voice-over says "is there anybody here?". It is the voice of one of the very few particles of sodium: "Rich in pleasure and poor in sodium". The allusion is to Ferrarelle, which contains much more dissolved sodium than Lete. Since the single-minded proposition in this advertising copy strategy consists of highlighting this physical trait, we may consider these commercials as the expression of a practical valorization.

A few years later, in 2006, Ferrarelle responds to the success of Lete's campaign by changing, again, mode of valorization. Utopian is negated in favour of critical. No more beautiful girls or peculiar characters: while the images close up on the water going back from a glass to the bottle, a voice-over explains that Ferrarelle is "the only one whose natural effervescence has been certified". In this manner, quality is removed from the opinions arena, while being objectivized and guaranteed by certification.

In the years to follow, the same valorization will be addressed in a very different way. A commercial shows a fetus in the amniotic fluid, while the voice-over says that 60% of every man is water (Fig. 2.24). The motivational value of water quality, though, is arguable, as may be inferred by the pregnant woman's fetus who starts dancing to the disco song *Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)* by Sylvester, as soon as its mother drinks a glass of Ferrarelle. The humorous expedient here is intended to multiply the effects that the product may have on consumers, or, rather, on their bodies, in their most elemental representation, that of a fetus. Lete will abandon its sodium particle in 2010, only to roll out a less fortunate campaign, that of "Lete moments" (Fig. 2.24). The campaign's protagonists, a sandwich and a Mexican chili pepper, personify the digestive properties of the water brand. In the face of Lete's new campaign, Ferrarelle responded in a confusingly mixed valorization mode. The company initially regressed to a utopian valorization, while playing with the meaning of "a glass less full/less empty" (the slogan reads: "to those who see their uniqueness as a glass half full. Love who you are and nobody will be like you"). However, that was a temporary detour. Soon, the utopian valorization was negated in favour of a critical one. Yet, given that narrative logic suggests the negation of a valorization mode through the affirmation of its opposite, the optimal route appeared to be the adoption of a practical valorization that Ferrarelle hadn't used for years. The company adopted this route in 2012 with a very successful series of

commercials. The commercials were staged in the kitchen of a big restaurant where a smart little boy named Robertino and a waiter played by Alessandro Gassman, insist quite emphatically on the digestive properties of the water brand. "Drink, digest and taste" is the slogan that refers both to food and to life in general (Fig. 2.26).

In 2014 Lete responds by following the opposite path: from ludic valorization it moves to a utopian territory, with the aid of the "Lete family", a family of anthropomorphic bottles whose personality traits mimic those of a typical Italian family (Fig. 2.27). The idea is that there is a deep relation between the typical Italian family and Lete, both being part of the same identity. There is a mom-bottle (Letizia, who "was born for cuisine"), a daddy-bottle (Olimpio who "was born for sport") and a baby-bottle (who "was born for music") that are "the most effervescent of Italian families". The commercial refers to many different things, but it never talks about sodium particles. The unique reference to functional benefits appears to be an answer to Ferrarelle commercials ("in every family there is always something to digest").

In conclusion, we may visualize the two brands' diachronic valorization pathways by mapping (Figs.2.28-2.30) their strategic communication avenues on universal axiological maps (Floch 1990), thus furnishing a snapshot of competitive moves and counter-moves alongside the four main valorization routes that were exposed in this Section.

1920
Water as cure

Practical valorization   *Utopian valorization*

Critical valorization   *Ludic-Aesthetic valorization*

                                                 1930
                                                 The best table water

Figure 2.28: Ferrarelle advertising from 1920 to 1930

1960
"Remember health"

2012-2014
"Drink, digest and taste"

Practical valorization

1990 – 2005
"Everyday Ferrarelle: to live naturally, to be effervescent"

"Men always ruin everything…"

"Single thirst"

"We are different… so what? Ferrarelle!"

2010
"to those who see their uniqueness as a glass half full"

Utopian valorization

Critical valorization

2006-2007
"The only one with certified effervescence"
"60% of every man is water"

Ludic-Aesthetic valorization

1975-1980
"Still,sparkling or...Ferrarelle!"
"Frrr"
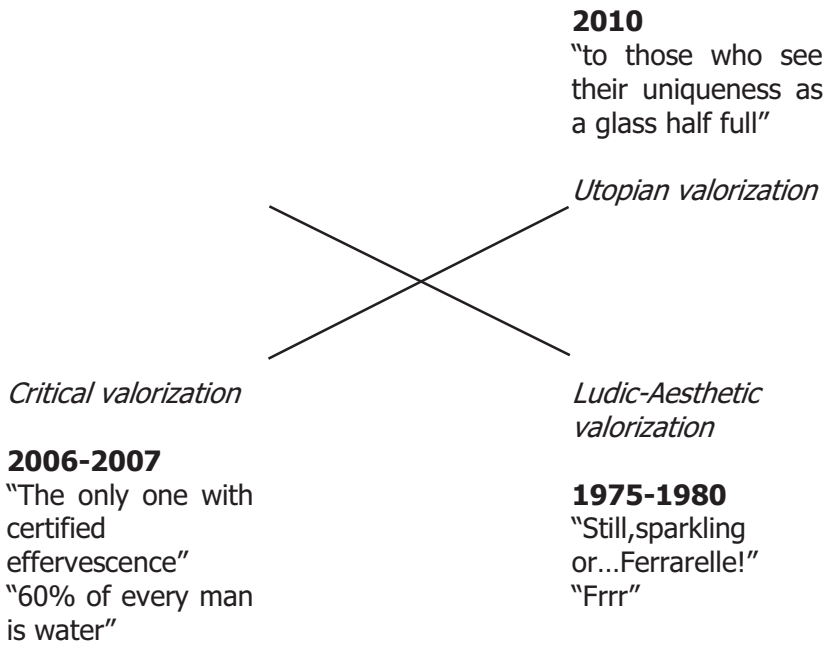
Figure 2.29: Ferrarelle advertising after the Second World War

2000
Sodium particle: "is there anybody?"

Practical valorization

1980
"AcquaLete is my life"

2014
Lete family

Utopian valorization

Critical valorization

Ludic-Aesthetic valorization

2010
Lete moment
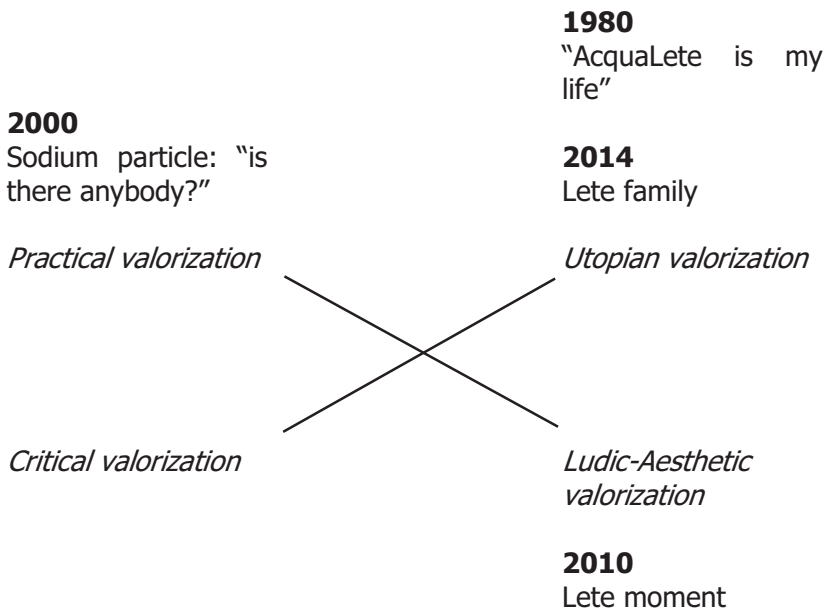
Figure 2.30: Lete advertising after the Second World War

2.5 Conclusions

As we saw in this Chapter, brands constitute primarily semiotic entities made of single or clusters of *values*, *individual and social meanings* that they articulate multifariously in pursuit of a specific *identity*. Over and above a partial emphasis on single content-values or a system of design expressive units, what must be accounted for in any descriptive attempt at mapping out brand language through semiotic tools and methods is the *process of valorization*. As demonstrated throughout this Chapter, the process of valorization is that narrative path thanks to which subjects, objects and values assume specific relations, and it is

these unique relational formations that attain to differentiate one brand language from another.

Semiotic aspects, such as narration, on which we dwelt extensively, should not be considered simply as instruments for achieving commercial goals or as a trivial embellishment of informative and persuasive strategies, but as constitutive parts of brand essence. In this context, the displayed structuralist models and methods (with a sociosemiotic bend) are instrumental in (re)constructing and describing the strategies that shape the communicative artefacts (i.e., ad texts) that are part of brands' semantic universe. But even more importantly, these models and methods are mostly useful when it comes to changing the strategic orientation of a brand language, as they allow us to examine the repercussions of such changes in terms of values and valorization.

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CHAPTER 3

Narrativity approaches to branding

F. Xavier Ruiz Collantes and Mercè Oliva

3.1 Introduction

The concept of narrative is of paramount importance across various social sciences and humanities disciplines, including anthropology, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, sociology and semiotics. The "linguistic turn" that took place in the 20th C. was succeeded, as noted by Fludernik (2009), by a "narrative turn". This Chapter is an attempt at a critical overview of some of the most relevant approaches to branding from narratological or narrative points of view. "'Narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that "tell a story" (Bal 1987: 3)" (Fludernik 2009: 105). The aim is to compare and contrast how narrative approaches have been imported in disciplines such as psychology and anthropology, and how they have made inroads into branding research, with a focus on semiotics.

In order to meet this demanding task, four perspectives on brand narrativity have been considered in this Chapter, viz. narratology, semiotics, archetypes and consumer storytelling. The selection criteria consist in their relevance, both for academic scholarship and branding practice.

We have divided this Chapter into five Sections. The first one deals with what today is widely known as the perspective of storytelling in its application to brands. The storytelling approach places narrative at the forefront of professional applications in brand communications. The second Section is devoted to semiotics, and especially structuralist and narrative semiotics. The third Section explains the archetypical models and approaches to branding that are based on anthropological and

psychoanalytical perspectives. The fourth Section is devoted to the study of consumers' narratives concerning their relationships with brands, with a focus on the disciplines of anthropology and cognitive psychology. The final Section engages in a critical comparison between the various approaches that were laid out throughout this Chapter, with an emphasis on the relative merits of narratively informed semiotic research. All along, we have tried to maintain a fruitful dialogue with multiple perspectives on the above research areas that have been voiced from marketing researchers, with view to enhancing the inter-disciplinary relevance of our readings, but also to highlight as yet untapped areas that constitute significant opportunities for marketing research going forward.

3.2 Storytelling in the context of branding

Storytelling is unquestionably a word that is very much in vogue today. In recent years, many authors in the field of advertising and marketing, but also in the fields of management, education and political communication, have been rather keen on exploring communication from the point of view of narrativity. As Fog et al. (2005: 15) contend in their *Storytelling: Branding in practice,* storytelling has become one of the key concepts in understanding how brands are built. As will be shown, storytelling can improve a brand's visibility and achieve higher levels of recall and emotional involvement among receivers.

According to Barthes (1977: 79), narrative is as old as mankind and has been present in all societies throughout the ages. Narrative is one of the main ways whereby we make sense of reality (Fiske 1987: 128) and there is a long academic history of studying and analysing it in semiotic studies of literature, film and television. However, the popularization of the term *storytelling* in these areas is indicative not only of a renewed interest in narrative as a concept, but of sweeping changes in communication strategies in many different areas, including advertising. Salmon (2008: 27-41), for example, refers to the

beginning of a new "narrative age" or "narrative turn" in which storytelling is colonizing areas other than fiction, while Prince (2004: 13) remarks that "narrative has become one of the most common hermeneutic grids of our time" (see also Bal [1987, 2004], and Herman [2005] for a comprehensive overview of classical narratological perspectives, and Nunning [2003] for a comprehensive account of post-classical trends in narrative/narratological research, including inter-disciplinary approaches).

More specifically, in the fields of advertising and branding, Salmon (2008: 38) defines storytelling as an "instrumental use of the story" to build a certain brand image, attribute values and create an emotional bond with the consumer. Salmon describes the birth of storytelling as one more step in the evolution of advertising communication from selling products to selling brands (see also Pérez Latorre 2013: 71; Semprini 1992); from informing about functional attributes to conveying emotions: "The physical product no longer makes the difference. The difference lies in the story, because the story is what drives the bond between the company and the consumer [...] Companies need to communicate based on values, and clearly illustrate how they make a difference" (Fog et al. 2005: 19–21). For Fog et al. there are two basic points of interest in storytelling: values and emotions. According to these authors, a solid brand is built on clearly defined values and an emotional connection with the consumer, while a narrative should communicate these values in a way that is understandable and emotionally appealing. Vincent (2002) also highlights the importance of values and emotions in brand narratives. Moreover, for Dahlen et al. (2010: 13) "the brand with the best story wins" and the main function of marketing communications should be to create and perpetuate deep meaning through narrative (Dahlen et al. 2010: 237).

As we shall see in this Section, storytelling developed in two principal ways. Firstly, manuals have been offered for experts in advertising and marketing in an attempt to provide "recipes"

for better strategic brand communication through stories (Vincent 2002; Fog et al. 2005; Mathews and Wacker 2007; Godin 2012; Dahlen et al. 2010). Secondly, in academic research, storytelling has been coupled with reception analysis in an attempt to determine how consumers read narrative advertising and its effects in terms of brand recall and emotional bonding (Escalas 2004; Woodside et al. 2008; Woodside 2010). In both cases, the main aim is to improve advertising effectiveness through storytelling.

Nevertheless, storytelling is not a perspective with its own methodology. Rather, it borrows concepts from narratology and semiotics. In this Section, we focus on approaches that are concerned with narrative structure, while postponing addressing perspectives in storytelling studies, such as archetypes (Jung 1981, 1989, 1997) and structuralist semiotics (Greimas 1970, 1986), for later Sections.

A key benefit that is constantly highlighted in the use of narrative in brand communications concerns the ability of storytelling to create emotional bonds between brands and consumers (Escalas 2004; Fog et al. 2005; Salmon 2008; Vincent 2002; Woodside et al. 2008; Woodside 2010). For example, Vincent kicks off his book *Legendary brands* by stating that legendary brands are based on narratives, which in turn is what allows them to generate empathy with the consumer (Vincent 2002: 8). Moreover, stories stir emotions and manipulate logical processing in such impactful ways as to elide rational argumentation (Vincent 2002: 28-32). According to Vincent (2002: 33-34), the principal reason for the success of brands like Kodak does not lie in technical superiority, but in a tradition of emotional advertising (for example, the *True colours* and *Kodak moment* campaigns). Godin (2012: 159) stresses that "a great story is believed and its lie is retold". For Ramzy and Korten (2006: 172), storytelling has been used by heritage brands such as Chivas and VSM to reconnect with an alienated consumer base in an emotionally compelling way.

According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010: 21), who draw on the work of cognitive psychologists such as Bruner, the use of narrative in brand communications is an aid to memory, a way of making sense of reality, of strengthening emotional connections and of identifying with particular brands. The narrative form is effective in creating emotional relationships and/or extending and deepening brand recall, precisely because individuals think narratively (Woodside et al. 2008; see also Escalas 2004, and Dahlen et al. 2010: 247). Moreover, human memory itself is based on stories (Woodside 2010: 532). Thus, using narrative to convey a particular brand image is perceived as a way of adapting advertising communication to the way consumers actually process information. The storytelling perspective also emphasizes how brands are used by consumers to build and communicate a specific identity (Escalas 2004; Fog et al. 2005; Vincent 2002). At this point, the theory of storytelling converges with the analysis of consumers' narratives, as will be shown in greater detail in due course.

A principal objective of storytelling authors is to identify the "principles of a well-told story" and how to apply them to advertising and branding. For example, Fog et al. (2005: 28-45) identify four elements of good storytelling. The first is the message: all brand narratives should have a clearly defined message and should transmit the brand's core values. The second is conflict: "a good story always centres on the struggle to attain, defend or regain harmony" (Fog et al. 2005: 33), yet this conflict should not have an immediate or predictable solution. At the same time, a story should not have too many conflicts in order to avoid distracting or confusing the audience. The third is the characters, who should create an emotional bond with the audience. Finally, the fourth element is the plot (i.e., the narrative form and how the story is told), which is very important for the audience's experience. In a nutshell, for Fog et al. a good brand narrative should convey a brand's core values and at the same time it should be entertaining, accessible and emotive. Fog

et al. also recommend serial narratives, since they can create a long-term relationship with an audience, and stories with strong inter-textual references as a way of appealing to an audience's prior knowledge.

Vincent (2002) also identifies four key elements of storytelling: plot, characters, themes (values) and aesthetics. These four elements are very similar to those highlighted by Fog et al. Vincent (2002: 135) also stresses the importance of creating stories that maximize the emotional impact on an audience and their involvement. To this end, every narrative should have compelling characters who must overcome great obstacles in order to achieve something difficult but possible (Vincent 2002: 127). Moreover, every story should have a well-constructed plot and a satisfactory ending. Finally, the author encourages the generation of "original" narratives, albeit based on "universal plots" (Vincent 2002: 73) and genre codes (Vincent 2002: 138).

Vincent (2002: 55–57, 122, 135, 139-141), Fog et al. (2005: 43), Woodside et al. (2008: 101) and Woodside (2010: 534-536) recommend using the canonical narrative structure, which is quite representative of modern Hollywood films (see Bordwell 2006). Thus, for these authors, the creation of a "good story" usually involves the events being organized in a structure in three Aristotelian acts (situation, complication and resolution) which in turn progressively create a dramatic curve (see Campbell 1959). In the first act, the protagonist and the conflict are presented. Usually, an event disrupts the hero's world and forces him to embark on an adventure. The second act tells of the obstacles the hero faces in pursuit of his goals, while the helpers are also introduced. Finally, in the third act, the moment of greatest dramatic intensity (the climax) occurs, followed by the resolution of the conflict or ultimate failure. Papadatos (2006: 383) contends that this narrative structure can be understood as a "universal sequence of events", since it is not only present in

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literature, film and advertising, but also used by consumers spontaneously to tell their stories involving brands.

In addition, storytelling authors understand stories as a transition from balance to imbalance, and then back to balance (Woodside 2010: 534-535). Although not mentioned explicitly, this is the model of minimal narrative as defined by Todorov (quoted in Fiske 1987: 138-139). In this context, desire is identified with the motivating force behind action (Woodside 2010; Vincent 2002: 135) and causality with the principle that adjoins the various events (Vincent 2002: 52).

Examples of campaigns based on storytelling that have achieved this emotional connection with their audience, in addition to getting across a clear message about the brand, include the famous "1984" Apple advertisement[1], in which the brand is presented as a rebel fighting against the establishment, thus linking the brand with the values of individuality and creativity. In this campaign, the aim of storytelling was to transmit the values or the "core story" (Fog et al. 2005) coherently and consistently via a brand's communications. For Vincent (2002: 14, 46-47), this advertising is an example of how narrative advertisements attain to grab viewers' attention in a media-saturated environment while instilling a heroic narrative in the minds of its audience. Ramzy and Korten (2006) highlight the case of Chivas in order to suggest that narrative brand communications should be based on the brand's own story.

As for the involvement of the audience/consumers, using narratives as a communicative strategy is seen as a way to encourage their participation. For example, Pérez Latorre (2013) addresses the ways whereby advertising narrative encourages a participatory response from the audience through three strategies: brand narratives oriented towards the creation of metaphors for universally common or daily matters (e.g., Levi's

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNy-7jv0XSc

"Odyssey" advertisement[2]), intrigue narratives (e.g., Sony Playstation's "Mental Wealth"[3]) and narratives geared towards imaginative play (e.g., Martini and Red Bull advertisements).

Other researchers focus on how brands encourage consumers to create narratives. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) show how consumers were inspired to create their own stories related to the concept of "real beauty" by *Dove*'s "The Evolution" spot,[4] which communicated the notion that "the idea of beauty created by the beauty industry is not real". For Singh and Sonnenburg (2012), what motivated consumers to take part in the brand's narrative was precisely the conflict conveyed in the advertisement, since conflict "makes us act". Fog et al. (2005: 173–193) also consider how, in the current context of digital media and participatory culture, many brands incorporate consumers' stories in their communication campaigns. For example, Starbucks organized a contest that invited couples to share their real stories about how they met at a Starbucks outlet. Virality is another effect of storytelling, since good stories incite repetition by an audience (Godin 2012: 159, see also Jenkins et al. 2013 and Gray 2010).

Despite a long academic tradition in this field, the proponents of the storytelling approach in branding do not base their texts on specific narratological theories. Instead, these authors borrow their concepts from popular screenwriting manuals such as McKee's (1997, cited in Vincent 2002: 28, 121-164, 307-308; Fog et al. 2005; Woodside et al. 2008: 98, 101, 105-107; Woodside 2010: 534-536) or Howard and Mabley's, (1993, cited in Vincent 2002: 135). These manuals' main aim is to teach would-be screenwriters the principles and conventions of storytelling. Moreover, they offer a simplified version of narratological concepts and theories in order to facilitate their application to screenwriting.

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[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KofgtfivYfg
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDdNn0x7Y0Y
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U

As noted above, there is a long theoretical tradition in narratology, spanning both literary and filmic narratives (Genette 1972; Ricoeur 1985; Bordwell 1986; Bal 1987; Chatman 1989; Casetti and Di Chio 1991; Kozloff 1992; Gaudreault and Jost 1995; Herman 2005; Fludernik 2009). A key distinction in classical narratology is the one between story (*fabula*) and plot (*sjuzet*). In short, this distinction concerns the difference between what is narrated on a story level (*fabula*) and how this story is emplotted (*sjuzet*) (cf. Chatman 1989: 19-20, and Herman et al. 2005). This distinction, which was popularized by the Russian formalists (e.g., Propp, Shklovsky), permeates the diverse landscape of narrative theories that have been put forward over the past fifty years (e.g., Genette's [1972] tripartite classification into discourse, narrative content and the act of narrative production; Bal's [1987] classification into *fabula*, story, text; or Bremond's [1973] distinction between *raconté* and *racontant*). Furthermore, concepts such as diegesis, focalization and narrative functions are instrumental in narrative analysis. However, the conceptually rich narratological tradition tends to be ignored by storytelling authors.

It is worth noting in passing that there is a group of authors such as Kozloff (1992) and Moreno Sánchez (2003) who, although not identifying themselves with the storytelling approach, have been approaching advertising narratively. Both Kozloff and Sánchez Moreno apply narratological terminology to advertisements to demonstrate that advertisements are also narratives that can be analyzed like any other narrative text. Nevertheless, they do not emphasize the implications for building brand image.

To conclude, although works by academic and commercial authors alike who follow the "storytelling" path in the field of branding and advertising have proliferated in recent years, they have largely concentrated on how certain emotional responses may be elicited from consumers, without addressing the expressive dimension in detail.

Using a simplified narratological approach constrains the possibility for understanding narrative advertising. From a storytelling point of view, it may seem that it is easy to understand what makes a good story, but there is nothing more difficult than actually creating one. As Bordwell (1986) has shown in the case of cinema, applying a full-fledged narratological model to narrative analysis can be very useful in understanding narrative meaning and the audience's experience and pleasures (see also Grodal 1999; Alwitt 2002; Herman 2003, 2005; Plantinga 2009). Furthermore, the rich terminology developed by narratology theorists not only enables a deep understanding of narratives' meanings; it can also function as a generative model for fostering creativity.

Finally, although storytelling authors suggest that the main aim of storytelling should be to convey and communicate a brand's core values effectively, they do not outline rules of transformation to explain the transition from story (plot, characters, conflict, etc.) to values. As will be shown in the next Section, this issue has been amply scrutinized in narrative semiotics.

3.3 Semiotics, narrative and brands

Within the semiotic discipline, structuralist semiotics has placed the greatest emphasis on brands from a narrative point of view. Peircean semiotics, on the other hand, has scrutinized the specifically narrative aspects of brand signification to a lesser extent.

By drawing on the inaugural and seminal work by Propp (1970), structuralist semiotics has been particularly concerned with studying narrative structures ever since its inception (Barthes 1966; Genette 1966; Todorov 1966; Metz 1968; Todorov 1969; Genette 1972; Bremond 1973). The scrutiny of brand narratology via structuralist semiotics is replete with significant complexities, since narrativity lies at the very core of structuralist semiotics (Greimas 1970; Greimas and Courtés 1979;

Courtés 1980; Greimas 1986). In fact, Greimasian semiotics may be considered to be a perspective based on the principle of pan-narrativity that postulates that all kinds of texts can be understood and analyzed as constructions of narrative signification. Thus, any approach to brand signification via Greimasian semiotics should be conceived as a narrative approach.

The Greimasian semiotic perspective is organized as a generative model (the "generative trajectory of meaning"), with different levels of depth and rules of semantic transformation, that describe how a level is generated from the previous one (Greimas and Courtés 1979). The generative trajectory of meaning comprises three inter-locking levels, the depth structural one, the middle or semio-narrative level and the surface or discursive level. These hierarchically ordered levels proceed from the manifest or surface text to its deeper organizational forms, from the particular to the general and from the concrete to the abstract (Bianchi 2011: 255), and vice versa.

At the deepest level of the trajectory, values (i.e., a brand's values) or *semes* (as elementary units of meaning) are structured according to the logic of the semiotic square (Greimas and Courtés 1979), that is through the logical relations of contrariety, contradiction and implication (Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2).
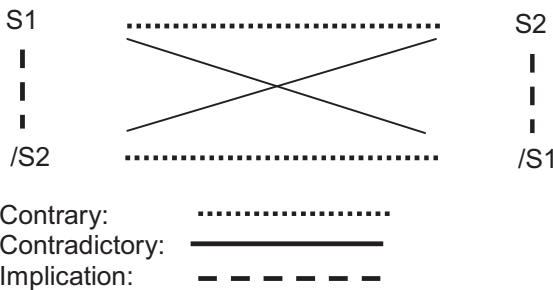
Figure 3.1: The semiotic square (adapted from Greimas 1970)
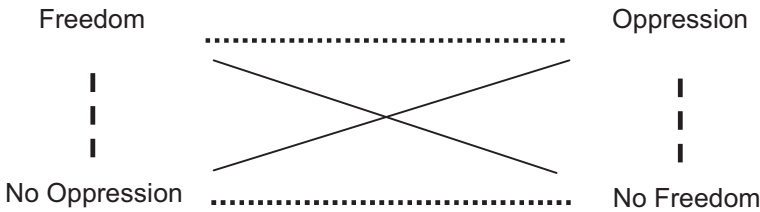
Figure 3.2: Semiotic square of the brand value "freedom"

On the middle level of the trajectory, a narrative syntax and a bespoke morphology of signs are posited; the syntax includes the actantial model and the canonical narrative schema, while the morphologically distinct signs consist of actants (Greimas 1970; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Courtés 1980; Greimas 1986).

The actantial model posits that every narrative revolves around a set of unchanging, universal syntactic positions occupied by actants (that should not be confused with manifest discursive actors). For example, a brand may assume different actantial positions, such as: Subject, the subject that performs a mission; Object, what is sought by performing the mission; Helper, the one that supports the Subject or makes its task easier; Opponent, the one that hinders the subject's performance; Sender, the one that gives something to another actant, the latter being the Receiver (Fig. 3.3).
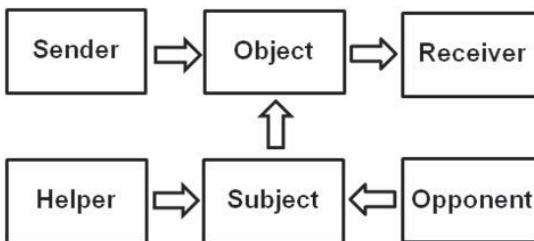
Figure 3.3: Greimas's actantial model (adapted from Greimas 1986)

The characters in a manifest narrative (that is, at the surface or discursive level), whether they are figurative or abstract, individuals or groups, always have an actantial position at the semio-narrative level that gives them meaning and function within the narrative.

The actantial model is directly related to the canonical narrative schema. In its standard version (Greimas 1970; Courtés 1980; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Greimas 1986), the canonical schema suggests that a narrative in its entirety consists of four phases: contract, competence, performance and sanction. These phases are not ordered chronologically, but logically, since each phase involves the previous one. In the contract stage, the so-called "manipulation" involves a subject, the Sender, ordering another, the Receiver, to carry out a mission with view to acquiring a desired object (such as a brand value, benefit, attribute). During the competence phase, the Subject acquires and proves that he/she possesses the skills and motivation to carry out the mission he/she has undertaken. The performance phase refers to the undertaking of the mission that may end in success or failure, i.e., achievement in attaining the Object of desire or not. The sanction phase involves an assessment of the performance of the mission that was established in the first phase and a positive or negative acknowledgment of the subject who carried it out. In fact, the different actants are distributed throughout the phases of the narrative schema. Thus, the Sender and Receiver are positioned in the contract and sanction phases, whereas other actants such as the Subject, Object, Helper, Opponent and Anti-Subject take on meaning in the competence and performance phases (Greimas and Courtés 1979). Finally, at the discursive level, the narrative is further concretized by being inscribed in actors, actions, places and times.

In this generative model, the semio-narrative level is essential as it confers a structural organizational principle to all discourses by connecting the semantic values of the deep level with the discursive configurations of the surface level. It is,

therefore, the semio-narrative level that lends narrativity to brand communications.

It should be understood that narrativity, from a Greimasian standpoint, is an organizing principle that confers structural coherence to discourses, regardless of genre. As an organizing principle, narrativity should not be confused with how narratives or stories are often understood in an intuitive manner, that is as a succession of actions by a protagonist, causally and temporally ordered with a beginning and an end (at least not coincidentally with the deployment of a story at the surface discursive level). The principle of narrativity may be applied not only to a TV advertisement that "tells a story" about the life of a character in relation to a brand, but also to a logo, a visual symbol, a slogan, a vitrine or a row of shelves in a retail outlet. Any brand communication vehicle can be analyzed in semio-narrative terms.

Semprini (1992) offers a simplified version of Greimas's generative trajectory of meaning, applied to the study of brand identity. This model has three levels, in line with the original Greimasian conception, viz. (from the deepest to the surface) the axiological, the narrative and the surface or discursive levels (Fig.3.4 and Fig.3.5).

The axiological level, which can be roughly equated to Greimas's depth or elementary structure of signification, corresponds to a brand's core values. For example, in the case of Levi's (Fig. 3.5), the brand values are non-conformism, freedom and masculinity, which are encountered in all of Levi's communications.

The narrative level is equivalent to Greimas's semio-narrative level: narrative syntax, role attribution and narrativization. As above mentioned, this is the level that lends narrativity to a brand's communications. In the example of Levi's (Fig. 3.5), the narrative structure features confrontation with a dichotomous structure.

The surface or discursive level corresponds to the discursive level of the Greimasian model. This is the level where values and abstract narrative structures are concretized in characters (actors), times, spaces, as well as rhetorical and aesthetical resources. In the Levi's example offered by Semprini (Fig. 3.5), the brand's values and narrative structures, identified in the axiological and narrative levels, are embodied by laid-back men and characters with beautiful and sensual bodies (actors), who appear in advertisements that narrate stories of seduction (theme), set in the 1950s (time) in the American countryside (space).

PRODUCTION ENCYCLOPAEDIA   RECEPTION ENCYCLOPAEDIA

SURFACE LEVEL
(DISCOURSES)

- Themes
- Space
- Time
- Actors
- Style
- Rhetorics

NARRATIVE
LEVEL

- Narrativization
- Role attribution
- Narrative

AXIOLOGICAL
LEVEL

- Core values
- Brand's basic identity
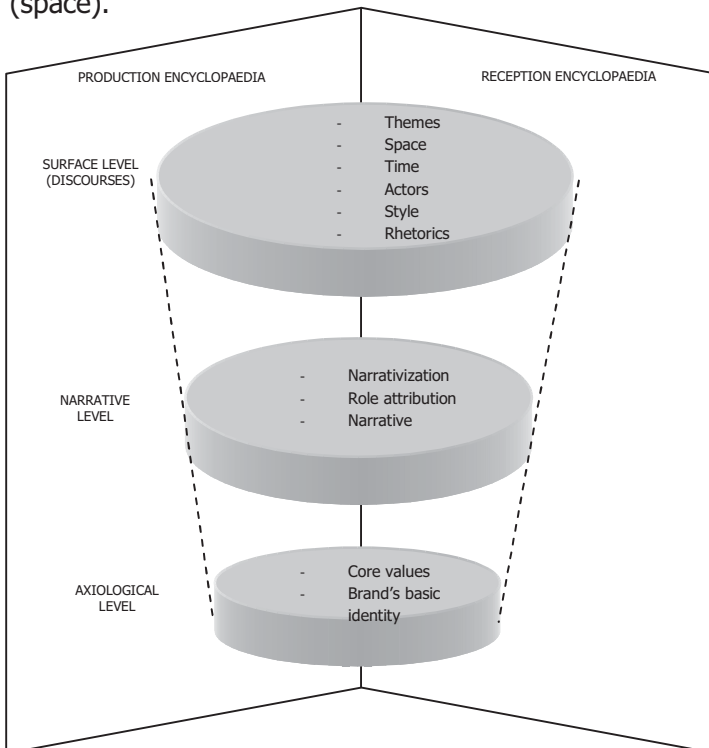
Figure 3.4: Brand identity system (adapted from Semprini 1992: 55)
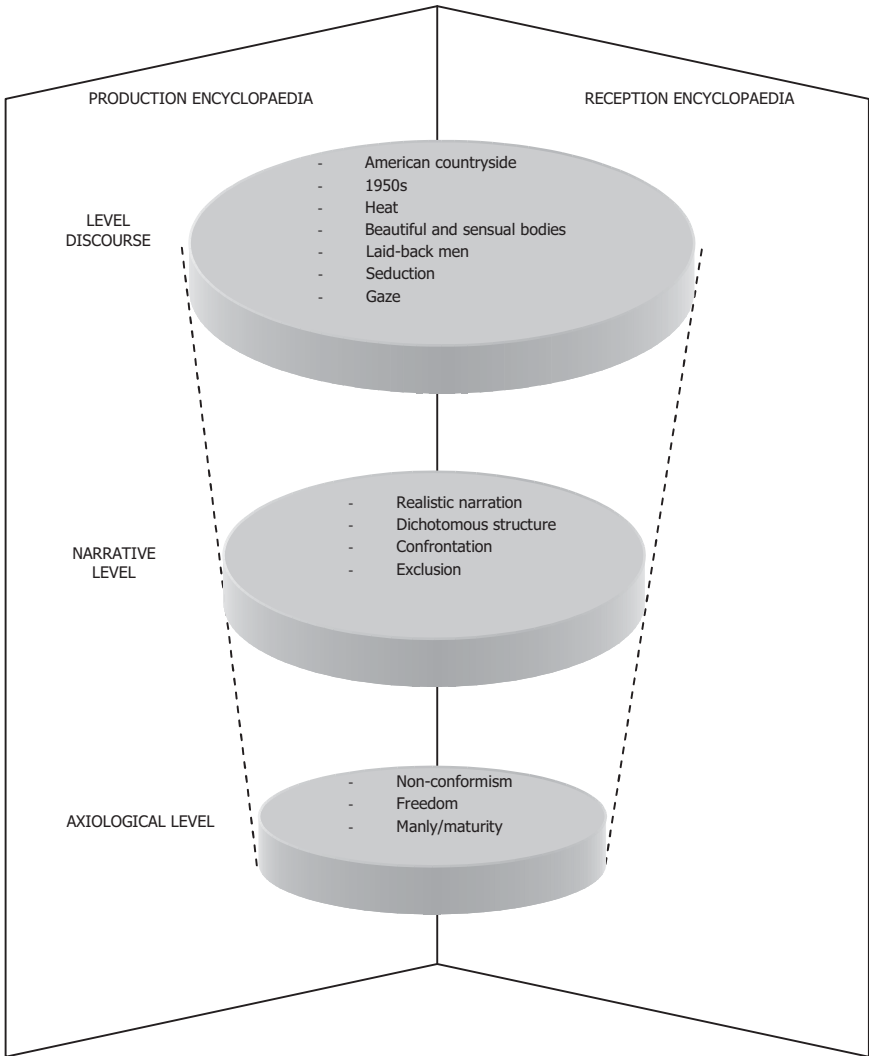
Figure 3.5: Levi's brand identity before 1990 (adapted from Semprini 1992: 59)

The component of the generative trajectory that has had the most lasting impact in semiotic analyses of brands and brand communications is the semiotic square. In this context, the square of consumption values proposed by Floch (1990) is an exemplary application. This square organizes the exemplary semantic universe of a brand's values into four types defined by logical relations of contrariety, contradiction and implication: utopian, practical, ludic and critical values (Fig. 3.6).

Practical valorization

Handling
Comfort
Reliability

"Utilitiarian" values
(instrumental values)

"Existential" values
(base values)

Utopian valorization

Costs/Benefits
Quality/Price

Non-existential values

Non-utilitarian values

Critical valorization

Ludic valorization
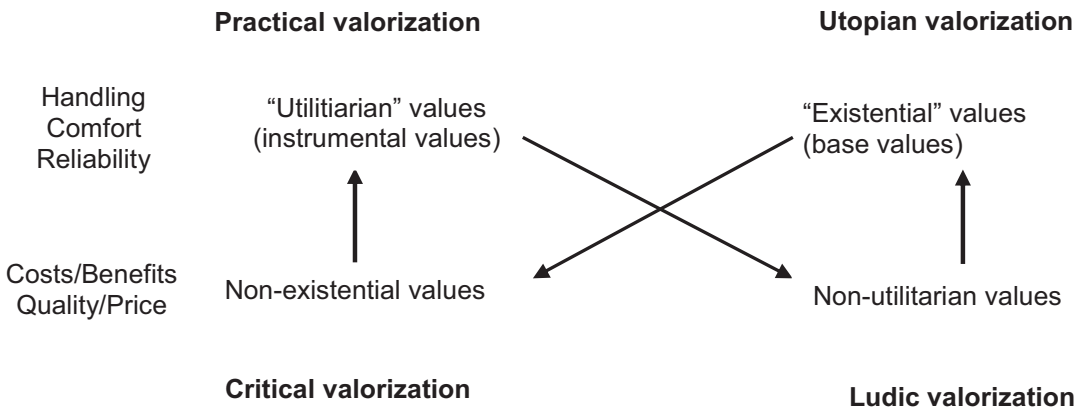
Figure 3.6: Square of consumer values (adapted from Floch 1993: 148)

The prevalence of the semiotic square in structuralist semiotic applications to brands reflects the fact that the core of a brand's meaning is identified in branding with a set of values that endow it with character and position it compared to other brands. This set of values can be interpreted, in a typical Greimasian vein, as an axiological semantic organization of positions in a semiotic square. The appeal of this model lies in the fact that it can be used intuitively by marketing professionals, thus enabling the

development of alternative positioning routes (Mick and Oswald 2006; Rossolatos 2014a). Furthermore, the popularity of Floch's semiotic square of consumption values is undoubtedly attributable to its all-encompassing character and to the reduction of all possible types of consumption values to four basic categories (regardless of the fact that it was developed against the background of a single brand's – i.e., Citroen – advertising communications).

The signification of brands is thus reduced to static models of values that are presented as place-holders awaiting to be occupied, regardless of the narrative actions that must be carried out in order to bring about axiological shifts. Nonetheless, narrativity is based on transformations from a state defined by a value to another state defined by a different, contrary or contradictory value. At this juncture, one must consider that a minimal narrative implies the transformation or movement between two successive, different states-of-being (Courtés 2003) that takes place not at the deep level of signification, but at the semio-narrative level. The logical relations between the values of the semiotic square at the axiological level is what makes the transformation at the semio-narrative and discursive levels possible and gives it meaning, since this transformation does not proceed from one value to another unrelated value, but between values that have a logical relationship. This transformation is reflected differently on each level, based on each level's unique morphology and syntax.

For example, a non-narrative semiotic model of a brand's deep meaning would posit that a particular brand is characterized by the value of "freedom" in a semiotic square where it is positioned in comparison to other values based on logical relationships ("oppression", "no freedom", "no oppression"). However, a semiotic model that takes into account narrativity also considers that the deep meaning of a brand is defined by the transformation between two states, for example by passing from one state defined by the value "oppression" to another state

defined by the value "freedom". In this case, the transformation is related to a story of "liberation" at the semio-narrative and discursive levels, rendered possible by the logical relationship between the semiotic square's values (Fig. 3.7). These axiological transformations occur at the semio-narrative level as transformations between states-of-being of subjects who perform actions.

LIBERATION

Freedom   Oppression

No Oppression   No Freedom
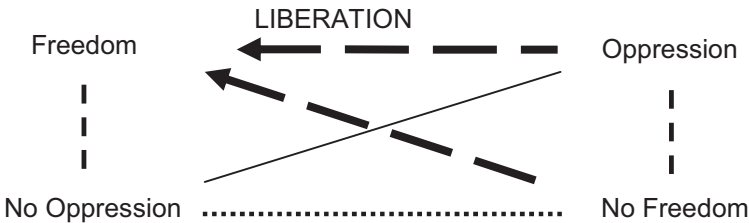
Figure 3.7: Liberation as the deep meaning of a brand

Although Bianchi (2011), Codeluppi (2013) and others (Mick et al. 2004; Mick and Oswald 2006) emphasize the aptness of Greimas's narrative semiotic approach for analyzing advertising discourse, the narrative dimension is unduly focused upon. It is the semiotic square (which corresponds to the axiological level) that has been mostly used by analysts, at the expense of the principle of narrativity.

In this regard, the study by Dano et al. (2003) on cosmetics brands for men is noteworthy, as it compares consumers' perceptions about the use of these brands alongside their communication strategies. Similar analyses have been conducted by Kessous and Roux (2008) on brands related to the concept of nostalgia, by Anido Freire (2014) with regard to luxury brands and by Rossolatos (2012b) with regard to the invariable semantic universe of Johnnie Walker throughout different advertising executions. In the same vein, it is worth looking at the analysis by Ourahmoune et al. (2014) on how brands have

appropriated the discourse of sustainability, as well as how this discourse is related to gender stereotypes in their advertising communications. These authors use the semiotic analysis of colours, shapes, postures, movements, sounds and verbal language as expressive ground, then identify "recurring themes and narratives", and eventually construct a semiotic square that enables them to distinguish between two main types of discourse on sustainability: narratives of "control" linked to traditional masculine values, and narratives of "co-operation" based on traditionally feminine values. Other interesting studies are those by Veg and Nyeck (2007) and Ourahmoune (2008) on the representation of masculinity in advertising, as well as by Oswald (2003) on representing the family. These works examine the dialogue between social values and advertising (see also Codeluppi 2008).

Among the narratological aspects of the Greimasian semiotic perspective, the actantial model is undoubtedly the most extensively applied one (Greimas and Courtés 1979). Among the earliest studies that analyzed advertising narratives via the Greimasian actantial model is *The language of advertising* by Vestergaard and Schrøder (1985). These authors contend that in advertising messages the advertised product does not always perform the role of the Object, but usually functions as a Helper and Object-Sender, whereas the consumer usually assumes the position of Subject and Object-Receiver. The Object is a positively connoted value that can be related to the product. For example, in an advertisement for Sanatogen Multivitamin, the Object to which the Subject (consumer) aspires is "good health", while the product is the one who will help the Subject in achieving this goal.

Other authors, such as Bertrand (1988) and Floch (1990), have adopted a piecemeal outlook towards the generative trajectory of meaning in their analyses of advertising messages. Bertrand (1988), in his analysis of an advertising campaign for Black & White whisky, concludes that the two basic values

conveyed by the campaign are conciliation and complicity. Firstly, all of the elements of the campaign refer to the idea of reconciling opposites, for example by assigning positive values to "black and white" (perfection) and "neither black nor white" (life), while refusing absolute values ("black or white"). In other words, according to Bertrand, the campaign emphasizes the "&" in Black & White, focusing the consumer's attention on the name of the brand and its semantic richness. Secondly, the campaign manages to create consumer complicity through irony, by using double meanings and by leveraging consumers' recognition of the semiotic sophistication of the messages (Bertrand 1988: 287). However, although the author discusses the discursive and axiological levels in some detail, he eschews the narrative dimension of the campaign and hence the semio-narrative level. Rather, the author merely states that some images from the campaign represent states, whereas others represent actions (playing on reconciling the identified pairs of opposites).

Other studies display a greater sensitivity towards the narrative dimension of brand communications. This is the case with the analysis of Google's advertising by Scolari (2008). Scolari highlights the narrative potential of any brand in the context of possible worlds. In his analysis, he concludes that Google constructs its image from values (axiological level) such as simplicity, speed and usability which are related to certain features of its browser's design (discursive level). Finally, for Scolari, Google is constructed as a brand via the user's experience, which can be understood (and analyzed) as a narrative: Google places consumers at the centre of the interaction process, assigning them the role of hero (Subject), while Google assumes the role of Helper (semio-narrative level).

Ruiz Collantes developed a methodological framework based on narrative semiotics in order to analyze the discursive and semio-narrative levels in concert, while identifying systematic attributions of actantial roles to social groups in large samples of texts (see, for example, Ruiz Collantes et al. 2011). In the field of

advertising, he applied this framework to institutional advertising in Spain so as to identify what type of image is constructed of the Spanish State, as a brand, and of its citizens (Ruiz Collantes 2009a, 2009b; Ruiz Collantes et al. 2009). In this study, the actantial positions that were identified consist of the State as Sender who assigns missions to citizens, and the citizens as Receivers who must comply with what has been assigned to them. A hierarchical reversal is thus created: it is not the State that must carry out the tasks that the citizens democratically decide, but the opposite—it is the State that decides and the citizens who perform. Moreover, in the few cases where the State carries out the missions, it prescribes these missions for itself and always demonstrates that it is competent and achieves positive results, while it is recognized as a hero in the sanction phase. On the other hand, when the citizens assume the role of Subject, their skills are questioned and they never receive recognition as heroes who have succeeded in their mission.

Ruiz Collantes (2011) also suggests that a brand's deep meaning is constructed through a narrative framework, that is a core narrative in which the brand and the consumer are assigned roles. Thus, this narrative framework is generative in the sense that new stories can be created from it.

Last, but not least, there are studies where Greimas's actantial model has been extensively applied to advertising. Pineda et al. (2013) examine the role assigned to the product in 72 examples of corporate advertainment, such as BMW's *The Hire*[5] or Mercedes' *Drive&Seek*.[6] Sánchez Corral (1997), in a comprehensive and exhaustive work, analyzes the discursive and semio-narrative levels to identify consumers' and brands' narrative roles in advertising.

In addition to applications of the actantial model in analysing advertising discourse, other branding aspects, such as

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[5] http://www.bmwblog.com/2009/08/25/video-collection-bmw-films-the-hire/

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nf75iUZVn7Y&noredirect=1

packaging, have also been addressed (also see Ventura, this Volume). For example, Bobrie (2008) uses the Greimasian narrative model to analyze the signification of packaging and shopping areas. Bobrie explains that packaging usually conveys a very specific narrative: (1) The brand presents itself as a credible Sender, in order to give credibility to the packaging's narrative; (2) The product's qualities are demonstrated in the images and texts that show the product in action; (3) The consumer is also portrayed, as well as the benefits the product offers them; (4) The packaging narrative represents the consumer's satisfaction as a result of the product benefits.

Ruiz Collantes (1999) analyzes the Nike swoosh logo alongside plastic, formal, compositional and chromatic dimensions to define the narrative communicated via this symbol-logo. In this narrative, the characteristics are defined for the Subject/hero, the Object/goal and the transformation/action to be carried out by the Subject to achieve the Object. Based on the adopted perspective, Nike's graphic logo-symbol is a communication device expressing a story with a minimal narrative structure that can be applied to other forms of brand communications.

Since in structuralist semiotics the brand is understood as a structure of levels from the deepest to the surface, a fundamental theoretical and methodological concern for some authors has been to establish models that explain how the transition from one level to another is brought about, from the points of view of analysis, of the construction of brands, and of their communication. These models also aim to ensure discursive coherence and communicative consistency amongst the different levels of a brand's trajectory, as well as throughout its communicative manifestations.

Floch (1990) and Semprini (1992, 2006) highlight that a brand's meaning is structured and constructed through different levels of depth and analyze some of the interactions between these levels. Rossolatos (2014a, 2014b) addresses the issues of

brand coherence and communicative consistency between the levels in his model of the brand trajectory of signification, by drawing on the Greimasian generative trajectory as a blueprint, which is subsequently revised to incorporate advances in post-Greimasian textual semiotics, rhetorical semiotics and advertising rhetoric, among other fields. The author outlines a methodological framework comprising nine steps for ensuring semantic coherence among the levels of the trajectory, while connecting brand values with the textual manifestations of a brand's advertising communication. The framework explicitly challenges the binarist rationale that underpinned the original Greimasian generativist model in favour of a connectionist approach, using associative networks that work both synchronically and diachronically and, moreover, in a competitive setting, rather than resting at the level of single brand communications.

As regards more peripheral, yet still crucial applications of structuralist semiotics in branding research, a limited number of studies have been devoted to the analysis of passions in advertising narratives, as well as to the implications of corporeal, tensive, and aesthetic elements (Melchiorri 2002; Reza and Nassim 2010; Bianchi 2011; Boutaud and Bertin 2012). In the context of narrative semiotics, "passions" should not be confused with "emotions", from the point of view of psychological theories as applied in marketing research. In a narrative semiotic framework, passions should be considered as a fundamental element of the narrative logic since they affect characters and the story's development (Greimas and Fontanille 1991). Characters not only perform actions, but also feel passions such as love, envy, desire, ambition, happiness, and so on.

The opposition between actions and passions is based on the opposition between *actions* (*doing*) and *states* (*being*), and their modal configurations. Passions refer to an actor's *being* or *state*. They should be understood as "effects of meaning" and not as psychological states of empirical subjects. These meanings are

not universal, since they take form and are manifested discursively within culture-specific settings.

In this context, semiotic states (*being*, *doing* and *having*) that are modalized by *wanting-to*, *having-to*, *being-able-to*, *knowing-how-to*, can be related to certain passions. For example, modal positions such as *wanting to be, knowing not being able to be* or *believing not to be* will produce *frustration* and *bitterness*. From a structuralist semiotic point of view, passions should be understood as syntagmatic articulations of different phases, which conform to pathemic schemes. For example, Fig. 3.8 displays Greimas's syntagmatic articulation of *anger*. Moreover, passions and actions are interrelated in a narrative: for example, an action can cause a passion and a passion can trigger an action.

| Trust | ⇨ | Wait | ⇨ | Frustratio n | ⇨ | Unhappin ess | ⇨ | Agressive ness | ⇨ | Explosion |

Figure 3.8: Anger sequence (adapted from Greimas 1983: 226)

In the branding scholarship, the semiotics of passion is a considerably under-researched area that merits further investigation, since it enables us to analyze a significant element of brands' narratives: consumers' and brands' passions, which influence their actions in the narratives where they appear as characters.

In general, studies of brand narratives tend to focus on the level of the enunciated, at the expense of the study of enunciative structures. The concept of enunciation refers to the act of using (any kind of) language to produce an *énoncé* (the end-product of an enunciation) in a particular spatio-temporal setting (see Benveniste 1966; Genette 1972; Benveniste 1974; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Gaudreault and Jost 1995). In every discourse, the subject of the enunciation (the subject who communicates) portrays him or herself as enunciator of the

enunciated discourse, as well as the subject who is addressed in this communicative act. Thus, the communicative exchange is represented in the subject's discourse itself. In other words, the subjects that take part in the communicative act (*enunciator* and *enunciatee*), as well as the spatial and temporal coordinates in which the communication takes place, are all represented in the discourse (marks of enunciation). *Enunciator* and *enunciatee* are textual roles that should not be confused with the empirical author and receptor of a message. The *enunciator*, or implicit author, can be embodied by different subjects that narrate, communicate or participate as characters in the story, who have knowledge, beliefs, passions and who are situated in a specific time and space that may be represented through *deictics* (designating words, expressions or visual elements whose meaning depends on the context in which they are used, for example pronouns such as *I* or *this*; see Benveniste 1966, 1974; Pericot 2002). A story can also be narrated by many voices and viewpoints (enunciative polyphony). These implicit or explicit enunciators address their stories to another subject, the enunciatee. The enunciatee is also represented in the text as a subject with a specific identity and with knowledge, opinions, viewpoints, passions (see Bally 1965; Benveniste 1966; Genette 1972; Benveniste 1974; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Ducrot 1984; Nadal 1990; Cervoni 1987; Gaudreault and Jost 1995; Filinich 1998; Culioli 1999).

An enunciative structure can be identified in every story. This level does not correspond to the story that is narrated, but to the narration act itself, in which *enunciator* and *enunciatee* establish a communicative relationship. When an empirical author creates a narrative, not only he or she creates a story (in which characters act in order to achieve some goal), but he or she also creates an enunciative structure, circumscribing the relationship between enunciator and enunciatee.

Several authors have analyzed the enunciation of advertising discourses (Pérez Tornero 1983; Gavard-Perret and

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Moscarola 1998; Steffens de Castro 2004; López Díaz 2006; Sánchez Corral 2006; Skibicki, 2007; Garrido Lora et al. 2009; Karamifar 2009). In contrast, little work has been done regarding the implications of enunciative structures for branding, although they play a significant role in building a brand's identity and personality. In brand communication, the brand itself is portrayed as the enunciator of the advertising message—an enunciator with specific traits. Thus, from a narrative viewpoint, a brand should be understood not only as a character in an advertisement's narrative, but also as a subject that narrates (whether it is represented implicitly or explicitly, as an invisible storyteller or personified as a character, as a single enunciator or as multiple voices) and in its narration portrays itself and consumers as enunciator and enunciatees respectively. The brand as enunciator should be understood as a central element of a brand's identity.

Semprini (1992) examines the enunciative structures of brand communications and how the brand and the consumer are represented in terms of encyclopaedias of production and reception (Fig. 3.9). Following Eco (1981), the concept of "encyclopaedia" does not refer to a dictionary, but to individual subjects' organized networks of knowledge and information about both real and possible worlds (for example, those of fiction). The concept of "encyclopaedia" also refers to the interpretative competences of a text's model author and model reader. Both model author and model reader are not empirical subjects, but enunciative subjects, textual figures whose traits can be inferred from a text. Every text presupposes that its author and reader possess a certain encyclopaedia and, at the same time, every text may equip its reader with new competences and knowledge. If a reader does not possess the competences presupposed by a text, he or she will not be able to actualize and reconstruct its meaning. In this sense, a text's author has to keep in mind the reader's encyclopaedia when creating a text and a text's reader has to keep in mind the author's encyclopaedia when interpreting a text.
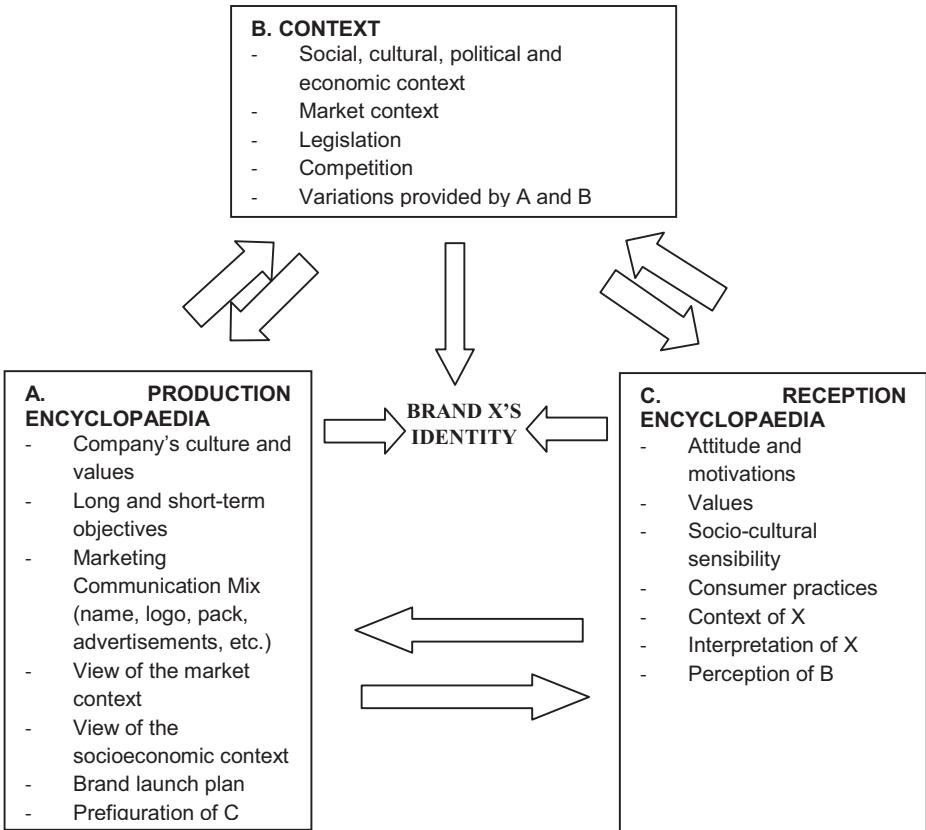
Figure 3.9: Brand identity creation (adapted from Semprini 1992: 41)

Finally, some fundamental questions have been raised about the applicability of the standard approach of structuralist semiotics to the analysis and construction of brands. Rossolatos (2012b, 2014b) presents a crucial issue while questioning whether the Greimasian canonical narrative schema and actantial model are directly applicable to brands as structures of signification and to

brand communications. In this respect, the author points to the fact that the canonical narrative schema has been defined based on an analysis of literary texts, which is a very different genre from brand communications. Rossolatos argues that when analyzing and structuring brands one should take into account how the elements of the planes of expression and content may be correlated with a view to furnishing differential benefits and competitive advantages to brand owners which is not a central concern in literary narrative analyses.

However, it should be noted that the standard narrative model of structuralist semiotics—in terms of the actantial model and, above all, with respect to the canonical narrative schema—refers to narrativity as a universal structure in so far as it relates to fundamental structures of action. Narratives can be used in different communicative contexts and can pursue different aims. Nonetheless, narratives at their deepest level correspond to fundamental structures of action that are deployed following a narrative logic (Courtés 1980: 5-25). There is a common logic in all kinds of actions, whether they are co-operative or competitive in nature: a subject aims to transform a state-of-being by performing an action to achieve an objective; this subject must be competent in order to achieve its objective; while performing the action it can also acquire assistance or encounter hurdles. Hence, since narrative is based on transformations triggered by actions, structuralist semiotics' narrative model has pretensions of universality and can be used for studying any kind of text.

In this sense, narrativity as a fundamental principle responsible for articulating brand signification should be closely linked to the idea that the brand is a character and agent capable of undertaking actions and, therefore, capable of being a character within different types of stories, whether these are brand-owned stories or stories by consumers who narrate their relationships with brands (as we shall see in due course).

3.4 Myths and archetypes

One of the most relevant lines of reasoning for the strategic development of brand image draws on so-called "archetypes". The use of archetypes in branding has been evinced mainly in types of characters or personalities. Each of these types has specific characteristics that enable them to function as the source of different types of stories. In this sense, identifying a brand with an archetype implies projecting it onto a certain narrative universe. An archetype is a narrative anchor for each brand that identifies with it. One could argue that archetypes are proto-narrative contexts.

The theoretical basis for applying archetypes to branding is the psychoanalytic work of Carl Gustav Jung, which revolves around the concepts of the collective unconscious (Jung 1981, 1989, 1997) and myth. These two concepts aid in the elucidation of some fundamental characteristics of archetypical brands. In order to understand the relationship between myth and archetype, we shall look into two perspectives that converge on various grounds. The first perspective stems from anthropology, for which myth is a fundamental research area. The second perspective is based on Jung's psychoanalysis, for whom universal myths constitute the proof of the existence of unconscious archetypes that are also universal.

The study of myths and archetypes in branding stems from the fact that brands in contemporary societies have been occasionally appealing to the realm of the sacred and the magical (Twitcell 1996; Kottack 2010; Dufour 2011). Through brands, objects become amulets, relics, fetishes, etc. Brands have enabled a re-enchantment of the world (Belk et al. 1989), a new encounter with the sacred, the magical, mysterious and inexplicable, in contradistinction to the programmatic rationality of historical modernity.

Myths are cultural constructions based on a narrative backdrop. They are dynamic narrative models whose primary function is to provide humans with models to understand the

sacred, the magical and anything they do not understand and which exceeds their ability to make sense of the reality they are experiencing in life (Durand 1993a, 2000). Myths are stories that explain the origins of the universe, life, peoples, nations, their evolution and their ends. Although mythical narrative may hark back to a moment in time, it does provide a discourse whose meaning is timeless and eternal. The same myths appear in different cultures under various guises in stories about gods, heroes, magicians, saints, legendary characters, etc. For this reason, according to relevant anthropological schools of thought, myths tend to be universal and related to aspects of the unconscious (Eliade 1978, 1988, 1991; Durand 1993a, 1993b; Eliade 2001, 2014). Furthermore, myths have their own profound logic and this logic is based on the union of opposites. Myths are stories which, at their core, tend to resolve contradictions that are intractable outside the myth itself, while unifying opposites such as life and death, good and evil, the ephemeral and the eternal, the human and the animal (Lévi-Strauss 2003). This logic of myth may also be applied to the consumption of brands (Levy 1981).

The analysis of myths is fundamental to the study of brands (Randazzo 1996; Levy 1981; Holt 2003, 2004; Arnould and Thompson 2005). Brands reproduce mythical narrative models and become fundamental myths themselves in our consumption culture. For example, while analysing femininity myths in advertising, León (2001) culminates in the following fundamental archetypical figures: the victim, who relates to the myths of vulnerable goddesses; the female dominator of men, based on figures such as Artemis, Athena, Aphrodite, the sirens and the sphinx; the female angel such as Dante's Beatrice; and the great mother, originally represented by the great Palaeolithic goddesses with their opulent shapes.

The use of myths and models of mythical narratives are presented as a method for constructing brands, since a brand can

be built socially as a projection of universal myths (Mathieu et al. 2014).

For Jung, the universality of myths constitutes unshakeable proof that above culture-specific manifestations, they originate in some aspect of human nature that resides in the unconscious, while, given their universality, they form a collective unconscious. Archetypes are the contents of the collective unconscious: deep, primordial images reflected in myths, religions, literature, art, film and all forms of culture, be they elitist or popular. Archetypes are innate in the human mind. They answer to primary, symbolic instincts and this is why they have fascinated, dominated and persuaded human beings of all times and places. Nevertheless, the idea that archetypes are innate in the human mind has been repeatedly contested and Jung has been accused of Lamarckianism. Jung claims that archetypes are innate structures, inherited and incorporated into the collective unconscious as a consequence of cultural practices and learning. This idea contradicts the Darwinist evolutionary model (Neher 1996; Haule 2006; Merchant 2009; Goodwyn 2010; Rensma 2013).

From a branding standpoint, there is considerable appeal in exercising the strategic option of using archetypes to construct brands that are powerful, emblematic and mythical. Positioning a brand in line with an archetype ensures its universal impact and presence in consumers' unconscious. For this reason, assuming that the theoretical apparatus on which archetypes are based is valid, archetypes have become a relevant instrument in constructing brand meaning.

In this vein, the typology offered by Mark and Pearson (2001) constitutes a fundamental reference in the theory of archetypes for brand assessment and the delineation of communication strategies. The twelve archetypes that are included in this work are caregiver, creator, explorer, hero, innocent, jester, lover, magician, outlaw, regular guy, ruler and sage. Each of these archetypes corresponds to a specific

character that can be transferred to brands. Each character instantiates certain qualities, goals, motivations, capabilities and relationships with others. In this sense, as mentioned above, each archetype acts as the core for narrative development, in terms of a proto-narrative structure.

For example, "the creator" is an archetype that corresponds to brands that generate something new and of lasting value for consumers, that stimulate originality and aid in creativity. Apple is a good example of this type of brand. "The innocent" is the archetype of brands that offer consumers purity, simplicity and goodness. It stands for a return to innocence and for a calm life with no complications or immorality. Examples of this type of brand are Coca-Cola and Johnson & Johnson (Mark and Pearson 2001). "The hero" is the archetype of brands that symbolize the rewards to be reaped by those who act with determination, energy and discipline, who confront difficulties and try to overcome their own limits. Examples of this type of brand are Nike and BMW (Mark and Pearson 2001).

The model offered by Mark and Pearson (2001) suggests twelve archetypes based on two axes. The vertical axis consists of the opposing values of mastery/stability; the horizontal axis of the opposites belonging/independence. At the pole of Mastery the archetypes of the magician, hero and outlaw are located. At the Stability pole we encounter the archetypes of the creator, ruler and caregiver. At the pole of Belonging we encounter the archetypes of the lover, regular guy and jester. At the pole of Independence, the archetypes of the innocent, explorer and sage are located.

This model has simplified considerably the work of Jung, rendering it easily applicable, thus boosting the popularity of archetypes in branding. However, this simplification and perhaps vulgarization of Jung's work has led to an impoverishment of the scope of applications of the psychoanalyst's theories in branding research. The application of the theory of archetypes to branding (see, for example, Connan and Sarantoulias 2013), based on the

work of Mark and Pearson (2001), does not take into account the complexity and wealth of Jung's work. According to Jung, the collective unconscious is an inexhaustible source of archetypes that is impossible to reduce to a round number like 11. Moreover, for Jung, the archetypes can be combined and synthesized, thus giving rise to countless possibilities. Archetypes can refer to characters, but also to spaces, situations, routes, transformations. There are archetypes that do not correspond to characters, but to desired or feared states such as paradise lost, the creation of the world, the apocalypse, unified duality, etc. Finally, Jung's fundamental archetypes usually are not taken into consideration due to their complexity. For example, the archetypes of *anima* and *animus* that correspond to the feminine side in men and the masculine side in women. The *anima* can take on positive or negative values and appear as a maiden, goddess or witch. Another fundamental Jungian archetype is "the shadow", which refers to what the conscious mind ignores about itself and which is made up of hidden and repressed aspects. The figure of the "hero" represents domination and positive assimilation of one's own shadow.

Wertime (2002) also proposed a typology of twelve archetypes that can be applied to brands. Wertime's list is largely similar to that put forward by Mark and Pearson (2001), although some figures differ: the hero, the antihero, the enigma, the siren, the creator, the change master, the power broker, the wise old man, the loyalist, the mother of goodness, the ultimate strength and the little trickster.

In addition to characters with an anthropomorphic figure, other archetypal projections have been used in studying brands. For example, animal archetypes (Lloyd and Woodside 2013), the cosmological elements of earth, fire, air, water (Soares de Moura Guedes and Nicolau 2009) and the Greek gods and goddesses. The theoretical model of archetypes has, thus, been used profusely to analyze brand communications through design and

advertising (Maso-Fleischman 1997; Caldwell et al. 2010; Connan and Sarantoulias 2013; Moraru 2014).

The success of the archetype formula is based on the assumptions that archetypes establish a privileged relationship with consumers' unconscious and that these consumers project archetypical myths onto brands in their day-to-day lives, thus investing their existence with a deep, gratifying and transcendental meaning. Hence, consumers enact myths and archetypes via experiences with brands (Hirschman 2000; Woodside and Chebat 2001; Wertime 2002; Holt 2003; Holt and Thompson 2004; Tsai 2006; Woodside et al. 2008).

Finally, consumers gain gratification by telling stories about episodes of their lives, and brands that are included in these episodes. As may be gathered from the study of archetypes, telling stories about episodes of their lives enables consumers to organize the meaning of their experiences and to consciously (but mainly unconsciously) feel that they themselves instantiate, at some point, an archetype, whether it is the hero, the magician, the creator, the rebel, etc. (Holt 2003, 2004; Holt and Thompson 2004; Woodside et al. 2008).

3.5 Consumer narratives

Consumers produce stories about their relationships with products and brands in their everyday life. In recent decades, the study of these stories has been approached from different perspectives as a fundamental way of understanding the meaning of brands in consumers' lives.

In this Section, we shall first consider how individuals understand their life, themselves and their relationship with brands in narrative terms. Secondly, we shall discuss how consumers understand their stories related to brands as if the brands were people, projecting anthropomorphic models onto them. Thirdly, we shall deal with the types of relationships that consumers establish with brands and which they explain in their narratives. Fourthly, we shall point out certain general

characteristics in the relationships with brands narrated by consumers. Finally, we shall examine how the narratively mediated consumer understanding of their relationship with brands has resulted in the common place that advertising that tells stories is highly effective.

A fundamental tenet that is shared among different theoretical perspectives—from cognitivism to hermeneutics—is that humans tend to understand life, its phases and episodes via narrative configurations. These autobiographical narratives are concerned with the interpretation, memorization and story-telling of what we do and what happens to us (Schank and Abelson 1977; Bruner 1990; Schank 1990). From the points of view of psychology and psychoanalysis in particular, one can understand the construction of personal narratives as ways of projecting a coherent representation of the self (Spence 1982; Sarbin 1986; Polkinghorne 1988). Self-identity is constructed through storytelling that is generated by oneself and by others, so that the self emerges as a collective construct of an intersubjective nature (Ricoeur 1981, 1996).

Consumers' relationships with brands are part of their lives and make up specific episodes. These episodes are narratively interpreted by consumers who give them meaning, while making sense of the brand and of oneself. The consumer creates stories in which (s)he and the brand become the main characters and their relationships are the core of the narrative plots.

Consumer relationships with the products that they own, use and consume and which are the centre of their stories about brands, can be considered to be relationships between subjects and objects. However, the brand's mediation entails that the interactions tend to be interpreted as relationships between people, between subjects. Consumers view brands as people (Levy 1985; Plummer 1985); they interact with them as if they were human, and their interpretation is that brands perform activities intentionally that are driven by specific goals and

motivations. This suggests that consumers think narratively about brands, about the events and the episodes in which they are involved.

The fact that consumers think about brands as if they were persons has given rise to the concept of "brand personality" (Aaker 1997; McEnally and de Chernatony 1999), a concept that became essential in researching brands and in managing brand image. Additionally, the fact that consumers see brands as if they were people and act towards them accordingly constitutes the phenomenon of anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism designates the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, such that these entities are considered to have consciousness, intentions, desires, emotions, motivations (Epley et al. 2007; Puzakova et al. 2009; Waytz et al. 2010). As will be shown in this Section, anthropomorphism has been found to be of central importance to the relationship between brands and consumers and to the narrative interpretation that consumers make of these relationships.

Although any brand can be considered by consumers as if it were a person, there are strategies that facilitate and emphasize brands' anthropomorphic nature. One strategy is to represent the brand via human characters or anthropomorphized cartoon animals. In this regard, Rossolatos (2012a) analyzes Kellogg's anthropomorphization of Tony the Tiger from a semiotic and psychoanalytic perspective. Some brands are identified with celebrities who act as their spokespersons in the media or with their business owners, such as, formerly, Steve Jobs for Apple and Richard Branson for Virgin (McCracken 1989). Products with physical characteristics similar to the human physiognomy are more likely to be anthropomorphized. Aggarwal and McGill (2007) showed that a car that looks like a smiling face was more clearly anthropomorphized than other products which did not look like human faces. Over and above physical appearance, Kim and McGill (2011) show how objects whose behaviour can be likened to human behavioural patterns can be anthropomorphized. In

this sense, there is a strong tendency to lend human qualities to products that demonstrate technological intelligence (Turkle 1984; Mick and Fournier 1998).

The anthropomorphism of brands and the narrative worlds that this phenomenon generates serve specific purposes for consumers. People in general tend to anthropomorphize products to increase the level of intelligibility and predictability in their dealings with them (Dawes and Mulford 1996). This is part of a strategy that aims at imposing controls on one's surroundings (Harter 1978). The recital of autobiographical stories involving brands helps consumers structure and give meaning to their experience. It also serves to clarify one's own thoughts about what happened at some point. Another function is the gratification stemming from reliving what happened and even experience the gratification of embodying myths and archetypes (Woodside et al. 2008). Furthermore, consumers' emotions and personality, and the nature of their social relationships, may be contributing factors to the anthropomorphization of brands (Epley et al. 2008; Kim and McGill 2011). Although brand anthropomorphism is relevant in understanding the relationships that consumers establish with brands, anthropomorphic projection is not necessary to the establishment of such relationships (Aaker et al. 2004; Aggarwal 2004).

Consumers construct stories based on their relationships with brands. These stories are based on non-human person-to-entity relationships or person-to-person relationships that are established through anthropomorphic projections. In any case, what is relevant is that consumers construct stories that are very important in understanding the relationships they establish with brands and in analyzing the image they have of such brands.

Beyond consumers' tendency to tell stories, for example verbally, face-to-face or through blogs, researchers often encourage consumers to tell stories with the aim of studying consumer-brand relationships. One such fundamental relationship

of consumers with brands concerns the construal of self-identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Askegaard et al. 2002; Holt 2002). The construal of identity involves the social presentation of the self in everyday life (Goffman 1959) and a narrative interpretation of that presentation. The importance of brands should be considered in this context. Belk (1988) develops the idea of an extended self which includes products-objects that an individual creates or possesses. In this context, the used and consumed brands form part of the self, while consumers subordinate them to construction strategies concerning self-presentation in everyday life scenarios.

The relationships between consumer and brand identity can be quite complex. On the one hand, these relationships can be established by using symbolic, iconic or indexical connections and, on the other hand, consumers can use several brands to express different aspects of their character (Schembri et al. 2010). Thus, a consumer explains that she uses Toyota because it connects with her hard and secure side, Lancôme with her sensual side, and Dove with her soft and tender side (Schembri et al. 2010). Fournier (2009) criticizes the assumption that identity related considerations are the only ones relevant to brand consumption, while explaining that in various cases consumers seek purely functional and economically beneficial relationships with "invisible brands" (Coupland 2005).

In a much-quoted paper, Fournier (1998) analyzes consumers' stories and discovers that they establish different types of personal relationships with brands that are similar to the types of relationships that consumers establish with other people throughout their life. Fournier identifies these relationships as arranged marriages, casual friends/buddies, marriages of convenience, committed partnerships, compartmentalized friendships, kinships, rebounds/avoidance-driven relationships, childhood friendships, courtships, dependencies, flings, enmities, secret affairs. For example, the "marriage of convenience" refers to a relationship type that is enduring with satisfactory rules,

created via a commitment that is influenced by circumstances and that is neither clearly thought nor desired; the "fling" relationship implies a short relationship and a lack of commitment, but with high emotional gratification.

Other authors have argued that consumer relationships with brands are governed by the same rules as different types of relationships with other people (Aggarwal 2004; Aggarwal and Law 2005). Relationships of matrimony and love affairs have been studied (Shimp and Madden 1988; Fournier and Yao 1997; Oliver 1999; Thomson et al. 2005; Albert et al. 2008; Alvarez and Fournier 2012; Batra et al. 2012), inasmuch as negative relationships where brands play a dominant role over the consumer (Hill 1994; Paharia et al. 2011; Miller et al. 2012).

Escalas (2004) suggests that consumers use brands for different purposes: to construct and grow their self-concept and express it publicly or privately, for their social integration, to connect with the past, to symbolize their personal fulfilment, to increase their self-esteem, to differentiate themselves, to help in the transitional life-stages.

Fournier and Alvarez (2012) analyze relationships of affection, capabilities, identifications that are nurtured between consumers and brands. In addition, Fournier (2009) defines a set of key features in the relationship between consumers and brands that evolves in the stories about their interaction. Firstly, consumers relate to brands with a purpose. Relationships with brands are used instrumentally by consumers to help them live their lives. Secondly, consumer relationships with brands are multi-faceted phenomena, since they move in various dimensions and take many forms. For example, the multidimensional scale known as INDSCALE identifies seven dimensions in the brand-consumer relationship: harmonious and cooperative vs. competitive and hostile; emotional and identity-orientated vs. functional orientation; weak and superficial vs. strong and deep; balanced vs. hierarchical; lasting vs. fleeting; independent vs. interdependent; and voluntary vs. imposed. Thirdly, consumer-

brand relationships evolve and change via interactions and contextual variations.

The research evidence suggesting that consumers think about their relationships with brands in narrative terms, leads us to infer that narrative texts, and in particular advertising narratives, are most effective in determining and positively influencing the connections between consumers and brands (Escalas 1998, 2004).

Consumers' processing of narrative messages in advertising leads them to make connections between the manifest story in the advertising narrative and their own stories that are stored in memory. But most importantly, it enables them to auto-generate narratives via autobiographical memories or mental simulations involving brand use (Fiske 1993; Baumeister and Newman 1994). The incidence of parallels between the stories narrated in advertising texts and consumers' own stories in relation to the achievement of goals and the satisfaction of desires and aspirations, enables the establishment of positive brand associations. The very structure of narrative advertising fosters and reinforces these associations.

The phenomenon of narrative transportation has also been related to advertising effectiveness. Narrative transportation occurs when the audience is absorbed by the story they are following, thus being lured into the world of the story (Green and Brock 2000). According to Escalas (2007), when viewers of advertisements are transported by the story they are following, the produced experiences tend to neutralize the negative effects of the weaker arguments.

Apparently, the effectiveness of narrative advertising is based on the importance of narrative in consumers' self-reflective comportment towards their life and their relationship with brands. Nevertheless, this thesis contradicts the fact that there are other types of advertising that do not tell stories, albeit they have a marked impact on memory and, ultimately, on advertising effectiveness. This contradiction has been underlined by Escalas

(1998, 2004) who shows that only 20% of advertisements portray well-constructed stories and that other types of advertisements that do not tell stories also attain to establish robust brand associations.

3.6 Concluding remarks

In this Section we draw conclusions about the similarities and differences between the narrative approaches to branding that have been laid out throughout this Chapter, while highlighting the relative merits of leveraging semiotics for carving a truly narratively oriented branding model.

The "narratalogical" approaches to branding vary markedly and have different goals and characteristics. As already shown, structuralist semiotics features a narratological prong that is applicable to any text or structure of signification, since it considers, at least in principle, any text to be a narrative configuration of different levels in a generative trajectory of meaning. Conversely, the branding related narrativity perspectives that derive from psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, hermeneutics, are suggestive of a narrative dimension in brands, only when their textual manifestations and communications display a clearly recognizable narrative organization as stories. In this sense, it is only through narrative semiotics that one can address a brand's textual essence to its full extent. The rest approaches, by dint of their restrictive theoretical assumptions, only afford to address partial manifestations of narrativity, based on manifest storylines.

Due to space limitations, only a handful of theoretical models and methodological avenues have been considered in this Chapter: storytelling, semiotics, archetypes and consumers' narratives. As stated in the introduction, the criteria used in this selection concern their relevance both for academic scholarship and branding practice.

Some of these perspectives may be said to be fully narratological, whereas others can be understood as "proto-

narrative" models. Fully narratological models address narrative analysis in its most explicit and fullest sense. On the other hand, a proto-narrative model, such as that of archetypes, outlines a range of characters-symbols (each character-symbol is equipped with a personality, capabilities, motivations, and specific ways of acting, feeling and simply being in the world) that can be considered as a narrative matrix, in the sense of constituting a vantage point for generating possible narratives.

Semiotics, anthropology, cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis offer different approaches to brand narrativity. Each and every one of these theoretical perspectives may aid researchers in understanding different aspects and levels of brand meaning and social signification; in concert, they can provide a broad and deep knowledge about brands: for example, consumers' cognitive and affective relationships with brands, brands' meaning for individuals and social groups, the invariable expressive elements of brand communications, the values conveyed by brands' discourses and their articulation in specific product categories.

The theoretical approaches to brand narrativity that were laid out in this Chapter have different, yet complementary facets that are pertinent both for academic scholarship and branding practice, while seeking to construct and manage a brand's identity and meaning. For example, cognitive psychology claims that human comprehension, memory and identity are narratively mediated. Therefore, narratively oriented advertisements are, in principle, more effective. Narrative semiotics offers a more accentuated picture of this principle through canonical narrative schemata that can be used as frameworks for constructing brand narratives. It also proposes a generative trajectory of meaning model that can guide branding professionals in the process of creating brand communications. Anthropology establishes links between brands and myths, and, therefore, it points to ways whereby universal myths may be leveraged as models for the creation of brand identity.

Nevertheless, as explained earlier, theoretical models that understand the core of a brand's meaning and identity as a static character, endowed with certain values, fail to take into account the narrative dimension of brand signification. Narrativity is based on transformations from a state defined by a value, to another state defined by a different, contrary or contradictory value. Thus, a semiotic model that takes into account narrativity should consider that the deep meaning of a brand is defined by the transformation between two states, for example by passing from one state defined by the value "oppression" to another state defined by the value "freedom". In this case, the transformation would concern the object of value "liberation" at the semio-narrative level and its equivalent story at the discursive level. These axiological transformations occur at the semio-narrative and discursive levels as transformations between states-of-being of subjects who perform actions.

The narrative definition of brands should conceptualize narrativity as the principle that shapes their meaning at its very kernel. This implies an appreciation of a brand discourse as an articulation on three inter-locking levels: a) the brand as a narrative, b) the brand as an author-enunciator of the narrative and c) the brand as a character in the narrative. Firstly, the brand should be identified with a specific narrative. Nike-narrative, Apple-narrative, Volvo-narrative, etc. correspond to this category. Secondly, the brand should be understood as the author of this narrative and its enunciator. Furthermore, the brand may be a co-author insofar as consumers also construct stories about their relationship with it, thus actively participating in the social construction of its narrative. Thirdly, the brand should be regarded as a particular character in the brand-narrative. However, as person-character, it must be understood within an encompassing narrative structure that fleshes out brand personality, identity and meaning. This is why Nike, Volvo and Apple, within the Nike-narrative, Volvo-narrative and Apple-narrative respectively, are characters related to other characters;

they set themselves missions, perform actions and are motivated by passions.

Thus, a brand can be analyzed as a single coherent entity with its own identity that unfolds on three levels and through three roles: as a narrative, as the subject of enunciation, and as the enunciated subject. Structuralist semiotics is most capable of systematically and rigorously defining narrative models of brands as configurations of meaning. However, semiotics should take into consideration contributions from other disciplines and other theoretical perspectives, as pointed out throughout this Chapter.

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CHAPTER 4

Transmedia storytelling: Brands, narratives and storyworlds

Carlos A. Scolari

4.1 Introduction

In January 2003, when Henry Jenkins published an article in *Technology Review* entitled *Transmedia storytelling: Moving characters from books to films to video games can make them stronger and more compelling* nobody could have imagined that the concept of 'transmedia storytelling' would become one of the favourite keywords of media professionals and researchers in the first decade of the new century. What started as a very personal reflection inspired by Jenkins' passion for fan cultures ended up as one of the key business strategies in the contemporary culture industry and an entrenched research field.

This Chapter provides an overview of transmedia storytelling against the background of essential works for understanding its cultural dynamics, with an added focus on one particular aspect: the relationship between transmedia narratives and brands from the perspectives of semiotics and narratology. In recent years there has been much discussion about the links between brands and storytelling (e.g., Salmon 2007). In this Chapter we will delve into the area where branding overlaps with narrative, while keeping an eye on transmedia storytelling and fictional worlds. Global cultural artefacts like *Star Wars, Harry Potter, The Matrix, Batman, The Lord of the Rings, Lost, 24* and Walt Disney's characters will accompany us throughout the following pages.

4.2 Transmedia storytelling
4.2.1 The *Lost* incident

On 22 September 2004 the Oceanic Airlines 815 flight disappeared between Sydney and Los Angeles. While flying over an island in an uncertain location in the Pacific Ocean, the fuselage fell prey to ravaging mysterious forces that resulted in the plane's crash in an uncharted territory. The survivors soon discovered that they were on a very strange island, with hidden underground facilities and non-human beings moving through the woods. You do not need to be a *lostie* to know what we are talking about: *Lost*, one of the most representative transmedia productions in recent years. Although *Lost* was born as a TV series (six seasons, 2004-2010), it soon spread across multiple media and communication platforms. The ABC series generated a textual galaxy including blogs, comics, mobisodes, wiki webpages, augmented reality games (ARG), videogames and novels, while the fervent activity of millions of *losties* expanded the borders of this narrative world to new territories. Despite the fact that the TV series remained the tent-pole of this textual universe, the contributions of different media transformed *Lost* into an incredible transmedia puzzle (Pearson 2009; Scolari 2013a, 2013b).

The mobisodes that were produced from the TV series (*Lost Missing Pieces*) showed funny scenes and dramatic passages never seen on TV. Some even included elements of considerable relevance for understanding the enigmas of the mysterious island. The PC game turned the player into another survivor of the Flight 815 crash. Inside the game (carefully reproduced in 3D) it was possible to interact with the virtual version of the TV series' characters. The immersive capacity of the videogame genre enabled a unique achievement: the possibility to "live" in the storyworld and to interact with the inhabitants of its fictional universe. Almost all of the novels follow the same logic as the PC game; they tell the story of other survivors never seen on TV. Finally, while moving towards user-

generated content, we notice that *Lost* inspired all sorts of content, from parodies to alternative endings, recaps, synchronizations, machinima, and stop-motion reconstructions made with Lego and Playmobil toys. In the context of user-generated content it merits mentioning Carlos Azaustre's comic *Pardillos*. Although it was freely available online, this parody of *Lost* was successfully printed and commercially distributed in Spain. *Pardillos* confirms that the boundaries between commercial productions and user-generated content are often porous (Scolari 2013a, 2013b).

While some transmedia narratives originate from TV shows (e.g., *Lost, 24, Star Trek*), others start from films (e.g., *Matrix, Star Wars, Indiana Jones*), literature (e.g., *Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings*) or videogames (e.g., *Lara Croft, Super Mario Bros.*) and then expand to other media and platforms. The emergence of this narrative strategy, involving a logic of narrative migration from one medium to another with the active participation of fans, immediately caught the attention of media researchers.

4.2.2 The academic answer

How does Henry Jenkins define transmedia storytelling? First, Jenkins (2003, 2008) identifies a trend in the culture industry towards the creation of stories that span different media (cinema, TV, literature, etc.) and collaborative platforms (YouTube, fanfiction portals, blogs, etc.). As shown in the previous Section, the producers of *Lost* opted for a transmedia expansion that included, among other platforms, novels, video-games, mobisodes, and alternate reality games (ARG). According to Jenkins, in a transmedia narrative "each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins 2007: Paragraph no.3). Jenkins added a second element to this expansion through different media and platforms: consumers collaborate in the expansion of the story, for example, by remixing scenes, by creating a parody or by participating in a fan

wiki website like *Lostpedia*. In this way the consumer becomes a *prosumer*, a subject that actively participates in the narrative process by providing new texts that expand the transmedia narrative world.

This definition of transmedia storytelling, widely shared by practitioners and researchers alike, does not consider some crucial aspects that have been discussed extensively over the past decade. Should we consider *adaptations* (or intertextual translations) as part of transmedia strategies? Should every text have an autonomous life inside the transmedia universe? For example, the comprehension of some textual units may require the consumption of another text. As we already know, adaptations or intersemiotic translations (e.g., from book to cinema) usually do not extend the narrative world. Researchers like Long (2007) discarded the inclusion of adaptations in transmedia storytelling. Adapting a story and expanding it with new characters and situations are two different, albeit not mutually exclusive, options. Other researchers (e.g., Scolari 2013a) are more flexible and consider the possibility of including some adaptations within transmedia narratives. The debate, at least on the academic front, remains open. Recent studies are indicative of a wide range of possibilities. In the same narrative world we encounter fully autonomous texts inasmuch as texts that cannot be understood without the consumption of another part of the story. For example, most of *Lost*'s mobisodes are almost incomprehensible to viewers who have not seen the TV series. However, novels that have been inspired from the series could be consumed separately.

The academic landscape of transmedia narratives is rich in debates. Research into this new kind of narrative has just begun and every week we experience the launch of new transmedia productions. Moreover, transmedia narratives constitute a unique research field that eschews the strict boundaries of traditional *monomedia* research (which focuses on single media, such as radio or TV), while opening them up to

interdisciplinary perspectives that range from semiotics to ethnography, economics, narratology and media ecology.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the relationship between transmedia storytelling and branding in Section 4.4, it is advisable to make a short detour into the relationships between brands and narratives.

4.3 Branding and narrative

A brand is perhaps the most perfect synthesis of the material and the symbolic worlds. If Marx had already detected the commodity fetishism process in the mid-19th century, and a few decades later branding was born to differentiate standardized products, we could say that at the beginning of the 21st century commodities have liquefied into a storytelling container that conveys them through a narrative world. The crossover between storytelling and branding is not precisely new; already in the 1990s semioticians like Jean-Marie Floch (2001) and Andrea Semprini (1993) had analysed brands from a structuralist semio-narrative perspective.

According to the above marketing semioticians, a brand always tells a story and conveys a series of values. Subjects are free to choose one story/brand or another; if a consumer does not accept the values proposed by the narrative of brand A, he or she may adhere to the values of brand B or C. If a consumer is in agreement with the story and adheres to the values of a particular brand, it can be said that a semiotic contract has been signed between the brand and the consumer.

Following this line of thought, we can imagine the entire market as a symbolic space where each company or institution tries to establish its own storytelling and values, in an attempt to persuade consumers into 'signing' the semiotic contract. If a company or brand seeks to position itself in this space by appealing to values like *freedom* and *rebellion*, its competitors need to articulate either different narratives based on the same values or different narratives based on different values, such as

sustainability and *saving*. Storytelling is a useful tool for defining one's own position in the symbolic market and retaining customers by offering a set of shared values. The political market, especially during election periods, is not too far from this vision based on narrative supply/demand. Each political actor proposes a story and expresses a set of values that distinguish them from the other candidates and parties. Until the 1950s advertising campaigns were product-centric; then, they became increasingly user-centric. Nowadays brands constitute a narrative-centric experience (Scolari 2008).

4.4 Branding and transmedia storytelling

The intersections between branding and transmedia storytelling are multiple and complex. In the following Sections we will map this territory, while identifying different strategies that are implemented in a landscape that is defined by strong media convergence. At the same time, the growing weight of social networks and collaborative practices is challenging the hegemony of broadcasting (Carlón and Scolari 2014).

> Entertainment and corporate communications have intertwined for as long as there have been things to sell and stories to tell. Marketing has traditionally shown consumers what they want the consumer to see, but pervasive communications – the explosion of multi-directional communication channels – has made this model obsolete. The age of broadcasting is clearly dead and we are not just dealing with an audience, but an audience of audiences. This requires new techniques and processes. The solution lies in the substance of the corporate story world. (Berkson 2012: Paragraph no.1)

A new notion of storytelling within a larger context has emerged.

4.4.1 Product placement

The relationship between brands and narrative worlds used to be expressed in product placement. In this sense, the transmedia narrative universes are no exception. For example, *24* forged a transmedia narrative world covering TV episodes, videogames, comics, novels, games, mobisodes, webisodes and all kinds of merchandising. Jack Bauer, the character played by Kiefer Sutherland, uses Nokia smartphones, Ford and Hyundai cars, Apple computers, in his fight against international terrorism. This presence of brands in the story was stronger in some media (TV) than in others (comics) (Scolari 2009, 2013a).

Other productions like *Lost* failed to exploit the full potential of product placement due to the peculiarities of the narrative world. The only products on the mysterious island have been introduced by the Dharma Initiative since the 1960s. Characters only consume Dharma beers, Dharma cereals and Dharma peanut butter. What strategy did ABC apply while seeking to introduce 'real' brands into the storyworld? During the alternate reality game *Lost Experience* the TV episodes were interrupted by fake commercials from the Hanso Foundation – the institution that finances the Dharma Initiative – sponsored by Coca Cola, Sprite, Jeep, Chrysler, Verizon Wireless and Monster.com (The Monica 2006; Pearson 2009). In this way the brands were able to participate in the narrative world of *Lost* in a double space of symbolic contamination (real world / fictional world, island / rest of the world).

Many researchers agree that product placement has lost its effectiveness over the years, and that its overuse could result in diminishing returns (Grainge 2008: 34-35). Movies like *The Truman Show* (Weir 1998) overtly criticized the abuse of product-placement, forcing companies like Starbucks to double the bet and create a parody of product placement like in A*ustin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (Roach 1999). By becoming excessively visible, traditional brands could overshadow the narrative context in which they circulate and become what they

do not want to be: a mini-spot that interrupts the fiction.

4.4.2 Reverse product placement

As José Martí Parreño explained in *Funny Marketing* (2010), reverse product placement creates real goods to match those seen in fictional worlds. For example, Homer Simpson's *Duff* beer has left the screen and is now on the shelves of supermarkets and wine shops around the world. When a product leaves the media space it automatically becomes an extension of the narrative world and joins other components often grouped under the category of merchandising. From a broad narratological perspective, such as the one proposed by Gray in *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (2010), we can consider reverse product placement as a commercial form of paratextuality. In other words, a bottle of Duff beer that a consumer buys in a supermarket should not be excluded while mapping the territory of a transmedia narrative world. Drinking Duff beer is also a way of entering and participating in the narrative world of *The Simpsons*.

4.4.3 Merchandising and transmedia production

Media researchers and narratologists are usually oblivious to merchandising. This kind of textual production – let us not forget that beers and toys are also texts – has always been regarded as something alien to the world of media and, subsequently, never seriously scrutinized in a scholarly fashion. "Merchandising is a marketing issue, let's leave it to business people" seems to be a common place among media scholars. However, the explosion of user-generated textual productions and the increasing weight of transmedia business strategies have contributed to a shift of interest in favor of merchandising. Nowadays, the inclusion of a long tail of merchandising pieces in analyses of intertextuality is not at all surprising, as practised by researchers such as Gray (2010).

What is the relationship between merchandising and

narrative? First, as shown by *Star Wars* and Walt Disney's universe, these 'marginal' products are part of the narrative world and, consequently, may also be analysed from a semiotic and narratological perspective. In addition, as already indicated, more and more fans use merchandising items such as Lego or Playmobil toys to produce new contents and spread them over the web. What was born in the narrative – a toy inspired by Indiana Jones or Batman – eventually returns to the narrative. From this perspective, the different pieces that are marketed under the umbrella of merchandising – from toys to games, costumes, posters and, obviously, the Duff beer – are texts that are part of the transmedia narrative world.

4.4.4 From brand as narrative to narrative as brand

According to Jeff Gomez, one of the most recognized transmedia producers in the US, in today's fragmented digital frontier

> (…) stakeholders must design their properties to play uniquely and compellingly on different media platforms, so the point of entry into the brand or story world can come from almost any direction through any medium. By creating a consistent and ever-growing canon and maintaining brand integrity, you will reinforce your relationship with your audience, building lasting brand loyalty, and a potentially evergreen franchise. The best way to accomplish this is the technique of transmedia storytelling. (Gomez 2012: Paragraph no.20)

If in the traditional approach brands appeared in fiction under the form of product placement, we are now witnessing a radically different phenomenon where *fiction becomes the brand*. As Jenkins explains in *Convergence Culture* (2006), narrative worlds like *Indiana Jones*' or *Harry Potter*'s should be considered brands. In this context, it may be claimed that the ultimate goal of market-oriented transmedia strategies is to build a *narrative*

brand-world, while installing in the social imaginary a set of characters, geographies, values and situations that could be expressed in different media/platforms and exploited in different ways.

4.5 Narrative brand-worlds
4.5.1 Brand Hollywood
Hollywood has always been intensely involved in the world of consumers. With the passing of decades it has turned into an *advertising medium* (Wasko 1994). Since the first *Star Wars*[1] experiences in the late 1970s the audio-visual sector's business strategies became ever more refined and widespread. At the same time, large corporations have been convinced of the need to develop competitively appealing storytelling strategies. Brands ceased to be simply logos or manuals for managing visual identity and became stories expressed in multiple media and platforms. Moreover, in the 1990s the TV and film industries underwent extensive restructuring through a massive wave of mergers and acquisitions in the face of great financial pressure (Grainge 2008: 31). In the 2000s everything seemed to be ready for the great cultural convergence and the emergence of transmedia storytelling.

4.5.2 From Disney to Star Wars
The strategy of the Disney Company is exemplary as regards the relationships between branding, entertainment and transmedia narrative worlds. Born in the 1930s as a cartoon factory, in the 1950s it was transformed into an entertainment machine that integrated a string of leisure markets, while connecting filmmaking with TV, tourism, theme parks and merchandising, all

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1 According to the *24/7 Wall St.* financial portal, in 2014 the total *Star Wars* franchise revenue was over $30 billion (http://247wallst.com/special-report/2012/02/10/the-force-star-wars-franchise-worth-over-30-billion-and-growing/).

of them under one single narrative umbrella. This integration process was expressed at all levels. For example, ABC's Walt Disney TV show was organized into four sections – *Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland* and *Tomorrowland* – just like Disney's amusement parks. According to Anderson (1994) these TV productions generated a centrifugal movement that led consumers beyond the immediate textual experience. "People wanted more of Disney's shows, products and experiences" (Anderson 1994: 155). In order to effectively accommodate the increasingly versatile consumer demand, the company adopted a diversification strategy by creating new spaces for expressing the brand, like Disney Stores, Disney Channel, Disneyland, Disney Theatrical Productions, Disney Cruise Lines, etc. According to Michael Eisner (CEO of the company between 1984-2005), they considered themselves as "an operating company, operating the Disney brand all over the world, maintaining it, improving it, promoting it and advertising it with taste" (cit. by Grainge 2008: 50).

Disney's philosophy of *total merchandising* is the source of the current narrative brand-worlds that we encounter in the works of Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and J.J. Abrams. In the last two decades Hollywood has invested heavily in family entertainment through franchises like *Star Wars, Shrek, Toy Story, Harry Potter* and *Indiana Jones*, creating narrative worlds with a strong corporate cultural component. The revival of digital animation, thanks to companies like Pixar and DreamWorks, has also contributed to this process.

Licensing– a system that establishes agreements between narrative brand-world right-owners and a network of licensees who can market it –is one of the pillars of this system. The experience of *Star Wars* should be considered a milestone in the development of this strategy. In 1975 Universal turned down a script that was presented by a young director called George Lucas. They considered his science fiction imperial saga a silly idea. After contacting many studios, 20th Century Fox finally

decided to go for Lucas and offered him $11 million. When the director negotiated his contract with Fox, all gasped: he was not looking for cash. George Lucas wanted control over the narrative world. He kept for himself the right to the final cut of the movie, 40% of the box-office net profits, the right to the creation of future sequels and all the rights on merchandising. Fox managers were convinced they were making a great business deal. We should contextualize their decision.

In the 1970s science fiction was not a profitable genre. Neither the sequels nor the merchandising appeared to hold great business potential. Whereas toys inspired by TV cartoons were popular among young consumers, Hollywood science-fiction characters were not a sizeable source of revenue. Safeguarding the rights to *Star Wars'* merchandising was one of the best bets George Lucas ever made.

Was George Lucas a marketing, merchandising and transmedia narrative visionary? Not at all. He just did not want Fox to ruin his movie, while maintaining control over the narrative world and impeding its debasement with low quality productions (Sansweet 1992). *Star Wars - A new hope* was released on 25 May 1977 in 43 theatres. The rest is history for the culture industry and popular culture. *Star Wars* demonstrated that films have lost their weight as discrete commodities and have become a platform for a new type of branding, expressed through multiple audio-visual media (film, TV, VHS, DVD), transmedia experiences (novels, videogames, books) and consumer goods (toys, drinks, fast food).

4.5.3 Batman in the Matrix

The merger between Warner Communications and Time in July 1989 was a clear sign of the on-going processes in the new media ecology. Turner Broadcasting Systems (1996) and America Online (2000) joined the alliance, giving birth to a conglomerate with extensive control over content production and distribution. From TV to theme parks, music, books and magazines, sports

teams and new media, everything seemed to converge towards an integrated whole. As regards audio-visual production, the declining cinema profits highlighted the exigency for further strengthening the links between different markets and the media. Productions like *Batman* (1989) carved paths that would soon be trodden by other characters and fictional worlds, like *The Matrix* and *Harry Potter.*

Batman was the product that tested the waters for an effective integration of a large number of non-media acquisitions in cosmetics, restaurants and sports by Warner in the mid-1980s. If the film directed by Tim Burton generated $ 250 million in the US alone, the total earnings exceeded $ 1,000 million under any concept. The horizontal and vertical integration of the media industry allowed for the expression of this total entertainment philosophy and confirmed that it was possible to recover old characters and relaunch them under the new branding logic.

The old cartoons became prized possessions in Hollywood. Any character from the Looney Tunes series, like *Bugs Bunny* or *Duffy Duck,* could be the source of the next blockbuster. The film *Space Jam* (1996) suggested another interesting crossover, in this case between the audio-visual conglomerate and the sports industry. In this context, Warner soon followed in the footsteps of Disney and opened in the early 1990s their own theme parks and Warner Stores in order to exploit its cultural heritage.

The Matrix is one of the most discussed and studied works of the transmedia universe (Dawson 2003; Clover 2004; Lawrence 2004; Gillis 2005; Diocaretz and Herbrechter 2006; Jenkins 2006; Grainge 2008). The contradiction is manifest: the movie that denounced capitalist society's alienation embodied the paradigm of narrative brand-worlds. The transmedia expansions – digital animations (*The Animatrix* 2003), comics (*The Matrix Comics* 1999-2004 [online version], 2003-2004 [print version]), videogames (*Enter the Matrix* 2003), online multiplayer gaming experiences (*The Matrix On-line* 2004) and hundreds of

merchandising goods – offered an integrated, coherent and interrelated narrative world that facilitated the consumer's immersion into the Matrix experience. Somehow *The Matrix* was Hollywood's answer to the growing challenge of videogame companies, whose profits have been increasing year on year. Thanks to the creation of a new aesthetic – from bullet-time to black-leather clothes – and the ability to generate an expandable narrative world and its philosophical ambitions, *The Matrix* confirmed the deep affinity between branding and transmedia storytelling. The green version of the Warner Bros. logo that is projected during *The Matrix* initial credits was more than an aesthetic game; it was the graphic representation of the ultimate coupling between a corporation and a narrative brand-world.

4.5.4 Harry Potter versus Sauron

The transmedia planning of *The Lord of the Rings* took place against the background of the following audience segmentation: 25% of J.R.R. Tolkien hardcore fans, 50% of people who had heard about the books but never read them, and 25% of viewers who had never heard of Frodo, Gollum and Minas Tirith. If a work like *Harry Potter* was aimed at a family audience, *The Lord of the Rings* was targeted to a wider audience, among whom were adolescents and young adults (mostly male). The narrative challenge was impressive: the fictional world had to satisfy the hardcore fans who would scrutinize the film adaptations frame by frame, and at the same time it had to adapt a teenager novel into a series of films for all ages (Grainge 2008: 136).

In order to meet the expectations of different audiences, the New Line team produced various formats, from trailers to spots, spoilers, interviews, screensavers, making-of videos, etc. The online broadcast of the trailers served to build and strengthen a community of users around the narrative universe that Peter Jackson was creating in New Zealand. New Line constantly monitored the fans' web activity with view to checking the evolution of this segment's relationship with the film

narrative. Furthermore, instead of bombing the market with merchandising from the first day, the producers developed an incremental strategy with the aim of avoiding excessive commercial exploitation. Values such as loyalty (to the literary universe of J.R.R. Tolkien) and independence (despite the large financial investment behind *The Lord of the Rings* it was presented as an indie production) were at the centre of this strategy. *The Lord of the Rings* integrated a massive diffusion blockbuster strategy with niche activities targeting specific consumer groups. The narrative brand-world was expressed at various levels and was addressed to different segments. While numerous corporate mergers took place in the 1990s, very often each production company continued to work as an independent economic unit and narrative actor. As Grainger put it, "the decentralized nature of some corporations like Time Warner led to competition rather than cooperation between its different divisions" (Grainger 2008: 10).

Harry Potter was perhaps one of the first planned brand narratives, managed by the different divisions of Warner Bros. Just like with *The Lord of the Rings*, the producers of *Harry Potter* decided to avoid over-saturating the market with merchandising, while preserving a set of literary values. Once again, the web became a privileged space for sharing contents and engaging fans, although this did not prevent legal conflicts when fans produced their own *Harry Potter* stories (Jenkins 2006). These tensions between the owners of a narrative brand-world and its consumers are inevitable in a media ecology that is going through a profound reconfiguration process. Fans also consider themselves to be 'owners' of the narrative brand-world and do not hesitate to tell new stories and expand the transmedia universe. In this context, the traditional broadcasting and copyright practices must be adapted to the exigencies of an environment that is dominated by social networks, peer-to-peer exchanges and Creative Commons licenses. What attitude should a creator adopt when users manipulate his/her characters with

impunity? From the perspective of transmedia storytelling we believe it is counterproductive to stigmatize or persecute this type of textual (post) production. Whenever an amateur author shares a *Harry Potter* story in Fanfiction.net, or when a new parody of *Star Wars* comes to YouTube, the symbolic (and therefore economic) value of that specific narrative brand-world increases.

4.6 Conclusions

We are currently experiencing an extraordinary moment in the evolution of the media ecology. Every day new 'media species' emerge; old species must struggle for space and must adapt if they want to survive. The media, their languages and their narratives tend to recombine, leading to new multimodal stories. In this context, media researchers are urged to put aside monomedia approaches and to establish transmedia research strategies.

While narratologists and semioticians have theorized fictional worlds for decades (Eco 1979; Pavel 1989), the experience of living and participating in a narrative brand-world is relatively recent and emerges from the confluence of two processes: 1) the convergence of marketing, branding and storytelling strategies, and 2) the transformation of narratives and characters into brands. If traditional advertising was product-centric, and in the second half of the twentieth century adopted a user-centric approach, today we are witnessing the prevalence of narrative-centric transmedia experiences. As noted in Section 4, the relationship between brands and fiction has been reversed: if in traditional product placement the brand appeared inside the fiction, now the fiction is the brand. In parallel with this process, the large media corporations have become sensitive to the symbolic value of their stories and characters, which now take the form of narrative brand-worlds. Although transmedia

narratives existed long before *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*[2], in the last two decades their development has become professionalized and transformed into a strategic issue for media conglomerates. Large corporations have risen to the challenge of designing transmedia narratives, of articulating their distribution across multiple media, of managing their exploitation in all possible manners, and of enabling collaborative spaces so that fans can join the great narrative feast. Transmedia storytelling is here to stay, and we are already completely enmeshed in it.

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2 For a first approach to transmedia storytelling in the first half of the 20th century see Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman (2014).

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CHAPTER 5

Yo logo(s): On the icono-plastic configuration of brand symbols

Francesco Mangiapane

5.1 Logos as the iconic dimension of brand image

Among the various areas with which the vast research field of branding is concerned, brand image is recognized as a territory most pertinently analyzed with semiotic tools, since it is populated by symbols that are amenable to interpretation, such as brand logos. According to Henderson and Cote (1998), logos are graphic designs that companies use, with or without their name, to identify themselves or their products.

Semiotics, and particularly structuralist semiotics (e.g., Floch 1990,1995; Landowski 1989; Fabbri 1998; Marrone 2001, 2007), has largely abandoned the scrutiny of symbols and signs as standalone objects of analysis, in favour of textuality levels (Danesi 2006), logos and ad campaigns (Floch 1990, 1995), but also point-of-sales materials (Floch 1984, 1988), retail environments (Hetzel 2002), websites and social networks (Zinna 2004). A contemporary and effective semiotic perspective (e.g., Rossolatos 2014), instead of looking at analyzing individual signs in symbolic terms (e.g., red is passion), is more concerned with (re)constructing the multimodal textual semiotic strategies that undergird manifest commercial discourse.

Consequently, from the point of view of brand signification, logos as expressive units of brand image should be addressed on a different level than the one customarily presupposed in traditional consumer research (e.g., Keller 1998). From a semiotic point of view, the iconic aspects of brands, such as logos, and other visual elements, are considered not as isolated signs, but as textual elements, that are or should be

inter-connected in a coherent fashion in structural gestalts, as noted by Lindekens (in Rossolatos 2013). Logos, for example, acquire meaning by entering into complex relations in larger semiotic configurations: horizontally, with other expressive brand elements (including competitors' logos); vertically, with the story and the discourse of the brand which they are summoned to actualize iconically. In this context, static concepts like 'denotation' (primary meaning of a sign) and 'connotation' (what signs mean symbolically and ideologically) constitute antiquated semiotic tools, although still employed by some analysts (cf. the concept of "connotative index" in Danesi 2006).

In order to fully appreciate the iconic dimension of brands, they should be analyzed in the context of a wider *æsthetic identity*, while seeking to establish coherence among various sensory elements (be they specifically visual, or related to taste, olfaction, haptics, sound and any hybrid form thereof) in connection to some form of intelligibility. It is precisely within such a framework that we shall conceptualize the form and function of brand logos in the following pages, by recourse to a string of mostly structuralist theories, applied to highly 'visible' case-studies.

5.2 Figurativity in iconic and plastic semiotics

For several years, semioticians have been pointing out the doubly signifying nature of images (Greimas 1984; Floch 1985; Groupe μ 1992). Images are supposed to signify by virtue of their ability to iconically represent objects of the external world (the traditional Peircean notion of iconicity at its most basic and naively realistic), which presupposes a relationship of similarity between the icon and the portrayed object. However, images may also signify by virtue of entering in novel configurations with other iconic elements, without presupposing a prior relationship to objects in the external world. For example, the image of a coffee mug (see Groupe μ 1992) in the shape of a cat does constitue a hybrid iconic structure, which, yet, does not have any similarity with any

objects of the external world. In this case, images stand as "figures" of the world, while the elementary units that are used for composing such hybrid images constitute "figurative formants" (in Hjelmslev's terms). Whereas images of the purely iconic class may be said to have a representational function, hybrid images do not represent the external world, but, rather, shape or configure it.

According to common sense, images are supposed to be isomorphic to what they represent and almost perceptible directly and universally as forms of knowledge. On the contrary, as shown by Greimas (1983) and Groupe μ (1992), among others, images signify largely by being tied up with concepts or themes, which they are summoned to substantiate. So, if the issue of public health may be considered to be a theme, there must be a figurative apparatus which makes it concrete, perceptible, somehow "realistic": hospitals, medical tools, operating rooms and so on (see Marsciani and Zinna 1991; Bertrand 2000).

Figurative language, thus, is responsible for configuring human perception and social representations in the context of determinate structures.The figurative formants which configure the world as a proper "spectacle" are, according to Greimas (1989), the result of a primary reduction of the world to a semiotic web. This conversion is rendered possible thanks to a reading grid as web of meaning in a given culture. "It is this grid that we use for reading the world that causes it to signify for us" (Greimas 1989). And the same iconicity principle applies (as argued by Greimas 1989) and has been shown extensively as being applicable to verbal language, over and above pictorial signs, by dint of tropes such as metaphor which establish structures of likeness among the seemingly most disparate figurative formants (also called endophoric iconicity by Nöth [1990; see Rossolatos, this Volume], a concept that resonates Lotman's position that iconic signs model their own content).

> This grid is of a semantic nature, not visual, auditive, or olfactory. It serves as a "code" for recognition which makes the world intelligible and manageable. Now we can see that it is the projection of this reading grid- a sort of "signified" of the world- onto a painted canvas that allows us to recognize the spectacle it is supposed to represent. (Greimas 1989: 633)

The figurative apparatus that invests abstract themes semiotically, making the world significant, is neither universal, nor necessary, but culture-specific. Recognizing an image by calling a certain object "ship" is possible by nominating it at a given moment and in a certain social group as such, while populating its grid with specific figurative formants. Seeing something "as" implies deciding in advance what to see and how to see it (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 1964; Goodwin 2003).

Obviously, not all images are iconic in the same way. A square, in itself, is a square, nothing more or less; but if we gradually draw on the outside and inside a series of strokes, it may become a house, or a kite, or a pack of biscuits. Conversely, if we gradually eliminate from the same square the strokes which mark the windows of a house, the entire figure becomes more and more ambiguous, up to loosing any meaning and turning into pure abstraction.

Groupe μ (1992) refers to a key distinction between iconic and plastic signs which consists in the former being reducible to instances of types (e.g., different images of rivers representing the type 'river'), whereas the latter are characterized by the absence of any type (cf. Rossolatos 2014: 101). The Greimasian theory proceeds slightly differently. According to Greimas, the figurative level of discourse may be seen as a continuum that stretches from a maximum of figuration to a maximum of abstraction. "Iconization and abstraction are thus no more than varying degrees and levels of figurativity" (Greimas 1989: 634).

Following this line of thought, Fabbri and Marrone (2001: 143; also see Marrone 2007; Agnello 2003, 2007, 2012; Polidoro 2008) suggest three layers of figurativity: a first sub-layer called *figural* (where a few figurative formants begin to cover a previously purely abstract theme); a second sub-layer called *figurative* (where images appear as recognizable figures of the world); a third one called iconic (where such figures are enriched with increasingly meticulous details, up to establishing themselves as clichés). The Shell logo, notes Marrone (2007: 266-267), followed a process of figurative abstraction, with the progressive elimination of figurative formants (Fig.5.1).
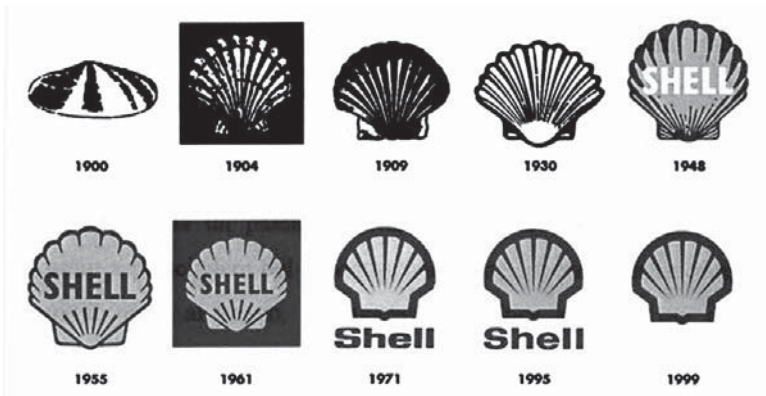
Figure 5.1: Evolution of Shell's logo (Marrone 2007: 266-267)

Within a century, the Shell logo turned from a fine-grained portrayal of a sea-shell to an abstract composition where the actual shell is barely visible. Its recognizability is partly attributable to the brand name and partly to the memories associated with the previous logo. The transformations undergone by Shell's logo resonate both a dominant trend that is suggestive of minimal logo designs, as well as similar evolutionary paths followed by other brands that call for an

accentuated co-operation of the enunciatee with the brand discourse, in terms of producing the correct interpretation of the logo's meaning.

The case of Nike is most eminent in this respect. In the 90s, Nike decided to remove entirely the brand name from its logo. By doing so, the brand erased its final "referential stronghold", in terms of establishing a relationship with the historically localizable statue of the Nike of Samothrace, or, rather, with its inter-textual embeddedness in a chain of cultural artefacts. Thus, on the one hand, the paucity of figurative formants and the erasure of marks of enunciation rendered it an obliquely signifying logo, which requires of enunciatees additional interpretative effort. A "swoosh", a comma, a mustache, a boomerang, a smile, a wing, are all possible interpretations. These interpretative possibilities attest to how graphic signs are used actively, as tools of a discovery game of ulterior (but not infinite) iconic similarities (Agnello 2003).

But images may also be analysed from another point of view, by attending to the concatenation of *plastic traits*. The plastic dimension is partly dependent on the figurative, as above defined. Among the categories which have been posited for the construction of the *plastic* dimension by Greimas (1989: 636-644), we may single out those that concern lines and shapes (*eidetic*), those concerning colors (*chromatic*) and those concerning the position of figures on the surface of the employed medium (*topological*). Any concatenation of plastic traits that partake of these categories may give rise to variable meanings. These meanings are part of the plastic language of logos. As an illustration of two plastic languages, let us consider the differences between two competitive logos, by Apple and IBM. While IBM capitalizes, in eidetic and chromatic terms, on a cool color (its famous blue) and straight lines, Apple uses largely warm colors and curved lines. This visual contrast in the concerned brands' aesthetic identity resonates with a conceptual

contrast: whereas IBM is associated with formality and a rational approach, Apple is associated with informality and creativity.

In Hjelmslevian terms, the relationship between categories of plastic (figurative) formants on the form of the expression plane and their semantic counterparts on the form of the content plane is a semi-symbolic one (see Floch 1985; Eugeni 1999; Calabrese 1985, 2006). With reference to a famous study byThürlemann on the "Blumen-Mythos" by Paul Klee (1982), the semi-symbolic relation has been represented as a quasi-mathematical analogy (akin to Greimasian homologies), where, on the one side of the equation stands the category of the expression plane, while on the other side the category of the content plane: warm colors:cold colors::formality:informality.

At this point we might ponder whether logos should be considered as 'signs' to be analysed alongside iconic or plastic dimensions. The answer is that logos may be analyzed on both dimensions. Each logo usually features some iconic reference, albeit, more often than not, of minimal nature (*figural*), as we saw in the case of Nike. This seeming 'iconism' does not rule out that each of these logos signifies by virtue of its plastic language. Forms, colors, the arrangement of the elements on a surface, are all meaningful aspects which work beyond, despite and regardless of the iconic references of the image that may be featured in a logo. Iconic signs and plastic traits are not at all mutually exclusive. On the contrary, logos are meaningful precisely due to this "double signification path". This point will become even more concrete by considering the iconic and plastic language of logos in the following case-studies.

5.3 Digging deeper: The mythic structures of Apple and IBM logos

In the Introduction we stressed that in order to understand the meaning of logos, we have to take a few more steps than simple symbolic correlations between figurative traits and concepts, and towards the (inter)textual semiotic strategies that undergird

manifest commercial discourse. In the 90s, Jean-Marie Floch published *Visual Identities* (1995), a book that proved to be foundational for ensuing studies of brands' visual language.

Visual Identities tried to reconnect semiotic studies with the tradition of cultural criticism. The main thread that permeated Floch's analyses is 'simple': to understand the structure of media discourses, the texts that circulate in the public sphere must be considered for what they really are, that is cultural artifacts to be studied by using the tools of cultural criticism. The ultimate goal was to reveal the textual strategies beneath the manifest signs. Floch's provocation was that in order to understand the latest industry trends it wasn't enough to look at the current advertising creative routes. One should look for sources of inspiration and understanding into more deeply seated references in the philosophical tradition. For example, to understand the key success drivers of the renowned furniture brand Habitat, it was useful to take a fresh look at Epicurian philosophy. In other words, in order to fully understand the articulation of pop culture, it is more useful to refer to seminal social and philosophical theories.

In one of the most famous chapters of *Visual Identities*, Floch engages in the analysis of the visual identity of two leading brands in the IT industry, Apple and IBM. In line with his above-noted proclivity for immersing in the most relevant social and philosophical theories for furnishing deep and novel interpretations of cultural phenomena, Floch chose to refer to a well-known analysis by Levi-Strauss, concerning the masks of the Amerindian tribes.To study the vanguard of global technological discourse, according to Floch, analysts should be examining the way populations commonly regarded as "primitive" were creating and disseminating simulacra in their social environment.

In this respect, during his anthropological research among tribes of American Indians, Lévi- Strauss realized that in order to understand the hidden meaning of tribal masks, they should be analysed not merely as a part of the tribe's iconic inventory. The

outlook should be expanded to include those created by neighbouring tribes. By doing so, that is by reconstructing the "inter-tribal" iconic system, the meaning of the masks could be explained (cf. Floch 2000: 48). In his studies, Lévi-Strauss noticed a particularly problematic mask, called Swaihwé, that was associated with the values of wealth and good fortune in the Salish tribe. Its visual features, considered in isolation, were inexplicable. Why did the mask have feathers? And why were its eyes extruding? What was the aquiline nose referring to? In order to answer these questions, Lévi-Strauss moved to the neighboring Kwakiutl tribe, where, indeed, he found a similar mask, but totally disengaged from the value of wealth. What matters most, however, was his discovery of yet another mask, called Dzonokwa, which was associated with the values of wealth and fortune. Needless to say that the traits of this mask were directly opposed to the Swaihwé one. A basic assumption was formulated against this evidence: each of the plastic traits of the masks could be explained as being exactly the opposite of its "competitor" in terms of associated cultural values.

Levi-Strauss's discovery of this deep logic of the visible inspired Floch to recognize the same mechanism as being operative in the communication of Apple and IBM. Likewise, just like tribal masks, the myths of the communication society may be understood only by comparison, while looking for a general system that regulates their transformations. By undertaking a thorough textual analysis, Floch describes how the logos of these two leading computer manufacturers are built in a diametrically opposed manner, involving the reversal of their plastic traits.

Figure 5.2: Apple logo   **Figure 5.3:** IBM logo

The IBM logo was designed by the famous graphic designer Paul Rand and represents the acronym of the company, colored in blue with a font type that belongs to the family of the so-called "Egyptian" typefaces. Floch notices how the designer models every single letter of the acronym according to a proportional perspective where the "I" is enlarged as the "M" is narrowed down, with the purpose of communicating the idea of a well-adjusted composition, a triptych capable of standing for the complex identity of the brand. This task demands of the designer to re-arrange even minuscule details of the artwork. This explains why, for instance, the eyelets of the letter "B" have been modified from curved to straight, in order to accommodate the vision that the brand should bear only straight lines, also linked to the values of rationalization and business orientation. A few years later, the famous stripes were added with a dual purpose: from a *plastic* point of view, in order to fortify the effect of the acronym's unity; from an iconic perspective, in order to configure a binary code as an iconic reference to the universe of computers and IT.

Further comparisons with the Apple logo are also revealing as to the following: whereas IBM is verbal, and therefore abstract, the Apple logo (featuring a bitten apple that is colored like a disordered rainbow) is figurative. The structure of

the first logo is complex (a triptych with repetitive separated bands), whereas that of the second is simple (an apple with alternating combined bands). The colors of IBM are monochromatic and cold (blue), those of Apple are polychromatic and warm (purple, red, orange and yellow stand out because they are inserted between blue and green). The shapes of IBM are thick and straight, those of Apple are purely delimitative curves. It is clear that the two logos are intimately imbricated: each of them indicates on the inverse the visual qualities of its opponent.

Table 5.1: The plastic traits of Apple, IBM and Microsoft logos

	IBM	APPLE	MICROSOFT
Structure	Complex configuration; repetition of disjoined stripes	Simple configuration; non repetition of joined stripes	Simple/complex configuration; repetition/non repetition of joined/disjoined stripes
Colours	Monochromatic; Cold	Polychromatic; warm	Polychromatic; warm/cold
Shapes	Bold; straight lines	Simple limits; curved lines	Bold/limits; straight/curved lines

We know, however, that Apple entered the PC market well after IBM. It is Apple, then, that had to differentiate its identity from IBM. Moreover, by choosing the image of the colourful bitten fruit, Apple was aiming at giving form to the creative euphoria that characterized the company right from the start, forcing IBM to undergo a rearticulation of its identity.The famous blue color

as a visual metonymy of efficiency and expertise was compared to the conviviality and the "coolness" of Apple.

The analysis that was undertaken in this Section demonstrates the resourcefulness of a textual semiotic orientation in the examination of logos' signification: whereas most analysts would be keen on seeking the symbolic "connotations" of Apple's shape (Newton's apple, the apple of Adam and Eve...) which might be supposed to communicate the "real" meaning of the Apple brand, Floch suggests looking elsewere, to the plastic language that was employed by the logo. The semiotic work on logos, inaugurated by Floch, has been enthusiastically propagated by brand semiotics scholars, such as Semprini's (1997: 89-137) analysis of RATP and ltineris logos; Marrone's (1999) overview of italian mobile communications brands; Ceriani's (2001: 135-143) analysis of Jammin / MTV; Agnello's (2003, 2012) study of Nike / Adidas and McDonald's / Burger King; Teotti's (2006) study of Mercedes' logo; Brucculeri's (2009) study of the tourist logos of the Mediterranean countries. These studies do not simply replicate Floch's analyses, but provide even deeper accounts on various fronts, some of which will be examined in later Sections.

5.4 The myth continues: Microsoft Windows

The subsequent history of competition amongst the major brands in the IT market deployed in the form of a "war of signs" amongst visual identities (Mangiapane 2009). The visual identity of Microsoft Windows was built with reference to both the identities of Apple and IBM. Let us take a closer look at its configuration.

Figure 5.4: Microsoft Windows logo

The affiliation of the Microsoft Windows logo's visual identity with the IBM and Apple logos' plastic traits, as laid out in the previous Section with reference to Floch's analysis, can be immediately recognized. By focusing on a 'Western' reading path (from left to right), we notice a progressive transformation of the logo's visual traits. This evolutionary path marks a distinction between two areas, a 'digital' and an 'analogical' one. Starting from the left, we identify 'disjoined stripes', built by the composition of coloured fragments in perspective.   These elements contribute to the formation of a horizontal continuity: the more they move to the right, the bolder the lines become, up until turning into a unique body, where four quarters can be spotted. The shape of the body is wavy and it is built by using in equal measure orthogonal and curved elements (the vertical axis is built according to orthogonal

criteria, the horizontal one using the curved line). At the same time, while moving from left to the right, the logo progressively turns from an open shape to a closed one. As regards the use of colours, often referred to as 'silent salespersons' (Hynes 2009), they are set as parallels on the vertical axis, according to an organization of cold/warm colours (red and blue). This criterion is reversed in the body of the picture, with a composition which features the green colour next to the red one in the first quarter, and the yellow colour next to the blue one.

Clearly, the Windows logo is engaging dialogically with both Apple and IBM's identities. It tends to re-mark the aesthetic identity of these two IT brands. In the Windows logo, the warm colours (defining of Apple according to Floch) co-exist with the cold ones (defining of IBM), while the orthogonal elements (defining of IBM) with the curved ones (defining of Apple) on the horizontal axis. The reconfiguration of Apple and IBM logos' plastic traits in the Windows logo is also evinced at the point where the order of the colours in the analogical side is overturned, that is in the right quarters (a cold color like green is following the warm-red and the warm-yellow is following the blue), thus cross-breeding visually the two aesthetic identities. Windows' visual identity reconciles mythically the visual traits of Apple and IBM, instead of overturning them. This strategic move opens up a third way in the concerned logos' design. This third way seeks to expand the brand's audience, by extending Apple's promise of transforming the world of information technology. To this part of the world, that is a world plastically configured through the brands' visual discourse, Microsoft offers a chance of 'redemption' against the 'intellectual snobbism' of Apple.

A few years later, after a crisis period that almost brought Apple to a standstill, clever communicative actions, including the famous advertising campaign "Think different", and a logo redesign, reinstated the brand's growth status.The modifications brought about by this redesign consisted in turning the logo into monochromatic, with a preference for a canonical version of gray
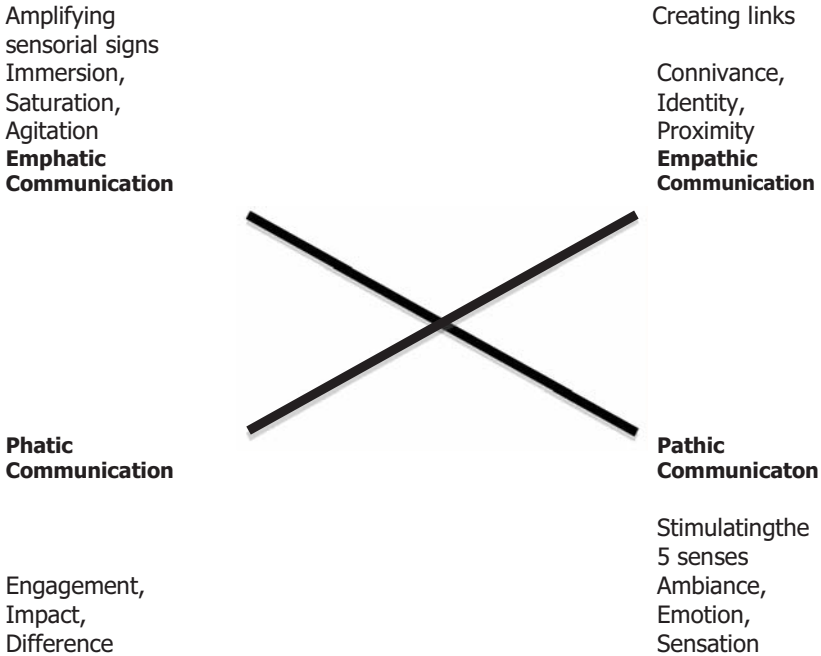
in a white background, while removing the characteristic stripes. At a plastic level, this redesign was a clear repositioning, by adopting an *overturning logic*, in Floch's terms: Apple changed its logo to monochromatic against the polychromatic Windows logo, thus giving birth to a new æsthetic of 'fine-grained beauty', as against the 'creative psychedelics' of its beginnings. The *design-oriented* look and feel that everybody commonly ascribes to Apple started with this redesign initiative.

5.5 Logos "en terrain sensible"

Semiotics may also offer tools for analysing the way sensory appeals of certain artifacts, such as logos, are prescribed in emotional relational paths. Ever since Floch's early analyses of visual identities, the issue of how to mark- and therefore how to manage – consumers' experiences has been central in the debate between marketing and semiotics. In this respect, Boutaud's (2007) critical interpretation of the Experiential Wheel model by Hetzel (2002) is quite relevant. Hetzel (2002) proposed five essential properties for encapsulating the emotional mood of any text: extraordinary, surprising, creating links, stimulating the five senses, and using the symbolic capital of brands. Subsequently, Boutaud (2007) draws a distinction between *Emphatic Communication* which "amplifies sensorial signs", thus giving rise to a mood that is related to immersion, saturation and agitation, and *Empathic Communication*, which tones down the signal and promotes connivance, identity and proximity by creating links within a community. By abnegating these two semes, two more positions emerge. *Phatic Communication* stems from the contradiction of *Empathic Communication* and it stands for a communication mode which aims at surprising the enunciatee, while marking a difference of tone and impact over a given background. Finally, by abnegating *Emphatic Communication*, we arrive at *Pathic Communication*, which is, by definition, multisensory, charged with stimulating the five senses and constructing around it emotions and sensations. The resulting

semiotic square that trajectorizes these communicative routes is displayed in Fig.5.5.

Amplifying
sensorial signs
Immersion,
Saturation,
Agitation
Emphatic
Communication

Creating links

Connivance,
Identity,
Proximity
Empathic
Communication

Phatic
Communication

Pathic
Communicaton

Stimulatingthe
5 senses
Ambiance,
Emotion,
Sensation

Engagement,
Impact,
Difference

Figure 5.5: Boutaud's communication model (Boutaud 2007)

But what does this model have to do with logos? While applications to visual identities are still scarce, herebelow follow suggestions whereby it may be fruitfully operationalized in the exploration of logos' signification.The transformations that the Apple logo has been undergoing over the past years may be explained as a fine-tuning of the dialectic between *Emphatic Communication* and *Empathic Communication*. We might stress, while considering the first Apple logo studied by Floch, that it is an Emphatic sign which aims at being immersive and saturate the

ambience against the cold and stoney IBM. Its first redesign constitutes an attempt at enhancing its multisensorial posture, providing it with a 3D-like appeal. The logo's investment with a glossy texture enriches its expressive substance, while forging tactile bonds with consumers. IBM's redesign, then, forced Apple's identity from an *Emphatic* position to a *Pathic* multisensory one. The ensuing changes in Apple's visual identity culminated in the current 'minimal' monochromatic version. This identity positions Apple in a 'cool' atmosphere of collective identity and purity by reducing the tone of Communication. This evident understatement must be examined in a broader perspective, by considering the æsthetic project of the brand as a *total look*: while the official Apple visual identity chooses a minimal (and *Pathic*) position, the offered product (which is part of the brand's aesthetic identity) actively leverages the multisensory appeals of the featured equipment, thus giving rise to an interaction between the *Phatic* and *Pathic* communicative positions. This seeming understatement may be challenged in instances, such as the logo's redesign that was used in 2012 by Tim Cook during the presentation of the iPad, shortly after the passing of Steve Jobs. This redesign, which actually hasn't survived Cook's keynote speech, urged many commentators[1] to speculate about a return to the past (the multicolored striped logo), which, after all, could be justified as a virtual move towards a *Phatic* communication, and predictably so according to Boutaud's model. Boutaud's model may, therefore, be applied to tracking the transformations of Apple's logo, as per Fig. 5.6.
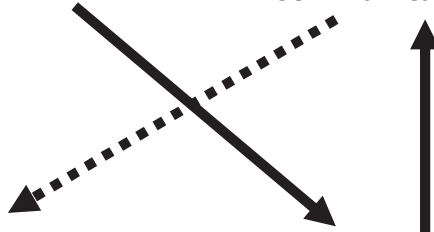
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[1] See, for instance, http://www.creativebloq.com/branding/apple-goes-back-future-logo-revamp-3128182

Striped Apple Logo
Amplifying the signal
Immersion,   Saturation,
Agitation
Emphatic
Communication

Apple Flat Logo
Creating links
Connivance,   Identity,
Proximity
Empathic
Communication

Phatic Communication
Surprising
Engage, Impact, Difference

Mosaic Apple Logo
(as seen during the iPad presentation's Keynote)

Pathic Communicaton
Stimulating the 5 senses
Ambient,   Emotion,
Sensation
Apple Embossed Logo

Figure 5.6: Boutaud's (2007) communication model applied to the evolution of Apple's logo

5.6 McDonald's vs. Burger King

The visual identities of these two giants in the fast-food market (also see Ventura, this Volume) have been analysed by Agnello (2012) with the explicit purpose of continuing Floch's work. Agnello begins his analysis by noticing that the discourse of McDonald's, condensed in its logo, is basically *Mythical.* McDonald's logo adds temper to the product, while immersing it in a fairytale world that transcends the banal, daily acts of food consumption. The famous Golden Arches figuratively mark the entrance in a protected area, where the maximum of productive organization and the maximum of fun are guaranteed. Crossing the golden threshold opens up a universe where everything is possible. This world, a sheer communicative artefact, represents the key brand-promise.

Figure 5.7: McDonald's logo

Figure 5.8: Burger King's logo

On the contrary, the brand promise of Burger King lies halfway between *Referential* and *Substantial*, promising no more than sandwiches, at their purest and tastiest. Burger King just wants to treat customers' sensual and gustative core. The scheme of inverted traits that was identified by Floch (see Section 5.3) is also applicable in this case, as shown by Agnello (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Plastic traits of McDonald's and Burger King

	McDonald's	**Burger King**
Structure	Closed shape Outline	Open Shape Flat figure
Colours	Red background White background Yellow figure	White background Red background Yellow figure
Shapes	Vertical curves	Horizontal curves

It merits noticing, by looking more closely at the figurative dimension of McDonald's logo, how it stands out as eminently *figural*. Since its shape is not detailed, it comes across as ambiguous and therefore subject to proliferating interpretations. As in the case of Shell, the figural component offers the aperture to a wide range of possible interpretations: the initials of the brand name, the feminine or the Great Mother who is conventionally responsible for controlling and permitting (see Codeluppi 2001).

5.7 McDonald's vs. Slow Food and their synthesis via MasterChef

A more recent study by Marrone (2011) on Slowfood observes how, just like in the case of Apple and IBM, the logo of Slowfood is a silent bearer of a clear system of parallel divergences from the McDonald's one, arising from a small set of common plastic traits. It appears quite clearly (see Table 5.3) that the logo of SlowFood has been designed in opposition to that of the famous

American fast food giant, using the same tactics, and positioning itself in the same discursive universe.

Table 5.3: Plastic traits of Slowfood and McDonald's

	Slowfood	**McDonald's**
Articulation	Binary configuration	Binary configuration
Structure	Semi-closed format Flat figure	Closed format Outline
Colors	White Background Yellow figure	Red background White text Red figure
Shapes	Curves in spiral	Curves in vertical

The story of the birth of the Slow Food movement is closely linked to the clash with McDonald's. It was in reaction to the opening of the first McDonald's restaurant in Rome that a group of intellectuals gathered around the Italian magazine Gambero Rosso signed the first manifesto that spawned the Slow Food movement. It is no coincidence that this manifesto, as pointed out by Marrone, refers to the figure of the snail, which will also serve as main reference for the association's logo. It is also evident that the rivalry between the opponents' logos contributes to shaping a proper competition between two *forms of life*: fast versus slow food. This is why they can even be seen as short philosophical treatises on how to relate with pleasure. Whereas the concept of pleasure offered by McDonald's is acute but repetitive, punctual but always the same, unlimited but monotonous (repetition of the identical arches), SlowFood chooses the figure of the spiral, relating to pleasure as "going deep", looking for an experience both progressive and durative, tensive, patient, delivering new sensations. The figure, which Agnello (2012) in her essay ascribes to McDonald's, of a Don Giovanni happy to always access the same pleasure, contrasts with that of SlowFood which propounds, on the contrary, going deep into one single object/experience of pleasure. The

reccurrence of the same is opposed to internal differentiation and graduality towards a taste that is considered as unique and specific. Moreover, as Marrone (2011) argues, the logos are bearers of a spatial difference. In the McDonald's logo, the golden arches constitute a spatial configuration as a mythical space that can be accessed by a subject, already equipped with a willing. The situation with SlowFood is exactly the opposite, where the snail, by definition, is always at home: always and everywhere at home, taking compulsorily the risks of the unknown, the danger of going elsewhere. Both logos, however, tend to produce *mythical* universes of sense.

Figure 5.9: Slow Food logo

Figure 2.10: MasterChef logo

A sort of mythical reconciliation between these two forms of life is suggested by the logo of the famous TV program Masterchef (Marrone 2013). In an extensive analysis of the program, Marrone notes that the Masterchef logo combines the invariant elements of the two logos, on both iconic and plastic dimensions. As regards the iconic dimension, the logo contains a reference to the spiral of Slowfood, reconfigured as a burning cooking plate, and a reference to the 'M' of McDonald's. On a plastic dimension, the logo of Masterchef is configured in line with that of Slow Food, whose famous spiral is coupled with the concept of a prolonged and gradually intensifying pleasure, following an involutionary path. But the direction of the spiral has been reversed: in MasterChef, the spiral looks like the sign of an email

that follows a motion path from the inside to the outside. At the same time, the stroke of the lines is very different. The Slowfood identity uses an uncertain stroke which tries to mimic handwriting with the purpose of marking the individuality that is associated with the sensory experience of taste. The plastic choices for which Masterchef has opted consist in borrowing McDonald's regular and controlled stroke that "Mcdonaldise" the Slowfood spiral, thus dissolving the opposition between fast and slow food. Masterchef adopts Slowfood's concept of taste and culinary experience, albeit in a standardized and controlled form, suitable for mass consumption.

5.8 Michel Bras' multisensorial aesthetic identity

The case-studies that we have considered so far suggest that logos represent, at the same time, less and much more than they have been acknowledged; less, since they are just one of the many possible realizations of an abstract code which we call *Visual Identity*; more, since, by now, it should be clear that they do not signify as 'signs', but as cultural artifacts that are entangled in inter-textual relationships that are multi-layered and deeply articulated in a cultural software. Moreover, as seen in the last case-study of McDonald's, Slowfood and Masterchef, logos are operating as synaesthetic machines that function by constantly translating different aspects of a brand's aesthetic identity from one sensorial mode to another. An outstanding example or such complex multisensory inter-translations, that brings us full-circle back to Floch, concerns the identity of the famous chef Michel Bras (Floch 1995).

Michel BRAS
Laguiole . France

Figure 5.11: MichelBras logo

Floch's approach suggests that even the logo and the font type (Eve light italic) contribute to the construal of the gastronomic experience, that is a visually mediated taste experience. The analysis starts from the observation that the particular type-face (the Eve light italic) used to visualize the brand name of the famous French chef Michel Bras, shares the same æsthetic traits (e.g., the extreme delicacy of the lines) as the selected figure of the logo: an Alpine fennel, wild and fragrant plant that is often used in the precious creations of the menu. Alpine Fennel is the emblem of the aromatic cuisine of Bras, at the same time a figurative element of his visual identity and a taste-olfactory trait that represents the finishing touch of some of his dishes. The visual identity of Michel Bras is suggestive through its various manifestations - logo, lettering, dishes - of a unique brand discourse: that of 'delicacy'. Floch suggests that the idea itself of delicacy (the main sensorial quality of the alpine fennel, an extremely fragile plant, but with an intense smell, pungent and

persistent) can be visually translated both by the typeface used in business documents and even by the tactile material substance of a printed logo: a recycled paper in relief, where, among other things, the logo is embossed and emerges from black. A logo that calls for being touched before seen, a figure that should be treated with the same care as the fragile plant. Opposite traits, then, inhabit its plastic structure: it is fragile, hardly visible, exposed to natural forces, but, at the same time, it is very strong as regards smell and taste, ready to emerge from the 'interior of a plate', to overwhelm it. A very special semiotic configuration, thus, underlies a proper 'tale' which, in Floch's opinion, constitutes the paradox of this delicacy. Being sensitive means being perceptive of the smallest changes, of grasping nuances that are barely sensible to the majority of perceivers. But delicacy is, at the same time, a sensible quality of objects and a competence of subjects. The encounter between a delicate subject (that is capable of recognizing delicacy) and a delicate object spawns the magic of the Bras brand, which extends its value to a wide range of mechandise - preserved food essences, a country resort and sensory experiences. Approaching Bras' brand means opening up to an existential experience, a rediscovery of the delicate sense of nature, a dining experience which is meaningful in anthropological and cultural terms. In order to bring about this effect, the brand counts on every sensory mode to be coherent and *isotopic*. Corporate image, taste of the plates, spaces, merchandise, walks in nature must evoke exactly the same concept of delicacy by articulating its deep and hidden *plastic* grammar. This is what Floch demonstrates, while deconstructing one of Bras' most carachteristic plates, the sea-bass with Alpine fennel and buttermilk, thus laying bare the hidden grammar of gastronomic artifacts.

5.9 Conclusions

In this Chapter we tried to enquire into the complexities of visual identity as part of a brand's discursive universe, by examining how logos as indispensable brand symbols are configured alongside iconic and plastic dimensions.

The issue of visual identity that was consolidated as such by Floch for the first time, points to another question, that of logos as realizations of an overarching brand code that is realizable in other forms, sensorial modes and through various media. This deeper code, still æsthetic, regulates the translation of icono-plastic traits across sensory modes. The aim of a brand language, then, should be to recognize how this code operates for realizing a deep coherence across all expressive manifestations and media.

But this is not enough, as brand meaning is realized in a complex and inter-textual predicament that entails constant dialogue between a brand's language and the cultural tradition(s) that inform it. The image of a brand, then, and its logo as key brand symbol, has a mythic dimension. As such, rather than being 'signs' to be decoded through simple correlations of expression/meaning, aesthetic identities resemble real stories, liable to modification and recontextualization according to shifting objectives and communicative contexts. These stories and these identities interact in manners that transcend the narrow confines of the 'here-and-now' and of competitive advertising discourse, while their elucidation is feasible only by opening them up to robust cultural criticism.

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CHAPTER 6

Semiotic roadmap for packaging design

Ilaria Ventura

6.1 A brief history of packaging: From unpacked goods to modern packaging design

The history of modern packaging is closely connected to the shift from a predominantly protective function of packing materials towards a communicative/persuasive one. This functional shift took place during the transition between two historical periods, before and after the second half of the 19th C., an interim period that was marked by the emergence of wholly new commercial practices.

 The first revolutionary practice dates back to the universal expositions in the second half of the 19th C. and concerns the establishment of the industrial production system which was coupled with the birth of a new way of displaying goods, from unpacked to well-wrapped. Concomitantly, commercial goods were transformed from unique artisanal objects to standardized products. The identification of and differentiation among products was realized through the elaboration of graphic elements on boxes, bottles and cans containing goods. It was the birth of the industrial and graphic design for serial industrial production (Vitta 2011).

 As a matter of fact, the act of branding objects for selling is not a modern phenomenon. The branding of packing materials originates in ancient trade, when foods, textiles, seeds and any kind of goods were transported around the world in glass or earthenware jars, as well as in paper or wooden boxes (Heilbrunn and Barré 2012) that were marked with signs of recognition. Not only products had to be preserved and protected, but whom they belonged to and their place of origin also had to be recognizable.

It was a primordial form of packaging as a communicative text. As is the case nowadays with the packaging of some fruits, just a label on the product, without any container, may suffice in fulfilling the need for distinguishing producers, while emitting essential information about products. These can be considered the key functions of every modern packaging. However, graphics for product packaging became a specific and well-developed field of design during the industrialization of the 19th C.

The second historical phenomenon that must be taken into consideration concerns the birth of the self-service purchasing system. The role of packaging became more instrumental since human sellers and shop assistants were replaced by *silent salesmen* (Pilditch 1973) on the shelves of department stores. With the spread of this distribution system in the second half of the 19th C., and due to the increasing competition among brands, packaging acquired a central role in the communication mix. Initially in the U.S., some pioneer companies established their own packaging design divisions. Packaging not only had to protect and preserve goods, but also to attract consumers, dispense information and help them make purchasing decisions while in front of department stores' crowded and packed displays. As the history of the Coca-Cola Company suggests, the *contour* bottle, so called due to its sinuous shape, was invented in 1915 by E. R. Dean as a strategic resource of the brand: the bottle design was unique and flawless, so that it could be recognized even when blindfolded. The Coke bottle is so important to the brand's identity as to be at the centre of almost every Coca-Cola advertising campaign, while in some recent cans it appears as a shape, used in lieu of a logo. The history of this international brand is the history of its packaging. As Bucchetti (2005) points out, the modern commercial system is first of all a history of brand names and, hence, it is the history of packaging, since the emergence of branding processes was coupled with the development of product packaging.

6.2 The role of packaging in brand identity: Case-studies of successful brands' packaging

Packaging should be considered as a special communicative touchpoint between brands and consumers, since it is a syncretic object (that is using various languages) with textures, materials, shapes, and colours that consumers can see, touch, smell, involving different modes (visual, verbal, tactile) that convey a brand's core values.

As thematic contents and intangible meanings connected to certain brands, core values must be coherently expressed through a recognizable visual identity. Packaging is an integral part of this identity. Once strictly functional quality controls have been adequately applied to packing materials, and an acceptable quality/protection threshold has been achieved, packaging assumes an added communicative function. This dual task that packaging is summoned to accomplish is reflected in current issues on top of branding agendas, such as that of eco-friendliness. Eco-friendliness involves technical aspects (innovative materials for a more efficient disposal) inasmuch as communicative ones that mandate the use of specific textures and materials (such as natural colours and raw materials).

The importance of the symbolic function of packaging is not always adequately reflected in consumers' perceptions. Innovations in packaging's protective aspects are usually welcome as economical, hygienic, etc., whereas purely aesthetic changes are often considered as useless restyling and superfluous artifice. Nevertheless, packaging should not be considered as just an envelope for something already meaningful by itself – the product – but rather as an indispensable branding aspect that functions as a crucial point of differentiation. The history of commercial trade demonstrates that packaging has always been an *object-sign* in charge of expressing places of origin, producers, characteristics of the product and so on. There are proofs of precious paper covers for excellent tea with labels

reproducing coats of arms and elegant images which date back to the 16th C. (Klimchuk and Krasovec 2006).

Changes in packaging are often based on light modifications of shapes, colours, types, materials, images, photos, capable of conveying new meanings about a brand. Mineral water or eau de toilette bottles come in various shapes that may not be very impressive, however they are capable of expressing lucidly key brand messages. It is necessary to determine which expressive attributes are prevalent in producing the intended semantic effects. The straight shape of a bottle as opposed to a competitor's sinuous one may contribute to highlighting the differences between two brands, such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Coca-Cola and Pepsi bottles

The use of black colour for premium products of Selfridges or Marks & Spencer highlights differences in quality and price of specific variants or groups of products within the same product line (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Selfridges brand store

Tiffany reduced the size of the printed brand name on its unique blue boxes and bags in order to enhance the effect of preciousness of its jewellery (Figure 6.3).


Figure 6.3: Tiffany blue box

The key for understanding these semiotic tweaks lies in the perception of a discrepancy at the plane of expression that is capable of effecting a variance at the plane of content. The three aforementioned cases may be approached semiotically from a synchronic point of view as differences between competitors (Coca-Cola and Pepsi) or between groups in the same product line (Selfridges) or, from a diachronic point of view, as transformations of a brand's visual identity (Tiffany), in which case the core identity is maintained by upholding essential visual elements, such as Tiffany's unique blue colour.

As Marrone (2007) points out, the idea that brands are warrantors of the quality of a product has been overtaken and overturned, since a product is planned depending on the brand positioning in the market. In the same fashion, packaging does not simply envelope objects, but it translates products in different expressive substances that furnish a communicative contract with consumers, a meaning proposal that is embedded in a value-based exchange. Tea packaging preserves the intense taste of the beverage, but at the same time it offers English tradition, oriental exoticism or environmental responsibility, depending on a brand's image structure. Moreover, each type of pack aims at different consumer segments. For example, tea bags are targeted to consumers who seek primarily convenient and fast consumption, whereas loose tea in hermetic cans to those who care for the preservation of the aroma as an important part of the tea-consumption ritual. In both cases, we are confronted with a value-based semiotic contract between brands and consumers, supported and facilitated by packaging. Without tangible support, brands as *effects of meaning* (Semprini 2006) that await to be realized in adequate and coherent expressive texts, would be meaningless. As Calver (2007) contends, "the pack is the brand".

6.2.1 McDonald's vs. Burger King

McDonald's packaging restyling was introduced as an opportunity for improving the company's dialogue with consumers. Why? What happened to take-away bags, boxes and cups with Golden Arches? By attending semiotically to a flagship burger product, the Big Mac, salient visual differences may be discerned between the new and the old packaging (Figure 6.4).

(a)   (b)
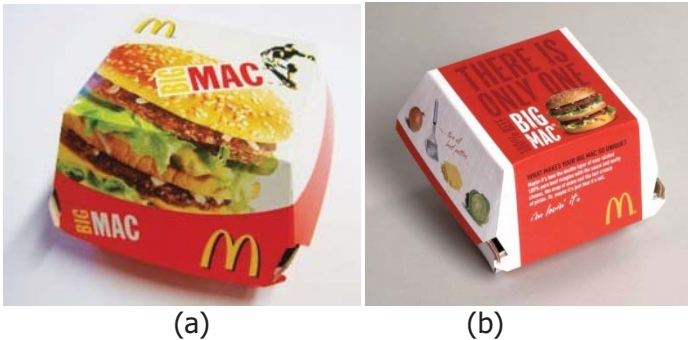
Figure 6.4: Old (a) and new (b) Big Mac packaging

The old packaging featured a curved box that looked as if it could barely contain a big burger. A meaning effect of abundance was produced by the tempting large image of a Big Mac that covered most of the pack, as if it was actually protruding from the pack. By contrast, the new pack is a slimmer straight-shaped box, with more words and smaller images. The burger on the front cover has been resized, while verbal descriptors give information about the product, its ingredients ("100% beef") and its special taste. This communicative strategy aims at informing consumers about food quality in order to appease concerns associated with health risks from eating fast foods. The use of smaller images, reproducing natural ingredients, such as tomatoes, cheese, lettuce, aids in avoiding imaginary associations about obesity and negative consequences on consumers' bodies. In this manner,

McDonald's responds to the severe criticisms that have been voiced from scientists, doctors, media, parents' associations, consumers' groups who stigmatize fast food as junk food. By contrast, the company's historical competitor, Burger King, adopted a completely different packaging approach that featured a dynamic and colourful graphic line, inspired by comic strips (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: Burger King packaging

Unlike McDonald's informative and realistic strategy, Burger King pursued an expressive trajectory featuring fantastic images of ingredients that convey meaningful effects of vivacity and playfulness. The packaging graphics of these fast food competitors reflect two different branding strategies, one that is aimed at increasing consumer awareness about food ingredients, and another that is aimed at entertaining, while being ironic with regard to fast food ingredients.

As Floch's (1995: 41) studies on visual identities of brands such as IBM and Apple suggest (also see Mangiapane, this Volume), the inversion of expressive traits of logos and of visual identity units is fundamental to the communication of different brands' positioning, especially between direct competitors. Contradictory and/or contrary visual categories (such as colour vs. non-colour; warm colours vs. cold colours; straight lines vs. curved lines) can be related to semantic oppositions at the level of content, thus giving rise to semi-symbolic systems of signification. For example, Floch (1995) highlighted how the different design philosophies of IBM and Apple are well transmitted by the use of contrasting visual elements in the logos, so that IBM's logo reflects a rational and pragmatic culture through a complex and verbal monochromatic visual identity, whilst Apple represents creativity and friendliness thanks to a polychromatic and figurative sign of identification.

In the case of McDonald's and Burger King's packaging, we observe the same systematic inversion of expressive traits (verbal-intensive text vs. visual-intensive text, realistic images vs. fantastic images, straight-shaped packs vs. curve-shaped packs) that represents the divergent fast-food philosophies of the two competitors.

6.2.2 Ikea and Nespresso

Although Ikea and Nespresso belong to different product categories (furniture and beverages), they do share in many respects a similar packaging design orientation. They are both leading companies in the markets wherein they compete that have pursued a diversification strategy. Thus, Ikea sells furniture, but also food, while Nespresso produces coffee, as well as coffee machines and other kitchen accessories. In addition, they both distribute their products via own-brand stores, without displaying competitors' products, in which case packaging performs a peculiar brand narrative function.

Ikea, according to its core values of frugality and savings, endorses a packaging reduction policy. Most Ikea packages are cardboard boxes with no images, featuring only the brand name and the product name in a regular black typeface. At first glance, we notice a sort of elimination of the communicative function of packaging that is reduced to the performance of protection and conservation. As is customary in every Ikea store, visitors can preview and choose unpacked products at the upper floor, whereas in the warehouse below they may buy the selected goods that are packed in the typical cardboard boxes. This articulation of spaces may suggest that packaging is a minor element at Ikea stores. However, this is hardly plausible, as the Swedish company employs plain wrapping papers and boxes as essential elements of its visual identity. It is the aesthetization of packaging that conditions handling, transportation and storage. The warehouse is part of the display system at Ikea stores. This is the reason why food at the Ikea restaurants is packed in exactly the same fashion as home furniture and accessories: pasta in transparent plastic bags without labels, biscuits in plain boxes and so on (Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6: Ikea packaging

It is primarily a visual style, an aesthetic choice (Floch 1995), rather than a decision made for practical reasons. Essentiality and reduction are the key words of the Ikea world that tie up products and packaging. These key values emerge as semantic effects of figurative traits (basic shapes), materials (raw cardboard, transparent plastic), colours (neutral backgrounds, use of black and white).

The story of the Nespresso brand is about elegance and sophisticated coffee flavours, with a complex packaging system based on multi-coloured coffee capsules (pods). The capsules containing different types of coffee are intended to preserve the various and unique aromas of Nespresso, but they are also the product itself, as Nespresso coffee machines only work with those capsules. In this case, we observe an interesting inversion between packaging and product, as to render them almost indistinguishable branding aspects. The multi-coloured capsules are the heart of the visual and spatial organization of Nespresso's point of sales (Figure 6.7).
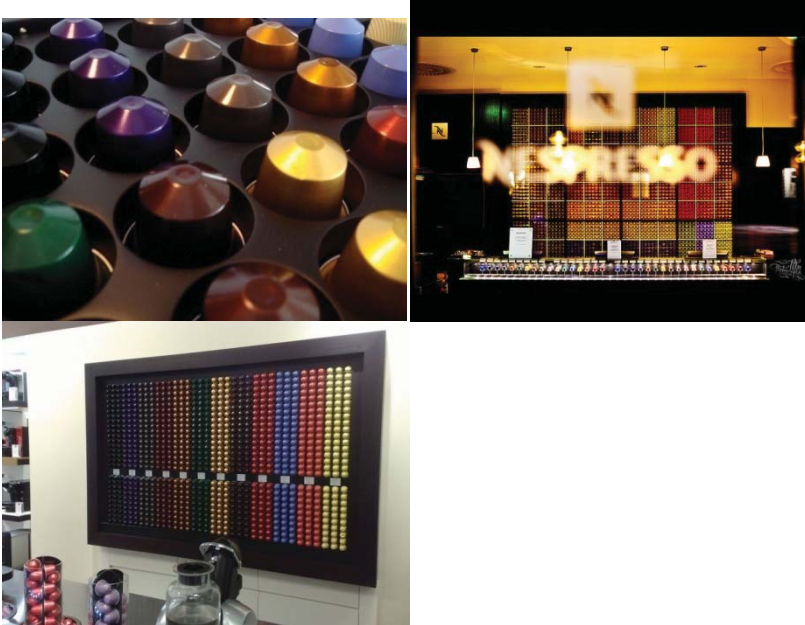
Figure 6.7: Nespresso

Grouped by colour, they form regular shapes on the wall or bright lines in glass cases: they are much more than packages of something else; they are exhibition objects, expressing the brand values of pleasure and sensuousness.

Although Ikea and Nespresso adopt opposing visual strategies, the first based on the reduction and the second on the exaltation of packaging, in both cases packaging performs a primary function in communicating brand identity. For Ikea, on the one hand, the intentional expressive simplicity of its packs is demonstrative of its core values, viz. that the brand is more interested in savings and product quality, rather than communicative embellishment. On the other hand, the multi-coloured Nespresso capsules with their in-store visual displays may be considered as a visual anticipation of the rich tasting offer of the branded coffee.

6.3 A Greimasian approach to packaging design

As already explicated, packaging affects directly brand competition, while functioning as key point of differentiation among brands. During the planning phase of packaging development, when decisions about salient icono-plastic variables, such as size, shape, texture, colours are made, as well as during the purchasing phase, when consumers visually inspect brands on-shelf, while searching for familiar packs and/or alternatives, a constant process of comparison among objects, shapes, colours, names, logos is involved.

In order to proceed with a systematic analysis of the dimensions where these multiple comparisons take place in brands' packaging design structures, I am drawing on Greimas's method (1983) for analyzing objects of value as lexemes that was also adopted by Floch (1995: 145-174) in his study of ordinary objects (e.g., Opinel knife).

Greimas's (1983: 21-22) methodological framework comprises three components: *configurative, taxic and functional*. According to this framework, initially objects have to be decomposed into their elementary parts (*configurative component*). For some types of packaging, this is a straightforward procedure, as is the case with jars (lid and glass container), bottles of water (cap and bottle) or cardboard boxes

(often "up" and "down" sides are indicated). Occasionally, the elementary parts to be taken into consideration in the configurative dimension do not correspond to packaging's visible surfaces. In bags, sprays and other packaging types, the front-of-pack (FOP) and the back-of-pack (BOP) cannot be distinguished without different labels, usually more image-intensive on the front and more verbal-intensive on the back. Bucchetti (1999) identifies a primary area in packaging, that is usually on the front, performing the main functions of attraction and brand identification, and a secondary area that performs an informative function, usually corresponding to the back of packs. This articulation of pack space should be considered a design routine due to the fact that packs are displayed abreast in department stores. The organization of packaging spaces that is suggested by Bucchetti, however, should not lead to an identification of FOP with the primary area (attractive function) and of BOP with the secondary area (informative packaging). Many packaging types use verbal-intensive labels on the front that feature details about the product, and hence the distinction between primary/secondary areas should be considered as a general guideline, rather than a rule. As we will discuss in due course, the informative and attractive aspects of packaging depend on a brand's communicative strategy. What is particularly relevant in our discussion of Greimas's classification of lexemes, and by extension Floch's classification of ordinary objects, is that the analysis of the configurative component does not always fit into directly visible partitions of packaging, but also concerns how different functions are assigned to various packaging spaces.

The *taxic component* (Greimas 1983: 21; Floch 1995: 151) designates the comparison between an object and its elementary parts with other objects that belong to the same category. It is very important to delineate the salient set that will be used for comparison purposes. For example, in order to compare among wine bottles, we should decide whether our focus will be on a narrowly defined category (bottles for red

wine), a larger category (bottles for any kind of wine) or even larger categories (bottles for wines and spirits). Once the categorical level has been identified, we may proceed with considering the attributes of the packs' elementary parts that produce meaning through their variable configurations. As regards wine bottles, we will consider the shape, the colour of the glass, the label (size, image, typeface, type of information), the cap and its material, but also the gestures that are required for opening the bottle (glass caps involve a very different ritual than traditional corks). If we take a look at vodka bottles (Figure 6.8), we may see how the brand image of this clear alcoholic drink is conveyed by the specific appearance of each bottle, especially as regards the shape of the pack and the colours of the labels.

Figure 6.8: Vodka brands

The taxic component can be used to analyze variations in competitors' packaging design, as in the case of Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi, but also packaging transformations throughout a brand's history (cf. *supra*, the example of Tiffany). If we observe the evolution of Nivea moisturizing cream's packaging (Figure 6.9a), we may notice the succession of curved and straight lines, as well as an alternation of blue/white colours. The latest restyling resulted in a soft shaped packaging that mixes the historical colours of the brand. Moreover, the brand name has been included in a blue circular shape that is clearly inspired by one of

the most representative packs of Nivea, the round blue tin (Figure 6.9b).

(a)

(b)

Figure 6.9: Transformations of Nivea packaging

Finally, the taxic component allows us to study the evolution of a packaging type in a cultural context, such as the history of canned beverages that popularized the habit of eating outside, but also resulted in an increase in disposable objects. The socio-cultural meanings of objects may be scrutinized via the third conceptual pillar of Greimas's method of analyzing lexemes, that is the functional component.

The *functional component* does not involve merely observing objects from a technical point of view or performance

aspects in a practical setting. As regards packaging, it involves practical functions (preserving, protecting, facilitating handling and transport, and so on), inasmuch as communicative tasks such as describing, persuading, illustrating, advising. Just like a throne is much more than a seat as it functions as a symbolic sign of prestige for the one who sits on it, or a party dress may be suitable to the context in which a person is wearing it, rather than comfortable, the functional component of packaging depends on variegated tasks. These tasks include the relations between a brand and its consumers, the role of packaging in the communication mix, the point-of-sales context, the specific consumer cultural traits and a given socio-aesthetic imaginary.

Thus, from a semiotic point of view, we can assimilate "form" and "function" in terms of packaging's meaning and structure. On the one hand, the function of a pack is interwoven with social semiotic effects (for example, mobile phones are used for calling relatives, but also fulfil the tasks of staying connected and of control), while, on the other hand, social meanings are functional since they affect our practical affairs, such as being able to call relatives on a mobile phone contributes to maintaining relationships and one's role in a family.

How packaging contains, protects and is used, conveys strong meanings that affect directly the relationships between consumers and brands. This point has been discussed both in the marketing literature (Metcalf et al. 2012) and in semiotic studies (Ventura 2006, 2014), with view to highlighting that the analysis of the visual aspects of packaging does not suffice for understanding the meaning effects of these brand "delegates" (cf. Floch 1995: 156-157), since it requires a consideration of packaging's everyday use. For instance, ergonomic shapes are useful for handling bottles and other containers, but they are also expressive elements that suggest a certain conception of usage inasmuch as the seme of user-friendliness. On the contrary, some organic products' packaging, available, for example, in the Italian market, are characterized by the absence of user-friendly shapes,
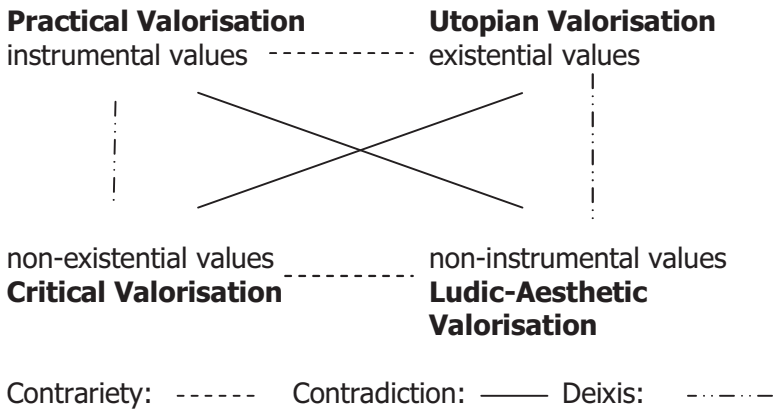
since their main aim consists in enhancing naturality associations for the corresponding brand that might not be attainable if an ergonomic design, indicative of industrial culture, had been adopted.

6.4 Differential brand valorisation through packaging

Brands are valorised and narrated in different ways, while being positioned and articulated in discrete meaning universes. Packaging undoubtedly contributes substantially in this valorisation process. In order to demonstrate this contribution, we will analyze in this Section the ways whereby packaging "tells" and "translates" brands, by drawing on Floch's (1990, 1995) model of valorisation strategies for studying verbal texts, images, shapes and packaging materials. We will take into consideration the cardboard boxes of brands that compete in the cereals product category in the Italian market, in order to outline how packaging contributes to brand differentiation, but also how breakfast consumption is represented in these packs as texts.

Floch's model of valorisation (Figure 6.10) is based on the contrariety between instrumental and existential values that he deems to be a very common manner of presenting products in advertising (Floch 1986). In this context, Floch takes into account the difference between instrumental programs and existential programs that belong to the Greimasian narrative theory. According to this theory (Greimas and Courtés 1979), narration is a model for understanding social reality that includes two types of programs of action: instrumental and existential programs, the first serving to obtain the means and the second representing the aims of a subject. Different values drive these programs that are organized according to a narrative logic in which the instrumental programs precede the existential ones since they are necessary for realizing them. But, as Floch observes, very often in advertising these types of values are introduced as conflicting and this is the reason why the model of valorisation represents them in a relationship of contrariety.

Practical Valorisation
instrumental values - - - - - - - - - Utopian Valorisation
existential values

Utopian Valorisation

non-existential values - - - - - - - - non-instrumental values
Critical Valorisation   **Ludic-Aesthetic Valorisation**

Contrariety: - - - - - -   Contradiction: ———   Deixis: - ·· — ·· —

Figure 6.10: Floch's square of brands' consumption values

Let us now explain this model by recourse to the Italian cereals market, while showing how it is organized in four different positioning territories that emerge from the logical articulation of the semantic category "instrumental vs. existential values".

Nestlé *Fitness* front-of-pack features the main message "Slim Belly Program", that is whole wheat flakes are a means to the attainment of staying in shape, as a more elaborate promise of the brand's name (Figure 6.11a).
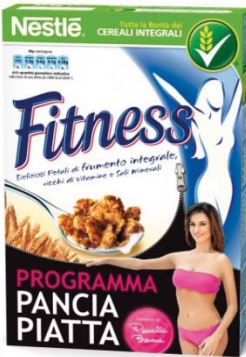
(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

Figure 6.11(a-d): Packaging positioning of breakfast flakes

Moreover, nutritional facts that are usually located on the back-of-pack, appear on the top left of Nestlé *Fitness* front cover, thus producing the meaning effect that information about fats, proteins and calories are mostly relevant for the consumers of this type of cereals. The portrayed woman, Rossella Brescia, a very famous Italian dancer, functions indirectly as a testimonial for the efficacy of *Fitness* cereals, along with the image of a
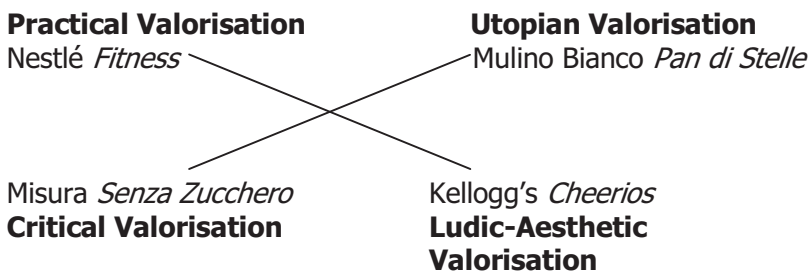
zipper and a perfect feminine shape on the background. The figurative imaginary stereotype of female dietetics is condensed in the primary area of this packaging (also see Klapish 1995 on feminine representations in packaging design). As regards the form of valorisation, cereals as part of a balanced breakfast are portrayed here as a step towards a regulated program that aims at physical wellness, so this packaging refers to a *practical valorisation* of the product.

On the contrary side of instrumental (practical) values in Floch's semiotic square of universal values (Figure 6.12), we encounter the *ludic-aesthetic valorisation* of consumption. This value territory is occupied by packagings from cereals brands that are mostly targeted to children. These packagings portray breakfast as a playful moment of the day, with fan animals and cartoon characters depicted on the front of the pack (Figure 6.11b). Breakfast is not a step in a calculated program, but a fun experience. The same form of valorisation involves packaging that highlights the taste of cereals, either classic or with chocolate or honey, all sharing a positioning of breakfast as a moment to be savoured and not just a rapid meal to be eaten before going to school or work.

The contrary position of the aesthetic valorisation is occupied by the *critical* one. Taste and playfulness are prohibited in this value territory, as is the case with the Misura *Senza zucchero* cereals (sugar-free). As suggested by the brand and variant names, this brand adopts a dietetic positioning. In this respect, it shares common values with *Fitness* by Nestlé, but unlike *Fitness Senza Zucchero* cereals are portrayed more as an opportunity for consumers to take care of their own health, than a step towards losing weight. The image on the front of the cardboard box expresses this critical positioning coherently, by depicting a simple cup of milk and flakes against an elementary two-coloured background (Figure 6.11c). The main characteristics of critical valorisation in terms of product evaluation usually involve economic, medical, spatial aspects. For an illustration of

the *utopian form of valorisation*, based on existential values, the contrary of practical valorisation, we will examine the Mulino Bianco *Pan di Stelle cereals* that represent a unique case in the Italian cereals market (Figure 6.11d). First of all, from a visual point of view, this is not a common parallelepiped cardboard box, like most of competitors' packaging, but a plastic bag clearly inspired by the packaging of the more well-known biscuits of the same name. *Pan di Stelle* are chocolate biscuits produced by Mulino Bianco. The brand's increasing popularity incited the company to extend it to other categories, such as cereals cakes and snacks. On the front and on the back of the bag, children's questions and playful puns are featured along with fantastic images, such as that of a winged cup of milk. From the point of view of content effects, this packaging belongs to an existential positioning since it expresses childhood fantasy, as a way of enhancing family values of intimacy and proximity, in line with other food brands produced by Mulino Bianco for the Italian market.

To summarize, the scrutinized packs in this Section and their corresponding values, may be mapped out in the *semiotic square of consumption values* as per Figure 6.12.

Practical Valorisation **Utopian Valorisation**
Nestlé *Fitness* Mulino Bianco *Pan di Stelle*

Misura *Senza Zucchero* Kellogg's *Cheerios*
Critical Valorisation **Ludic-Aesthetic Valorisation**

Figure 6.12: Semiotic square of brands' consumption values in the Italian cereals market

6.5 Communication strategies for packaging design

As mentioned earlier, the areas of packaging which involve different functions – to inform and to attract – are not pre-ordered in the space of a pack, but constitute the outcome of communicative effects created by labels, images and words. Some routinely used expressive units are usually capable of conveying a semantic (dis)continuity and a consistent transition between different communicative styles, such as chromatic discontinuity (the primary area is often more colourful and visually dynamic than the second one), prevalence of verbal or visual language (the secondary area is more verbal-intensive, giving information and prescriptions), the size of typefaces (they are bigger in the primary area due to the exigency for visibility on the point of sale), the types of contents (brand name, variant name and consumer benefits in the primary area; instructions, recipes, usage advice in the secondary area). All these considered, primary and secondary areas, as well as informative and persuasive packaging functions must be approached as semantic effects of each textual surface (cf. Floch 1995). This is the reason why nutritional facts that, at least in principle, belong to the informative function, are often used, as in Nestlé *Fitness*, as a persuasive device on the front of pack. Furthermore, numbers and nutritional percentage information have a high persuasive potential, since they are perceived as true and indisputable facts. The communication of information based on scientific facts may produce positive persuasive effects since the hard science paradigm is hard-wired in our culture.

A key distinction that may be drawn with regard to the communicative function of packaging or the adopted enunciative strategy (also see Mangano and Marrone, this Volume), consists in objective versus subjective enunciation, which is a function of the explicit involvement of the subjects of enunciation in the text (subjective strategy) or not (objective strategy). When the enunciatee (i.e., consumers) is directly addressed by the use of personal pronouns (e.g., "I-You"), we are confronted with a

subjective communication strategy. The "I-You" category can be expressed in verbal or visual modes, as is the case with the testimonial advertising genre where actors are looking directly at viewers or with slogans such as Nike's "Just do it".

As regards packaging design, the mode of enunciation is inherent in a pack's text, since its primary function is that of dialoguing with the clients of a department store in *phatic* interaction[1] that implies visual and physical contact. This is the reason why packaging design is usually developed by taking into account shoppers' in-store buying habits, including their movement through the different aisles of retail outlets, as well as their eye movement while in front of the shelf. Pantene hair-care products, for example, have been displayed in bottles with large and flat coloured caps that were placed at the lowest shelves, by taking into consideration onlooking consumers' points of view.

Standout and effective packaging should be *context-oriented*, that is involving the relation between shelf-placement and the spatial context of the store, the relative position vis-a-vis competitors' placement, but primarily with customers whose behaviour must be considered alongside spatiality aspects. This is the case with the Vidal Sassoon packagings (Figure 6.13a) which engage directly in phatic communication with consumers, as suggested by the image of models' gaze that captivates onlookers.

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[1] According to Jakobson (1958), the phatic function in a communicative context serves to control and regulate the communication between a sender and a receiver, such as the initial or final greetings in conversational settings. Phatic communication can be observed when subjects need to establish or confirm rapport between them.

(a)

(b)

Figure 6.13: (a) Vidal Sassoon hair dye (b) Mulino Bianco biscuits

To obtain an objective-effect discourse, the first person pronoun has to be replaced with the third person, as is the case with news stories, descriptions of scientific experiments, information leaflets for medication and other kinds of texts that are characterized by the effacement of the instance of enunciation. Thus, an *effect of reality* (Barthes 1968; Greimas and Courtés 1979) is created, that is an impression of truthful communication that is the result of not showing the marks of enunciation, both as regards the

enunciator and the enunciatee. Such a semantic effect is often used in advertising to improve the credibility of a brand and to reinforce the agreement with consumers, especially in those fields that value trust and honesty above all. Kids' food and body care brands, for example, are required to follow high quality standards as to consumers' health. As a result, advertising in these markets often uses a scientific language, an impersonal style, medical terms and numbers. These informative kinds of texts may be strongly persuasive, thanks to a predominant cultural ethos that places unquestionable trust in the hard sciences. In packaging design, we usually encounter an objective communication strategy in BOP labels, in the form of informative charts, modes of use, health-hazard warnings, products' chemical composition (see, for instance, the packaging of washing liquid Bio Presto in Figure 6.14b).

(a)   (b)

Figure 6.14: The front (a) and the back (b) of a washing-up liquid packaging

6.6 "Less is more": A new trend in packaging design

The economic crisis and the post-recession effects in the majority of Western markets have been reflected in packaging design in a "less is more" philosophy in displaying and selling goods. In the face of anti-brand protests accusing the world's biggest companies of being tyrants of globalization and of profiting at the expense of consumers, various brands have had to redesign the style and contents of their communication in order to address such criticisms. As observed earlier in the context of McDonald's repackaging style, a dominant trend is the visual "deflation" of packs in favour of more verbal information and simple illustrations that do not shout at consumers, but engage in fruitful dialogue with them instead.

This aesthetic transformation conveys the idea that products are more important than communication and that customers do not need any "artifices" to be persuaded of their quality. This aesthetic orientation is characteristic of the ideology of cultural trends, such as fair-trade organizations, Slow Food movements, organic products organizations whose role has been steadily shifting from niche to mainstream. The British Hovis brand, for example, redesigned the packaging of some products in its bread product-line, by replacing full-coloured plastic bags with transparent packs, thus offering consumers direct visual contact with the bread loaf, while guaranteeing the British origin of wheat and informing about the positive health effects. Through the use of transparent materials, a packaged product becomes a means of communication, while giving potential consumers more decision power. As Hammad (2003) contends, transparent surfaces make a sort of *promise* as they ensure, through the establishment of direct visual contact with customers, that what is inside or behind the pack is really how it appears – just like looking through shopping-windows. This packaging strategy confers greater decision-making responsibility to consumers, while recalibrating the relative salience of product over brand image. Nevertheless, as above noted, this is the

outcome of a semiotic effect that is created by the specific packaging strategy.

The issues of healthy eating, organic products, sustainability development, but also of savings and *terroir* products have gradually become socio-cultural trends and collective exigencies, on which brands have sought to capitalize by re-orienting their corporate images and by re-launching existing products. As regards the impact of these socio-cultural trends on packaging, a sort of return to original raw packaging, whose function consists in merely containing and protecting products, has spread in graphic design. The Japanese brand Muji (Figure 6.15a), for example, literally meaning "no-logo", which markets stationery, clothing and home accessories, is a clear case of the *rhetoric of visual reduction* that prioritizes expressive features that convey essentiality and simplicity. Natural colour palettes, basic-shaped containers, few images (no pictures, but hand-drawn illustrations), simple labels with minimal information (sometimes in handwritten or sketchy typefaces), raw materials (paper, cardboard, metal, glass) and any other visual means capable of conveying the visual deflation of packaging. This perhaps oxymoronic predicament that involves using packaging tactics to communicate the reduced importance of packaging itself, in favour of brand honesty and product quality, should not be considered as a contradiction in terms, but as the textual effect of a visual aesthetic approach that is underpinned by a solid and well-delineated consumption philosophy. As we are informed by Muji in its website, the brand envelops products in simple raw packages and sells products of no-logo quality, that means real quality in Muji's philosophy.

Lush, the hand-made fresh cosmetics brand, has adopted the same graphic line of packaging minimalism (the so-called "naked packaging" approach of the British brand), by wrapping its coloured, scented and eccentric products in simple paper envelopes or basic black/transparent containers with labels in handwritten typefaces (Figure 6.15b).

(a)   (b)

Figure 6.15: The rhetoric of packaging essentiality, Muji (a) and Lush (b)

This packaging strategy is coherent with Lush's values of hand-made production, vegetarian ingredients, product freshness and no animal testing.

The examples of Muji, Ikea, McDonald's and Lush are indicative of how the raw packaging-effect has been catapulted to a mainstream strategy that reflects the socio-cultural trend of healthier and back-to-basics products in a "less-is-more" design philosophy.

6.7 From consumers to users: Packaging as object of daily use

Packs are also objects of daily use. They enter consumers' homes and become part of their everyday life, so the dimension of use may affect the interaction between the consumer/user and brands. Actions and gestures such as opening and using packs are not simply physical movements, but they are involved in creating specific relations with products and, more generally, in defining the brand experience.

Marketing researchers have defined the phase of using packaging as "the second moment of truth" (after the first moment that consists of the product purchase at the point of sale), while highlighting that consumers' interaction with packaging is not irrelevant for brand identity at all, but rather a fundamental part of the brand experience that may influence brand relationships and loyalty (Metcalf et al. 2012). In their research that adopted a mixed qualitative/quantitative research design, Metcalf et al. (2012) examined whether consumers prefer eco-bottles of water with less plastic to traditional ones. The research output suggests that the usage of packaging may affect social values, such as eco-friendliness. However, some respondents, even though sharing the same environmentalist concerns as the researched brands, would have preferred traditional bottles for their comfort and usability, rather than eco-ones, which are considered to be flimsy and unstable. This research clearly demonstrates that the design of a pack and the ways it is suggested to be used may contrast with brand strategies for some consumer segments.

From a semiotic point of view, in order to study the pragmatic dimension of packaging, we will consider them as textual objects, that is socio-cultural items with an expression plane and a content plane, producing meanings in relation to other objects and users. The construct of 'users' will be addressed in two directions, the first regarding the real user who materially handles objects, and the second regarding the model user as is inscribed in the object and circumscribed by it. The concept of model user has been used repeatedly in the semiotics of objects and design (Landowski and Marrone 2002; Mattozzi 2006; Mangano 2008) and has been inspired by Eco's (1979) concept of model reader.

From a textual semiotic angle, packs as semiotic objects contain the marks of the instances of production and reception, as they feature prescriptive instructions about the material gestures that are involved in their handling. A wine bottle has a

very prescriptive packaging because it forces consumers to use a specific tool, the corkscrew, and to engage in a specific gestural sequence, without which the cork cannot be removed (Marsciani 1991; Ventura 2006). Beer bottles, on the contrary, are not so prescriptive and can be opened by bottle openers, to the same extent as by improvised tools. This material dimension of the consumer/packaging relation urges us to consider alongside sensorial aspects of marketing aesthetics (Schmitt and Simonson 1997) and experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999, Schmitt 2003), the gestures and the actions that are prescribed in the shapes and design of packs.

Slow or fast movements, tense or relaxed gestures are envisioned by different kinds of packaging, such as wine bottles that suggest a slow opening, whilst champagne bottles create a more tense and exciting context. Toys for children are sometimes sold in packages containing items in a jumble, like children's buildings, whilst sometimes they are well arranged in pre-ordered spaces in the pack. Order or disorder are different effects produced by the packaging arrangement and may affect the general product experience. Potato chips are usually sold in bags, however Pringles has differentiated its product thanks to its peculiar coloured cans in which chips are perfectly arranged in an orderly manner.

The type of packaging influences consumption habits in terms of occasion and location. For example, disposable drink cans and walky cups are objects that prescribe an outside home usage. Packaging also prescribes consumption habits in terms of quantity of consumption, as is the case with one-portion or family packs that clearly target different types of social groups, while excluding specific consumer segments. Furthermore, packaging affects the time of consumption, by shortening cooking time (pre-cooked meals, pre-made salads), extending consumption time (special bottles for saving sauces and oils), monitoring and warning about the state of preservation of food (the so-called intelligent packaging). Additionally, food on-the-go is usually

connected to informal consumption settings, involving either a complete absence of packaging or minimal wrappings, thus circumscribing a consumptive context based on relaxed and improvised gestures. On the contrary, fast food consumption, although seemingly conveying freedom and carefreeness, is a pre-ordered scenario with all types of food packaged in specific boxes or bags, with trays, bowls and cutlery, so that the informality of the consumptive occasion is more symbolic than real. These examples are of particular interest not only in terms of the packaging technologies involved in such innovations, but primarily because packs as objects of daily use aid significantly in shaping cultural trends which are reflected in consumption habits.

In conclusion, it is not possible to distinguish strictly amongst products, packaging and consumption experiences, since packaging cannot be described as merely the envelope of something else; it is the container, with its meaningful features (shape, colours, size, texture, material, mode of use), and the product itself at the same time. For Nespresso capsules, as discussed earlier, is it possible to separate the product to be consumed from its packaging? Highly unlikely, as it is through the specific form of its pack that Nespresso coffee becomes branded as such. Therefore, in the context of brand design, container and contained should be approached as an indistinguishable semiotic unit.

6.7.1 Packaging instructions as tacit actions

The interfaces of objects consist of the material areas of interaction between human bodies and objects, also including cognitive interfaces such as visual and verbal instructions (Zinna 2004; Mangano 2010). Guides, manuals, recipes, short instructions communicate a competence, in the form of words and images, which users should realize. However, this is not a simple transmission of information from text to users who employ instructions in a passive way, but complex texts suggesting different and contrasting forms of interaction. Some neglect or

interpret in their own ways manuals and guides, whereas others follow them strictly. Moreover, instructive texts, while offering information, have prescriptive effects as they impose or forbid actions.

As regards packaging, instructions are not always necessary because of two reasons. First, the shape of packaging may be easily suggestive of its use, according to the mental mechanism of *affordance* (Gibson 1977; Norman 1988) that is not at all a natural reaction to objects, but rather the result of cultural and unconscious learning. Affordances are types of clues we receive from objects and should be considered as mute instructions. Secondly, some packagings are so common in daily use that they do not need any explicit instructions to be handled and opened. In both cases, a sense of naturalness is produced but it is an effect of assimilated cultural habits. Most of the products we consume are packaged according to a sense of naturalness, in order to create consumption relations based on the ideas of ease and user-friendliness.

On the contrary, some product categories require a special packaging that emphasizes the difficulty of usage or needs instructions to be opened, such as packaging for certain drugs or personal and household products that have been developed in such a manner as to prevent children's use through specific opening mechanisms. In these cases, the sense of security that is conveyed by the packaging design may reassure consumers and contribute to position the products in their imaginary.

In conclusion, the presence or absence of instructions says something about the cultural status of a packaging item, whether it is a new or special object or one of the common "objects" of everyday life. In addition, instructions on packaging can be used as communicative devices that distinguish categories of consumers since they prescribe a model user. This is the reason why loose tea boxes do not usually give instructions about the preparation process of the hot drink, whilst tea bags often

provide usage instructions to facilitate the preparation process, thus also affording to differentiate the two customer segments, the first as experts, and the second as occasional consumers. In a similar vein, wine bottles do not feature information on how to open with a corkscrew, since it is not simply a series of movements but a real ritual, socially and culturally meaningful.

6.8 Conclusion

Packaging plays a key role in the communicative and distribution systems, since it allows for the identification of and differentiation among brands. Its functions have increased in line with the development of the self-service purchasing system. Any brand development and auditing process may not be undertaken without taking into consideration the products as they are represented and narrated at the terminal point of the value chain. Packaging can be considered as a delegate of the brand that dialogues with the entire communication mix and with other brands. In line with the rest communicative vehicles, packaging should be developed according to a corporate image structure, while upholding invariant expressive elements that are fundamental to the visual identity of the brand. Secondly, it should convey consistently the brand's core values. This was rendered evident in the analysis of the repackaging initiatives by McDonald's and Burger King, where different visual choices served to position competitors differentially and to underline different approaches to fast food. The same process of generating meaningful structures of opposition was followed in the cases of Ikea and Nespresso which were shown to be adopting opposing design aesthetics, starting from packaging.

As regards the contained product, it was shown that packaging is not an added surface reproducing and representing something that is already meaningful, but that it contributes instrumentally to the construal of products, their values and their positioning in the consumers' imaginary. As found in the case of breakfast cereals, different scenarios regarding consumption

occasions and discrete needs/benefits are communicated in very different ways through packs, which convey social values and cultural trends, such as the dietetic issues that are on top of current consumption agendas.

When packaging seems not to add meanings but simply to inform about the qualities of a product, it should still be considered as the result of a communicative strategy that is based on a textual structure that is geared towards the production of an "objectivity effect". Informative labels are not about the "truth", but verbal texts using a descriptive language that creates an effect of reality, often coupled with "scientific facts". This approach affords to dispel popular misconceptions about brand communications as a superfluous apparatus that aims at persuading unwary customers. On the contrary, any kind of text may have persuasive effects, depending on the type of communicative contract that is established with consumers. In this context, the role of semiotics is indispensable in delineating textual strategies for pertinent cultural contexts.

We examined packaging as a daily use object because the communicative dimension and the pragmatic dimension are inextricably linked within a semiotic paradigm. The range of messages that are featured in packaging is not confined in the moment of purchase, but stretches over the entire period of brand use. Finally, while explaining Greimas's (and Floch's) method for analyzing objects, that is based on the structuralist principle that relations are more important than individual parts of a system (configurative and taxic components), the concept of function was readdressed. From a semiotic point of view, practical functions convey cultural meanings, as is the case with the ritual of opening wine bottles, and, vice versa, communicative meanings may influence practical social behaviors. Packaging is a communicative device and cultural object at the same time, that is influenced by cultural trends and historical changes, while contributing to their emergence and consolidation.

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CHAPTER 7

Addressing methodological challenges in brand communications research: A comparison of structuralist, Peircean and social semiotic readings of advertising

John A. Bateman

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, we apply socio-semiotic multimodal analysis to the study of brand communications. Socio-semiotic approaches are currently gaining in recognition and there have been several recent publications applying socio-semiotic methods to brand communications research. To clarify why this is the case and to offer specific research directions, the Chapter adopts the following two-step path. First, we discuss previous semiotic approaches to brand communications – and in particular print advertisements – by examining the extent to which the two main semiotic schools that have been applied to date in brand communications research (Peircean and structuralist), have met the methodological challenges raised with respect to a single print advertisement selected for discussion; this comparison will function as a diagnostic tool for highlighting methodological requirements. And second, we introduce the basic tenets of socio-semiotics and how these have grown from an established linguistic theory to become a powerful tool for addressing multimodal meaning making more broadly and multimodal advertising in particular.

In many respects, brands can be seen as multimodal entities that are communicated visually (e.g., in logos and other strongly coded design features), spatially (in styles of architecture and place design), verbally (in styles of language), aurally (e.g., with musical themes) and in any combinations of the above (as in films, TV advertisements and so on). The fact that such diverse

forms of expression can be orchestrated for branding purposes is already a significant challenge for theoretical and practical semiotic analysis – it is, therefore, the multimodal facets of socio-semiotics that will be of most concern to us here. We will briefly identify the key socio-semiotic tenets that led to the development of multimodality within this approach and then, by referring in detail to the selected print advertisement for illustrative purposes, we will propose particular directions for future research.

7.2 Critical discussion of Peircean and structuralist approaches to advertising analysis

As other Chapters in this Handbook have established, the two principal semiotic directions employed within brand communications research are broadly Greimasian, building on concepts stemming from Saussure via Hjelmslev and Jakobson, and Peircean. In this Section, we build on some existing analyses of advertisements performed within these perspectives in order to highlight methodological aspects that we consider problematic for pursuing more empirically robust research. Both the need for such research and as yet unaddressed, but related gaps in the state-of-the-art that stand in the way of development in brand semiotics have been highlighted in the extensive review of marketing semiotic research offered by Mick et al. (2004). In the course of our discussion, we will return to Mick et al.'s points and explicitly indicate in what ways the socio-semiotic approach can now move us forward.

For illustrative purposes, we draw on Floch's (1989 [1981]) detailed post-Greimasian analysis of a cigarette brand advertisement, both as Floch originally set it out, and in a Peircean variant, by drawing on a parallel analysis of a different advertisement offered by Nöth (2011). These examples will offer a glimpse of the application of Greimasian semi-symbolic systems (cf. Mangiapane, Ventura, this Volume), combined with paradigmatic analysis, and the use of Peirce's classification of sign-types and their role in semiosis (cf. Nöth1990).

Cigarette advertisements are particularly demanding in terms of semiotic analytical resources as consumer behaviour in the tobacco market is characterized by high loyalty/inertia levels, as well as by considerable brand-switching psychological barriers. In the light of these constraints in consumer dynamics, tobacco players have spent, and continue to spend wherever tobacco advertising has not yet been banned, a sizeable proportion of their revenues on aggressive brand communications as they attempt to counter the fact that tobacco consumption constitutes an enormous drain on health systems worldwide, as well as contributing directly and indirectly to considerable personal misery. The strategies employed to encourage consumption are consequently sophisticated and draw on the labour of highly skilled communicators.
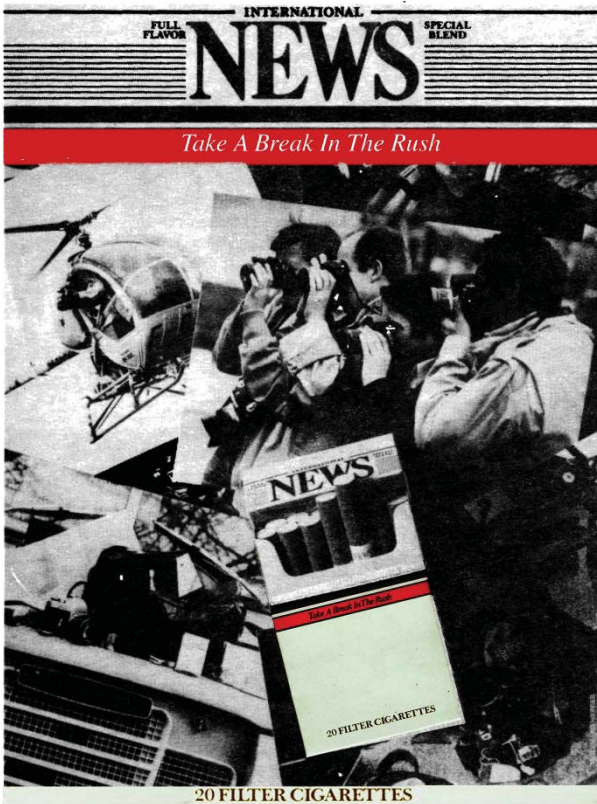
Figure 7.1: NEWS cigarette advertisement from the 1980s discussed by Floch – retouched and coloured version based on Floch (1989 [1981]: 56) and Floch (1985: 146)

In line with the general orientation of this Chapter, our discussions of both the Greimasian and Peircean analyses will focus primarily on method – i.e., on just *how* analyses are to be performed rather than on specific results. Our descriptions make no claim to being exhaustive with respect to the technical constructs used by either Floch or Nöth – nevertheless, the descriptions should be sufficient for understanding the style of the performed analyses and the potential problems or gaps which

will particularly concern us below. Figure 7.1 reproduces a slightly re-touched version of the advertisement to support the discussion[1]. In the original advertisement there is sparing use of colour: the horizontal bands at the top and bottom of the ad, as well as the image of the cigarette pack in the middle, are shown in colour/black (with a very limited palette of red, white and ochre), while the photographs in the background are shown in monochrome.

Floch's analysis, following the rationale of semi-symbolic systems as laid out in Greimas and Courtés (1986), distinguishes two main strata of description: the 'plastic' organization of the layout (i.e., signifiers, or expressive units, concerning the arrangement of the visual field) and 'axiological' (i.e., signified, semantic content, meaning). Based on Floch's adaptation of Hjelmslev's biplanar approach to signification, this conceptualization of the print ad as a visual unit constitutes a semi-symbolic system that captures structural relationships between categories at the level of expression and specific meaning units within the plane of content. Floch, accordingly, provides distinct analyses of each of these two planes, thereby emphasising their relative autonomy, and then characterises what is gained by their combination by showing the semi-symbolic system at work.

At the 'lower', i.e., less abstract level of description, the distinctions drawn concern both the visual appearance – lines, curves, areas of texture or colour, horizontality, verticality, visual rhythm and so on – and the phonetic properties of the employed linguistic resources. This level consequently offers the basic material out of which expressive categories may be constructed and makes use of Hjelmslev's notion of 'figurae', that is, the non-

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[1]There are at least two slightly different versions of this advertisement in circulation in the literature; in Bianchi's (2011) overview of broadly Greimasian analyses, for example, a narrower version of the ad reproduced in Floch (2001 [1990]: 77) is used; the differences do not appear to affect the analyses, however.

meaningful parts of meaningful sign-expressions (Hjelmslev 1961 [1943]: 46) that lie at the secondary level of double articulation (cf., e.g., Martinet 1960). Eco talks similarly of such forms as parts of a 'second articulation' that are not yet significant (in their own right), but are nevertheless distinctive – again, following the Hjelmslevian tradition (cf. Eco 1976: 231–233). Similarly, for Floch, such lower-level characterisations are concerned solely with form (expression) and not yet with any objects or elements that may be depicted or denoted. This opens up the possibility of finding visual regularities manifesting more abstract patterns of meaning, but which are not in themselves directly referential or depictive. The task is then to find which kinds of oppositions or structural similarities are being employed within the lower-level make-up of the artefact.

This narrow focus on elementary expressive units already manifests a certain segmentation rationale and suggests relations among those segments. Thus, in the current example, Floch sees three broad horizontal bands at play, distinguished both by colour and form. The horizontal lines at the top and bottom of the advertisement are in colour, in black-on-white and regularly horizontal, while the main central band (containing the photographs and the pack of cigarettes) is primarily monochrome (the photographs are all black and white). With the exception of the rectangle depicting the cigarette pack, this band consists of rectangles at various irregular angles to the vertical and horizontal axes of the ad.[2] Floch also draws attention to a structural relationship, characterized, in the vein of structuralist analyses, as a 'homology' between the *visual* organisation of the advertisement as a whole (made up of its three bands) and the

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[2] Unfortunately, the version of Floch's paper produced in English as Floch (1989 [1981]) is incomplete as regards its description of the visual segmentation, leaving the translated text incoherent at that point; the reader should, therefore, refer to the original version for the full analysis (e.g., Floch 1985).

corresponding *visual* organisation of the coloured rectangle standing out against the monochrome background.

Floch suggests that a general distinction permeates particular visual forms of expression found in the advertisement: that between 'continuity' and 'discontinuity'. This can then be considered as a general category of organisation for both the visual and verbal distinctions drawn. The subsequent semiotic questions that are raised concern whether these distinctions signify and, if so, in what way. To address these questions, Floch proceeds to the level of content description where particular semantic distinctions are hypothesised to hold. These semantic distinctions are produced on the grounds of a narrative reconstruction of the depicted objects and events (for example, that there are photographs and a pack of cigarettes, and the apparent rendition of a newspaper's front page). The characterisation, here, ranges from more direct interpretations of the visual material – i.e., denotations – up to more abstract readings of the material – i.e., connotations. All of these semantic oppositions are seen as potentially standing in solidary relationships with oppositions at the level of expression, as suggested by Greimas's semi-symbolic systems.

The analysis offered by Floch is detailed and, in many respects, undoubtedly correct concerning what meanings are evoked and how they are supported in form. What merits further consideration, however, is the precise method whereby the emerging categories are produced. The most abstract semantic opposition that Floch proposes is that between 'individual identity' and 'otherness'. This distinction is played out in form (expression) by the various identified visual contrasts and serves, in turn, to connote distinctions, such as between 'editorial activity' and 'taking news shots', as well as between 'the newspaper's own discourse' and 'the discourse of others'. These distinctions, in turn, resonate with the potential lifestyle of the consumer as an individual concerned with organising and intervening in material provided by others, regardless of what their profession may be.

By these means a 'narrative' is suggested whereby the advertisement can be contextualized. In the light of the above considerations, we may discern how the NEWS advertisement, although on the surface apparently performing a simple visual pun involving a pack of cigarettes and a newspaper's front page (supporting the brand name through a visual pun), in fact makes a lifestyle-based claim about its potential consumers: are they merely the 'others' caught in the rush or do they have the power to step away from that rush, and stand above it, thus suspending their 'editorial' activities over others?

We now turn to Nöth's Peircean advertising analysis and attempt to apply it also to the NEWS cigarettes example. Nöth (2011) sets out by claiming that his analysis adopts a different perspective to that of Floch in that "reading pictures is a semiotic process (a process of semiosis). Images are signs that do not only *have* meanings, but also *create* meanings" (Nöth 2011: 312). We will see below how this contrasts at least with how Floch's results are presented: even though most semiotic and discourse accounts claim to be dealing with 'process' in some sense, there are considerable differences in how (and even if) this is actually captured.

Nöth's analysis begins by pointing out that objects shown in advertisements are generally *iconic* because they are similar to what they represent; this remark holds for any of the visual depictions present. Thus, for the cigarette example, we have iconic depictions of a pack of cigarettes and some of its contents, as well as of photographs (apparently) loosely spread, while the entire advertisement resembles (and is thus iconic for) a newspaper's front page. This, then, corresponds broadly to the (denotational) labelling offered by Floch at the semantic (content) plane of description. The individual visual qualities on Floch's plastic dimension would be considered from a Peircean viewpoint as cases of 'qualisigns' – i.e., the various perceptual qualities by which resemblance can be established. Although many of the iconic signs that are semantically labelled in this classification are

relatively obvious, it is nevertheless valuable from a Peircean viewpoint to make them explicit, as, to my understanding, this is the entry point to the process of semiosis – it is only on the basis of the resemblances identified or created in iconic signs that subsequent interpretative processes begin to take shape.

This vantage point in the Peircean analytic has ramifications in several interesting directions, only partially overlapping with the observations made by Floch. By drawing on one such direction, while applying Nöth's analytical rationale to the NEWS ad, we might say that the pack of cigarettes is not just a pack of cigarettes, but that it is intended to stand for *the brand as such*: that is, it operates as an instance of the Peircean sign-type called 'legisign', i.e., a sign whose relationship with the object and the interpretant is established by 'law' or through observed/enforced regularities. Accordingly, Nöth maintains that "all brands are legisigns" (Nöth 2011: 313). The photographs in the background are, in contrast, single, individual photographs and, hence, following Peirce's more elaborate 10-category typology, constitute 'sinsigns', i.e., individual instances or tokens. Moreover, they resemble photographs and so are 'iconic sinsigns' (while what they depict is also iconically indicated). The scattering of the photographs is then 'indexical' of work practice, presumably as an instance of searching for appropriate photographs in a newsroom context.

Stacking up different sign types in this way, where parts of an analysed artefact participate simultaneously in variegated sign-relationships, is customary in Peircean analyses, and, in many respects, correct in that many sign types are simultaneously operative in a verbo-pictorial (multimodal) text. Nevertheless, this can also lead to confusion on the part of commentators because it is easy to read texts as if they were arguing, for example, that some interpreted object or depiction is simultaneously and from the same perspective classifiable as an icon *and* an index *and* a symbol, and so on. This has led some authors, such as Jakobson (1965: 26), to turn to talk of blending

distinct types of signs. Even though Peirce himself sometimes adopts this kind of formulation, it must be considered with extreme caution since these sign types are formally distinct and cannot be 'merged' in any simple fashion; a more precise discussion both of this issue and of the grounds for Peirce's potentially misleading formulations is given by Short (2007: 226–227). Here we follow Short and adopt the position that, to remain consistent with Peirce, it is necessary to approach this process as the emergence of *distinct* interpretants on the basis of 'previous' signs.

Thus, the depiction of the pack of cigarettes resembles a pack of cigarettes and so may be interpreted as an iconic sign for an interpreter; this sign may in turn give rise to a further interpretant, as an index of a particular box of cigarettes; this interpretant, in turn, may give rise for some interpreter to another interpretant as symbolic of a specific brand. Therefore, we are not confronted with a blend of sign types, but rather with a growth of knowledge by virtue of the creation of new interpretants in the process of semiosis. Unfortunately, in the majority of ad semiotic analyses that lay claim to be adopting a Peircean rationale, this aspect needs to be brought out rather more explicitly than has been the case, as it is essential for understanding the aforementioned remark as to how meanings are created. This processual growth and movement towards further interpretations entailed in the Peircean analysis is also applicable to the goals and purposes of analyzing advertisements in general. As Nöth notes, "[t]he ultimate interpretant, which is the real aim of all advertisements, is the consumers' habits of consuming the product presented in this ad" (Nöth 2011: 313).

It is still far from self-evident, however, to see how the Peircean sign types that are identified in an analysis suffice to build explanations of the choices made in the construal of specific artefacts. What is missing from the Peircean account is what, in another context and with respect to a very different perspective, Forceville (2007) describes as 'top-down guidance', i.e., a prior

sense of what kinds of analytic distinctions are going to be relevant for construal and why. This is implicitly present in Nöth's selection of some of the manifold signs that might be discerned in an advertisement rather than others, but the selection process is not formulated explicitly – in other words: *why* is this particular legisign, that particular icon, or those sinsigns selected for discussion? Unless such key methodological criteria are clarified, it cannot be expected that other researchers will provide comparable analyses.

It should be clear that semiotic studies have not yet made very much use of the battery of methodological considerations for guiding analyses that have now been produced in several disciplines (cf. e.g., Shenton 2004; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Schreier 2012). This also applies to the methods employed within linguistics that focus on the empirical investigation of language and language use. Whenever more empirically-oriented methods have been employed within linguistics, substantial improvements in the breadth and explanatory value of the theoretical descriptions have resulted. Given, then, the long history of overlaps between linguistic analysis and semiotic analysis, there may be good grounds to expect beneficial transfers of such empirical methods to other semiotic realms (also see Rossolatos 2014c). Consequently, moves have already been made towards corpus-based multimodal analyses with respect to several types of multimodal artefacts and performances(cf. Bateman 2014c).

The capability of shifting the focus of semiotic accounts from individual cases towards larger corpora is seen in this Chapter as one of the primary ways whereby semiotic analyses may become more robust. Until this shift is realized, a critical level of 'quality control' for semiotic analyses will remain unattained. In this respect, it is particularly interesting that although Nöth (2011) also presents Floch's NEWS analysis, he does not approach it from his Peircean perspective; the Peircean analysis he presents is reserved for another, quite different advertisement: in other words, Nöth does not offer a contrasting

Peircean analysis of the *same* advertisement. Regardless of the possible motivation behind this decision, it is also indicative of, and further co-constructs the central problem facing many previous and current semiotic approaches of dwelling on individual examples. This produces deep interpretative analyses, but more often than not leaves unaddressed issues of *robustness* that are often raised in methodological discussions in qualitative research. What is required, in my view, as a first step towards more robust semiotic output are then (i) analyses of the same artefacts from different perspectives and (ii) analyses of different artefacts from the same perspective.

In summary, semiotic frameworks are often compromised in at least two respects: first, when the constructs themselves are insufficiently tightly defined to support robust analyses and, second, when the absence of a specific methodology for guiding semiotic interpretation leaves analysts overly free, inviting them to draw on more or less randomly selected facets of the material being analysed rather than, as we shall see below, making available methods by which access to the material can be directed by the organisational choices manifested in that material. Alone or combined, these drawbacks mean that individual observations, even when correct, lack the analytic punch necessary for delivering nuanced interpretations. This critique in fact applies to most Peircean analyses of complex cultural artefacts and composite signs. Such artefacts involve so many simultaneously operative semiotic processes and relationships that insightful interpretations are made *in spite of* masses of unco-ordinated detail. In these terms, Floch's readings are more robust as they do furnish co-ordinates for the reading process in the form of (at least in principle) reproducible interpretive categories as relata both on intra-planary and inter-planary levels.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Floch's approach is without limitations and the extent to which reliable analyses were actually achieved remains, at best, debatable. Although his lower

level of abstraction may be well motivated on grounds of perceptual contrasts, it is by no means so clear just why certain semantic distinctions are seen as applying rather than others. Constraints in Greimasian styles of analysis may also appeal to an underlying notion of narrativity: however, as Rossolatos (2012, 2015: 57) has argued in some detail, it is unclear whether branding, and advertisements in particular, may be reduced unproblematically to this specific literary genre – even in the semiotically extended sense as intended by Greimas. Narrative is clearly important in many respects and plays a central role in many discourses, but foreclosing the range of genres which may be applicable to brand communications is problematic. Given the above, it is still unclear what criteria should be drawn upon for producing robust semioticinterpretations of brand communications.

7.3 The socio-semiotic response to the robustness challenge

The limitations pointed out in the previous Section were intended to highlight some of the issues that are encountered while applying semiotic concepts to the analysis of brand communications. The driving question is simply stated: how can we analyse specific 'texts' – understood as a general label for any instance of brand communications in any form or medium – more robustly than has been the case up until now.

We have now seen exemplars of analyses of an ad message couched within semiotic traditions that are traceable to Saussure (via Greimas in the case of Floch) and to Peirce. However, these perspectives not only appear to be wanting in terms of methodological requirements, but also are quite restricted when compared to the rapid growth of our understanding of the human linguistic system over the past 40 years in areas as wide as semantics (both formal and functional), pragmatics (sociocognitive and analytic), and psycholinguistics, among others. We will see specific examples of these advances below, as

we characterise the socio-semiotic approach and its relation to some of these ongoing advances in linguistics. Moreover, whereas the use of semi-symbolic systems for relating patterns of distinctive features on one level with those of another has been of significant benefit, this can also now be concretized and extended considerably both with methodological insights from text and discourse linguistics and with advances in multimodal analysis.

Consequently, in this Section we introduce a particular line of thinking within linguistically-inspired semiotics that engages explicitly both with the issues raised in the previous Section, as well as with the recommendations and challenges for brand related research raised by Mick et al.: that of systemic-functional social semiotics.

7.3.1 Origins and definitions of systemic-functional socio-semiotics

Systemic functional socio-semiotics originally grew out of the understanding of language and its place and function in the social world articulated by the linguist Michael A.K. Halliday (cf. Halliday 1978).[3] The approach has subsequently been extended to offer a powerful framework for addressing multimodal communication in general. Among these extensions, we find fine-grained descriptions of visual and other resources – analogous to, but more richly structured than, the identification of the visual properties described above – paired with the central social semiotic thesis that these are all resources for realising socio-cultural and ideologically positioned discourses (see below). Moreover, the systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) inspired socio-semiotic perspective remains one of the most 'linguistically'-

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[3] Interestingly, the very term "socio-semiotics" employed by Halliday was originally borrowed from Greimas (cf. Halliday 1978: 81); thus there are evidently many further interconnections to draw out that have not, so far, received attention in the literature. However, these lie beyond the scope of the present Chapter.

oriented among the available socio-semiotic alternatives (cf. Cobley and Randviir 2009) and, hence, inherits, at least in principle, the empirical orientation to data and its analysis that we identified above as desirable.

Halliday's systemic-functional linguistic theory appeared in the 1960s with strong influences from the functionalist approach to language that has been identified with the Prague School of linguistics (including some of the earlier works by Jakobson), some important concepts from Hjelmslev's glossematics, and the strong anthropological and cultural tradition of the London school of linguistics and British contextualism (cf. Nerlich and Clarke 1996: 316). According to Halliday, the main goal of linguistics was to establish methods for making visible the inter-relationships between the linguistic features of concrete texts and social situations. Language was consequently seen to vary according to dimensions of variation in social contexts, and, conversely, to constitute those dimensions of variation in discrete contexts of use. This intimate connection between social situations and language use was, in turn, assumed to exert influence on the internal organisation of the linguistic system as such. Insofar as particular social roles need to be enacted or performed, the language system becomes streamlined to reflect this practical orientation.

On the basis of a range of studies on language varieties, relations between situations and language use, as well as language development in children, Halliday came to propose that Hjelmslev's content plane needed to be internally stratified in its own right, thereby separating lexicogrammatical organisation from semantics as distinct strata (Matthiessen et al. 2010: 205–207). This stratal relationship is seen as a form of 'generalisation': grammatical configurations provide general communicative resources that allow for a broad range of semantic configurations. The combination of lexicogrammar with semantics was then itself seen as generalising across situations and contexts, thereby allowing a broad range of situations to be

covered by re-using the resources of language. In this way, infinitely varied particular social situations can be expressed and communicated without requiring new language forms for each individual situation. The development of language patterns is thereby coupled simultaneously with the development of situation types (and vice versa). This suggests, in turn, that particular types of social situations, relationships and so on might be related to particular patterns of language use – both 'downwards' in abstraction to language patterns and 'upwards' in abstraction to genres that also generalise across situations.

When analysing any text in this model, descriptions are provided on each of these levels of abstraction. The types of social situations make up a 'topology of genres' that is claimed to correlate with a notion of 'ideology', considered in a similar fashion to that suggested by Foucault (cf. Foucault 1969; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001), as patterns of discourse formations, albeit in a manner linked more closely to observable and operationalisable linguistic practice than is common in cultural or sociological studies. Taken together, these considerations establish a multi-layered view of the language system where both denotation and connotation (in the sense attributed to these terms by Hjelmslev) are internally stratified, thus already adding significantly to the types of organisation that can be assumed as guidance for analysis. The general architecture of the SFL linguistic system is portrayed graphically in Figure 7.2 in the form of an 'onion' with layers of abstraction. This model has been applied to a diverse range of communicative artefacts and there is considerable agreement about its working precepts. More experimental is its extension to multimodal artefacts, to which we shall return below, as well as the continued documentation of genres (cf. Martin and Rose 2008).
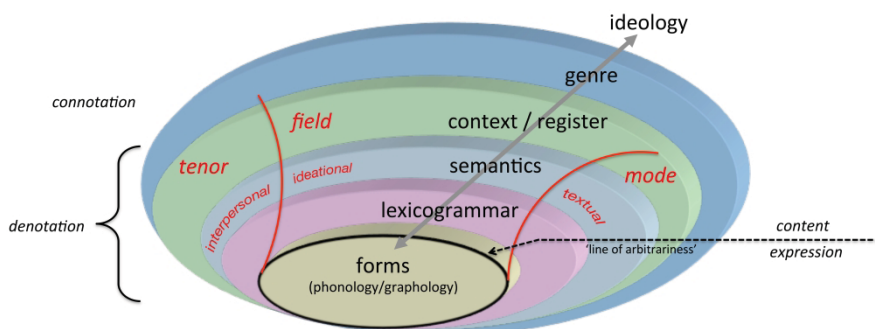
Figure 7.2: Standard graphical representation of the linguistic system according to systemic-functional social semiotics, portraying multiply embedded stratification (vertical),the tripartite division according to metafunctions (horizontal),andrelations to Hjelmslev's distinctions betweenexpression/content and denotation/connotation

This multi-layered system is argued to involve a range of other organisational dimensions that pre-structure even further the features available for analysis. One of the most significant dimensions that has found broad applications is that of *metafunction* (Matthiessen et al. 2010: 138). All of the content levels of organisation between grammar and genre are divided across three metafunctions, each of which is responsible for a different communicative function. The three metafunctions of the mainstream Hallidayan model (Matthiessen et al. 2010: 138) are (i) the 'ideational', responsible for expressing propositional content, types of events, objects and qualities, and their structural and logical inter-relationships, (ii) the 'interpersonal', responsible for enacting social relationships between participants in an interaction and for performing appraisals and evaluations of content, and (iii) the 'textual', responsible for bringing the ideational and interpersonal contributions together in coherent

and cohesive messages or texts. The metafunctions occur within each of the content layers of description and, hence, cross-cut the levels of abstraction as shown in Figure 7.2. Textual analysis, consequently, may consider any of these aspects, both individually and in co-operation with others. In addition, each area has different consequences for the kinds of linguistic phenomena that can be observed and so supports analysis with a high degree of operationalisation.

The task of linguistics according to this framework is to identify language as essentially a semiotic resource for social action, rather than as sets of rules determining acceptability as common in standard grammar (cf. Rossolatos 2015). Throughout the development of the various strata and the co-ordinates of their internal organisation, there has been a progressive expansion both in the available theoretical tools for describing linguistic artefacts and in the construction of detailed linguistic descriptions. Currently, both micro- and macro-scales are covered by a finely articulated and inter-related set of strata, relating phonetics, grammar and semantics to broader 'socio-cultural' contexts, text organisation, genres and ideology, as suggested in Figure 7.2 (cf. Bartlett and O'Grady 2016 for an extensive discussion and examples).

Within each stratum, linguistic description proceeds in terms of interconnected networks of abstract 'choices'. This constitutes a considerable extension of the notion of paradigm, originating in Saussure and further refined by Hjelmslev. The results are given in terms of 'systemic classification networks' that stand as blueprints for classifying any material analysed. Because of the notion of 'generalisation' across higher strata distinctions, these networks are re-usable across artefacts and performances – they represent the potential for semiotic action that a particular language or other semiotic system provides for its users at different levels of abstraction. Thus, for example, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) provide a very extensive account of the lexicogrammar of English; Martin (1992) provides a similarly

extensive account of the (discourse) semantics of English and, at the most abstract level, Martin and Rose (2008) offer a similar classification of genres and their functions in society.

In all cases, analysis is seen as operating in the same way: relevant units (i.e., syntagmatic) are identified in the texts being examined and their internal organisation is described by classification with respect to the various systemic networks provided by the theory (i.e., paradigmatic). Relations between levels or layers are captured by 'realisation', which states how configurations at one level are to be re-expressed in configurations or classification features at lower levels, thereby refining considerably earlier notions of relations between levels such as those postulated by Hjelmslev or, indeed, the semi-symbolic systems of Greimas. To the extent that classifications are problematic or of insufficient detail, extensions to the networks are made and then tested against further data. A full description should then be in a position to relate fine-scaled variation in the artefacts or performances analysed and concomitant changes or differences in the social function of those artefacts or performances, drawing on any or all of the validation methodologies sketched above for evaluation. Analysts are thus provided with a growing toolset, successively and continuously evaluated though practice: distinctions drawn at any level need to support reliable classifications and, to the extent that they do not, need to be explicitly characterised as exploratory and refined. Reliability in the particular linguistic sense employed here may be assessed in many ways, ranging from level of inter-coder agreement for simple categories, across predictions of distributions of co-occurrences in corpora and automatic analysis systems, and on to perceptual and behavioural studies (cf. Lu 2014; O'Donnell et al 2008; Thomas 2014).

The socio-semiotic framework, therefore, offers an integrated set of tools and methods that are intended precisely to handle the kinds of complex, multimodal forms of expression that constitute today's media-dominated culture. Since this is the

context in which brand communications appear, many applications of this toolset for the detailed study of brand communications are waiting to be explored. Insufficient attention to consistent linguistic choices, for example, can readily result in 'mixed messages' of various kinds – such as when a company projects itself visually as a progressive, modern enterprise while employing a language that is formal, stiff and more reminiscent of that of earlier decades. The reverse situation is also not only possible, but readily observed: a diverse, modern form of language might interact with inappropriately selected visuals in order to yield an unwanted or restricted range of interpretations.

Various socio-semiotic studies have been conducted thus far in this direction, such as those by Waller and Delin (2003) and Delin et al. (2006). These studies consider both language choice and the most effective forms of document design by combining ad messages with other consumer-targeted communications. The explicit identification of linguistic features provided in research of this kind – seen linguistically as *registerial* choices – are particularly valuable both for diagnosing problems and for suggesting concrete ways of changing formulations so as to align the communicated register more congruently with brand/corporate image and its intended values. The primary goals here, as in other applications of the framework, consist in rendering more transparent how the particular deployment of semiotic resources can explain the construction of particular social values and positions and to explicate the internal workings (or not) of individual artefacts – i.e., do they achieve their communicative goals and, if not, why not. Such artefact or performance-oriented analyses can then be expected to complement broader sociocultural questions as to the reception and production context.

7.3.2 Applying systemic-functional multimodal socio-semiotics to the NEWS ad

We have now sketched briefly the abstract organisation of the linguistic system according to systemic-functional socio-semiotics. However, in order to show the various components in action, it is necessary to proceed with concrete examples. Moreover, since the linguistic components of the approach have received extensive discussion elsewhere and have been employed for analysing a broad range of verbal artefacts and performances across most imaginable contexts of use (cf. Bartlett and O'Grady 2016), we will for our present purposes focus more on the current extensions of the framework that deal with artefacts and performances employing multiple expressive resources – i.e., 'multimodality'. Several styles of performing such analyses have been developed and it will be useful to briefly review them before proceeding anew with putting the NEWS ad under the microscope, this time from a socio-semiotic angle.

7.3.2.1 Three strands of sociosemiotic analyses

We distinguish three broad analytical strands. In the first strand, the standard SFL approach for verbal language, as described above, has been applied to communication in general. By using the descriptive mechanisms of the theory (classification networks, stratification), bodies of resources have been constructed for other 'modes' – most notably for visual representations by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]). In this account, the metafunctional organisation of language is also assumed to be at work visually, and different networks are proposed for the visual form within each metafunction, as we will illustrate below. Many approaches have followed in this vein, adding new resources to describe a range of artefacts – including print advertisements and TV commercials. Analysis here generally proceeds by 'transcribing' some corpus of data using the categories proposed in the classification networks (cf. Baldry and Thibault 2006). In the second strand, closer attention has been paid to approaches

established in other research traditions that have addressed the types of artefacts under scrutiny. For example, Baldry and Thibault (2006) and Burn (2014) attempt to 're-create' film theoretical constructs in socio-functional terms, while others have imported conceptual terms from film theory and other disciplines, such as speech and gesture research, thereby combining perspectives (e.g., Wahl 2013). In a similar fashion, Martínez et al. (2013) imported work from transmedial narratology, while Rossolatos (2014a, b) applied classical rhetoric.

In most approaches along these two paths, the distinct 'modes' of meaning making at issue have been addressed only informally. It is then common to simply list 'modes' that are taken to be operative and then proceed to classification and analysis. For example, Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio write in the preface to their collection on TV advertisements:

> we can identify three main modes apart from the coded verbal language. Probably the most important, given the attention it gets in scholarly circles, is the visual mode made up of still and moving images. Another set of meanings reach us through our ears: music, diegetic and extra-diegetic sound, paralinguistic features of voice. The third is made up of the very structure of the ad, which subsumes or informs all other levels, denotes and connotes meaning, that is, lecture-type ads, montage, mini-dramas. (Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio 2013: 13–14)

Similarly, Jewitt (2014: 1) lists "image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech, posture". Despite the apparent commonalities across these approaches, there are problems with such characterisations – for example, whereas still and moving images obviously share many properties, the semiotics that they support are also very different: there are meanings that can be afforded with the moving image (in particular, with edited moving images) that are not available for still images. And static visual images composed

of diagrams have only a limited connection with visual images in oil painting, while both overlap only partially with comics and graphic novels. Such lists of 'semiotic modes' are consequently often heterogeneous, and, potentially, even overlapping, and, hence, provide a less than optimal starting point for more precise analyses (for a detailed critical discussion see Bateman, forthcoming).

The primary weakness of these informal classifications is in fact that they are less effective than required for addressing what most working in multimodality take to be the central research issue (cf. Jewitt 2014: 15): that is, that distinct expressive resources function together in the service of tightly orchestrated ensembles. As Baldry and Thibault put it:

> Multimodal texts integrate selections from different semiotic resources to their principles of organisation. …These resources are not simply juxtaposed as separate modes of meaning making but are combined and integrated to form a complex whole which cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of the mere sum of its separate parts. (Baldry and Thibault 2006: 18)

But identifying distinct semiotic modes, each with their own inherent possibilities for meaning making, is what raises this very problem: how to relate distinct expressive resources. This situation is then often further exacerbated by the employed 'transcription' methods: when transcription attempts to be sufficiently detailed as to 'replace' the data transcribed, rather than to *analyse* that data, the level of detail pursued for most multimodal artefacts quickly becomes counter-productive. In practice, this means that transcriptions of different 'modes' are highly selective and tend to already incorporate precisely the points of contact or complementarity that need to be raised as a research question – that is, *because* the analyst has already seen

that the multimodal artefact or performance is tightly integrated, the analysis picks out precisely those aspects in the hypothesised individual modes that support (and already had supported) that reading. This turns transcriptions into 'running commentaries' on the connections that the analyst has already seen, rather than explaining how that interpretation came about (cf. Bateman, forthcoming).

In order to counter this problem, therefore, in the third analytical strand, closer attention is paid to the definition of semiotic modes and how they may dynamically integrate and organise very different means of expression. The mechanisms whereby new structures can be created constitute precisely the kind of dynamics pursued within our third style of analysis and we have given detailed examples of their definition and use elsewhere, with regard to visual narrative, comics, films, illustrated documents of various kinds, websites and newspapers (cf., e.g., Bateman 2008; Bateman and Wildfeuer 2014).

7.3.2.2 Re-reading the NEWS ad sociosemiotically

We now return to Floch's NEWS ad in order to compare and contrast the already discussed semiotic perspectives (Section 7.2) with the systemic-functional socio-semiotic one. Our main task consists in showing how brand communication analysis can be directed and heuristically guided using the SFL socio-semiotic blueprint.

The methodological steps to be followed within this framework remain the same, regardless of the artefact or performance being addressed, and so it is important to understand that the description of method offered here would remain largely unchanged for multimodal artefacts and performances of any kind. A brief overview of the analytical steps is provided in Figure 7.3.

Step 1

> • For any artefact/activity to be analysed: **Determine the applicable genres** in terms of staged social activities and the rhetorical strategies supporting those activities' achievement

Step 2

> • For any artefact/activity to be analysed: **determine the medium** in order to **restrict the expressive resources** (semiotic modes) operating in that medium
> • This gives the range of possibilities that may be drawn on for realising genres *in that medium.*

Step 3

> • Apply **each expressive resource** (semiotic mode) to the artefact/activity:
>   – at each applicable level of abstraction
>   – within each applicable metafunction
>   – identifying inter-semiotic correlations when possible

under the constraints of abductively maximising discourse coherence

Figure 7.3: Overview of the analytical steps in the multimodal systemic-functional socio-semiotic model

First, it is always beneficial to consider the likely *genre* of the object, or objects, of analysis. From the available 'maps' of distinct general purposes, or semiotic activities, such as the broad categories offered by Martin and Rose (2008), or the more specific 'genre colony' of promotional genres set out by Bhatia (2004: 61-65), we locate the artefact as precisely as we can. This offers a principled way of collecting the required information about a corpus of artefacts. Often, for such artefacts, initial genre allocation will be primarily visual – that is, recipients will make an estimate of genre based on the artefact's visual properties. It is possible that this assessment be modified by other factors, such as the context in which an artefact appears (e.g., an exhibit in an art gallery), but some assessment will always be made by a recipient simply to begin the process of interpretation. In general, then, this decision interacts with questions of medium as we shall

describe shortly. In the case of the NEWS advertisement, the primary properties are readily available – there is both product identification and product information and evidently some messages (visual, verbal and combinations) to be interpreted. This suggests a general structure for the artefact, closely related to a similarly schematic rhetorical structure that may be glossed as 'buy X because Y'. In general, the role of genre is to set 'horizons of expectation' (cf. Bateman 2014a) and this is certainly fulfilled here.

Second, the expressive resources employed in an artefact or performance need to be identified in order to decide which components of the theoretical toolkit must be applied. In the present case, this identification operates purely visually: there is pictorial information (activating the semiotic resources of images: Kress and van Leeuwen 2006 [1996]), there is layout information (activating the semiotic resources of layout and information design: Bateman 2008), and there is (printed) verbal information (activating the semiotic resources of the linguistic system: Halliday and Matthiessen 2013; Martin 1992). Some of these resources are 'second order', or organisational, which operate to relate distinct components of the artefact. Layout is a classic example of such a resource as its units may include verbal, pictorial, diagrammatic and other forms depending on what is supported by the medium involved (cf. Bateman 2014a).

Third, descriptions of the artefact are produced by applying each of the expressive resources identified as potentially relevant. Expressive resources are defined in such a way as to 'lay claim' to particular materially present distinctions that may be found in an artefact: when such distinctions are found, the classifications offered by the expressive resource hold. Any material patterns remaining 'unclaimed' raise further interpretative goals for the recipient, demanding closer examination. Analysis then proceeds by successively segmenting and classifying, following the blueprint that is offered by the expressive resources applied. This can be seen, in contrast to the form of analysis presented by

Floch, as an explicit 'top-down' orientation – that is, it is only because it is assumed that a particular expressive resource, or *semiotic mode* in the sense set out in Bateman (forthcoming), is at work that particular material patterns are assumed to be relevant. At this point, a broad range of 'inter-semiotic' descriptions that have been explored more recently in multimodal discourse analysis (cf. Liu and O'Halloran 2009) come into play. For example, Royce (2007) characterises connections between text and image in terms of an extended notion of 'cohesion' (Halliday and Hasan 1976), while Martinec and Salway (2005) offer a systemic classification of relations between text and image by drawing on a combined Hallidayan and extended Barthesian view.

Whereas the more abstract levels of description in terms of genre and cultural context tend to be shared across different modes of expression, the lower levels naturally diverge, although the model also draws analogies and similarities across modes. Thus, focusing on the ideational metafunction, several distinct 'messages' are being expressed. These are usually represented in terms of 'configurations' of processes, relations or activities, the 'participants' in these configurations, and (optionally) the 'circumstances' in which the configurations take place (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2013: 220); relations can also be drawn here with the Greimasian analysis of actants and their roles. The resources of the linguistic system then inform us that for the message 'Take a break in the rush', for example, we have a configuration in which an implicit addressee is taking a break; the circumstance of that break is identified only as a 'rush' – all of these categories are additionally linked to social activities at the level of context as part of their usual lexical semantics. Then, interpersonally, we have the additional meaning that the implicit addressee is 'encouraged' to realise the state of affairs described ideationally.

As mentioned above, Kress and van Leeuwen propose similar classifications for the system of visually coded 'events',

which includes depictions of actions, mental processes and relational states. Moreover, whereas within the linguistic system certain patterns of distribution and contrast allow for the recognition of analytical units, for the visual system this information is generally secured by the existence of visual properties. Thus, actions require visual 'vectors' indicating movement or action, mental processes require vectors of gaze or conventionally coded indicators (such as thought balloons), and relations require that similarly prominent entities are depicted in spatial compositions without vectors that might indicate action.

Distinct recognition criteria are also required for corresponding visually expressed meanings on interpersonal and textual metafunctional levels. The visual layout, which is considered as an aspect of the textual metafunction, for example, operates by demarcating relevant units (e.g., by stronger or weaker 'framing'), and by assigning relations of similarity and difference (e.g., by spatial proximity, cohesive connectivity or explicit connecting lines) and relative salience or information load (e.g., by colour contrast, foregrounding/background, size and so on). These correspond in part to the visual properties identified by Floch and others but, in addition, assign *functional* roles to them as contributions to the overall communicative artefacts being analysed. This is exactly analogous to the situation within the verbal system from a socio-semiotic viewpoint; as a functional account of language the analytical focus is laid not only on the distribution of syntactic units, but also on the functional communicative loads that the distributed units take on. This shows the importance of identifying genres beforehand, since it is quite possible for the functional loads of the identified features to vary across genres.

In the present case, therefore, the visual segmentation of the layout is a quite straightforward procedure, as there are varying degrees of salience directing attention to different aspects of the message that are required for the message's interpretation. Nevertheless, it remains important that any such

analyses are couched in terms that support empirical testing, for example, in perception studies (Holsanova 2014) and in automatic document recognition procedures (Bateman 2008). Bare statements of the form that 'the reader' would address some portion of the page first, or follow some reading path rather than another, are insufficient without identification of the visual properties that lead to such statements: they then also always constitute hypotheses that may (and should) be tested. Textually (i.e., in terms of the visual composition of the message), then, three broad segments are likely to emerge, precisely as Floch suggests. Each of these segments receives further analysis within the framework. In terms of such analyses, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]) suggest that the composition itself may potentially be meaningful, one interpretation being that the top band gives a more 'ideal' or 'abstract' version of the message (in this case, the brand as such), whereas the lower bands spell out a 'real' manifestation of this abstract ideal, that is using the cigarette brand to take a break. The extent to which these interpretative analyses can be subjected to experimental confirmation is now also an active area of research (Holsanova et al. 2006).

The upper band is also structured visually to evoke the well-known visual genre of newspapers, providing obvious connotations in a loose inter-textual relationship with the manifest advertising genre, as well as acting as a conventionalised visual brand identifier. In contrast, the central band is pictorial, and hence, Kress and van Leeuwen's above mentioned visual classification applies. In this case, since there are no vectors relating elements, the image is classified as a relational state of affairs without action; the interpretation is thus a collection of elements of similar status (the photographs). Foreground/background relations allow us to segment the visual depiction of the cigarette pack; in this context the photographs receive a rhetorically supportive role (i.e., standing in the background or establishing the circumstances), while the

cigarettes are central, following multimodal rhetorical analyses of the kind described in Bateman (2008).

Although any of the configurations identified during this third phase of analysis can 'take the lead' in terms of guiding the search for resonances with other aspects, the organisational structure of the framework leads to the same areas of potential connection being explored. The socio-semiotic method thus approaches its objects of analysis more systematically compared to the Peircean and structuralist antecedents, by addressing, *and relating*, more dimensions (e.g., the interpersonal and textual metafunctions and the distinct semiotic modes that are assumed to operate). For example, Floch's observation that the design of the ad as a whole and the depicted cigarette pack are analogous is one example of visual cohesion. In addition, the (ideational) semantics of the expression 'take a break' as a message may be related, also by cohesion, with the visual 'offer' of the open cigarette pack.

This point has also been made by Floch, but little substantiation has been offered as to why that connection should be drawn. In contrast, from a socio-semiotic viewpoint, it follows directly from the methodological requirement that such cohesive linkages be identified and listed. In addition, whereas the linkage offered by Floch between the verbal message and the visual message in terms of 'sound symbolism' is quite suggestive, we can see here that the requirement that we link the two pieces of information is actually much stronger: the visual layout 'states' that they stand in some relation to one another and this in turn *requires* any interpreter to find connections in order to perceive the artefact as having been understood. This would be the case even without the relationship that Floch describes, even though, arguably, the increased 'density' of connections to which the sound relationships contribute could be a positive stylistic feature of the ad: this evaluation would require empirical consumer research.

7.3.3 Discursive coherence in focus

The use of the composition of the ad to drive the selection of elements to be related that we have just described is an essential facet of functional interpretation in general, but also constitutive of the third strand of multimodal socio-semiotic analysis as introduced above: the design of an artefact is seen as offering *explicit instructions for interpretation*. For semiotic analyses it is then crucial to make the guiding role of such instructions transparent in its own right. When comparing the style of analysis offered here with Peircean analyses, for example, we can see that the latter often follow the instructions present in an artefact but *do not acknowledge this in their descriptions*. This makes semiotic analyses appear more haphazard than actually should be the case, while not providing a shareable methodology for systematic analysis. In fact, we see this as a problem afflicting most current approaches to multimodal analysis, viz. a lack of attention as to the *how* of performing analyses which leads to results being presented as if they emerge automatically, i.e., independently of the specific textual instructions present in an artefact; generally, however, this is not the case.

In contrast, given the specific components of the analyses that we have presented so far, we have already isolated very strong and explicit indicators of appropriate 'coherence relations' (Bateman 2014b), that may hold between the verbal and visual components. And, quite crucially, these are *driven* by the artefact under analysis. Without following these indicators, the various compositional aspects of the artefact remain unmotivated. On the verbal side we have a main component of a suggestion/demand for 'taking a break', supported by the circumstantial information 'in the rush'. On the visual side we have a main component of an open cigarette pack (with a minimally expressed 'action' according to the angle and openness of the pack and the vector of the slightly protruding cigarette), supported by circumstantial information of heaped photographs (expressed as visually static relations). The textual compositional layout of the artefact

demands that we relate these. 'Break' and 'rush' stand in a lexically contrasting relationship; the cigarettes and the photographs stand in a visually contrastive relationship. This gives us a structured cohesive and inter-semiotic relationship aligning 'rush' with the arrayed photographs and 'break' with the cigarettes as a solution to the interpretative challenge raised by the text. The remaining verbal components of the entire message provide additional background information considered supportive of the purpose of the ad as a whole. The text at the bottom is linked cohesively to the same text on the cigarette pack. This, then, provides 'instructions' for deriving a coherence relation to the 'main topic' of the ad, regulated by the genre at hand.

In short, by these means the artefact leads us to a configuration of coherence relations which together provide an explanation (for the recipient as well as for the analyst) of why the expressive elements are present in particular modes and arrangements rather than others. In addition, it is the notion of discourse coherence that replaces and significantly extends the use of 'narrative' found in the semiotic accounts that we mentioned earlier. Discourse coherence provides a far broader set of mechanisms and includes much of narrative as a special case (cf. Bateman and Wildfeuer 2014).

As a last step in understanding how the sociosemiotic framework operates, it is essential to make explicit the different contributions made by the distinct strata of the model, since different formal mechanisms apply. All of the descriptions offered at the semantic level and above are *abductive hypotheses* in Peirce's original sense: they do not follow 'automatically' on the basis of features at lower levels of abstraction as typically seen in both semi-symbolic systems and simple 'encoding' frameworks. To illustrate this point, it is useful to contrast more closely a description from Floch with the analysis that has been offered here. Floch writes:

In fact what this 'News' advertisement is suggesting to the reader is a myth: it is a lifestyle that reconciles two opposing states: participation in the hectic life of others and the enjoyment of a certain rhythm, a certain personal temporality. (Floch 2001 [1990]: 76)

The choice of words here invites the reading, criticised by Nöth (2011) in his analysis that we mentioned earlier, that the artefact 'has' a meaning, i.e., that it suggests a particular myth and corresponding interpretation. What we need instead is an empirically robust method for revealing how it is that whatever cues may be present in an artefact *work together* with recipients or addressees to encourage particular lines of interpretation rather than others.

The semiotic resources that we have outlined must be seen in precisely this light: in order to 'have understood' the artefact – i.e., in order for readers to perceive themselves as having understood the artefact – certain abductive hypotheses are encouraged. To the extent that such hypotheses can be maintained in the face of the evidence gathered from the artefact and from cultural knowledge at the levels of genre and ideology, a coherent reading is created.

The differing strata of the model, then, capture the points of interaction or information exchange between concrete hypotheses and *what must be assumed of the context* for those hypotheses to hold. These hypotheses can then be related to empirical verification: i.e., given that a particular hypothesis has been made, then certain segmentations, interpretations, values and so on are assigned to the material and cues for interpretation are delineated accordingly. It is this that renders possible both that interpretations of such artefacts can be shared across communities and the apparently contradictory fact of individual, even 'aberrant' readings. The same processes and mechanisms of semiotic interpretation operate in all cases – it is simply that contrasting abductive hypotheses are being prioritised. By these

means, not only are we capable of identifying how, again in Nöth's terms, artefacts 'create' meaning, but also just what paths a composition can take in particular acts of interpretation.

Finally, we can now fill in some further gaps for individual design decisions by virtue of their resonances with other socio-culturally motivated interpersonal appraisals. Van Leeuwen (2005: 91) suggests that the key dimensions of social semiotic analyses consist of discourse (Foucault), genre (staged action), style (expressing identities, etc.) and modality (signifying the truth or reality of their representations; cf. Ledin and Machin, this Volume). All of these are deemed to be applicable across different forms of expression: verbal, visual and so on. In the present case, photography and news are leveraged as positively appraised, active and dynamic activities, thus implicitly appraising the overall context of the depicted and invited actions (Martin and White 2005). The co-existence of both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processing considerations here also merits notice: an abductive hypothesis of news as a *negatively* appraised depiction would render the discovery of a coherence-maximising representation for the artefact as a whole far more difficult; the use of this formal discourse semantic notion of maximal coherence in combination with the systemic-functional characterisation of levels of classification is described in more detail, and in particular with reference to visual artefacts, in Bateman and Wildfeuer (2014).

The adoption of motifs that may support negative appraisals here would evidently need to be guarded against in design, since appraisal is notoriously variable with respect to distinct social groups. Moreover, these and further supporting categorisations are brought into the analysis in order to support the hypothesis of overall coherence pursued above. Thus, that the photographs in disarray are actually treated (by an interpreter) as indexical of 'rush' is not a static property of the image but, again, emerges as part of the task of building overall coherence. Similarly, that the depiction of news photographers in action is to be valued

positively is itself an abductive hypothesis, which leads us directly to explorations of ideology and 'myths' in the sense of Barthes and others.

We have by no means exhausted the range of tools that the systemic-functional socio-semiotic approach offers. Indeed, the socio-semiotic analytical framework presented briefly here is more complex than can be described in a single chapter. Nevertheless, because of the conceptual and methodological pre-structuring provided by the individual components of the framework, the likelihood that different analysts will converge on largely congruent classifications is still significantly increased. Moreover, such analyses can be repeated for entire collections of artefacts – as undertaken, for example, by Floch – in order to pinpoint overlaps or differences in the deployed expressive resources. Such studies can then motivate proposals for new 'genres', since, by exposure to similarly organised artefacts or performances, new 'horizons of expectation' can be created for potential recipients, as well as providing data for tracking changes in design strategies over time, as suggested by Rossolatos (2014b), across different target audiences and cultures. The framework in its entirety, then, offers, at least in principle, both a communication model that is sufficiently general to apply to brand communications, regardless of vehicles, and a method which simultaneously maintains the possibility of fine-grained, empirical investigation.

7.4 Conclusions

In this Chapter, we considered examples of how traditional semiotic approaches have been applied in brand communications research in order to highlight some of the main challenges facing further developments in the future. The main motivation for considering semiotics as a source of inspiration and method was summarised by Mick et al. in terms of an extensive toolkit for dealing with meaning construal in brand communications (Mick et al. 2004: 53). Our discussion of examples has shown that

traditional approaches to semiotics, at least those that have been mainly applied in brand communication research, do not yet provide the kind of toolkit that is required for analyzing complex communicative artefacts. The identified problems revolve primarily around a lack of analytic precision or rigour that leaves analyses less incisive than is required for further progress.

A further diagnosis of the situation offered by Mick et al. identifies the following source of weaknesses:

> these semiotic works also reflect a persistent challenge observed in many scientific analyses; namely, the most effective number of levels of analyses, from micro to macro, is indeterminate and, most importantly, the ability to effectively synthesize them to make greater leaps of learning has yet to be achieved. (Mick et al. 2004: 29)

More recent advances in systemic-functional socio-semiotics, and particularly as a response to the need for multimodal analyses, have resulted in an articulated semiotic approach that, on the one hand, provides fine-grained characterisations of semiotic resources, at various levels of analysis, 'from micro to macro', while, on the other hand, maintaining a strong empirical orientation. It is precisely this connection, we have suggested, that marks out this approach from others. As Bouvier and Machin put it:

> While there is clearly a wealth of literature on visual communication advertising across disciplines such as semiotics and in media and cultural studies this new wave of work arguably, drawing on linguistic principles and practices, has contributed more rigour and precision to the process of observation and analysis. (Bouvier and Machin 2013: 61)

Thus, the extensive conceptual apparatus developed within systemic-functional socio-semiotics for the task of describing and

explaining communicative phenomena may be applied most fruitfully to the study of brand communications.

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CHAPTER 8

Online university branding: A multimodal social semiotic approach

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8.1 Introduction
Brand communications aim to develop and promote an organization's brand and its products and/or services to a target-audience, including internal and external stakeholders, through multimodal messages which are constructed using a variety of semiotic resources (e.g., natural language, images and sounds (cf. Lemke 2013). Through the careful selection of key semiotic elements which are re-contextualized across various platforms in traditional and new media (Iedema 2001, 2003; O'Halloran et al. 2014), brand communications aim to maintain a strong coherence and consistency across the various messages in terms of the themes which are promoted, the brand experience, and the interpersonal relations which are established with target-audience(s).

The aim of this Chapter is to demonstrate how a multimodal social semiotic approach based on Michael Halliday's (2003, 2008) systemic functional theory [SFT][1] (e.g., O'Halloran 2004, 2011; Unsworth 2008) can be applied for understanding the various semiotic dimensions through which brand communications create intended (and unintended) associations

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[1] Halliday's systemic functional theory is a theory of meaning and, as such, the fundamental principles of the approach are applicable to the study of other semiotic resources. For this reason, the term 'systemic functional theory' (SFT) is used to refer to the higher order principles used in multimodal semiotic analyses. Halliday developed SFT for the study of language, resulting in Systemic Functional Linguistics (see Jewitt et al. 2016; O'Halloran and Lim-Fei 2014).

for an organization. Social semiotics is the branch of semiotics which studies human signifying processes as social practices (Halliday 1978; Hodge and Kress 1988; van Leeuwen 2005), and thus is concerned with different sign systems and their interaction in texts and social activities, interpreted within the context of situation and culture.

Multimodal social semiotics which is derived from the principles of Halliday's (2003, 2008) systemic functional (SF) theory is specifically concerned with the relations within and across semiotic resources, both as sets of inter-related semiotic systems (i.e., the meaning potential) and multimodal texts as the product of selecting from that potential (see detailed description of the approach in Jewitt et al. 2016). That is, SF inspired multimodal social semiotics is concerned with modeling semiotic resources as inter-related systems of meaning, and with analyzing how combinations of semiotic choices from the different systems work together to create meaning in different communicative contexts. Central to the social semiotic approach is Halliday's (1978; Halliday and Matthiessen 2014) basic premise that language and other semiotic resources fulfill four functions in society: (a) they construct our experience of the world; (b) they make logical connections within and across specific situations and social practices; (c) they enact social relations; and (d) they organize messages (cf. Halliday 2003). The aim of this Chapter is to demonstrate how specific configurations of multimodal semiotic choices in brand communications fulfill these four metafunctions – the experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual – to structure thought and reality in very specific ways.

We draw on multimodal social semiotics to analyze the evolving brand identity of a university within the "volatile operating context" of higher education (Scott et al. 2010: 401). As Tan et al. (2015: 3) explain "[h]igher education globally has been undergoing significant and ongoing changes in recent decades, in response to pressures such as an increasingly globalised and marketised higher education sector, an

increasingly broad and diverse range of students, changes in funding, an increasing focus on standards and quality, and the information technology revolution". Curtin University (Australia) which is the focus of this study, like many universities, embarked on an intensive program to improve its international rankings within the highly competitive global educational market in order to attract quality staff, students, and research funding. A central component of this program is the university's branding strategy, which functions to position the institution amongst local, national and global competitors. In order to understand how Curtin University attempted to position itself amongst competitors, the branding strategies and tactics (http://www.curtin.edu.au/) pursued by the University between 1997 and 2015 are investigated. Curtin University's homepage is a major resource for the ongoing marketization of universities, and progressive versions reveal significant changes in brand strategies (Zhang and O'Halloran 2013). The implications of the multimodal social semiotic approach for brand communications are discussed in the light of the findings of this study.

8.2 Background: Universities as brands

Universities are among the most enduring and prolific social institutions, having survived and prospered since the establishment of the world's first university, the University of Bologna, in 1088 (Drori et al. 2015: 15). Today, there are approximately 12,000 universities worldwide (Drori et al. 2015: 4), with between one hundred and thirty one million (Maslen 2012) to two hundred million (UNESCO 2012) students in 2012. The rapid growth of the global student population has been coupled with an equally rapid growth in the number of what UNESCO refers to as "internationally mobile students". These are students who are studying in a country other than their homeland. In 2012, at least 4 million students went abroad to study, a rise from 2 million in 2000 (UNESCO 2012). Five destination countries hosted the majority of internationally mobile

students in 2012: United States (18%), United Kingdom (11%), France (7%), Australia (6%) and Germany (5%). While the number of students in the top five countries increased in 2012, their share of international enrolment declined from 55% in 2000 to 47% (UNESCO 2012). For example, Australia, which is the major host of international students in the Asia/Pacific region, is facing increasing competition from China, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and New Zealand.

In addition to the exponential increase in the number of universities and students, there has also been an extension of the range of activities undertaken by universities and the ways through which funding has been obtained. Engwall (2008) describes universities as having been initially established for educational purposes and the training of an administrative class, so that their services centred on teaching. However, since the mid nineteenth century the role of research has become increasingly significant. From an initial focus on the diffusion of knowledge, universities added the role of the production of knowledge to their services. These two roles, the diffusion and production of knowledge, constitute the principal roles of universities worldwide. They also constitute the very pillars that sustain the reputation and prestige of universities, which are, in turn, key indicators of university brands' marketability.

Paralleling the growth in the number of universities and students has been a recent reduction in the proportion of university funding provided by governments. For example, in Australia, the government's contribution to university revenues has dropped from around 90% in 1981 to around 42% today. The declining revenues from government funding have been recovered from other sources, such as student fees (both domestic and international), commercial activities and charity donations (Robinson 2015; Tiffen 2015). There have also been changes in the funding of research with more universities working in partnership with corporations and increasingly

becoming involved in entrepreneurship, both nationally and internationally.

Within the context outlined above, universities are increasingly constructed as competitors in a marketplace for students and research funding. That marketplace is local, national and global, and spans a wide demographic range of potential students, staff and business partners. Key features of marketization are "the increasing presence and acceptance of market ideology and […] market oriented reforms with the expressed aim of developing markets as the prime institutional arrangement" (Wedlin 2008: 143). As Zhang and O'Halloran (2013: 2) point out, it is "a far-reaching process currently running through most societal spheres, and the university sector is no exception".

Discursive practices associated with marketization are common in the higher education sector, where terms 'imported' from the corporate world such as enterprise and entrepreneurship have come to play a central role in higher education (Mautner 2005; also see Ledin and Machin, this Volume). Indeed, a university positioning itself as a brand is a striking manifestation of marketization. The process of marketization entails fundamental shifts in university policies and practices (Wedlin 2008), involving universities turning to the corporate world for inspiration and for 'reimagining' themselves as brands. Drori et al. (2013: 138) define *brand* as "a unique, visual representation that captures the essence or character of a product or an organization". By implication, "the brand of a university can be embodied in different artefacts of a university". Kornberger (2010: 14) sums up the essence of branding in a simple formula: "functionality + meaning = brand". That is, a brand does not only represent the product, but also incorporates all the meanings and associations that can be attached to the product.

A conundrum facing universities in the global marketplace is that they all do more or less the same things. In varying

proportions and with varying quality, they all disseminate knowledge and produce knowledge across the same range of disciplines. The market they operate in is, on the surface, akin to a commodities market, where "all units of production are identical regardless of who produces them", rather than a differentiated market where "each company's product is different from those of its competitors" (Hofstrand 2007). This is not to say that all universities deliver results equally well. The reputation of a university is largely built on the sustained quality of its output over time. In a competitive global market, and especially in the lucrative but very competitive market for international students, having a recognizable and highly regarded university brand is a significant competitive advantage.

As Kornberger (2010: 16) explains: "the brand differentiates the product from competing products". "To buy a brand means to buy a value" (Kornberger 2010: 9). This value stems not only from the functionality of the product but also from symbolic connotations attached to the product. The brand itself is not a functional commodity, but potentially "a social and cultural icon" (Kornberger 2010: 16). Functionality, as measured through rankings about the quality of research and teaching, is in no small part responsible for creating the *meaning* upon which the success of a university's brand depends. Some universities cherish high ratings of prestige and reputation, which they have upheld over time by delivering what is required in terms of knowledge dissemination and knowledge production.

In the field of higher education, an immediately recognizable brand with highly positive associations can give a university a strategic advantage over competitors. In this complex field a university's brand becomes the "interface between production and consumption" (Kornberger 2010: 13) where associations attached to the brand turn something that is relatively generic into a social and cultural indicator of status.

A symbol wherein associations about a university's prestige, reputation and image are inscribed is the university's

logo. The logo is the visible symbol of the brand. It is literally the trademark of the university that condenses a whole host of associations about the brand into one artefact. The logo identifies the university to both external and internal stakeholders.

The logo is always found on the university's homepage and it is here that the process of unpacking the values and associations engraved in the logo begins. Homepages perform two functions: they give visitors an overview of the site and serve as the official gateway to the site (Askehave and Nielsen 2005). Zhang and O'Halloran (2012) also propose that "the semiotic design of a homepage includes how the gate should look and how the gate should facilitate navigation" (p. 92). Zhang and O'Halloran (2012) apply and extend Askehave and Nielsen's (2005) model, to investigate how meaning is realized through verbal and visual resources across two dimensions: the reading dimension for the introduction function, and a navigational dimension for the gateway function. Meanings realized in both dimensions are related to higher-level cultural and ideological meanings (Zhang and O'Halloran 2012).

A university's logo and its homepage, therefore, are likely to be the most pertinent starting points for a social semiotic analysis of how a university's branding strategy is realized in practice and how evolves over time. As the trademark of a university, the logo appears not only on the university's homepage but also on every (almost every) publicly available artefact produced by the university. It is thus the focal point of a university's brand. A university's homepage is usually the initial point of contact with customers from both outside and inside the university. In other words, the logo and the homepage are key semiotic resources for representing the university to current and prospective customers.

8.3 The logo and the homepage as university brand identity components

Universities have been focusing their attention on visual identifiers as integral components of their brand identity strategy. University logos in particular symbolize what Drori et al. (2015: 1) refer to as "identity narratives", which "situate the university within a unique context and thus define the university's social place in a unique manner" (Drori et al. 2015: 14). Based on an analysis of logos on 826 universities' homepages from 22 countries, Drori et al. (2015: 1) identified four prototypical identity narratives: (a) guild-like classic narrative; (b) professional scientific narrative; (c) localized narrative; and (d) organizational narrative. The classic narrative portrays the university as an institution that derives its legitimacy from its heritage. The professional scientific narrative depicts the university in vocational and educational terms as a training site for certain professions, while also highlighting the importance of research. The localized narrative depicts the university as either a national, regional or local institution that exhibits some aspect of local uniqueness. Finally, the organizational narrative conceives of the university in universalistic and global terms, which locate the university in "brand society" (Kornberger 2010). Drori et al.'s (2015) study reveals that, despite having their origins in specific times and circumstances, representatives of all four narratives are found today in logos, along with combinations. However, the dominant single category is the organizational narrative (45%), which is the most recent to emerge.

Whereas Drori et al. (2015) analyze one aspect of the homepage (the university's logo) of a large number of universities at one point in time, Zhang and O'Halloran (2013) focus on the entire homepage of one internationally prominent university, the National University of Singapore, over a 14-year period. Zhang and O'Halloran (2013) use a critical social semiotic analysis (e.g. Halliday 1978; van Leeuwen 2005) informed by Halliday's systemic functional theory (e.g., Halliday 2003, Halliday

and Matthiessen 2014) to investigate the discourse of marketization as realized through changes in the university's website from 1998 to 2012. Zhang and O'Halloran (2013) reveal a series of changes, involving a shift from providing basic information about the university's courses, resources and expertise to addressing potential students as consumers of goods and services provided by the university. In the most recent versions, the students are offered a "lifestyle, experience and abstracted personal transformation and journey", shifting the focus from "education as a process of learning and mentoring" (Zhang and O'Halloran 2013: 468).

This study assumes Drori et al.'s (2015) and Zhang and O'Halloran's (2013) work as vantage points. However, it extends these studies by analyzing the evolution of the logo, homepage and student recruitment pages of Curtin University over an 18-year period. This leads to a more comprehensive analysis of the university's brand identity strategy and how it is realized through inter-semiotic choices of multi-semiotic elements, for example, through text and images relations (cf. Bateman 2014).

8.4 Case study: Curtin University – the evolution of a brand

Curtin University of Technology, based in Perth, Western Australia, is an example of a university which was established during the relatively recent, rapid proliferation of universities. The university was formed in December 1986, when the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) was formally upgraded to a university[2]. The university had its first intake of 13,000 students in 1987. Student numbers have grown impressively since then, with 48,263 students in 2014 (Australian Universities 2015), catapulting Curtin to the seventh largest university in Australia in terms of number of students. Of these students, 32,665 (67.7%) were domestic and 15,598 (32.3%)

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[2]http://about.curtin.edu.au/curtin-history/

international, thus rendering Curtin the third largest Australian university in terms of number of international students (Australian Universities, 2015)[3].

On 26 July 2010, as part of a rebranding campaign, the university changed its trade name from Curtin University of Technology to Curtin University[4]. According to the university's website: "The change is considered a logical step, considering the breadth of Curtin's offerings and our vision to be one of the top twenty research universities in the Asia-Pacific region"[5]. From that point onward, the university clearly positioned itself as a brand.

Curtin University, therefore, exemplifies the worldwide trend in higher education: it is a relatively recently established university which started from a small base but now has a large and growing number of students, both domestic and international, undergraduate and postgraduate, from a wide range of ages. The university is actively pursuing improvements in its world ranking through increased research output and it has responded to marketization by working to establish itself as a globally recognized brand.

The data for this case study was obtained from the Internet Archive *Wayback Machine*[6], a digital archive which permits users to compare archived versions of webpages across time since 1996 (see Zhang and O'Halloran 2013). While numerous archived homepages from 1997 to 2015 were explored to trace the evolution of the Curtin brand, eight homepages were selected for close analysis, based on explicit and overt changes to the homepage's design. Although Curtin University of Technology established its web presence in 1994, the earliest available snapshot of Curtin's homepage is dated 11 January 1997. However, as this version has been "Last modified Monday, 09-

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[3]http://www.australianuniversities.com.au/directory/student-numbers/
[4]http://about.curtin.edu.au/curtin-history/curtin-historical-timeline/
[5]http://about.curtin.edu.au/curtin-history/international-university/
[6]https://archive.org/web/

Jun-97", the version of the homepage selected for analysis is dated 13 June 1997. The other versions are dated 22 June 2000, 5 June 2002, 16 December 2003, 20 August 2006, 17 June 2010, 27 July 2010, and 5 September 2015.

8.4.1 Conceptual framework and methodology

To form a comprehensive picture of the various semiotic dimensions through which brand communications create meaning in internet homepages, the present study follows and extends Zhang and O'Halloran's (2012, 2013) social semiotic approach for investigating how hypermodal resources and affordances (e.g., text, image, hyperlinks) interact in university homepages to simultaneously create an institutional identity and an official "gateway".

In this study, multimodal social semiotic theory is employed along with software-based techniques (O'Halloran et al. 2014; O'Halloran et al. 2015) to demonstrate how meanings emerge for a website based on combinations of semiotic choices, and how the results of the analysis can be related to higher-level cultural and ideological meanings. The (manual) analysis of the homepages is aided by the *Multimodal Analysis Image*[7] software (see Figure 8.1a-h), which is equipped with facilities for entering analytical frameworks, importing multimodal texts such as webpages and image files, annotating the image files using overlays, attaching a system choice (or analytical category) to overlays, and exporting the results to Excel for further data processing and analysis.

The multimodal semiotic analysis of the Curtin homepages is undertaken using Askehave and Nielsen's (2005) and Zhang and O'Halloran's (2012, 2013) model which is based on the premise that homepages fulfill two basic functions: (1) to introduce the user to the general content of the website (defined as reading mode), and (2) to provide access to the site though

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[7]http://multimodal-analysis.com/products/multimodal-analysis-image/

navigation tools that take the reader deeper into the website via clickable items on the homepage (defined as navigating mode). The main communicative purposes of the former are to introduce the reader/viewer to the site, and to establish the credentials and identity of the website owner, whilst the primary purpose of the latter is to provide access through hyperlinks "which tie together the text chunks into a web structure" (Askehave and Nielsen 2005: 132).

Zhang and O'Halloran (2012, 2013) further propose that navigation content is 'directed' via navigation styles or link resources (e.g., buttons, icons, plain text), which have different degrees of affordance depending on the action potential that can be performed on an item, and on whether that action is immediately apparent to the user (Zhang and O'Halloran 2013: 480). Askehave and Nielsen (2005) distinguish between *explicit links*, where the action potential is made apparent to the user through visual resources (e.g., coloured text, underlining, as indicated by rectangular overlays shaded in light pink in Figure 8.1), and *implicit links*, where the action potential of an item becomes evident only on mouse-over (indicated by rectangular overlays shaded in dark pink).

As Askehave and Nielsen (2005: 133) observe, the affordance of the hyperlinks stretches beyond the relative ease whereby users can access information on a website: "Links add meaning to the chunks of information that they connect". They distinguish between *generic links* which provide access to a website's main categorical topics (indicated by rectangular overlays shaded in light green in Figure 8.1), and *specific links* which are thematically contextualized (indicated by rectangular overlays shaded in dark green). Linguistically speaking, generic links tend to be realized by a single noun or nominal group, and to provide shortcuts to the categorical items that are listed in the menus on a website. Specific links, on the other hand, not only introduce the topic, but also provide additional information about the topic, and the relevance of the link itself. The primary

function of specific links is thus to evoke curiosity in the reader/viewer, enticing him/her to engage with the content that can be found at deeper levels of the website (Askehave and Nielsen 2005: 133-135).

In terms of compositional layout, the Curtin homepage has been divided into distinct navigation zones which comprise: a *Masthead/Banner* for displaying the Emblem or Logo that establishes the identity of the website owner, generally situated at the top of the homepage (as indicated in Figure 8.1 by rectangular overlays outlined in dark blue); *Navigation* zones for granting the user access to the website's main categorical areas (overlays outlined in green); *Content* zones for displaying information aimed at attracting the viewer and establishing credentials (overlays outlined in red); *Utility* zones for displaying regulatory information, situated at the bottom of the homepage (overlays outlined in purple); and *User Feedback* zones for channelling user-generated content, such as making a complaint or sending feedback (overlays outlined in turquoise).
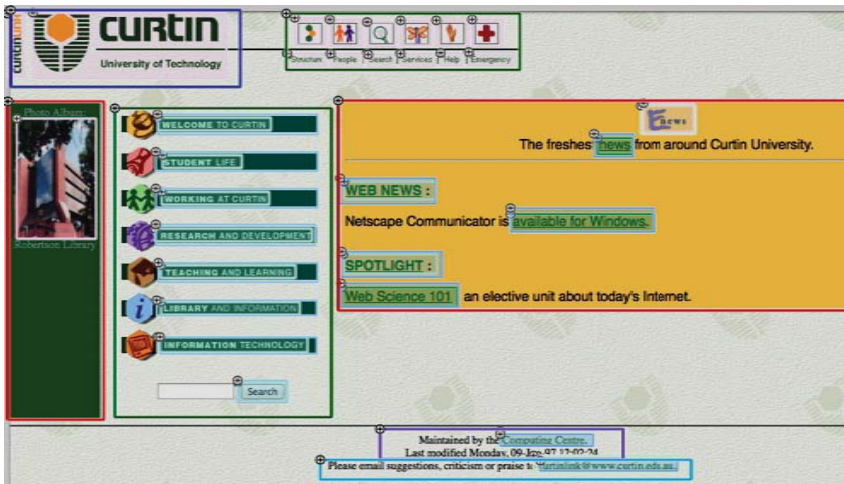
Figure 8.1a: 13 June 1997
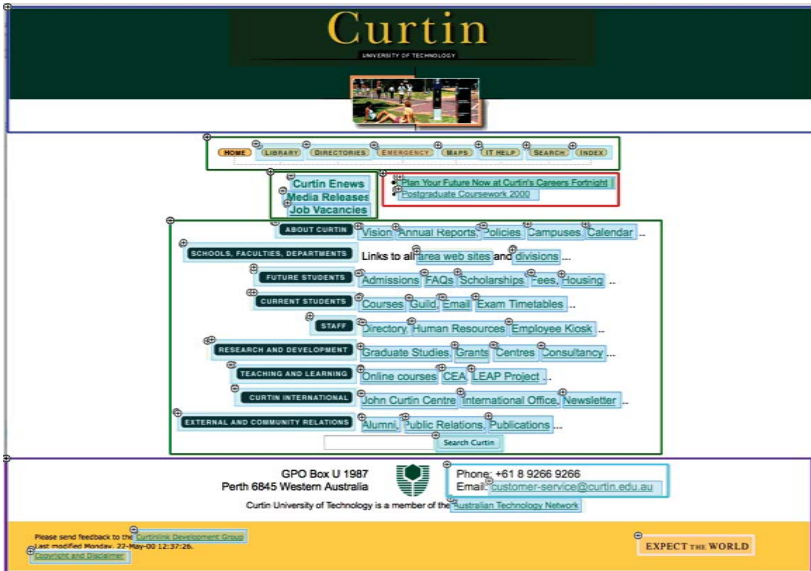
Figure 8.1b: 22 June 2000

Figure 8.1c: 5 June 2002

Figure 8.1d: 16 December 2003
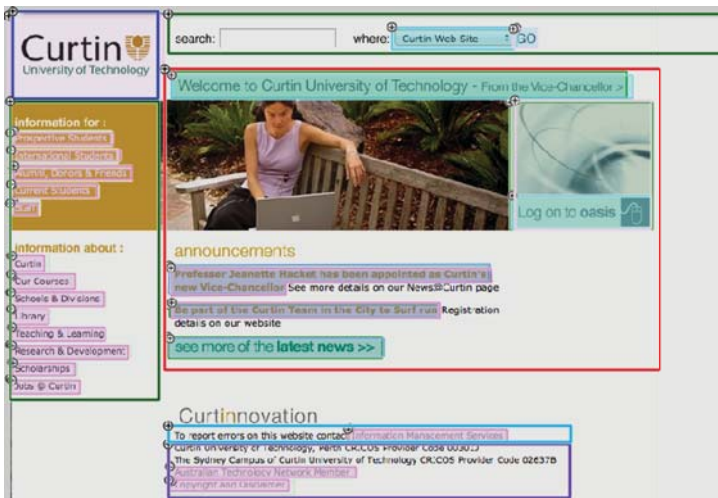
Figure 8.1e: 20 August 2006

Figure 8.1f: 17 June 2010
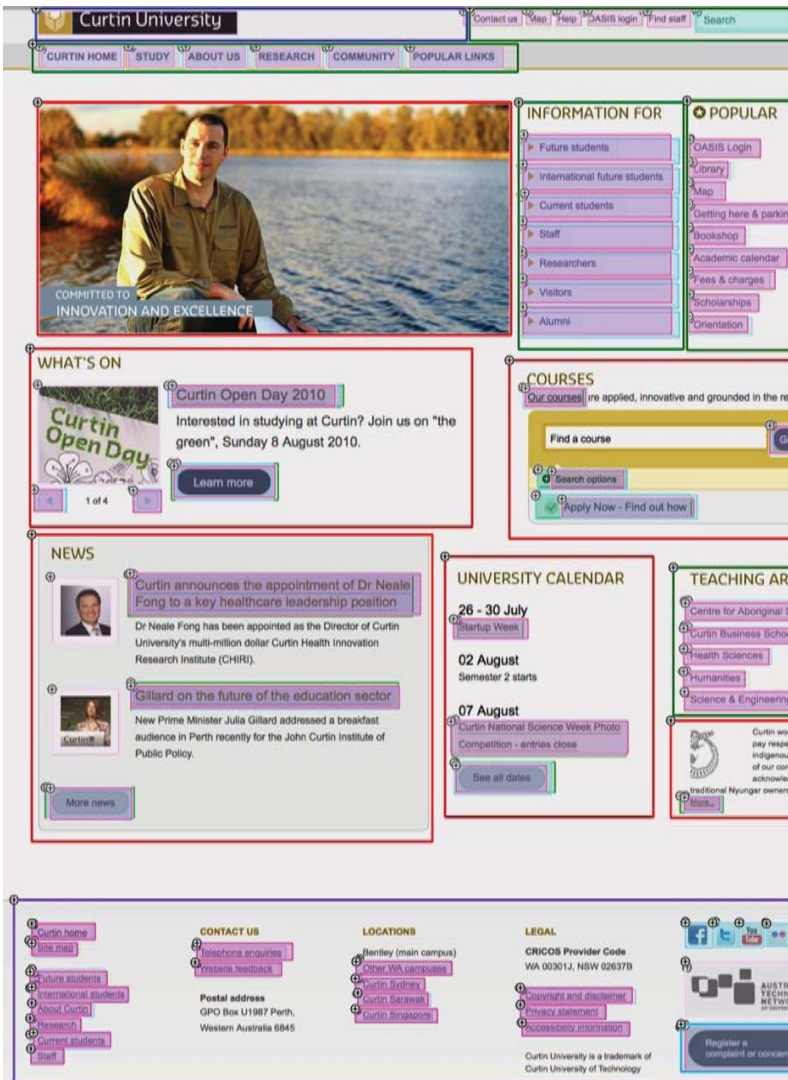
Figure 8.1g: 27 July 2010
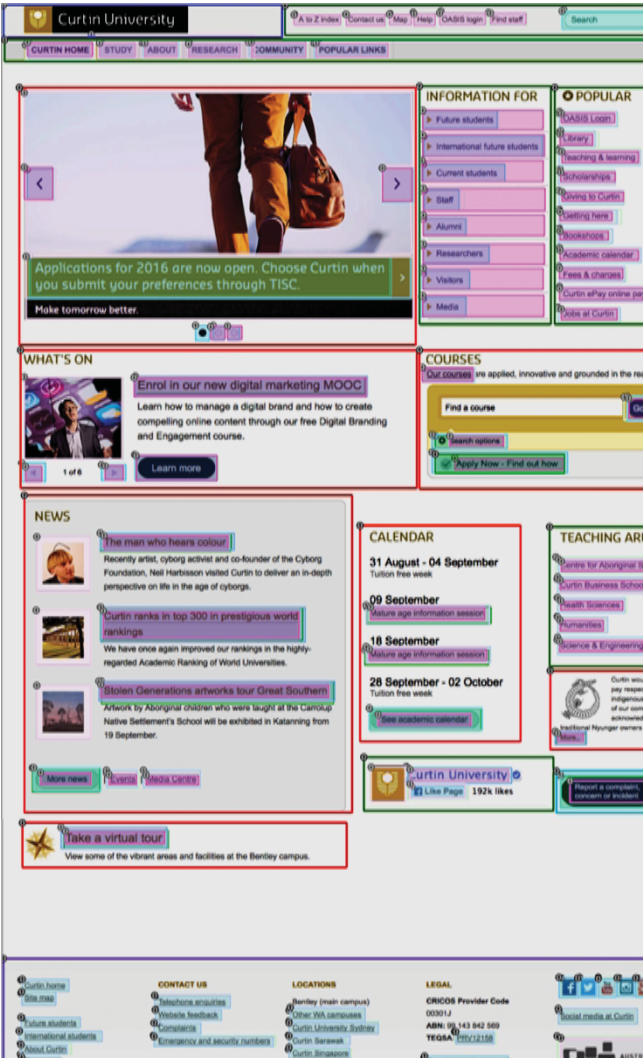
Figure 8.1h: 5 September 2015

Figure 8.1: Curtin University's homepages from 1997 to 2015

In the following Sections, the evolution of the Curtin brand is tracked by first analyzing the university's logo from 1997 to the present. This is followed by a discussion on how navigation styles contribute to brand communications on the homepages. Lastly, the ways in which information presented on the university's website is customized for three different groups of students are investigated.

8.4.2 Analysis and discussion
8.4.2.1 The logo

The logo is the primary visual identifier of the university as a brand. Curtin University describes its logo, which consists of a shield and the university's name (see Figure 8.2) as "the visual expression of the brand"[8]: that is, the logo is the single sign that uniquely identifies the university. It is found on the university's entrances and grounds, and on all Curtin publications, advertising and other materials produced by the university. The logo also identifies Curtin University on the homepage and on all other webpages. It is the single most important item of university iconography for distilling meaning. Indeed, the current logo (and all other university insignia) is part of an explicit and clearly articulated branding campaign which is aligned with the change of the university's trademark. The trademark is an integral part of the brand, as all references to Curtin University in promotional and contractual documentation need to include the statement 'Curtin University is a trademark of Curtin University of Technology'.

The current version of the university logo, displayed in Table 8.1 (bottom right), has been the same since it first appeared in late July 2010. The new logo incorporates some elements of previous versions, while new elements have been added. Prior to Curtin's being established as a brand and the logo's becoming fixed, aspects of the logo changed almost

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[8]https://brand.curtin.edu.au/working/applying-logo/

annually, as seen in Table 8.1 which displays versions from 1997 until 2015. The designs from 2004 show a progressive approximation of the shield (which originates in the logo of the university's predecessor, the Western Australian Institute of Technology) and the university's name towards the current design.

Table 8.1: Changes in Curtin's logo in chronological order

13 June 1997	26 May 1998	25 January 1999	18 January 2001
5 June 2002	16 December 2003	20 August 2006	30 August 2007
16 December 2008	26 June 2010	27 July 2010	5 September 2015

Using Drori et al.'s (2015) classification, the Curtin logo contains features of the professional, scientific narrative and the localized narrative. However, the design of the shield is more typical of universities exhibiting the organizational narrative, with its borderless, abstract and simplified graphic design (Drori et al. 2015: 9). The localized aspect stems principally from the name, 'Curtin University'. The hexagon shape within the shield also abstractly connects the university to its local origins as the Western Australian Institute of Technology. The use of the full name rather than an acronym and the retention of the word 'University' reinforce a link with tradition and heritage. This is typical of the professional, scientific narrative. However, the use of a modern font, Sansa Soft Pro, for the university's name (in the most recent versions of the logo) is more typical of the organizational narrative. The harmonious combination of features typifying these three narratives will be shown to align closely with the university's branding strategies for different groups of students.

The university aims to attract students locally, nationally and globally from three different segments: local Perth-based students; domestic students studying through distance-learning; and international students studying either in Perth or at one of Curtin's off-shore campuses. In the local market, Curtin is competing against other Western Australian universities to attract local students, principally local school leavers. The name Curtin has strong local connections, especially in the university's home state, Western Australia. The university is named after John Curtin, who was the first and only Prime Minister of Australia to come from Western Australia and who was Australia's leader during most of World War II. The logo also carries the state colours of Western Australia, black and gold. The name Curtin, combined with the state colours has strong positive local associations.

Most of the non-local domestic students are undergraduate and postgraduate who are studying by distance-

learning and can be located anywhere in Australia. The majority of these students are not recent school leavers. Many are studying part-time while working and raising families. For many of these students the incentive to study is to improve their employment and career prospects. While the local connection is not as strong nationally, the historical connection has meaning for (most) domestic students as it clearly identifies Curtin as being Australian. It is more likely, however, that the professional/scientific and organizational narratives are the main attractors for students in this segment.

While targeting international students, the university presents itself as a prestigious, global, international brand. Here, the adoption of features of the organizational narrative becomes of primary importance. While the university maintains tradition by having a shield as part of its logo, the style of the shield is abstract, geometric and graphically simple. It is global in character since it is not obviously associated with a particular place or time. Likewise, the name Curtin and the state colours of Western Australia are unlikely to have any local or historical significance for prospective international students.

Moreover, the name 'Curtin University' follows the pattern of naming typically high-ranking US universities. The names of thirteen of the top twenty US universities in 2015[9] exhibited the pattern of *Name* followed by *University,* such as 'Harvard University', 'Yale University'. The use of this naming pattern helps to create associations of prestige and reinforces the image of a global university, which is a marked feature of advertising targeted to this group of students, as discussed further below.

As Zhang and O'Halloran (2012, 2013) point out, the overall meaning potential of internet homepages is realized not only through the identity of the webpage owner as conveyed by the logo and its associations, but through the combined effects of

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[9]http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/slideshows/us-news-best-national-niversities

semiotic resources, including navigational aspects, which is the focus of the following Section.

8.4.2.2 Brand communication and navigation styles

While the communicability of Internet homepages is both constrained and enabled by the web technologies that prevail at a certain point in time[10], it is ultimately the combination of semiotic resources (e.g., text, image, hyperlinks) utilized by the web designers that will result in the brand's communicative effects. As the webpage owners profess, since the establishment of Curtin's web presence, "new sections have been added ad-hoc, resulting in a sprawling set of sub-domains in various states of currency, quality and design"[11].

As displayed in Figure 8.1a, the 1997 version of Curtin's homepage consists mostly of generic links, clearly arrayed in navigation zones at the top left-hand side of the homepage. Most of these generic links are explicitly marked by being framed and shaded in a contrasting colour, thus constituting visible 'gateways' to the website's categorical items. In contrast, despite occupying a comparatively large section of the homepage and being shaded in bright yellow, the content zone (corresponding to experiential meaning) contains very few specific links. It is significant, however, that these links are marked differently from the links in the navigation zones, attracting the viewer's attention mostly through coloured fonts and underlining.

From a social semiotic perspective, interpersonal meaning is realized linguistically through the grammatical system of Mood, which realizes "meaning as an exchange" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 135-139), with choices for giving and demanding information (statements, questions), and for giving and demanding goods and services (offers, commands). Most content on Curtin's 1997 homepage is presented in the form of

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[10]http://www.evolutionoftheweb.com/?hl=en
[11]https://web.curtin.edu.au/about/website-structure/

statements, which provide information. Apart from the generic "Search" button, and the demand "Please email suggestions, criticism or praise to curtinlink@www.curtin.edu.au" in the User Feedback zone, there are no requests for action.

Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Zhang and O'Halloran (2012, 2013) outline three main resources for realizing interpersonal meaning through visual images: (1) contact, realized through a character's gaze directed at the viewer (also see Harvey 2013); (2) social distance, realized through shot distance; and (3) point of view, realized through shot angle and perspective. In the 1997 homepage, the potential to engage the viewer visually is limited to a small clickable image of Curtin's Robertson Library building, taken at long distance and at a low vertical angle. Consequently, the affordance of the 1997 homepage to engage the viewer interpersonally through visual imagery is considerably low. Moreover, although the image is clickable, the link is implicit and only becomes apparent on mouse-over.

The subsequent version of the homepage dated 22 June 2000 (Figure 8.1b) consists almost entirely of navigation items, except for two small content items. Despite the abundant use of navigation buttons, these are generic links, explicitly marked by colour, underlining, shading and framing. Similarly, the list/menu items arrayed next to the vertically arrayed, darkly shaded menu buttons, are realized grammatically through nouns and nominal groups, while functioning as shortcuts to other sections and sub-sections of the webpages that can be accessed through the menu buttons on the left-hand side. While the abundance of explicit links makes the categorical items on the homepage easy to navigate, few resources are used to engage the reader/viewer interpersonally in terms of content. There is only one specific link, realized grammatically through an imperative addressed to potential students: "Plan Your Future at Curtin's Careers Fortnight". This is nonetheless printed in a relatively small font-size compared to the rest of the text. Additionally, in terms of the

visual resources deployed, the very small, non-clickable image of students relaxing on the lawn, taken at long distance with indirect or no visual address, is unlikely to engage the viewer interpersonally.

The versions dated 5 June 2002, 16 December 2003 and 20 August 2006 respectively (Figures 8.1c-e) present marked changes in the compositional layout and functional design of the homepage, which seem to reflect the quest for brand consistency. The first observable difference is that navigation zones and items are now clearly separated from the content zones. As a result, generic links and specific links are now also segregated clearly according to navigation and content. In particular, the navigation items in the menu on the left-hand side of the homepage are now clearly segregated into "for" and "about" sections, to be expanded in later versions into "information for" and "information about". Moreover, these generic links are no longer explicitly marked, that is, they are now implicit. It can be assumed that readers/viewers will know from experience that these items are clickable, so their functional aspect can be backgrounded.

In contrast, in the above versions of the homepage, specific links in the content section are foregrounded and rendered visually more apparent. To begin with, they are consistently contextualized in a headline plus lead, related mostly to 'announcements' and 'news'. Some of these links are now explicit as well as implicit, that is, they are visibly marked as links, with additional changes occurring on mouse-over. It could be said that these links have been endowed with increased 'affordance' for the reader/viewer to engage with the content, enticing them to explore the website further. This is also achieved linguistically, for example, through the emergence of typographically marked content links such as "more news and media info" (2002, Figure 8.1c), "latest news", "more details", "here" (2003, Figure 8.1d), and "see more of the latest news" (2006, Figure 8.1e), which is made even more prominent by

being marked typographically (bold font) as well as iconically (arrow symbols >>), and by being displayed in a different colour than the rest of the text. In addition, the reader/viewer is increasingly engaged through imperatives in the content section's image thumbnail, headline, body text, and link: "Log on to oasis", "See more details on our News@Curtin page", "Be part of the Curtin Team in the City to Surf run", "see more of the latest news".

Notable changes also occurred in terms of visual imagery. The 2003 version of the homepage marks the beginning of a distinct main visual display consisting of a large, centralized, clickable image of students or staff seated at the café in front of a Curtin building, whilst the subsequent versions from 2003 to 2006 feature a large photograph (out of a selection of sixteen), which changes randomly each time the homepage is accessed/refreshed, and one smaller image/text thumbnail. Ten of the photographs feature generic images of people (identified as students on mouse-over),and two images where the participants are identified as researchers by their lab coat and the activity in which they engage. Six of the images, captured at extreme close distance, show them gazing directly at the camera (see Table 8.2). O'Toole (2011: 12-13) suggests that the gaze from one or more figures directed at the viewer has the same function as direct address in language through the use of a vocative, and thus serves as an invitation to engage with the image. Other research has shown that the inclusion of images of people in a website has the power to influence viewers' perceptions and attitudes about the website, leading amongst other things "to a higher degree of online trust" (Cyr et al. 2009: 539). Consequently, the intensity of viewers' interpersonal involvement with the Curtin brand can vary depending on which image is displayed each time the homepage is accessed.

Table 8.2: Main visual display images 16 December 2003 to 20 August 2006

	Image	Contact	Social Distance	Point of view	Interpersonal involvement
1		Direct gaze, smiling	Extreme close up	Horizontal, frontal angle	Extremely high
2		Direct gaze, smiling	Close shot	Horizontal, frontal angle	Very high
3		Direct gaze, smiling	Close shot	Horizontal, frontal angle	Very high
4		Direct gaze, less smiley	Medium to close shot	Horizontal, frontal and slightly oblique angle	High
5		Direct gaze, puzzled look	Close shot	High vertical angle	High
6		Direct gaze, questioning look	Extreme close-up	High vertical, oblique angle	High
7		Indirect gaze	Extreme close-up	Horizontal, side view	Medium high
8		Indirect gaze	Medium close shot	Horizontal, side view	Medium high

9		Indirect gaze	Medium long shot	Horizontal, side view	Medium
10		Indirect gaze	Medium long shot	High vertical, slightly oblique angle	Medium
11		Indirect gaze	Medium to long shot	Horizontal, side view, blurred image	Medium low
12		Indirect/no gaze	Extreme long shot	High vertical, slightly oblique angle	Low
13		No gaze	Extreme long shot	Horizontal, frontal angle, panoramic	Very low
14		No gaze	Long shot	Horizontal, frontal, slightly oblique angle	Very low
15		No gaze	Long shot	Horizontal, slightly oblique angle	Very low
16		No gaze	Long shot	Low vertical, oblique angle	Very low

The design and functionality of Curtin's homepages from 2002 to 2006, however,does present some inconsistencies. The 2002 version, for example, includes many clickable and non-clickable

items, which are very similar in terms of design (e.g. grey pixelated directional arrows), which could potentially create confusion for the reader/viewer. In addition, the webpages include several implicit links, where the navigation potential is not self-evident. For example "Welcome" on the 2002 homepage leads to the Vice Chancellor's welcome message (although these design flaws were addressed more explicitly in the 2003 and 2006 versions), whilst a click on the image leads to the "About Curtin" page – an action potential which is not made apparent to the reader/user.

The 2003 version heralds the emergence of Curtin's current brand colours, although the colour scheme is not yet applied consistently. For example, some section headings in gold are non-clickable, whilst the main visual display caption "Welcome to Curtin University of Technology – From the Vice Chancellor" is printed in light grey, which makes it less interpersonally engaging. In the 2006 version of the homepage, all explicit links in the content zone are displayed in gold. But gold is also used for non-clickable section headings, thus potentially creating confusion.

The homepage dated 17 June 2010 (Figure 8.1f) reflects radical changes in its compositional design and navigation style, presumably as a result of advances in web and browser technologies occurring at this time[12]. One of the most notable changes is perhaps the appearance of tabs with drop-down/pop-up menus in the top navigation zone. Whilst the menu for "Information for" has been retained in the navigation zone on the left-hand side of the homepage, a new section, "Study areas", has been added beneath it. The "Information about" menu appears to have changed to "Quick links" and moved to the right-hand side of the homepage, to the effect that an overwhelming amount of list/menu items now frames and surrounds the content zone. As a result, the complex array of navigation zones, with

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[12]http://web.curtin.edu.au/about/

some areas overlapping, has the potential to distract the reader/viewer, especially as list/menu items are also used in content zones, which function almost in the same way as the tabs in the top navigation zone (i.e., with pop-up menus on mouse-over).

Whereas the previous versions of the homepage displayed a tendency towards standardization and consolidation of navigational styles, this version of the homepage appears to explore and experiment with different semiotic choices. For instance, this version features a wealth of explicit links in both navigation and content zones, with additional changes occurring on mouse-over, utilizing multiple semiotic resources at once. For example, the link "Find your career" in the content section "Want to study" is marked explicitly through the use of typography (bold font, underlining), by being framed and outlined, and by the triangular arrow symbol to the right of the link. It is also marked linguistically through the direct command addressed at the user "Find your career". On mouse-over, additional changes occur: a pop-up/drop-down menu appears on the right, the link background changes from white to yellow, and the icon to the left of the link changes into a "tick" symbol, as displayed in Figure 8.2.
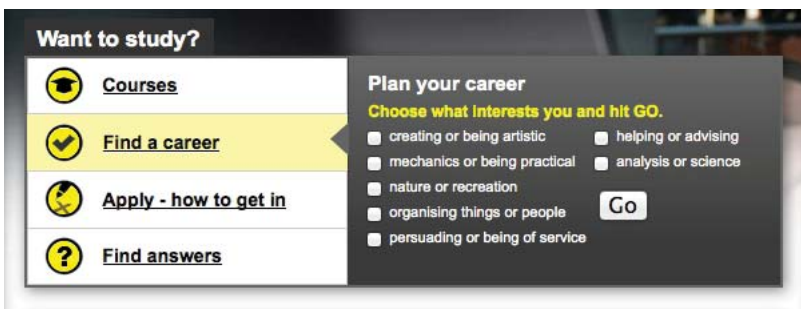
Figure 8.2: Multi-semiotic link resources

By foregrounding the navigation potential of a hyperlink, these multi-semiotic resources function to encourage the reader/viewer to explore the content. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the focus of the main visual display has changed from the Vice Chancellor's Welcome message, Announcements and News (addressed to all visitors to the Curtin homepage), to messages specifically directed at the university's target 'customers': prospective students. The large font-size of the caption or section heading "OUR MID-YEAR INTAKE IS NOW ON", the capitalized letters (in Sansa Soft Pro, the Curtin brand's signature font), the gold shading against the dark background, the explicit arrow ">" symbol, and the command "APPLY NOW", all work together to entice the reader/viewer interpersonally and to further engage with this section of the website.

Also, for the first time, inter-semiotic relations are being established across links; in other words, the same website can be accessed through different navigational means in different sections of the homepage. For example, the link/lead sentence "eVALUate survey – Provide feedback on your learning experience at Curtin" under the section "Key dates", the image/text thumbnail complex and linguistic command "eVALUate NOW! Log on to OASIS" under the "What's on" section (Sequence 4) all lead to the same webpage as the generic links "OASIS login" under the "Quick links" menu and to the top navigation zone (outlined in Figure 8.3). In the case of the image-text thumbnail, the capitalized font, white colour against the bright shades of amber and dark orange have the potential to further attract the target reader/viewer (in this case, current students).
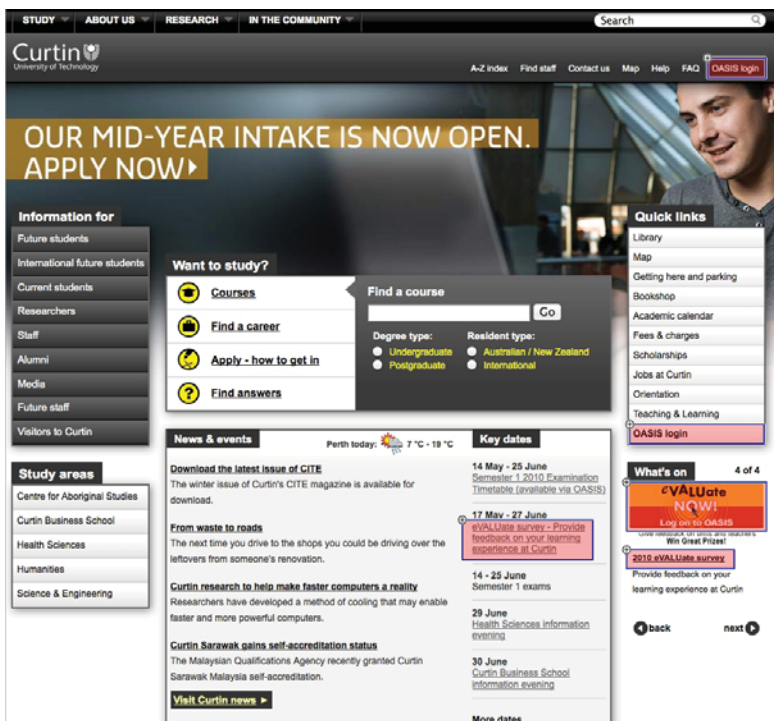
Figure 8.3: Inter-semiotic relations in Curtin's homepage 17 June 2010

Curtin's homepage dated 27 July 2010 (Figure 8.1g) coincides with the introduction of the new Curtin brand. The website's compositional layout and functionality are now regulated by strict protocols in terms of web structure and design[13], and other guidelines about working with the Curtin brand to ensure that the website design reflects Curtin's brand identity, and that the design remains consistent to reinforce the Curtin brand[14]. The introduction of the new brand identity strategy marks a period of

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[13]http://web.curtin.edu.au/about/
[14]https://web.curtin.edu.au/about/design/

great stability in the homepage's appearance and functional properties. As reflected in Figure 8.1h, the current homepage (5 September 2105) is almost identical to the homepage introduced on 27 July 2010, with only minor adaptations in its content and navigation zones.

In the new design, content zones predominate, taking up a large portion of the left and middle parts of the homepage. Navigation zones are arranged mostly at the top right-hand side of the homepage. Link resources in content zones comprise a mix of headlines and captions, lead text, as well as action buttons and action text. There is a clear segregation of specific links for content items, and generic links for navigation zones. In the latest version of the homepage, specific links are used– amongst others – for soliciting student applications in the main visual display and the section entitled "Courses", as well as for enticing students to "Enrol in [the university's] new digital marketing MOOC" under the section "What's On". As in the previous version of the homepage, content is now tailored specifically to address the target reader/viewer.

The latest design also features a prominent visual display with an increased capacity to attract the reader/viewer. Whereas the 2010 version contained only one non-clickable image-text complex that emphasized Curtin's 2012 mission "Committed to Innovation and Excellence", the image-text complexes in the 2015 version now unfold as a series of three, and are typically geared toward attracting students to courses and campus life, and events that raise the university's global prestige; for example, highlighting state-of-the art research, celebrating industrial affiliations, and honouring the achievements of staff and students (see Figure 8.4). Prestige and reputation are among the most important attributes a university can leverage in marketing its brand. World rankings are markers of prestige and reputation, while research quality constitutes a key performance indicator in universities' rankings. In addition to providing information about research, the concerned image-text

configuration performs an interpersonal function: research is presented as a means of engaging the viewer through brightly coloured images that attract attention (Figure 8.4, left).

Figure 8.4: Main visual display images from Curtin's homepage 15 September 2015

The latest design also features enhanced inter-semiotic collocations across navigation, content, and utility zones, many of which appear to be specifically targeted to new and potential future students, offering them multiple 'gateways' to the university's website. The emphasis on marketing the Curtin brand to students is particularly apparent in the current versions of the university's website, as discussed in the following Section.

8.4.2.3 Marketing the Curtin brand to students

An analysis of the information presented to three student groups (local, domestic and international) shows that Curtin University progressively adopted different brand communications strategies for each group.

In the earliest versions of the website there is very little, if any, overt marketing evident. In fact, finding information on the website involved extensive navigational effort. For example, Figure 8.5 shows a section of the landing page for prospective students in 1997. To access this page, the reader/viewer must have clicked on "Student Life" on the main menu on the homepage. The connection between "Student Life" and the

information it leads to is not immediately obvious. The "Undergraduate Admissions Information" link leads to an online version of the university's admissions handbook. It presents detailed information on admission requirements and how to apply for domestic and international students. The link to the "International Office" provides information that may be useful to students who have already been accepted by the university.

Figure 8.5: The landing page for prospective students in 1997

Between 1997 and 2001 the university's homepage changed several times, but the link "Prospective Students" still led to the same information for students. However, the information accessed via the "International Students Office" link (from the "Prospective Students" page) had changed to a more promotional flavour: Curtin University is still the principal topic but with a change in focus. Here Curtin is presented as an "outstanding

international university" with a "world-wide reputation and one of Australia's most popular destinations for international students offering degrees which carry substantial prestige". The rest of the information on the page consists of handbook-type information about aspects such as course structures and fees. The page also has links to downloadable documents with the information for students in Korean, Mandarin and Vietnamese.

By mid-2002 the university's homepage distinguished between "prospective students" and "international students". The information for domestic students, also, has a little more of a promotional flavour, but the university promotes itself to this student segment differently. For example, the student is the topic and subject of the two clauses in "When you choose Curtin, you choose Australia's leading University of Science and Technology!". The rest of the text on the page focuses on the university, with the university's name, courses, research achievements, reputation and relations with the community appearing prominently.

By August 2006, the "International Students" landing page had lost its promotional edge and had been reduced to presenting information to students through links to handbook-type documents. The languages in which the information was available to students was represented by national flags and had expanded to eight with the addition of Indonesian, Japanese, Czech, Portuguese (represented by the Brazilian flag) and German. The information on the landing page for "Australian Resident School Leavers and Mature Age Applicants" also lost its promotional flavour. The landing page, however, now had a menu bar at the top which contained a link to "Why Choose Curtin?" This link led to promotional information similar in style to that on the 2002 website. The information still focused on Curtin University of Technology but provided more reasons to choose Curtin, such as "job ready graduates, research opportunities and flexible study options".

The last version of the website before the current version, launched in August 2010, had changed markedly from previous versions. This version distinguishes between "Future Students" and "International Future Students". There is a subtle change in wording here from prospective to "future", with "future" indicating greater certainty about the learning outcome than prospective. The information on the "International Future Students" landing page also changed back to being promotional, with an enhanced emphasis on graphics and typography. For example, the prominent heading is presented in the form of a command: "Discover what is possible at Curtin" (see Figure 8.6). The heading is salient and functions interpersonally to attract the viewer's attention. The heading is placed above a number of calls to action, some of which are links. These calls are supported semiotically by photographs of students of various nationalities socialising and working together. All of the links perform the speech function of command: "Learn about Curtin and Perth, Begin your application process". The links guide the future students through information about courses, enrolment procedures and living in Perth. At the top of each of these pages is a heading in the same typeface and size, as displayed in Figures 8.6 and 8.7. The number of languages, represented by national flags, has now grown to thirteen with the addition of Norwegian, French, Russian and Polish.

Discover what is possible at Curtin.

Figure 8.6: Heading on the June 2010 Future International Students landing page
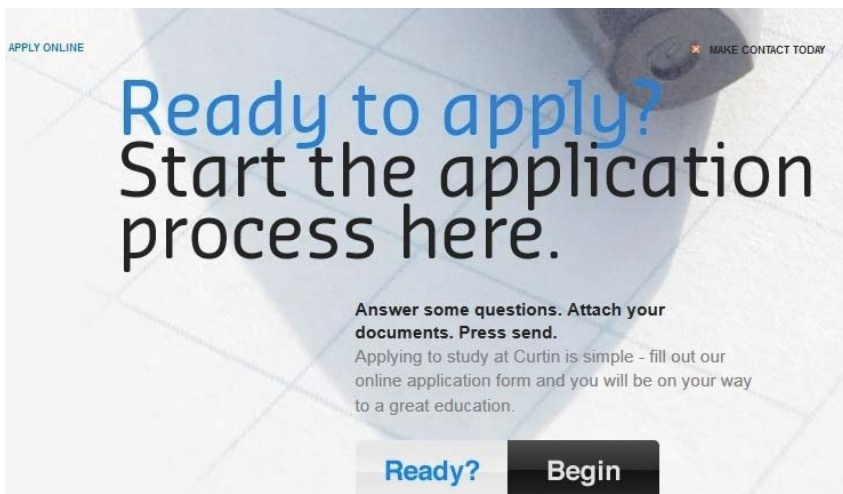
Figure 8.7: International Future Students enrolment landing page June 2010

The "Future Students" link leads to a page with an introductory paragraph which promotes Curtin as being "applied, innovative, grounded in the real world, relevant and globally recognised", which is closely followed by an extensive menu of links. The landing page for "Future Students (non-international)", however, differs in the deployment and configuration of semiotic resources. It does not use large typeface. It features one paragraph of promotional material in small typeface and the rest of the page consists mainly of links to information about the university such as courses and admission requirements. The promotional paragraph presents the university as "applied, innovative, grounded in the real world, relevant, globally recognised and culturally diverse".

Today, the relationship between the homepage and the various landing pages for future students is significant, because the homepage is typically the first point of contact with the university. From the homepage future students can link to the

pages most relevant to them. The university has fine-tuned the student segments it is targeting. International students still constitute a segment on their own but local students are now sub-divided into school-leavers and non-school leavers. For local school-leavers the text on the landing page features words like "independence", "take control" and "lifestyle". The "Why Curtin?" section of this landing page features themes of employment ("work alongside industry", "get a great job", "get in first with employers") and convenience ("getting here is easy"). The photographs which feature employment show people at an age by when they are expected to have completed their degree. For non school-leavers the text of the landing pages features a different set of attractors: "life-long benefits", "competitive edge", "transferrable skills". In the "Why Curtin?" section only one slide is the same as those aimed at school leavers ("Get a Great Job"). The text of the other slides promotes "flexible learning", "online lectures", and "ways to get in". The photographs feature relatively young people, yet who are too old to be school leavers and who are either at work or in the act of studying.

For international students, the text of the landing page highlights "a global university", "a strong global presence", "the top 2 per cent of world universities", "practical", "internationally recognised courses", "direct input from industry", "skills and knowledge", an "ever-changing global marketplace". Rather than slides, the international student landing page features ten short promotional videos. Of these seven are aimed directly at future international students and cover topics such as "The Curtin campus experience", "2014 Curtin Innovative International Scholarships", "Curtin, a global university", "Why choose Curtin?" and "Curtin's Bentley Campus". The videos promote the global and international features of Curtin both as a university and as a place to live and study.

8.4.2.4 Creating a cohesive university brand

The three different approaches to the three student segments (international, school leavers and non-school leavers) realize different aspects of the university's overall strategy. Each of these aspects is encoded and distilled in the iconography of the university's logo and reflected in different brand narrative strategies. The strategy for international students is a realization of Curtin's organizational narrative; the strategy for local school-leaver students and non school-leavers resident in and around Perth is based on a combination of the localized narrative and the professional, scientific narrative; the strategy for non school-leavers resident in other parts of Australia is based more on the professional, scientific narrative (Drori et al. 2015: 9).

Parallel to the shifts in brand strategy over time there has also been a shift in the university's 'selling offer'. In the early years of the university's website, prospective students were presented with straightforward, factual information about the university and what it offered. This information was generally in the form of html documents which looked like they had been copied from a university handbook. The university was the focus of the information in these documents where it was represented as an institution that offered degree courses to students. The university now actively markets to students. The current website has extended and crystallized a trend that had been present, albeit latently, in earlier versions of the website. This is reflected in shifts in focus in the form and content of the landing pages for future students. Students are now directed to do things, rather than just being presented with information, while different categories of future students are presented with different marketing materials. For example, the heading on the landing page for international students, "study at a global university and help make tomorrow better", combines the future with a global orientation. Other future students do not see this.

If the university is competing as one brand among many in a global marketplace, two questions that arise are: What is it

selling? And how is this better than what other universities are offering? Rather than presenting itself as an institution that offers courses to potential students, the university has now constructed itself as a brand that sells a glowing future to its customers. Its courses are the means of realizing that future but information about the actual courses is several clicks deeper than promotional material about the "awesome" future that "awaits" the future student. This *future* orientation is evident in some of the university's iconography: in the motto, "Make tomorrow better", and in its current slogan, "AWESOME AWAITS", as displayed in Figure 8.7. "Make tomorrow better" appears as part of the photographs' captions on the homepage's main visual display and in many other places on the website and on other university materials. "AWESOME AWAITS" is the slogan that was used in a 2014 campaign. In this regard, Curtin University seeks to differentiate itself by adopting a future orientated outlook.

Make tomorrow better

Make Tomorrow Better

Make tomorrow better.

MAKE TOMORROW BETTER

Figure 8.7a: Make tomorrow better

Figure 8.7b: Awesome Awaits
Figure 8.7: Curtin University's motto and slogan from 2014 to 2015

8.5 Conclusions

As seen in the above analysis, Curtin University has developed a comprehensive branding strategy to compete in the global educational market place. This branding strategy begins with the university's name and logo, and permeates the university's website and other publicly available materials. The strategy links the brand to the university's reputation by publicising items (e.g., research, world rankings and other news items) which enhance its reputation prominently on its home page. Moreover, the university's marketing is tailored to selling different futures to different groups of studens. For international students the future is built on employment resulting from an internationally recognised degree from a high ranking, global university. A side benefit is that at present the student can study in an environment that is welcoming, inclusive and supportive. For local school-leavers, their future entails getting a great job while they study in a convenient location and become ready for work. For non school-leavers, the future means a better job with life-long benefits while at present they have flexible options for how and when they study.

A multimodal social semiotic approach offers insights into the nature and evolution of brand identity, in this case Curtin University's as realized in the brand communications that deploy on its website which shifted from a focus on limited domains of experiential meaning (e.g., courses, regulations) to domains that include lifestyle, the student experience, employment and future prospects. These expanded domains of experience are accompanied by an enhanced interpersonal function, where information is no longer simply presented. On the contrary, the viewer/reader is actively engaged through requests for action and colourful headers, texts, images and videos. These multimodal messages are compositionally arranged for maximum effect, so they work cohesively together across the logo, homepage and landing pages for local, domestic and international students. Furthermore, bespoke branding strategies for other stakeholders (e.g., staff and funding bodies) can also be explored using this theoretical approach and methodology.

In this respect, the multimodal approach offers powerful discourse analytic tools for understanding and evaluating the effectiveness of brand communications strategies in context (e.g., by period, segment etc.). Indeed, a systemic functional approach to multimodal social semiotics – the study of the meanings arising from the interaction of language, image and sound choices in brand communications – provides theoretical and analytical tools and techniques for understanding the essence of successful (and unsuccessful) brands and communicative campaigns.

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CHAPTER 9

A multimodal critical discourse analytic approach to university rebranding

Per Ledin and David Machin

9.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, we look at how concepts and forms of analysis from Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) can be recruited for analysing the branding materials employed in the rebranding of a Swedish academic institution whereby new brand meanings and values were infused into a range of internal documents that circulated to internal stakeholders. It is important for organisations, especially where rebranding involves other forms of restructuring and re-focusing of priorities, purposes and practices, that these brand ideas and values are communicated effectively not only outwardly to the public, but also internally to employees who are called upon to shift their own priorities, purposes and practices. While this process can be studied across any organisation, here we look at the case of a public institution, a university in Sweden, which underwent a rebranding process in 2011, in an environment where government were demanding greater competition between universities, increased market relevance, increased output, cost efficiencies and greater evidence of superior customer service and transparency. As in many parts of the world, this shift in the way public services operate is reflected in a re-orientation of the university's civic role, and its being run by professional employees, to a role that is aligned with neo-liberal market principles, and spearheaded by professional managers based on performance monitoring.

In this Chapter we show that MCDA is a fruitful avenue for analysing and theorising this rebranding process across organisational documentation. CDA (Van Dijk [1995]; Fairclough

[2003]) was originally developed for carrying out close analyses of language and grammar, with a view to revealing the broader discourses that lurk behind manifest texts (Foucault 1977). CDA emphasises the need for carrying out not only detailed analyses of texts, but also for understanding texts in their context of production. It is not so much interested in grammar and language *per se*, but in the employment of linguistic resources for ideological purposes. CDA is interested, therefore, in the social uses of language in specific contexts and how institutions and those with power are able to control language in order to maintain their own position. CDA, according to Fairclough (2003), is also about the way language can create meaning beyond the level of micro-textual structures. Important, here, is the way different parts of texts can inter-relate or the connections between completely different texts. In the examples analysed in this Chapter, it is clear that analysis must look across a range of different texts in order to truly begin to grasp how this marketized discourse/brand is being realised across both outward facing promotional materials and within university practices.

MCDA (Machin and Mayr 2012) extends CDA to include other visual and design components of communication. As with the linguistic counterpart of this type of analysis, the advantage is that it can provide a highly systematic outlook on discourse formations, communicated through different semiotic resources. MCDA should be distinguished from other forms of multimodality that are related more narrowly to the application of concepts from Hallidayan (1978) linguistics. While MCDA is also influenced by this theory, the emphasis is more on the social uses of semiotic resources in context, whereas the SFL influenced multimodality stream rests at the level of identifying the underlying system, or grammar. MCDA, like CDA, is interested primarily not in describing the rules and options within different semiotic modes, but in drawing out how each mode is employed for specific ideological purposes.

MCDA is well suited for brand analysis. It has been argued (Machin and Thornborrow 2003) that the concept of brand is much like that of discourse. Like discourse, a brand is a set of associations comprising identities, ideas, values, sequences of activity, etc. Both can also be thought of as systematic ways for shaping how things, processes or persons are understood. In each case, a text maker or designer seeks to communicate a discourse, comprising a way of viewing the world, a set of associations, through the deployment of specific semiotic choices in language and design. In our example, an organization has been rebranded which, like discourse, includes associations of particular types of identity, practices, values and sequences of activity.

In this Chapter, we apply MCDA to five documents from Orebro University in Sweden. This institution underwent a rebranding process in 2011, during which it experienced many of the outward, and inward communications challenges with which public institutions are confronted in such cases.

In contrast to the more established universities which branded themselves around ideas of scholarship and tradition, Orebro branded itself as modern and fast growing university, which is tightly managed, with increasing research output, a commitment to international collaboration and student-centeredness. This orientation began with a new mission statement, a set of strategies for dealing with teaching and research and the development of a system of documents that introduced these core ideas, attitudes and values to the working practices of the university. The concerned documentation featured a quarterly university magazine that was made available to all academic, administrative and technical staff and was also distributed in the local community. The magazine hosted articles about the university life, as well as profiles of staff and alumni. The documentation described the university's processes, such as research, teaching and student recruitment, while stipulating the terms of performance management, and foregrounding the need

to increase output and quality, cost efficiency, market relevance and student/customer orientation. All of the above were conveyed in a tone-of-voice that gave the impression of an enthusiastic, forward-looking, dynamic, modern and collective enterprise. Documents were also designed where employees had the opportunity to report on their own activities in the face of the newly enforced management priorities, ideas and values that defined the new Orebro brand.

In this Chapter, we begin by examining the university magazine, looking at how the university staff and research are represented. We then look at an example from the internal Vision brochure, from a design point of view. Next, we delve into the university's research strategy, with a focus on the staff's roles and identities. Then, we move on to a university target document, by focusing anew on how research is represented and formulated, with an emphasis on visual language. Finally, we look at an activity plan where subject leaders are required to describe how they are meeting targets and strategies for research, with an added focus on design features. Overall, our aim is to show that the brand is constantly present, yet realised in different documents through different kinds of semiotic resources, while heeding both the outward facing self-representation of the university, and the ways whereby the identities and roles of staff are re-contextualized.

9.2 Branding of public institutions

Critical discourse analysts have highlighted the worrying trend of a shift from more traditional values and practices associated with education and citizenship in universities and other public institutions that have been taking a market-driven turn, while adopting a brand culture. Fairclough (1993: 14) was the first to observe this shift in university recruitment practices, arguing that the language used in this process showed that higher education institutions had turned into businesses trying to sell "goods, services, organizations, ideas or people". Other scholars have

since pointed out that universities, academic leaders and higher education research, in promotional materials and on websites, are using increasingly words imported from the corporate sector: buzzwords like "entrepreneur" and "entrepreneurial" (Mautner 2005) or "human capital", "innovative", "competitive", "globally engaged" and "enterprise" (Morrish and Sauntson 2010; Holborow 2013).

Discourse analysts have also observed important shifts in the way that universities have been presenting themselves visually. In prospectuses and on websites we find uses of color, photographs and space that resemble commercial magazines (Teo 2007), and that address readers in a casual and trendy voice. Photographs are intended to create feelings of intimacy, oriented to presenting students as customers who will acquire a degree, where university is more of a "lifestyle", rather than about study and learning (Zhang and O'Halloran 2013). These aims appear to be replacing any claims to fostering an educated citizenship or to stimulating critical thinking (Mautner 2014). These visual changes align with the shift to less formal language styles.

However, these changes and this new kind of language sit not only at the level of promotional texts and websites. Given CDA's emphasis on inter-textual and institutional discursive chains (cf. Fairclough 2003), we observe that this language runs through chains of strategic plans, performance monitoring and steering documents, and cuts across the entire university's hierarchical structure. This language, and the ideas, values and identities that it communicates, as a brand, reformulates how the roles and activities of staff are represented at different levels. These processes have been theorized and criticized in social theory and organizational studies, under the concept of "governmentality" (Peters et al. 2009). Scholars have shown how this new management system requires professionals who formerly steered and assessed their own fields of expertise, to transform what they do and how they do it into a different set of

priorities and categories that are handed down to them from policies, through managers, and audits (Power 2009).

In this Chapter, then, we seek to demonstrate that the outward facing brand and the internal re-contextualization of work processes are two sides of the same coin. Both levels are the realization of the same brand vision which comprises specific ideas, values and identities, by drawing on a range of multimodal semiotic resources.

9.3 Theory and methods

In order to achieve our analytical tasks, we draw on a set of tools from the apparatus of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin and Mayr 2012; Machin 2013). This is a form of critical linguistic analysis that addresses visual representations and design, using a specific set of concepts first introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Central to this kind of analysis is the notion of discourse. Discourses can be thought of as models of the world (Foucault 1977) and can include participants, ideas, values, goals, and settings (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999). In CDA, texts are analysed alongside linguistic and grammatical choices in order to reveal the underlying discourses and the power relations that sustain them. This interest in power relations is a defining characteristic of CDA. The aim is to show how those with power use communicative resources in order to establish, naturalize, legitimize and maintain their position. In the case of the rebranding of a university, or other public institution, marketization and the shifts in practices, identities and priorities must be naturalized and legitimized. As we show in this Chapter, this must be understood as a multimodal process.

We also draw on the notion of "re-contextualization of social practice" (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999). This is useful as it draws particular attention to the sequences of activities, or "scripts" that can be understood as the "doing" of discourses. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) argue that social practices can be re-contextualized- in the interests of individuals or institutions-

in language through substitutions, additions, deletions and in the re-ordering of the sequences that comprise them. A social practice can be thought of as including the following kinds of elements: participants, ideas, values and attitudes; activities; social relations; objects and instruments; times, settings and causality. Analysis, therefore, looks for the ways whereby these elements of a social practice are re-contextualized in a document.

In the case of the rebranding of a public institution it is clear that why and how things are done must be re-contextualized. Formerly professionals would carry out their work with an emphasis on outputs underpinned by humanistic ideas of knowledge and human inquisitiveness, and set their own teaching priorities (Mautner 2014). The performance management discourse emphasises meeting the market-based priorities of society, of increasing outputs, of customer service, of transparency, with associated notions of measuring how assessments are performed and levels of teaching quality recorded in the form of targets and objectives (Ledin and Machin 2015).

Importantly, in Foucault's (1977) view, discourses may never be fully present in any single text. As argued by Fairclough (2003), we need to look at language beyond the kinds of units normally dealt with by linguistic analysis. Therefore, analysis can look for how such models of the world are communicated or signified across texts, or across designs. What is particularly important about the rebranding of the university across documents is that these comprise a kind of interlocking and self-referential system (Power 1997), which renders them so pervasive.

In the analysis of the documents that follows we look at how participants and actions are represented - in texts, images and designs. This allows us to observe how the branding process is representing identities that are re-contextualized for the marketized discourse. We also draw on a number of other

concepts, particularly from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) that we will present in the relevant Sections.

One such term is modality. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that representations fall into different kinds of modalities. Naturalistic modality is the truth of what we see. This may be represented as a photograph of a human body as we would have seen it had we been there. Technical modality is the technical truth, for example a scientific diagram that identifies and labels the human body. This claims to represent not just any "truth", but a technical truth, rather than the naturalistic truth of the photograph. Sensory modality is the truth of the senses. So, an impressionist painting claims to represent the truth of the senses. Children's toys could be described as having high sensory modality through colours being simplified and saturated. We show in the following Section that modality is a concept that applies across documents in different ways.

9.4 Analysis of branding materials
9.4.1 The university magazine

Figure 9.1 shows the cover of the university magazine, which is distributed in the local city and among employees. An important characteristic of all of these images is the modality of the representations. On the one hand, these images are entirely naturalistic representations. On the other hand, they tend to be sensory. They have reduced backgrounds, high levels of lighting, suggesting slight overexposure, connoting optimism and creating a clean look. We find slightly saturated colors which can be used to co-ordinate images with other design elements. We also often find blurring and creative cropping. This is one way whereby such less naturalistic images are able to connote the symbolic ideas and values of the brand. But this sits alongside a certain use of technical modality. In these images, details are reduced. The clutter of everyday life has been removed, allowing a few key elements or settings to carry out their symbolic work. We see both uses of modality in Figure 9.1 which carries high key lighting

and saturated colors which resonate with the logo. The blurred background allows the iconic microscope to connote "research". Overall, these "less real" images allow the ideas and values of the brand to be less anchored in everyday university life, and at the same time to present it as technically simplified.

Figure 9.1: The university magazine

We now move on to examine how participants are represented in the magazine. One striking feature is that we find mainly images of individuals. These are often portrayed in close-ups, or extreme close-ups, as seen in Figures 9.2 to 9.5. These include academic staff, management, students and ex alumni. In terms of Van Leeuwen's (1999) observations on the representation of social actors, here we find high degrees of individualization and personalization. University staff, including lecturers (Figs.9.3, 9.4 and 9.5) and management (Fig.9.2) are represented not as distant and disinterested intellectuals, but as intimate and warm. This is a work environment of "openness", realizing the brand

values of customer orientation and transparency. Academics are not remote and self-absorbed, but communicative.

Figure 9.2   **Figure 9.3**

Figure 9.4   **Figure 9.5**

It is also important to note that these individuals look directly at the viewers, while engaging them. We do not witness them carrying out their work, absorbed, but in interaction with us. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) differentiated among various kinds of what they called "image acts" that photographs can perform. Where a person does not look out at the viewer, we can

say this is an "offer image". It offers information for us to consider. Where a person does look at the viewer we can say that this is a "demand image". As in face-to-face interpersonal communication, a kind of response is expected of viewers as the person depicted enters into a social relationship with them.

As well as individuals, photographs tend to depict small groups or teams. We do not see whole departments of academic staff, rooms filled with administrators or large management teams. In these images, we find researchers, as well as management and students represented as individuals or small groups. This is evident in Figs.9.6 and 9.7.

Figure 9.6

Figure 9.7

Again, we often encounter the same degree of intimacy and approachability through proximity and camera angles. "Demand

images" also tend to recur where the staff engage with the viewer, inasmuch as "offer images", as in Fig.9.7. Here, we see colleagues sharing a joke. And as we go through the analysis, it will become clearer that when we see people at work, they are communicating about work rather than doing it. Again, this signals a work and research environment of "openness". It also helps to communicate that this is not an environment that is remote and esoteric, but accessible and prepared to collaborate and engage with the wider society. As with Figure 9.1, these images are not highly naturalistic, intending to document work at the university, but sensory and abstract.

People are often positioned in close proximity to each other as in Figure 9.6. There is a sense of teamwork, of warm collegiality, lack of hierarchy and complete absence of individualism and competitiveness. We also see this in Figure 9.8 where senior management are portrayed sitting with students, all striking the same posture. This is in contrast to the actual nature of university life where staff must demonstrate their own personal strategies and where internal management discourse involves setting departments in competition as regards attracting external funding and publications output.

Figure 9.8

Figure 9.9

Finally, we encounter many images that depict different kinds of participants in similar postures. In Figure 9.9 we see four persons: management, academic, administration and student, represented in a way that suggests a high degree of equality. Photographs are of the same size. Each person is allocated the same amount of space, while text and borders separate them in equal measure. As we will see in subsequent analyses, this is important for the voice of "we" that circumscribes the mission statement, but also the different individual targets and goals that are inscribed in other documents. The systematic organization of these images on the page also aids in communicating that components are being identified and presented.

Moving on now to what people are depicted as doing, only in a very few images do we encounter people actually

carrying out concrete activities. This is the case for science, where participants are shown using items as test tubes, forceps, scissors, gloves, or, as in Figure 9.10, a microscope in performing activities. Here research is easily visible and comprehensible and not long-term, theoretical or challenging in any way.

Figure 9.10

Often images are characterized by blurred motion. This suggests lively and active work, rather than steadiness, thoroughness or tradition – again, as part of the brand of a modern, dynamic university. We also find an over-representation of people pointing at images, as in Figure 9.11. The employment of gestural mode in this instance suggests the concrete applicability of the research output that is produced in the University. In some images several people may be seen pointing at an object, or one person pointing, while others looking in agreement, thus highlighting that research is comprehensible, useful and the outcome of teamwork.
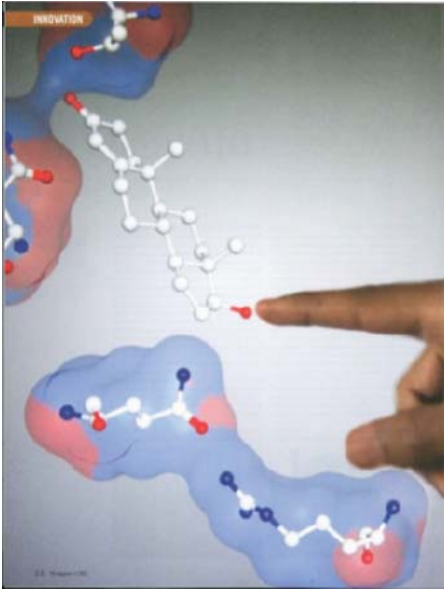
Figure 9.11

By and large, the portrayed actions in the magazine consist of poses. As Barthes (1977) has argued, poses are important as connotators of broader ideas, values and identities. We find several key poses in the magazine.

The first set of poses suggests energy, enthusiasm and a dynamic environment. These values are conveyed through the portrayal of people as leaning toward each other or forward, towards the viewer (Figure 9.12). In this case, we can imagine what meaningful differences would be afforded if the actors were depicted as leaning backwards, reclining away from the viewer. This would suggest lack of engagement and distance.

Figure 9.12

Other poses communicate liveliness and dynamism. We find staff pointing at the viewer. We also find staff jumping and depicted in different poses (Figure 9.13) to create a sense of energy and action, where in fact there may be none.
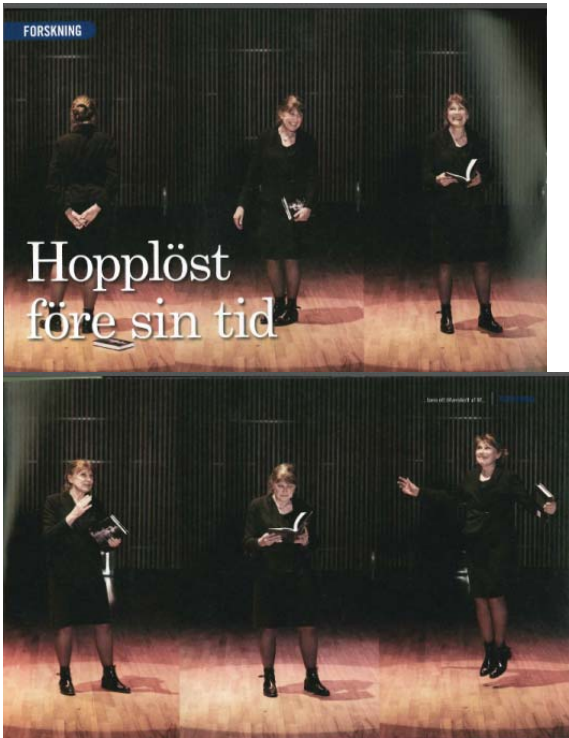
Figure 9.13

When representing research conducted in the Humanities or the Social Sciences, the selected visuals do not show people spending hours in front of their computers, alone in their rooms, carrying out extensive, rigorous, time consuming research, attending seminars or discussing research. Such activities, which are slow-moving and solitary, may appear visually dull, and hence have been deleted in the process of re-contextualization.

In the images featured in the magazine we find that most people smile or laugh. In Kress's (1989) terms, we can conceptualize this as a visual version of over-lexicalization. Kress explains that in instances where words or their synonyms are over-used in a text, it is almost certain that this signals some kind

of problematic area, usually one of re-contextualization. In the texts themselves we are never told that people are happy, having fun or always laughing. But visually we are. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) suggest that reactions are an important part of re-contextualization, whereby discourses can be evaluated by the depicted participants. The discourses of equality, of being relevant, or of working in teams are manifested visually in repetitions of "happy" staff. The smiles connote or indicate satisfaction, happiness, fulfillment, friendliness and well-being. Although work becomes reframed through the new management system with added bureaucracy, pressures for increased efficiency, outputs and market relevance, where around half of the academic staff at this university in fact work on temporary contracts, we find staff depicted as brimming with enthusiasm and happiness. Finally, the settings where people appear in the magazine are crucial in our analysis. What has been omitted from the magazine are offices and teaching spaces. Instead, we see settings such as spacious corridors, huge windows, hallways, libraries, stages and stairs.

When research and education processes are represented, we encounter not only laboratories, libraries, stages and board rooms, but also settings outside the university: a forest, a kitchen and even foreign countries represented by buildings and landscapes. These settings indicate the importance of the university in society, being useful, goal-oriented and creating connections.

We also see images where the setting has been eliminated altogether, replaced by a colored or white background, as seen above in Figure 9.6. This de-contextualization renders possible the diversion of the viewer's attention from everyday problems, towards values such as individualization, performance and space.

9.4.2 Co-ordination of photographs in the Vision brochure

Let us now proceed with examining an example from the university's Vision brochure, published in 2011. It is written in English, which signals the university's international orientation. This brochure is comprised of 16 glossy pages of A4-size and portrays the university in a design that features boxes and a framing. This design creates spaces which are filled with photographs of students, who are largely absent from the university magazine, of modernist spaces in the university, with success stories from professors and deans, and with charts indicating that numbers have been on a constant rise for publications, students, employees, rankings etc.

Figure 9.14: Page with visual co-ordination

In Figure 9.14 we see a typical page from the brochure, with a layout that uses a system of boxes of different sizes. As with the university magazine, the Vision brochure features images that depict airy, common spaces of different types, and staircases, rather than smaller private spaces. Using public spaces connotes a highly sociable environment; people are not isolated in offices or labs. In these communal settings staff are represented as being on the move, flexible, ready to perform and at the same time to enjoy the social relations they engage in – with each other and with the viewer. An important metaphorical meaning in these images is "on the move". Stairs are recurrent in these documents, as in the upper right corner, and suggest movement, speed and lightness. In one of the main university strategy documents the lead image is that of a staircase where people are represented only through blurred motion. This dynamism aligns with the brand's core values: readiness for change, improving performance, being successful.

Research is metonymically represented (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) by proximally placed test tubes on the left side of the page, one of them being lifted by fingers, suggesting "engagement in science", and by a close-up on two old books with patina at the bottom right corner, that may be interpreted as "the humanities", or "study". Research is represented with a sense of immediacy due to the affordances of the photograph (Barthes 1977), although not being effortlessly comprehensible. This kind of simplification and re-contextualization of social practices is typical when using photographs. A tangible scientific object, here a test tube, signifies research practices as something clear-cut and obvious and suppresses the complexities involved in actual research. As we will demonstrate shortly with regard to other documents, this simplification and loss of detail translates into accounts of activities in language, where staff must provide feedback on documents.

Densely crowded spaces or clutter are never seen in the photographs. Here "space" is highly emphasized over images of

people and takes on metaphorical meanings (Lakoff and Johnsson 1980), as the "luxury of space", the "power over space", "room to breathe", "freedom". Added elements such as saturated light, white (light) colors and the reflection of a glass window infuse connotatively spaciousness, ample ventilation and modernity into the representation, symbolizing innovation and vision. Space is clearly important in images, but also in document design as we shall see shortly, where it places a demand for de-cluttering, simplification and technical management of processes and identities.

Of interest in Figure 9.14 is the mode of layout, including graphics based on a design that is suggestive of a re-contextualization of different activities. We can think of this particular arrangement of photographs as a kind of conceptual representation that is part "classificational" and part "analytical" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996). In classificational structures, elements are represented through a kind of taxonomy, overt or covert, which usually suggests some kind of hierarchy. Analytical structures, in contrast, set up part-whole relationships, suggesting a fit between them. Both types of structures can be used ideologically to suggest that such links, taxonomies, and tenor/vehicle relations are natural and logical. They can also suggest a kind of technical modality, which we will illustrate in a more accentuated fashion in subsequent documents. Elements and identities which are very different in order, even with clashing interests, or which have specific places in causal chains, can be fused together or represented as parts of wider ensembles. The design principle of co-ordination is crucial in this process. It allows different things to be represented in abstraction and then co-ordinated with other elements, but in ways that are not specified in concrete terms. As we will see in the next Section, a key aspect of the re-contextualization process is the removal of the links between persons and processes.

9.4.3 Strategic plan 2011-2016

In this Section we focus on how the brand with its ideas, values and identities is realised in verbal mode in the university's strategic plan, which includes the university's regulations and components that are usually cited in all other documents. Once the new five-year vision for the university was created in 2008, senior administrative staff were then tasked to translate it into specific strategies, based on four strategic pillars: "Education", "Research", "Collaboration and Innovation", and "The attractive study and workplace". Here we analyze the language of the research strategies. This analysis can be traced back to the way that research is presented in both the university magazine and the brochure. Here we find that the diversity and nature of the research goals become obscured as they are divided into specific strategies. In the example of research strategies in Figure 9.15 we see that the layout is spacious. The strategies also enjoy the luxury of space and have room to breathe.

GOAL 2

RESEARCH

It is our goal to pursue free and creative research that caters to different needs, while striving for an approach that looks across and beyond boundaries. We are a university that attracts prominent researchers and forms partnerships that enhance the quality of our research.

STRATEGIES

We intend to...

2.1 review the quality of our research results through increased international scientific publication.

2.2 develop our international research collaborations.

2.3 stimulate initiatives for a substantial increase of our external research funding.

2.4 promote such research activities, research findings, and artistic research and development that contribute to the university achieving its overall goals.

Figure 9.15: Research strategies

To begin with, we encounter buzzwords which echo the kinds of ideas and values already found in the previously analysed photographs and the way they are organised: "free and creative", "across and beyond boundaries", "prominent", "enhance the quality", although in the photographs these ideas "float" in a de-contextualized manner. Who is responsible for bringing about these objectives and how are never specified. We can show this by looking again into detail at how participants and actions are represented, in which instance the design and the layout used to portray the verbal mode are very important.

In the CDA literature there is ample evidence of the function of pronouns as a most suitable grammatical category for the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power (Van Dijk 1998: 203). In the context of the current strategies, the pronoun "we" is used extensively. On the one hand, the use of "we" suggests cohesion and participation, as we found in the images of staff in the university magazine. Moreover, Van Dijk (1998) has shown how uses of "we" can be shifting in inclusionary and exclusionary manners, and can be used strategically. This manipulation is important as the discourse in these documents gives the impression that everyone is involved in setting the objectives, so it is not actually a question of obeying. This may be evinced if we attend to the verbs in infinitive at the beginning of each bullet point: "review", "develop", "stimulate", "promote".   However, a closer look at the strategies suggests that the value of "we" is shifting. It is used ambiguously, which is highly strategic. Compare strategy 2.4 and 2.2 (Fig. 9.15):

(2.4) We intend to promote such research activities […] that contribute to the university's achieving its overall goals.

(2.2) We intend to develop our international research collaborations.

In management steering documents, the aim is to communicate the priorities set by the management, while presenting them as the viewpoint of staff, and hence not a matter of obeying, but of being a shared aim. Sentence (2.4) clearly concerns the management ("We will pay attention to research …"), although in personal appraisals staff will also have to demonstrate how they are working to fulfill these goals. In sentence (2.2) the 'we' seems to also involve actual researchers.

The shifting "we" in the university documents has this effect of including sometimes staff as agents, whereas on other occasions clearly as subjects, or beneficiaries. It is in this way that the discourse attains subtly to involve everyone in setting the objectives, so it is not actually a question of obeying. And this "we", just like the images in the magazine that portray happy teams and different types of employees, communicates that this is a shared re-orientation of priorities and practices.

Most importantly, we encounter an elimination of participants. One way this is achieved in verbal mode is through nominalizations, where verbs are converted into nouns. So, for example, "research" becomes a thing rather than a process of "researching something" and there is no specification as to who is doing this. On the one hand, as Fairclough (2003) points out, nominalizations conceal agency, causalities and links between processes, while masking social relations. On the other hand, it is important to also see this as a shift from encoding as "process" to encoding as "product" (Halliday 1978). This means that the product can then be more easily talked about in terms of increasing "research" and stimulating "research". This shift in perspective is important for understanding how the actual process of research, from the point of view of the academic researcher, becomes lost in an abstraction.

Halliday (1978) points out that since nominalizations turn processes into products, they can then be quantified, or modified. In these strategies we find that nominalizations tend to be surrounded by modifiers. A telling phrase is "Increased international scientific publishing". The nominalization "publishing" is part of a complex phrase which in itself becomes a thing, a product. This means that the complex and diverse processes across different subject areas that comprise international publishing can simply be something that is counted and must "increase". So the principle is to render processes in time and space as things (in bullet points or nominalizations), because only then is it possible to act upon these things and start counting them. Overall, this connotes a technical process of breaking things down and presenting them in their core details.

What we find across the magazine and strategy documents are the ways whereby the actual complexities of research are obscured, visually represented by the metonyms of scientific equipment, or linguistically through the nominalization of "research". As was the case with the magazine where staff may be seen smiling and jumping, or verbally represented through buzzwords, in the strategic plan we discern a sense of energy and dynamism. Both of these values are important for rebranding the university as modern. Overall, we are confronted with a sense of process simplification. Research is represented visually as an easily comprehensible and goal-oriented task, while verbally it is simplified through nominalization in ways that make it appear to be easily quantifiable. The use of bullet points in the design also legitimizes this as a technical, systematic process.

9.4.4 Key target areas document
In 2012 the document "Målområden 2012" (Target areas 2012) was produced. This document contained 29 key target areas, each broken down into the same components as per Table 9.1.This document is used by management to formulate the different targets which must be met each year in order to realise

the university's strategies. So activities such as research are formulated and understood in terms of these key target areas. It is also given to subject leaders in order to explain the system and its priorities.

Table 9.1: Target area 2:1: Field normalized citation rate (Crown indicator) (English translation by Author 1)

Rationale:	The crown indicator is a measure that makes explicit the impact of research in citations by other researchers. The target area can be used for internal allocation of resources.
Definition:	Field normalized citation rate in relation to the field's world average, which is 1.0.
Unit:	The number is written with two decimals.
Frequency:	At least once a year.
Data source:	VR ['The Swedish Research Council'] delivers in June basic data to the government for its budget proposal. These data are compiled by the University Library and used for the accounting or the crown indicator for Örebro University in comparison with other schools. If the crown indicator is to be accounted for on a departmental level data from Leiden University must be compiled. Here, too, the work and analysis are carried out by the University Library.
Resources required:	Data delivery from Leiden costs 25000 kronor per year.

	The University Library arranges and summarizes data. Depending on the demand for data compilation, the allocated resources will increase. Continuous follow-up of allocated resources must be ensured.
Target area responsible:	Pro Vice-Chancellor.
Report to:	Various management committees like faculty boards, research groups and the University board.

Table 9.1 provides information to different management levels, including subject leaders, through a table which shows why particular targets are important, how often they are measured, where data comes from, the time taken to process data and who is responsible. The criteria recur for every target area and are coded in the same colour. All 29 target areas, related to teaching, student recruitment, research, staff training, etc., are organized into the same boxes under the same criteria on the left hand column.

The criteria on the left column end with a colon, thus pointing to the actual specification that is found on the right column. This is presented in a table format, suggesting an analytical structure or technical modality (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). These could have been presented as simple lists. But these representations connote that university processes are broken down into their fundamental discrete components that can be managed, counted and acted upon by administrators. This kind of boxing and placing things in space with framing, as we saw in the magazine and in the strategy document, is encountered across various documents. And given that all targets are divided into the same criteria with the same kinds of processes, to some extent, for those who work only at a

management or administrative level, they become of the same order, but also separate from each other, each with its own sets of measurements, cycles and administrators. Recruitment and teaching are separated from research, for example. Again, there is a sense that this is a logical and technical process, in line with the ideas and values of cost efficiency and transparency. And, as we have seen, across university documents, in both visual and verbal modes, research is reduced to a simplified abstraction where the actual processes are suppressed through the use of different semiotic resources.

The right-hand column of Table 9.1 lists the specifications of the terms that are repeated for all targets on the left-hand column. This is unlike the syntax found in the bulleted list of strategies above. In this table there are many full sentences in which real actors are presented carrying out actions that are located in time and space, like: "VR (The Swedish Research Council) delivers in June basic data to the government for its budget proposal." Here we have an actor ("VR") who performs an action ("deliver") that is intended for an object ("the government"), in a process that is deployed at a specific temporal point ("in June"). This implies a narrative structure with agents, processes, times, places and causality. But this is a narrative about administration and not about actual research.

As regards how the brand values become infused into the activities and the identities of the organization, it merits noticing that the claim to technical expertise and the symbolisation of measuring become the main organisational features. All processes become fragmented and co-ordinated with others through the use of language and design that allow them to appear as a systematic and simple process.

9.4.5 Activity tables for staff
After the new performance monitoring system was introduced in 2012, the notion of activity became important. Each member of staff across the university was instructed to specify activities in

provided tables and to show how they were working to meet each identified target (Table 9.2). At that time, this was a wholly new way of handling professional practices at the university. Let us take a closer look at the activity plan designed to measure two research targets (Table 9.2), as filled in by one subject leader.

Table 9.2: Activity table for research (English translation by Author 1)

Research	Institutionaltargets	Activity	Responsible	Completion date
Field normalized publications	All of the institution's researchers' publications must be registered in DiVA	To review and if necessary update all the publications in DiVA To provide administrative support system	EM, Pf, EC, AA	140331
	Knowledge and reasonable expectations around the field normalized citation must be obtained	Seminar on bibliometrics	Pf, AA	140615
Level of publications Norwegi	The good quality of the research must	Seminar to discuss and improve texts within and	AA, Pf, supervisor	

an model	be maintained	between subject areas • Encourage participation and presentations at international conferences		
	The number of all international publications will increase	• Seminar and discussion on publication strategy.	AA, EM, Pf	141231
	The number of total publications in the Norwegian model will increase	• Encourage article writing in English for PhD students and researchers by facilitating translations and proofreading • Guide classification of journals and publishers		

On the left-hand column we find two research targets, viz. the Web of Science which relates to Table 9.1 and the Norwegian model of research evaluation. In the next column the research targets are translated into concrete activities, where the subject leader must fill in what activities will be undertaken to meet the target, by whom, and by when. In fact, as may be gauged from Table 9.2, what is written in the activities boxes is usually that there will be seminars and discussions about the nature of measuring or about the nature of publications. For subject leaders it is hard to know what else to write. It is difficult to simply increase publication output if the majority of staff are on part-time teaching contracts, for example. Furthermore, some subjects, such as in the Humanities, tend to produce work that is not well suited to the Web of Science measuring system. Yet, the form must be filled in and can lead to economic rewards or penalties.

The language here combines features which lead to abstraction, fragmentation and co-ordination, as in the strategy statements analysed above. For example, in the second target column we find nominalizations such as "knowledge", "expectations", "research" and "publications". As was the case with the research strategies, this normalization suppresses the details, agents and competing voices in the processes. So, in instances like "knowledge........around the field normalized citation must be obtained", it is pretty vague what is expected of researchers in terms of knowledge, courses of action and benefits. The staff not publishing internationally, and not as frequently, tend to be those teaching full-time. It is hard to see what they might learn that could change practice. Using the nominalisation 'research' also helps to gloss over what is researched. Academics working across diverse subjects must all respond in the same way.

Looking at the activities, we find nominalizations such as "discussion" and "article writing", and infinitive verbs such as

"review", "guide" and "encourage". This suggests that the actual agents are present as abstractions. As such, formulations do not render clear which research or which researchers are of concern. We also encounter a persistent use of co-ordinations, such as "within and between subject areas". But how and why working between subject areas, which areas are involved and which staff remain unspecified. Throughout the university it is possible to find researchers working across subjects, as in medicine, psychology and communication. But such inter-disciplinary orientation is the outcome of specific professional interests, rather than strategic management guidelines.

Most important, though, are considerations pertaining to how this language deploys through the chosen design rationale. Presenting these activities as a table fulfils an important task, as it helps to bring the different components into an unspecified causal relationship. At their most basic, tables present information as conceptual processes that are spatially structured (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). This means that elements become inter-related not through a narrative causality, but by the use of graphical and spatial features. The items that populate the same columns are represented as being of the same order, or of the same paradigm. The term paradigm here refers to elements in language which relate to a particular area, or work at the same level. This can create co-ordinations at a macro level. So, in the first column of Table 9.2 we obtain a sense that these items are of the same order as they are target areas. In the fourth column we find those who are responsible. The collection of seminars, discussions, encouragements and guidance, listed in the activities column, are co-ordinated as being of the same order. Placing these collections of abstractions without the table would reduce their partaking of a uniform plan of action. So tables can be used to give the impression that the items found in the columns are of the same order.

In tables, items found in the same row are represented as if they are in syntagmatic relation with each other. The spatial

structure in this case suggests a kind of logical and finite sequence. There are 'targets' in the left hand column, and then the 'solution' in the form of activities. Next, we are given information about the agents, and then about the time for completion and closure. Whereas the activities are presented in the absence of their agents in an abstracted process, the table gives out a sense of a concrete and finite process with clearly identified agents.

The mis-use of the table format also occurs in the case of the bullet points that list activities. In this case, not only different items are included in each column, but each box contains items of a very different order, each written in an abstracted way using nominalizations, without agents, while dealing with issues in a fragmented manner. The bullets, as in the strategy list analysed earlier, give out a sense of including essential details. They connote a process of dividing items into components against a particular rationale. But these are rather highly different issues, arbitrarily shaped. What we find in this activity table is that staff become aware not only of their role and of the definition of work activities, but that they must show that they are acting in accordance with these activities and that they are aware that they will be evaluated based on the Table's terms. The binding nature of the Table is evinced as such due to forming part of a system of inter-related documents that are cross-referential. We see the staff engaging enthusiastically in relevant research in the magazine; the Vision brochure presents some success-stories, although never referred to explicitly in terms of how the university strategy enabled them. The strategies lay claim to being presented as logical and technical expertise. Yet, this presentation is highly abstract and removed from the wider context of inter-locking processes in the university. Nevertheless, this appears to make sense when presented as a logical administrative process in boxed form. Staff may be sceptical to some extent about what is taking place, but given the way this

process is rolled out throughout the university and realised multi-modally, it gradually becomes internalised as operating practice.

9.5 Conclusion

What we have shown in this Chapter is that MCDA is a fruitful way of analysing how brand ideas and values inform the basis of design, not only in out-bound communications, but also in-bound, in different levels of documentation. The Orebro university brand that is presented as being modern and energetic, efficient, focused, market-relevant and customer-oriented, is realised in different ways across different documents. We have shown the importance of drawing out the communicative potential of different semiotic resources, or different communicative resources. Verbal descriptors and photographs can be transformed as regards their meaning making potential when placed in lists, design compositions, and tables. MCDA offers highly nuanced descriptions of these transformations.

Finally, we have shown how the concept of re-contextualization of social practices can be highly productive for brand analysis, since it draws our attention to the way that the components of a discourse, or brand, such as ideas, values, identities, sequences of activities, can be deleted, modified, etc, for the purposes of changing meaning in an organization. In the case of the university, we see the actual practices of research and teaching becoming reformulated into maximum output and customer relations which impact on staff identities.

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CHAPTER 10

Building the IKEA brand in Germany: A cultural semiotic approach

Jennie Mazur

10.1 IKEA and the construction of a "Swedish" culture

The Swedish company IKEA, which has become famous worldwide, managed to carve a unique niche positioning with its IKEA "Swedishness" construction. In Germany, which is the company's top-selling market, the company attained a prominent status with its construction of "Sweden" and "the Swedish way of life." Due to well-planned and executed communication strategies as part of a consistent marketing mix over the years, IKEA reached a top position in home furnishing among German consumers. Today IKEA stands for Swedish innovation and a modern life-style concept in Germany and, for German consumers, it is almost a "must" to choose IKEA. Indeed, for the younger generation in Germany, IKEA is a symbol of Sweden – or, at least, the German perception of Sweden. Over the past years, some of the communicated commercials have even given rise to spontaneous "new traditions" within the German culture. How did it become feasible for a German target-culture to adopt habits, norms, communication skills and traditions from another, more or less familiar, Swedish culture and make it, in the terminology used by IKEA, a "Swedish Solution" ("Schwedische Lösung")? Furthermore, how "Swedish" is this IKEA construction?

In order to shed light to the above questions, I examined the process of establishing IKEA as a "Swedish" brand in Germany through its audio-visual advertising in the mass media of television and the Internet, including YouTube (Mazur 2013). The analysis of 48 audio-visual commercials, published by IKEA during the period 1997–2007, shows that the company

intentionally draws on various positive German notions of "Swedishness" and Nordic stereotypes.

A striking example of this "Swedishness" is the campaign launched by IKEA on St. Knut´s day, the date that traditionally ends the Christmas holidays in Sweden. In its German advertising, IKEA reinvented an old Swedish tradition of throwing the Christmas tree out of the window in order – as IKEA explicitly puts it – to create more space for IKEA furniture at home.[1] In the following pages, I discuss some of the most important aspects of this "Swedish" construct from IKEA and how it impacted on the German market. In the above mentioned humorous commercial from IKEA, one can see a man in boots and a fur-coat walking down a block of houses at wintertime, somewhere in Stockholm as explicitly stated. The man just walks there alone, failing to notice the numerous Christmas trees that fall from the sky. At the same time, a friendly male off-speaker with a slightly Swedish accent tells the viewer "his" story (actually the IKEA-story) about how "we Swedes" celebrate "Knut" and more indirectly that IKEA now offers extra low prices in Germany (sales). At the same time, as the trees are falling from the sky, the off-speaker happily says: "Kein Wunder" ("No miracle") and explains that it is just "St. Knut" that cuts, not Christmas trees, but the prices in Germany. Then a Swedish traffic warning sign, very well known to and beloved by the German audience, appears, but instead of the expected black elk, it features a black icon of a falling Christmas tree. In the end, as soon as the man reaches the porch of his house, he stumbles on a Christmas tree that is lying on the ground. Ironically, the nice off-speaker adds: "Also schau auf IKEA.de" ("Look out/up for IKEA.de").

This invented tradition has little real-life basis. Up until some decades ago, it was certainly common in Sweden to throw the Christmas tree out of the balcony, to avoid the tree shedding its

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[1] "Knut, IKEA, Werbung" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge9HiWdGBOo, accessed 10 June 2013).

needles on the staircase. However, this custom has been completely forbidden for security reasons, and hence the scenes shown in the TV commercial with numerous trees dropping down on the passer-by in the narrow street could not have taken place. In any case, the objective was certainly not to make place for new IKEA furniture, but simply to mark the end of the Christmas season.

Figure 10.1: IKEA "Knut" commercial screenshots

More significant, however, is the fact that the German target audience appreciated the commercial to the point of starting their own local "Knut-traditions" by actually throwing out Christmas trees from their own balconies and windows. Different media like radio, television and other companies also started to use the "Knut" theme in their own shows and commercials.[2] Even IKEA used this for its new commercials. This is a good example of how IKEA constructed a model of itself as a "Swedish" brand and, while reaching its target audience, how it entered into a dialogue, not only with the German furnishing market, but also with several discourses within the German society.

In order to identify how IKEA created a model of itself (an "ego culture" as Sonesson [2000] calls it), how the company projected its "Swedish" self-image in Germany and how it instigated a dialogue with the German market/culture ("alter

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[2] See, for example, Bäumschen raus, Schnäpschen rein!!! (http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=koj-Svx71rM, accessed 10 June 2013); Werbespot IKEA Knut mal anders! (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUgBEXUwTVw, accessed June 2013) and Mömax - Unsere Tannen leben noch, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDYGPXtRBBY, accessed 10 June 2013).

culture", according to Sonesson [1992, 1995, 2000]), I conducted research within an inter-disciplinary framework that consisted primarily of cultural semiotics,[3] inter-cultural communication studies with a focus on Sweden and Germany,[4] and advertising research.[5] Especially the concepts of "ego culture" and "alter culture" in a dialogue, as theorized by Sonesson (1992, 1995, 2000) and Cabak Rédei (2007), were employed in order to encapsulate the interaction and communication between the Swedish company and the German consumer culture. In order to effectively address TV commercials in their full semiotic complexity, I also developed an analytical model, primarily based on key insights from Müller-Doohm (1993), Kanzog (1997, 2007), Mikos (2008), Björkvall (2003) and Bergström (2004).

10.2 Germany and Sweden: Two cultures with a history of interactions

The positive stereotypical image of Sweden as a country with a robust welfare system, a solid democracy that is characterized by modernity and innovation, beautiful nature, quality of life, tradition, openness, and of Swedes as light, tall and kind, blond people with cool attitude and naturalness, equality between the genders, and respect for individual liberties, still resonates positively among Germans. The interactions between Sweden and Germany have a long history. Although it is primarily Sweden which has often been inspired by German institutions, values,

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[3]Sonesson (1992, 1995, 2000); Rédei (2007). Also see Posner (1991); Nöth (2000) and compare with Hansen (2003 [1995]).

[4]Important for the study were, for example, Breckle (2004); Henningsen et. al. (1997); Lüsebrink (2005); Schroll-Machl (2007[2002]); Müller and Gelbrich (2006); Gerhards (2006[2005]); Hofstede (2006); Winkelmann (2006).

[5]Especially important were Bechstein (1987); Björnberg (1990); Bjurström and Lilliestam (1993); Sottong and Müller (1998); Cook (2001); Goddard (2002); Felix (2003); Björkvall (2003); Bergström (2004).

habits, and traditions over the past centuries, especially during the period of national romanticism (at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century), the image of Sweden and the Scandinavian countries as a "pre-capitalist idyll" has been increasingly fortified. The red cottage in the countryside, cows living in nature, the stone church in the background of the nature are popular Swedish images that spread through new media like photography. Famous Swedish authors and painters like Selma Lagerlöf, Carl Larsson and Anders Zorn became extremely popular in Germany. The works of Ellen Key are also internationally acclaimed. Key inaugurated a new type of home styling, associated with simplicity, functionality, naturalness, space and luminosity. Later, with the advent of the social democrats, changes in social policy became popular, such as social pensions, unemployment insurance, health insurance, parental leave, childcare, rent control, longer holidays. The German political scientist Henningsen (1997:15) speaks of "Wahlverwandtschaften"[6] or elective affinities between the two countries. According to the ethnologist Winkelmann (2006: 241), "the golden age" of the social model of Sweden in BRD was during the time when the Swedish welfare state expanded and developed under the social democratic government. Today, especially ideas about a beautiful childhood, coming from authors like Astrid Lindgren, equality, education, and family policy are often discussed in Germany, with Sweden as a role model.[7]

Despite the affinities between Sweden and Germany, in terms of language, customs and traditions, still there are many cultural differences. Various studies show that Germany, when compared to Sweden, has a vertical societal structure.[8] Values such as challenge, income, prestige, knowledge, progress, performance, assertiveness and ambition are important in the

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[6] Henningsen (1997:15).
[7] See Frisch (2003), and Mazur (2013: 127-130).
[8] See Breckle (2004); Schroll-Machl (2007[2002]); Gerhards (2006[2005]); Winkelmann (2006).

German society. The German values also include structure, security and predictability. In Sweden, values like sensitivity, interpersonal relationships, and quality of life are important. Major trends in communication strategies in Germany are seriousness, directness, distance, and objectivity, whereas in Sweden indirectness, informality, subjectivity and self-irony are valued.[9] After this short excursus into some common aspects between Swedish and German cultures, I proceed with an exposition of the methodological framework that was used in this study for analyzing advertisements, and then with a more detailed analysis of how IKEA built its "Swedishness" construction.

10.3 Methodological framework for analyzing advertisements

Kanzog (1997, 2007) describes films as temporally organized combinations of visual and aural signs that form specific meanings through pictures, written and spoken texts, as well as sounds and music. From a semiotic angle, a film may be viewed as a secondary semiotic system, which uses signs from "reality" in order to create a fictional world. Although it is fictional, it is closely linked to the historical, cultural, and social reality where it was produced, and may, therefore, also influence people in the "real world".[10] Additionally, ad films or TV commercials contain a number of different signs which provide information about both the sender (the company) and the intended recipient, but also give information about the current socio-cultural context.

The generation of meaningful and interesting semiotic analyses of commercials features information about the intended recipient, the messages and the constructed Ego culture of a company. This procedure mandates bespoke conceptual models and methodological frameworks which should be adjusted to the

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[9] Breckle (2004:116, 148); Mazur (2013: 123-127).
[10] Kanzog (2007: 49).

research questions.[11] Since the available research on audiovisual advertising in traditional linguistics is still limited, a variety of models from various disciplines were combined with view to furnishing the model that was used in this research.

Kanzog (1997: 137-138) suggests that specific protocols should be determined prior to analyzing audiovisual texts, as it is easier to describe different components, such as dramaturgy, narratives, characters, aesthetics, perspectives, order of sequences, sounds. Based on Müller-Doohm (1997: 103), my framework comprised three main steps:

1. Description
2. Reconstruction
3. Interpretation

Step 1 (Description) concerns obtaining an initial 'feel' for the commercial in terms of describing background information and giving a brief summary of its content. Step 2 (Reconstruction) is about identifying and evaluating explicit and implicit aspects and messages in the commercial. During reconstruction, the filmic components are separated from each other and described: first in a storyboard, and then separately. Thus, it is possible to determine which components occur when, where and for how long. This step is a pre-requisite for further in-depth analysis. In this way, the analytical reconstruction gradually and systematically reaches the very core of the commercial. In Step 3 (Interpretation), results and issues are addressed and discussed (especially those that emerged in the reconstruction phase), which culminate in the constructed ego-culture. Tables 10.1-10.3 summarize the components that are involved in each step of the methodological framework:

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[11] Also see Rossolatos (2013).

Table 10.1: Description (Mazur 2013: 144-148)

Background information	
Product type	
Product	
Name of campaign	
Name of commercial	
Slogan	
Year	
Minutes	
Number of image sequences	
Other	
The dramaturgical structure	
Story	
Plot structure	
Narrative techniques	
Other details	

Table 10.2: Reconstruction

Storyboard[12]			
Sequence Time Setting (place/scenery) Camera perspective Shot type: Full-Shot, panorama, close-up, low-angle-shot, high-angle-shot, medium-close-up, extreme-close-up, etc. Coloration	Visual text	Sound (music, noise and sound effects)	Linguistic text M = monological (verbal) D = dialogical (verbal) W =

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[12] Also see Mazur (2013: 170-172, 194-198, 210-213, 238-240, 245-250).

			written

Visual text - What you see	
Spatial image elements	
Size	
Perspective	
Redaction	
Camera settings	
Visual aesthetics	
Color setting	
Objects	
Characters	
Other details	
Auditory text – Music, sound, noise	
Music	
Noise	
Background talks	
Background/Foreground	
Other details	
Linguistic text	
Spoken (auditory text)	
Number of spoken phrases and sentences	

Narrative components of the spoken phrases and sentences	1. Interactive in the story 2. Addressed to recipient
Monologue	
Dialogue	
Off-Speeker	
Interaction	
Product information	
Logo	
Slogan	
Other details	
Written text	
Number of written phrases and sentences	
Narrative components in the written text	1. Interactive in the story 2. Addressed to the recipient
Monologue	
Interaction	
Product information	
Logo	
Slogan	
Other details	
Significant rhetorical and grammatical aspects	
Vocabulary	
Choice of words	
Dialect	
Morphological characteristics	
Figures/Allusions/ Slogan/ Self-Irony	
Syntax (Type of sentence, Sentence structure, Mode, Tense, Punctuation)	

Text style (narrative/informative/prompting / inviting/ evidence-based)	
Fonts	
Secondary information	
Argumentation	
Recontextualization	
Characters	
Sex	
Age	
Clothing	
Attributes	
Occupation	
Hair	
Presence of main characters /other characters	
Body language	
Kinesics	
Relations between the characters	
Image of the characters Protagonist/Antagonist	
Others	
Context	
Situation	
Themes	
Social environment (traditional/modern/young)	
Home style	
Relationship to the objects in the room	

Other details	
Humor/Over-statement/Under-statement/Irony	
Other	

Table 10.3: Interpretation

Intended receiver	
Intended receiver (Model reader)	
Attitude toward the Model reader	
Other	
Symbolism	
Society	
Sweden	
Germany	
Other	
Messages	
Explicit Implicit	
Special advertising stimuli in Argumentation	
Background	
Cultural (national)	
Social	
Historic	
Portrayed Ego-culture of the company	

10.4 The Swedish Solution from IKEA

In the 48 analyzed commercials from IKEA in Germany during the period 1997-2007, I distinguished three overarching categories, which were labeled "The beginning and the ´Swedish´ solution",

"Swedish traditions", and "German daily life".[13] Of course there are all kinds of stereotypes, such as 'perfect life', 'love stories' and various plots being communicated. However, these belong to a more generic repertoire of commercials, rather than reflecting the specific themes of concern in this study. Even more interestingly, it was found that the old, already well known "typical Swedish" tendencies (including prejudices) in and about Swedish culture, such as way of thinking, democracy and gender issues, communication skills and so on, are also implicitly embedded or hidden in the commercials. The three categories have many things in common. For example, they mostly show blond and "normal"-looking women and men, people in their everyday life, always blond children, irony, the off-speaker with the Swedish accent who is very informal ("buddy") with the viewer, the blue-yellow logo IKEA always in the end of a spot. Many messages are also indirect and humorous. Women – both Swedish and German – are always portrayed as being stronger than men and emancipated, usually in leading positions. IKEA often jokes about the "soft" men in the commercials – without being too rude.[14]

The beginning and the "Swedish" solution

In this category of commercials, IKEA indicates a Swedish, i.e., a better solution, by merely writing the text "Schwedische Lösung" ("Swedish Solution") in blue and yellow fonts, while ending with the logo IKEA in exactly the same colors as the slogan "Entdecke die Möglichkeiten" ("Discover the possibilities"). The commercials in this category are very short (about 12 seconds) and humorous, but interestingly the dramatic themes are not "typical Swedish". An example of this category is the light room featuring a little laughing girl with blond hair in white dress, holding a saw and

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[13] Mazur 2013 (135-254).
[14]   See,   for   example,   Oh   Klaus (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lUIamznlxw, accessed 10 June 2013).

pointing at the black and white carpet (a product from IKEA) on the ground. A filthy old monster on the right side of the carpet, resembling the monster in Mary Shelley´s *Frankenstein*, approaches the girl (on the left side) in order to eat her, but quickly falls into the black hole along with the black carpet from IKEA. Even though the little girl could be associated with (the slightly stubborn but clever and independent) *Pippi Longstocking* because of her acts (she has already solved the problem with the monster by cutting a hole under the IKEA-carpet), in this category of commercials IKEA plays with well known "universal" themes and contrasts: good and bad, heaven and hell, little and big, new and old, innovative and old fashioned, female and male etc., where IKEA, in the end, always assumes the "positive" "nicer", "winner", "innovative", "white and clean/natural" part.[15]

Swedish traditions

In this category of commercials, IKEA expands its messages about "Swedishness". From now on the written text about a "Swedish Solution" is put aside. Instead, both visual and audio texts are distinguished. These so called "obvious Swedishness" commercials – like the Knut and Midsummer spots – all take place in Sweden, but are not conceptualized and presented without knowing the German notion *of* Sweden and the Swedish traditions. From now on the most popular and quoted slogan in Germany "Wohnst du noch oder lebst du schon?" ("Are you still just living or do you live life already?") is used. Interestingly, there are only two "Swedish traditions" which IKEA employs in

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[15] Mazur (2013:164-189).

Germany: Midsummer and Christmas[16] (theme: Knut´s day) – traditions, which, upon closer scrutiny, also exist in Germany, albeit practiced in a different way. In fact, the Maypole once came to Sweden from Germany, like the Christmas tree. In the commercials featuring "Midsommar" as a theme, there are always stereotypical happy blond Swedes – men, women and children – mostly in folk garments or dressed up celebrating this (according to IKEA) "typical Swedish" tradition outdoors in the lovely Swedish countryside. The visual narrative always involves nature, the green landscape, blue sky and sunshine, cows, the little red cottage itself, the Swedish blue-yellow flag (like the IKEA-logo). On special occasions like "lunch in nature", "midsummer dance around the maypole", "cow bingo" or "moped race" something bad or strange always happens, which has a concrete effect on the old wooden furniture (it all breaks) used for celebration. This threatens to destroy the entire festivities, but thanks to IKEA with its "Midsommar Wahnsinnspreise" ("midsummer insanity prices", i.e., sales) everything is solved and the celebration may continue as if nothing ever happened. In these commercials, IKEA really jokes about the Swedes, the Swedish culture and about themselves, while at the same time proudly presenting their innovative furniture and special prices.

German daily life

In this category, IKEA has already "moved in" to the German

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[16]See, for example, Knut (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge9HiWdGBOo, accessed 10 June 2013); IKEA Midsommar http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stL0rLBC3S4, accessed 10 June 2013), IKEA Werbung: TV Spot 2007, Kuh-Bingo an MIDSOMMAR (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48518pEUO24, accessed 10 June 2013), and IKEA MIDSOMMAR TV-SPOT MOPED RACE (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxaDsbN4c2o, accessed 10 June 2013); also see Mazur (2013: 190-224).

home.[17] From now on IKEA communicates that it is an integral part of the German culture. It presents itself as nice and friendly, but at the same time as a traditional and innovative company with its roots in Sweden. In this case, many associations with the paintings of Carl Larsson and the works of Ellen Key are presented, often in a modern way; light, functionality, innovation, modernity – cottage style together with ultra modern living.[18] However, the mostly blond people, the places and events at home that are presented in these spots are all German. Interestingly, the characters do not look like or represent the "average" German – even though IKEA at least claims that this is the aim. Instead, it appears that IKEA wants to be associated with Nordic stereotypes, but also with "wealth" and "innovative design," and therefore to reach out to another group of people with high income.[19] Children are featured less frequently in this category of commercials, which are also more direct and extend over a larger number of products. Whenever children are portrayed, they are always the honest and wiser ones but they do not play the main role as in the first category or in comparison to IKEA´s commercials in Sweden, for example. This also indicates a new communication route, which lies closer to a more German way. Yet, the Swedish off-speaker and the IKEA-logotype are still present. In summary, the IKEA commercials in Germany manifest the following traits:

• they describe everyday situations in Germany.
• they portray everyday, mostly blond people.

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[17] Mazur (2013: 223-254).
[18] See, for example, "Ikea Landhaustraum" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnr7BMykYcg&NR=1&feature=end screen, accessed 10 June 2013).
[19] This is different from IKEA in Sweden and also from the image IKEA has in Sweden. See, for example, "Ikea Mücke" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glYlltNpgvY, accessed 10 June 2013)

- they describe Swedish festive traditions.
- they always have a nice, respectful, but humorous approach.
- they give an idea of authenticity.
- they contain self-irony.
- an indirect communication style is used.
- they often consist of a dramatic plot where an issue and a certain problem are always solved by IKEA.
- they often contain pairs of opposites, a before-after principle and surprises.
- the locations for portraying "Swedish" traditions are always outdoor, preferably in the idyllic

  nature of the Swedish countryside.
- the locations for "daily life in Germany" are in the (fictional) homes of various German-speaking people, who mostly look well-off financially.
- a male off-speaker with a slight Swedish accent is IKEA's official voice. He comments on

  the events, speaks directly to the recipient and sets the subjective point-of-view of the commercial.
- many products are shown in the background, in their "normal" environment at home.
- one product or two products are highlighted and shown explicitly, together with the product name and price in written, bold and capital fonts.
- the highlighted products are always part of the narratives.
- a blue-yellow IKEA-logo is always shown at the end. The logo is a direct reference to Sweden, but also to IKEA's very origin, the well-known founder *Ingvar Kamprad*. The acronym IKEA stands for Ingvar Kamprad and his place of birth *Elmtaryd* in the community *Agunnaryd*, a small area in the countryside, in the South of Sweden where Ingvar Kamprad grew up.

10.5 Concluding remarks

In this Chapter it was shown that IKEA made use of existing representations from both cultures (Sweden and Germany),

which contributed to the company's success. The company constructed a model of Sweden ("Ego Culture"), which consists of well-known collective representations and popular myths in German culture about the North and the Nordic region. The employment of outstanding humor, self-irony and self-distance, coupled with an informal approach, were major determinants in nurturing likeability of IKEA among German consumers. Subsequently, IKEA, at least between 1997–2007, became synonymous with youth, origin, innovation, amusement, harmony, tradition, nature, Scandinavian design, fellowship, democracy, humor, "down to earth", equality, autonomy, lightness, goodness for German consumers.

However, even though it looks as if IKEA presents a "whole Swedish model or solution" (because they communicate this), what it really affords is to pick up salient cultural representations from *both* cultures, mix and transform them into an IKEA construct and then present them as a "Swedish solution". The term "IKEA-solution" would have been just as fitting. When IKEA noticed that Germans started their own "traditions", for example by filming their own "Knut-day", and uploading it on YouTube, it sensed the opportunity and started developing new commercials around this theme.[20] Many authors used parts of the famous IKEA-slogan in their own book-titles,[21] while, as above-mentioned, even other companies started their own campaigns by using IKEA's commercials as templates. The "IKEA effect" resonated so vastly in the German market, as to experience the phenomenon, during the 2006 World Football Cup

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[20] See, for example, "Bäumschen raus, Schnäpschen rein!!!" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=koj-Svx71rM, accessed 10 June 2013) and "Bäumchen rein Schnäppchen rein" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIcDpq6yyAA, accessed 10 June 2013).

[21] For example: *Wohnst du schon oder lachst du noch?, Stillst du noch oder lebst du schon?, Leidest du noch oder lebst du schon? Übersetzt du noch oder lebst du schon? etc.*

when Sweden played and lost against Germany in Munich, of German football fans shouting slogans like "Ihr seid nur ein Möbellieferant, Möbellieferant, Möbellieferant" ("You are only a furniture supplier, furniture supplier, furniture supplier"). Over time, IKEA became increasingly "German". For example, the typical self-irony is not as prominent, although still constituting an important style in Swedish advertising. The company also seems to be more direct in its messages, while focusing more on the products themselves. However, the constructed notion of "Swedish culture" in the German market still constitutes its strongest connotator.[22]

Appendix 10.1 IKEA facts and figures 2012[23]

Category	The IKEA Group 2012	IKEA Germany 2012
Revenue 2012	27 billion €	3.88 billion €
Growth	9.5 %	6.3 %
IKEA workforce	154.000	15.294
IKEA stores	298 stores in 29 countries	46 stores
Catalogue 2013	211 million copies in 62 editions and 29 languages	
Products	Approximately 9.500 products	
Top selling countries	1. Germany 14% 2. USA 12% 3. France 9% 4. Italy 6% 5. Russia 6%	

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[22] IKEA Werbung: TV Spot MIDSOMMAR Schlussverkauf 2013 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w57_3hqzn3E, accessed 10 June 2013).
[23] IKEA Homepage (Deutschland), "Daten und Fakten" (http://www.ikea.com/ms/de_DE/about_ikea/facts_and_figures/, accessed 10 July 2013).

Appendix 10.2 IKEA advertisements on YouTube

IKEA - Zuhause arbeiten

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZyzSatKhtM, accessed 10 June 2013.

Knut

Knut

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge9HiWdGBOo, accessed June 2013.

Bäumchen raus – Schnäppchen rein

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIcDpq6yyAA, accessed June 2013.

IKEA - Bäumchen raus, Schnäppchen rein - Knut Schlussverkauf 2012 Dezember, 2012
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yOlZ-vrr1g, accessed June 2013.

Midsommar

IKEA Midsommar
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stL0rLBC3S4, accessed June 2013.

Kuh-Bingo an MIDSOMMAR
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48518pEUO24, accessed June 2013.

MOPED RACE
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxaDsbN4c2o, accessed June 2013.

MIDSOMMAR Schlussverkauf

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w57_3hqzn3E, accessed June 2013.

German daily life

IKEA - Müll raus bringen
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyurG20B-Zk, accessed June 2013.

Oh Klaus
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lUIamznlxw, accessed June 2013.

Ikea Mücke
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glYlltNpgvY, accessed June 2013.

Ikea Werbung Baby (Germany)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idMybk4w-rk, accessed June 2013.

Sohn
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-pml5tbfko, accessed June 2013.

Private films and Knut commercials on YouTube

Bäumschen raus, Schnäpschen rein!!!
http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=koj-Svx71rM, accessed June 2013.

Ulk Werbung Ikea aus Privatfernsehen
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oir388d-gI, accessed June 2013.

Werbespot IKEA Knut mal anders!
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUgBEXUwTVw, accessed June 2013.

Mömax - Unsere Tannen leben noch
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDYGPXtRBBY, accessed June 2013.

Knuten Flug!
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4mCIHrjc5U, accessed June 2013.

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CHAPTER 11

The brand imaginarium, or on the iconic constitution of brand image

George Rossolatos

11.1 Introduction

Brand image constitutes one of the most salient, over-defined, heavily explored and multifariously operationalized constructs in marketing theory and practice. In this Chapter, definitions of brand image that have been offered by marketing scholars will be critically addressed in the context of a culturally oriented discussion, informed by the semiotic notion of iconicity. This cultural bend, in conjunction with the concept's semiotic contextualization, are expected to dispel terminological confusions in the either inter-changeable or nebulously differentiated employment of such terms as brand image, symbol, icon, as well as to address the function of brand image at a deeper level than a mere construct that is operationalized in quantitative studies of purchase drivers. This shift in focus is dovetailed with a critical turn from the cogito-centric view of the consuming subject through the cognitivist lens of the AI metaphor as decision-making centre at the origin of largely conscious meaning-making, in favor of a psychoanalytically informed approach that considers figurativity as an essential process whereby brand image is formed. In these terms, brand image will be intimately linked to brand images as figurative multimodal expressive units and rhetorical tropes, as figurative syntax, that are responsible for shaping an idiolectal brand language, as well as to distinctive levels of iconicity as textual condition of possibility of a brand language. In order to understand the role of iconicity as fundamental condition of brand textuality, rather than just a procedure for spawning brand

images, the discussion is contextualized in a wider framework involving the culturally situated source of brand images, how they become correlated with brand image concepts and how correlations between brand images and brand image result in brand knowledge structures (Keller 1998). This opening up of the discussion on iconicity is enacted against the background of what I call the Brand Imaginarium which involves: (i) a critical engagement with the dominant cognitivist perspective in branding research that prioritizes individual memory in brand knowledge formation, through a cultural branding lens that involves two additional types of memory, viz. communicative and cultural (ii) a critical engagement with the cognitivist perspective on brand knowledge formation that prioritizes conscious processing of stimuli (as 'brute facts', rather than as already semiotized expressive units) in a cognitive mechanism from which the faculty of imagination has been expelled, by restoring the importance of imagination in brand knowledge formation, and, concomitantly, by showing that the highly figurative language of brands may not be researched thoroughly unless imagination is posited anew as processing correlate (iii) the adoption of an expansionist approach to the role of the imaginary in brand knowledge formation, from cognitive (or psychic) faculty, to a more sociologically inclined process of inter-subjective mirroring, and concomitantly as imaginary social significations (Castoriades 1985) that are shared by culturally conditioned and habituated subjects that engage in meaningful cultural practices, rather than individual processing monads.

In greater detail, the following outlines the argumentative steps that are followed in this Chapter: Section 11.2 criticizes the employment of the terms 'symbolic' and 'iconic' in the relevant branding literature from a semiotic point of view, while proceeding with a nuanced tripartite distinction between brand images (or multimodal expressive units), brand image and iconicity. Section 11.3 focuses on iconicity and how it has been theorized mainly in the Peircean semiotic literature, while

proposing the tripartite distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary brand iconicity. Section 11.4 engages critically with fundamental cognitive psychological concepts from a textual branding point of view, in order to recontextualize and link the preceding discussion in a wider framework that concerns how brand related memory is formed. The adoption of an expansionist outlook to memory formation that is more relevant for a cultural branding perspective results in the tripartite distinction between individual, communicative and cultural memory. Finally, Section 11.5 presents the conceptual model of the Brand Imaginarium in a comprehensive manner that puts in perspective how the preceding 'triads' of (i) brand image/brand images/iconicity (ii) primary/secondary/tertiary iconicity (iii) individual/communicative/cultural memory interact in the development, dissemination and establishment of a brand language.

Brakus (2008) contends that despite interpretivist consumer researchers' recognition of cognitivism's limitations in the application of a mechanistic step-by-step view of the information-processing paradigm, they have not provided viable alternatives that might explain marketing phenomena. The generalist orientation of this counter-critique notwithstanding, the Brand Imaginarium is intended as an outline in lieu of a more comprehensively formulated 'viable alternative', while taking on board Levitt's dictum that imagination is the starting point of success in marketing (cf. Brown and Patterson 2000: 7).

11.2 Brand image re-revisited

Stern et al. (2001) furnished an overview of definitions of brand image that have surfaced in the marketing literature over the past 50 years, as a follow-up to a similar and more extensive study undertaken by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990). In that study, Stern et al. (2001) endeavored a reclassification of brand, corporate and store image definitions alongside salient dimensions, such as whether the examined definitions are

generic, symbol-oriented. message/meaning oriented, based on personification or psychological processes. Our aim in this Section is to expose critical gaps in Stern et al.'s analysis through a semiotic lens, with view to demonstrating that semiotic perspectives constitute (perhaps the) most potent frameworks for addressing such gaps.

Before proceeding with the critical outlook toward some of the offered definitions, the following points are suggested as critical remarks on the classification process *per se* and the discussion that deployed on the grounds of the emergent typology. First and foremost, Stern et al. do not consider a fundamental issue with the offered definitions of brand image, viz. based on which theories from the humanities and the social sciences they have been formulated, and whether there are significant gaps either in the original theories whence stem the definitions, or in the adaptation of terms in marketing research. Second, many of the classified concepts might as well have been classified otherwise, which is attributable to a lack of clear classification criteria (in other words, the classification criteria are not mutually exclusive). Third, the role of semiotic definitions in this barrage is at best elementary and not representative of the rich conceptual inventory of semiotic theories. Fourth, the examined definitions are by no means as exhaustive as the ones considered in the earlier study by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), while, partly attributed to the study's publication date (2001), brand definitions that have been offered within the contours of more contemporary perspectives (cf. Heding et al. 2009), such as community branding (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), experiential branding (e.g., Schmitt and Rogers 2008; Brakus et al. 2009) and iconic branding (i.e., Holt 2005) have not been considered. Nevertheless, dominant definitions that inform constructs and concomitantly scales in quantitative brand image studies (and, by extension, consumer-based brand equity), still fall by and large within the dimensions outlined by Stern et al., and particularly within the psychological dimension, with which we shall be

concerned in due course. Fifth, the criteria posited by Stern et al. for disentangling the 'definitional mess' of brand image definitions, viz. locus, nature, and number, include under the criterion of nature the notion of process, albeit as communicative transactions between sender and receiver, rather than as process of transformation of sensory stimuli (or signs) into brand image attributes (or semantic content or elements/concepts of a plane of content).

In this context, as will be shown, we are concerned with processes of configuration[1] and transfiguration, whereby multimodal expressive units[2] are, at the same time, configured in syntagms (or constellations of expressive units) and transfigured into intelligible aspects of a brand language (through multiple

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[1] I define a brand textual configuration as assemblage of multimodal units at the plane of expression, as opposed to (and inter-dependent with) transfiguration that designates the correlation of expressive units (regardless of level of articulation) with units at the plane of content or brand image concepts (traits) or intangible brand associations. I do not employ the Hjelmslevian term 'commutation' instead of transfiguration, as the latter, on the one hand, is more representative of the pan-rhetorical approach that is adopted in the *Brand Imaginarium*, while, on the other hand, it retains the transformative process whereby the sensible (expressive units) is transmogrified into the intelligible (intangible brand associations or brand image concepts). Moreover, by dint of upholding an inherent plasticity in modes of relatedness between the two planes, as against the Hjelmslevian term 'solidarity', transfiguration allows for brand textual cohesion even at the level of primary iconicity. Thus, a brand text at the level of primary iconicity may not be solidary, even through semi-symbolic relationships, yet it is transfigured, even at the level of a private language, *rhétorique folle* and singular assemblages.

[2] I employ multimodal expressive units as an extended umbrella term, instead of the visio-centric one of brand images (Schroeder 2008), as it is more indicative of the advanced stage of the multimodal turn, pursuant to the visual turn (cf. Section 12.3)

intra-textual and inter-textual rhetorical operations[3]) or brand image attributes. Sixth, Stern et al. (2001) seek to frame the multiple definitions as to whether they concern (ontologically) the 'outside' or the 'inside', i.e., an extra-subjective, objective world versus intra-subjective psychological states. In my view, this is an antiquated dialectic that has been superseded in philosophy ever since Husserlean phenomenology, in which context an object is always *for* a subject and vice versa. This basic premise was also prevalent in Kantian epistemology that sought to overcome the binarism between inside and outside and, hence, this dialectic has been addressed ever since Kant's 1st Critique. More recently (compared to Husserl) Bernstein (2003) in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* excited a flurry of critical activity against this binarism. Moreover, ever since the 60's, sweeping criticisms have re-surfaced against the 'inside'/'outside' dialectic with the upsurge of constructivism. The constructivist paradigm has informed structuralist and social semiotics, a whole host of marketing related phenomena (cf. O'Shaughnessy 2009; Hackley 1998, 2001), but also Eco's conventionalist theory of iconicity that recognizes constructivist conditions for possible objects (cf. Eco 1978: 162). In turn, structuralist semiotics and its actantial theoretic counterpart have informed Latour's ANT theory. In this context, communication theory has also moved away from inside/outside, encoding/decoding frameworks towards participatory forms of communication. The participatory facet of communication (enunciation) was formulated in a very astute

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[3] Rhetoric has mistakenly, in my view, been confined in marketing research in the field of advertising rhetoric, where it appears, at its most superficially manifest, to be impacting the mode of formation of brand texts. Rhetoric furnishes the figurative syntax that is responsible for configuring brand discourse across semiotic modes and, hence, its implications are more far-reaching and strategic than assumed in ad hoc studies (cf. Rossolatos 2013a,e,f; 2014a,c). Rhetoric constitutes the heart of brand discourse from a brand textuality point of view.

fashion by Greimas (1983; see Rossolatos 2014a: 138-142), who posited an addressee's (i.e., consumer's) strictly intra-textual existence by virtue of participating in a structure of enunciation that binds addresser and addressee, a most innovative (up until our days) conceptualization that, most likely, urged Bertrand (1988) to assert that consumers are 'complicit' with advertisers (also see Ruiz Collantes and Oliva, this Volume).

In general, two co-existing, but divergent trends in branding related research may be heeded, which largely reflect wider trends in the humanities and the social sciences. On the one hand, research based on offshoots of cognitivist 'science', such as cognitive psychology, has been intensifying. On the other hand, we have been experiencing a proliferation of post mind/body dualisms that do not share the cogito-centric premises of cognitivism, and the emergence of perspectives such as Latour's ANT that seeks to overcome the traditional micro/macro divide in sociological research (Alexander et al.1987); the rekindling of interest in mimetism in social theory (e.g., Sampson's virality perspective and contagion in the networking age; cf. Rossolatos 2015f); the rise of interest in post-subjectivist, post-psychoanalytical perspectives, such as Guattari's (1996) chaosmosis, Castoriades' (1985) magma, Bourdieu's (1993) habitus (cf. Rossolatos 2015a). To this list we should add post-Husserlean social phenomenological strands (e.g., Schutz, Luckmann, Gurwitsch, Garfinkel; cf. Vaitkus 1990) that have sought to bridge the abyssal gap that was left gaping in Husserl's transcendental psychologism (as a response to empirical psychologism), concerning how inter-subjectively common lifeworlds are possible. This question may not be answered by assuming as point of departure or as processing unit the individual consciousness (which is the province of cogito-centric cognitivist accounts), but mandate alternative modes of theorizing about the formation of culture and society. "With Husserl, the school of inwardness reaches its apex. At the same time, the entire tradition of inwardness is constructed as an

impasse in the direction of collective memory" (Ricoeur 2004: 97).

This effervescent theoretical landscape that has been largely concerned with carving conceptual frameworks for interpreting how the individual is formed pre-reflectively in its non-conscious interaction with its environment has been reflected in branding related research in the proliferation of perspectives that seek, likewise, to elucidate how individual memory depends on cultural memory and how the latter is dynamically fuelled by the former. In this context, emphasis has been laid on the role of brands in subjectivity formation in modes other than those suggested by the cogito-centric AI metaphor and its solipsistic ideotype of the individual as cause of cultural representations and processing unit: "while it is surely true that consumers have cognitive representations of brand symbolism, these representations are the outcome of their stature in public culture and social life" (Holt 2005: 277). This shift requires "moving from the essentialist, static, individual-level constructs of existing theories to social and cultural constructs that are grounded in historical contexts" (Holt 2005: 273). The Brand Imaginarium is situated in this wider stream.

Further to these preliminary remarks, and in order to demonstrate semiotically where and how brand image definitions have gone astray in the employment of terms such as 'symbol' and 'icon', I shall concentrate on symbol-related and cognitive/psychological definitions pertaining strictly to brand (and not to corporate or retail) image. In greater detail, the following definitions will be considered, primarily due to their impact on empirical studies, as well as representativeness in terms of the classification criteria that were posited by Stern et al. (2001) for each definitional dimension:

Symbol related definitions
(i) Levy (1958): 1.People buy things not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean. The things people buy are

seen to have personal and social meanings in addition to their functions. 2. To ignore or decry the symbolism of consumer goods does not affect the importance of the fact. It will suffice to say that in casual usage, symbol is a general term for all instances where experience is mediated rather than direct; where an object, action, word, picture or complex behavior is understood to mean not only itself but also some other ideas or feelings. 3. A symbol is appropriate (and the product will be used and enjoyed) when it joins with, meshes with, adds to or reinforces the way the consumer thinks about himself.

(ii) Frazer (1983): […] the advertiser formulates a claim of superiority or distinction based on factors extrinsic to the product. Often products are associated with symbols either socially extant or created by or for the advertiser … the effort to differentiate the product is psychologically rather than physically based.

Cognitive/psychology related definitions

(iii) Gardner and Levy (1955): 1. The set of ideas, feelings and attitudes that consumers have about brands. 2. The social and psychological nature of products. 3. … a character or personality that may be more important for the overall status (and sales) of the brand than many technical facts about the product.

(iv) Levy (1978): A brand image is a constellation of pictures and ideas in people's minds that sum up their knowledge of the brand and their main attitudes towards it.

Definition (iv) still resounds in Keller's (1998) brand knowledge structure, the definition of which, along with brand image, consumer associations and brand equity, constitutes one of the two most influential models in current brand image and equity research (the other being Aaker's Brand Equity Ten). Despite the fact that it was coined in 1998, and that it has been enriched throughout later revisions by Keller, in the light of advances in

experiential consumption and interactive advertising, but also partially challenged and revised in its application by consumer researchers in empirical studies, its cognitive psychological underpinnings have not been affected by time (or the criticisms formulated by Holt [2005] in the context of his cultural branding approach). Hence, although not mentioned by Stern et al. (2001), brand knowledge merits being cited as the fifth definition, also given that later on we shall be concerned with comparing and contrasting the connectionist cognitivist model with the brand textuality paradigm.

(v) Keller (1998, 2001, 2009): Knowledge of a brand refers to the establishment of a brand knowledge structure. The differential effect of a brand knowledge structure is reflected in the establishment of strong, favourable, unique brand associations. Consumer response is the outcome of a superior brand knowledge structure in terms of competitively superior associations.

Three sets of questions may be posed in the face of the above definitions, which will guide our analysis in the ensuing sections. First, as regards the symbol-related definitions, from a semiotic point of view, definition (i) wrongly asserts that a symbol is constituted simply because an object, action, word, picture or complex behavior is understood to mean not only itself but also some other ideas or feelings, as this is not the definition of symbol, but of sign in general. The qualifying difference between sign (in general) and symbol, according to Saussure (1959), concerns the motivated character of the latter, as against the arbitrary nature of the signs of a natural language (a division that has been severely contested, e.g. by Kress [2010], but which suffices for the argument at hand). Second, in the context of the same definition, it is suggested that objects, actions, words, pictures or complex behaviors, do not hold symbolic status because they are related "to themselves", but to other ideas or

feelings. This is a misnomer, as the former may be symbolic, insofar as they are signs, but with practical/functional signifieds, rather than "other" signifieds. For example, "the utilitarian commodity sign is associated with features related to its practical use-value" (Nöth 1988: 4). The same fallacy is replicated in definition (ii) where a symbol is related, in latent contradistinction to a 'simple' sign, to the correlation of a sign with 'superior' aspects that are extrinsic to the product (as sign). "Symbolic consumption focuses not so much on the good as sign per se, but rather on the meanings attached to the act of consuming the good" (Solomon et al. 2006: 53). Again, this definition is oblivious to the fact that that the distinction rests not with layers of abstraction and superiority of concepts (signifieds), but with levels of arbitrariness/motivation (according to Saussurean semiotics).

But what merits highlighting even more emphatically is that both definitions appear to be distinguishing between symbols and signs on a dimension that is even more alarming semiotically. This dimension concerns the valorization of signs or their exchange value. As noted by Saussure and extensively scrutinized in Rossolatos (2012b, 2014a), conflating the meaning of signs (of any type, including symbols) with value constitutes a semiotic cardinal sin. Meaning and value are inter-dependent, but not reducible to each other. Hence, claiming that a brand is symbolic in order to convey that a brand has superior value is blatantly misleading. The same holds in the perpetuation of this latent valorization to an even higher degree by christening brands 'iconic', as 'more than' symbolic (e.g., "iconic brands perform identity myths that address desires and anxieties" [Holt 2004: 7]; "iconic brands are brands that have become cultural symbols" [Holt 2005: 273]), first, because symbols do not imply by definition superior value, and, second, because symbols may mean without having superior value compared to ordinary signs. The superior exchangeability of symbols concerns not their image (or their meaning as abstract concept or signified correlated with

formal properties as signifier), but their equity (which is a wholly different discussion that will not be considered in this Chapter; see for relevant analyses and discussions Rossolatos 2012b, 2013b,c,d,e, 2014a).

The same 'cardinal sin' has been carried over and quite solidly rooted in the entire fields of branding and consumer research (see, for example, the analysis on the 'symbolic meaning' of brands in Elliott and Wattanasuwan 2000: "We live in a symbol-rich environment and the meaning attached to any situation or object is determined by the interpretation of these symbols", where 'symbol' actually performs the function of 'sign', albeit unjustifiably invested with value). Not only 'symbolic' has come to be identified in the marketing vernacular with 'valuable', but this unfortunate misnomer has been intensified by the ascription of 'iconic' to even more symbolically symbolizing brand symbols. Both symbolic and iconic imbrications with value are so embedded and widespread in the marketing literature and trade press that it would be more preferable to rewrite Saussure, rather than change deeply held misconceptions.

Now, there have been instances in the wider humanities literature where the symbol has been identified with an 'object of higher value' (cultural, aesthetic etc.; cf. Nöth 1990), however such definitions are neither semiotically informed, and particularly by the above-mentioned seminal Saussurean definition of value which is of utmost pertinence for both brand image and brand equity (as argued in Rossolatos 2014a), nor, by implication, favourable to conceptual frameworks that lay claim to be adopting a semiotic perspective (which is our concern here), in which case any further analysis on 'symbolic' grounds is likely to be severely misguided. It is hoped that the above function both as words of caution for brand semiotic researchers, but also as inspiration for further scrutiny of the seminal distinction and inter-dependence between meaning and value, as well as empirical applications.

Moving on to the cognitive/psychology related definitions, we observe that (iii) focuses partially on the signified (in Saussurean terms) or the plane of content (in Hjelmslevian terms), without reference to the signifier, in which context the conceptual leaning of brand image is correctly identified, albeit dislocated from sources (e.g., brand communications, word-of-mouth, brand usage) that give rise to specific image concepts or from a brand's plane of expression (in Hjelmslev's terms). And where expressive units are included in brand image definitions (e.g., (iv)), they are conflated with pictures in the mind, regardless of any non-mind dependent source of brand communications and the incidence of multimodal brandcomms texts, their units and, even more importantly, their combinatorial rationale. As noted in Rossolatos (2014b), the same disregard for sources of brand image as concepts or 'associations' (following a connectionist/associationist rationale) is evinced in Keller (definition (v)), who considers associations as sources of equity, rather than as outcomes of communicative sources of equity. But even more importantly, equity is not confined monoplanarily either at the content or the expression planes, but emerges as superior configurations of elements from both planes, along with their figurative syntactic counterparts, from a brand textuality point of view (as argued in Rossolatos 2013d,e,f, 2014a,c).

Moreover, and this point concerns a call for a wider paradigmatic shift from the cognitive psychological paradigm that buttresses definitions (iii), (iv), (v) towards a brand textuality paradigm, the relationship between brand image and consumers is neither an epistemic one (i.e., a matter of 'knowing' a brand, and hence reducible to a 'brand knowledge structure'), nor a matter of decoding, but of enculturation, textual memory, the participatory configuration of an enunciative structure and its conceptual transfiguration, and destructuration (Rossolatos 2013g), as will be shown in greater detail later on. Let this be called a fallacious epistemology (rather than epistemological fallacy), as we are not tracing a syllogistic flaw in an

epistemological theory, but questioning the applicability of an epistemic perspective when describing the process whereby brand image becomes meaningful. As will be shown later on, brand image is a product of memory, but not solely a mind-dependent one, and hence not a matter of cognition, but of enculturation. Enculturation is not reducible to knowing, as it does not follow a procedure for mastering the causal process that spawns phenomena, but of assimilation through learning, uncritical valorization based on group norms, mimetism and inter-subjective mirroring (see Rossolatos 2015f).

11.3 Iconicity as invariant textual condition of brand signification across the linguistic, visual and multimodal turns

Brand semiotics offers a descriptive metalanguage of deductive validity for designing brand languages and for managing them over time. The deductive validity of textual semiotic models emerges from their ability to prescribe alternative courses of action of the elementary units that make up their immanentist universe.

As amply argued throughout the Chapters of this volume (cf., for example, Marrone and Mangano; Mangiapane; Ruiz Collantes and Oliva; Scolari), contemporary semiotics has largely abandoned sign-dependent or sign-originating theorizing, in favour of text-centered perspectives and conditions of textual signification, in a context where the meaning of 'text' has eschewed the strict confines of the verbal mode and of literary oeuvres, to encompass the textual constitution of culture and subjectivity. This shift toward holistic (or, more aptly, comprehensive) frameworks has been notable over the past thirty years not just within the province of semiotics, but across linguistics related disciplines, such as discourse analysis, CDA, cultural pragmatics. In semiotics, its clearer manifestation may be identified in the school of sociosemiotics, where the textual metafunction is posited as the substratum against which analyses

alongside the ideational, interpersonal and experiential metafunctions are enacted (cf. Rossolatos 2015b), and whose orientation has been assimilated largely with that of a textual paradigm by its originator (Halliday 1978).

The textual semiotic approach to culture, which has been antedated and widely popularized by Lotman (cf. Rossolatos 2014b; Mangiapane, this Volume; Marrone 2013), continues to resonate, in more systematic form, in contemporary semiotic accounts that seek to chart the inter-textual embeddedness of cultural artefacts, such as Rastier's extension of micro, meso, macro-semantics to terra-semantics (cf. Rastier 2005a,b,c; Rossolatos 2013b). The vestiges of this pan-textualist, one might say, approach were ingrained in Greimas's programmatic declaration regarding the scope and objective of his inaugural work *Structuralist Semantics* (1966), viz. to furnish the conditions for textual signification (meaning), in a manner akin to the main task of the Kantian epistemological project. Greimasian structuralism, in a sense, inaugurated anew the Enlightenment, against the background of the linguistic turn that took place at the beginning of the 20th C. (only to be, sadly, obliterated, by historically misinformed perspectives, such as cognitivism) which has been succeeded by a visual turn (cf. Mitchell 2005) and, as of late, with a multimodal turn (Rossolatos 2015b).

Each turn has been coupled with a re-orientation in research priorities concerning the type of grammar that could accommodate heterogeneous textual configurations. Wittgenstein's (1953) linguistic (pragmatic) turn pointed to the need for attending to cultural practices and language-in-use, rather than logical semantics, for understanding how words and sentences assume meaning, and to cultural domains, rather than 'semantic domains', for understanding how signs are constantly re-interpreted according to distinctive contexts of use by situated social actors.

The visual turn, that was coupled with and conditioned by the rise of a visio-centric media language to dominant

communicative mode, sensitized researchers to the prevalence of images over verbal expressive units in understanding the language of media, but also to how an image-driven culture morphed in a consumer cultural ethos. The visual turn also rendered compelling the need for and subsequently spawned bespoke treatises and 'grammars', capable of addressing the idiosyncratic signification pathways of the visual mode (e.g., Groupe μ [1992], Kress and van Leeuwen [2001]). The visual turn has been reflected in advances in branding research in aesthetically informed works, such as Schroeder's (2008) analysis of images in brand culture.

Finally, the multimodal turn expanded the scope of scrutiny of 'expressive units' employed in communications (cf. O'Halloran et al., this Volume; Machin and Per, this Volume; Bateman, this Volume); and, subsequently (in small steps), in branding and brand communications research (cf. Rossolatos 2015b), from the visual domain to the multimodal domain. As was the case with the visual turn, the multimodal turn became increasingly concerned with charting the contribution of distinctive modes in the signification of multimodal segments (rather than sentences), the interaction among modes (above all), and the development of bespoke grammars (as befits the mission of social semiotics) that reflect distinctive cultural practices and are more attuned, compared to standard grammar, to their syntactic and semantic aspects.

A textual signification condition, though, that has remained invariably salient across the different turns, is that of iconicity. Brand image intuitively appears to be synonymous to brand iconicity as, after all, an image is a synonym of icon. However, there are significant differences between *iconicity* as (i) *condition of brand signification*, (ii) as *brand image,* that is intelligible (intangible) concepts that are ascribed to brands through correlations with expressive units (iconic and/or multimodal), and (iii) as *brand images* (or, more aptly in the context of the multimodal turn, as multimodal expressive units).

Thus far, we have been mostly concerned with clarifying semiotically categories (ii) and (iii). In the following Section we shall dwell on (i) as a condition of brand textuality.

Despite the fact that the notions of iconicity and pictoriality are occasionally conflated, as will be shown in the ensuing Section based on Eco's (1975, 1978) conventionalist approach to iconic signification, the pictorial sign neither entails, nor presupposes an iconic relationship with an extra-semiotic referent. This thesis entails both that brand images (or multimodal signs) (cf. *supra* type (iii)) establish an iconic relationship with a brand by dint of a convention that allows their recognizability as images of that brand, inasmuch as that the brand image (cf. *supra* type (ii)) with which they are correlated is based on the same convention: this convention is called *iconicity* (cf. *supra* type (i)).

The iconic object is more like an intra-iconic gestalt, as noted by Lindekens, a concept that is akin to Greimas's notion of logico-semantic simulacrum as self-subsistent structure with a particular internal logic of organization (also echoed in Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum as what resembles nothing, but itself; cf. Rossolatos 2015e; and Muller's [2001: 310] notion of 'autoiconism'). The difference between Greimas and the proposed iconicity avenue as textual condition *sine qua non* and principle of brand image configuration and transfiguration is that we are rather concerned with brands as *rhetorico-semantic simulacra*.

11.3.1 Iconicity in Peircean semiotics

The discussion on iconicity which assumes as its vantage point Peirce's triadic conception of signs as iconic, indexical and symbolic, dwells on the fundamental presupposition that the iconic sign has a relationship of similarity between what is depicted and the picture. However, Peirce himself did not approach iconicity as devoid of conventionalism. It is a popular misconception that Peirce's notion of iconic sign is a simple

relationship of resemblance between sign and object. In Peirce's universal categorial system, the icon belongs to the category of firstness, in contrast to the index and symbol, which belong to secondness and thirdness. Firstness is the mode of being which represents "the absolute present […], something which is what it is without reference to anything else" (§ 2.85). The icon participates in firstness because it is "a Sign whose significant virtue is due simply to its Quality" (§ 2.92), or "An Icon is a Representamen whose Representative Quality is a Firstness of it as a First. That is, a quality that it has qua thing renders it fit to be a representamen" (§ 2.276)" (Nöth 1990: 121).

If the criterion of similarity between icon and object rests with some qualia of the object that render it fit to be a representamen (which, as shown by Eco [1978: 154], does not hold), then the question is transposed from the icon's relationship to the iconized object to the mode of cognition whereby these extra iconic qualia may be known. If the relationship between icon and iconized object is incumbent on modes of re-cognition, then a naively realist similarity might as well be mitigated by some sort of Cartesian evil demon. Hence, Peirce is forced to acknowledge that the referential object does not even have to exist. This argument about the potentially erroneous re-cognition of an object's presumed likeness to an image becomes even more compelling if we consider the rhetorical dimension of 'catachresis' that was posited by Eco (1978) in defense of his conventionalist argumentation of iconicity.

In this context, the combined import of the ontological dimension (i.e., object properties) and the dimension of prior perceptual experiences in the formation of 'resembling' memories is recognized, albeit complemented by the rhetorical function of catachresis, that is of the process whereby a metaphorical resemblance has been reified into an arbitrary recognition by virtue of repetition, thus culminating in being perceivable as 'real'. The impact of catachresis on the resemblance potential of an image, and, subsequently, on its distorted portrayal, is

inevitable. The catachrestic distortion of an iconic resemblance is further compounded by graphic conventions (i.e. styles of representation). Furthermore, it is likely to be gravely complicated as we move from single objects (e.g., a flower) toward multimodal expressive units such as filmic sequences that portray "states of affairs" or "slice-of-life" advertising genre executions featuring "life-world emplacement" (Holt 2002: 84). In the case of the latter, the Cartesian "evil demon" is considerably more likely to produce erroneous memories and distorted resemblances. This is why any presumed ontological leaning of semiotic construals in terms of resemblance has been termed by Greimas and Courtés (1986: 111) referential impression (as a milder rendition of Barthes's referential illusion). While presaging the analysis that will follow, such referential illusions were in fact posited by Castoriades (1985) as foundational underpinnings in the constitution of society, as what he termed imaginary social significations that lie at the heart of pseudo-rationality (or the presentation of informally logical premises as rational arguments) and formal institutional forms.

Up until now we have been concerned with analyzing the notion of 'icon' as regards its referential status vis-à-vis objects, This is one among many research areas that have been scrutinized in the icon-related scholarship. Nöth (2001) identified three main classes of iconicity, viz. imaginal, diagrammatic and metaphorical. In the first category, the sign evinces an immediately perceptible similarity to its object of reference; in diagrammatic iconicity, the similarity is purely structural or relational; in metaphorical iconicity, the idea(s) conveyed by a sign are mediated by a *tertium comparationis* (between tenor and vehicle).

In branding terms and against the background of the three categories of image as previously delineated, we may discern a correspondence between diagrammatic iconicity and type (i), that is iconicity as condition of textual signification, and metaphorical iconicity and type (ii), that is brand image. Nöth

(2001) draws a further distinction that is of relevance to our classification, between endophoric and exophoric iconicity. The latter type retains a relationship with an external to the sign referent, whereas the former type is purely self-referential and points to the intra-textual (and, by implication, inter-textual) similarity among signs. In these terms, the textual condition of iconicity as self-referential mirror of culture is an instance of endophoric iconicity (which in many respects is on a par with the definition of simulacrum, as used by Baudrillard, among others; cf. Rossolatos 2015e for further analysis).

The endophoric type of iconicity spans all modes and genres, from literature to advertising, and from verbal, visual to kinetic signs (or expressive units), while its mirroring effect on a rhetorical level is identified by Nöth in the employment of figures such as chiasmus (also see Muller 2001: 320) that repeat the order of lexemes in a clause in inverse order than the preceding one (e.g., day by night, night by day). However, endophoric iconicity as textuality condition, from the point of view of the Brand Imaginarium, runs deeper than the manifest structure of the figure of chiasmus (or antimetabole), as it encompasses and conditions both the perceiving subject and the cultural practices in which a subject engages. From this point of view, as will be shown in greater detail in Section 11.3.3, this form of iconicity as the internal self-referential mirror that binds culture and subjects, is of a pre-reflective nature, and hence more primordial than the processing cogito.

11.3.2 The conventionalist approach to iconic signification

The thesis that what is depicted in an iconic sign is a conventional representation is tantamount to approaching the iconic sign as a matter of habituation into a particular aspect of seeing. Insofar as iconic signs are embedded in a structure of signification, they acquire meaning in the context of brands as motivated signs. Hence, as Eco (1976) argues in *Theory of*

Semiotics (also see Eco 1978), the relationship between iconic expressive units (functives in sign functions) and their counterparts at the content plane is not arbitrary, but motivated and depends on cultural correlational rules (albeit often tacit ones).

These rules, from a brand language point of view, concern a brand's 'inner logic' as rhetorico-semantic simulacrum. Thus, for example, Tony the tiger as iconic sign does not resemble a tiger as its extra-semiotic referent, but the brand Kellogg's Frosties as a plenum of brand images and brand image concepts. The portrayal of an episode from Tony's adventures as a slice-of-life from his counter-factual, fictive, cartoonist universe, does not have an extra-discursive referent, but an intra-fabular resemblance with Tony's lifeworld and the expressive inventory that renders it apt for being assimilated to that lifeworld (also see Nöth 2006).

In fact, the example of slice-of-life sequences, amply employed in advertising, is more relevant for justifying iconic similarity, as it includes a variety of interacting objects, movements, social actors, dialogues, settings that may be recognized as partaking of a brand language by virtue of far more complex relationships of iconicity than any of the cases involved in assuming as points of argumentative departure individual objects (or graphs, paintings, abstract outlines) that are usually evoked in the semiotic literature on iconicity. In this case, we are concerned not simply with iconic signs (which is how iconicity has been largely theorized in the relevant marketing literature thus far; cf. for example Grayson 1998), but with iconic texts (cf. Eco 1978: 164). This type of motivated similarity between a dominant element of a brand's plane of expression and an element of a brand's content plane is an instance of metaphorical iconicity, in Peirce's terms. And in the context of metaphorical iconicity "anything whatever […] is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it" (§ 2.247)" (Nöth 1990: 133; also see Nöth 2001: 21).

Eco spearheaded the iconicity debate in his earlier works *La Structure Absente* (1972) and *Theory of Semiotics* (1976). Throughout his argumentation he follows a conventionalist route to the iconic dimension of pictures. I would like to emphasize his point about the transformations involved in the process of conventionalization of the iconic sign. "Every biunivocal correspondence of points in space is a transformation. A transformation does not suggest the idea of natural correspondence; it is rather the consequence of rules and artifice" (Eco 1976: 200). Quoting Gibson, "similitude is produced and must be learned". The iconic sign, based on Eco's view, is as much conventional as the symbol. Its signification is a matter of enculturation as a prerequisite for correct interpretation. This brings us effectively back to the issue of the figurativity of branding language where similarity was posited in terms of contrived and motivated relationships between objects or concepts that become correlated as terms of a metaphorical similitude.

Eco's account of the conventionalist relationship between iconic signs is plausible insofar as it addresses rhetorical relata as modes of transformation, which is in line with our fundamental position that rhetorical operations of transformation are responsible (in part) for the figurative constitution of brands. Thus, iconicity as figurative similarity among brand textual elements concerns their semantic coherence and syntactical cohesion (Muller 2001: 310; also see Groupe μ's [1970] classification of figures based on whether they perform primarily a semantic or syntactical operation, e.g., metataxes, metasememes) which may be recognized as such based on a brand's inner logic. Iconicity is an instrumental concept for brand semiotics, as conceived in its conventionalist dimension by Eco, insofar as it accounts for the 'internal mirroring' of elementary units of signification as components of identifiable structures.

11.3.3 The expanded version of iconicity as inter-subjective mirroring

Having, thus far, analyzed how the endophoric type of iconicity works as textuality condition (11.3.1), from the point of view of the Brand Imaginarium, and why due to the conventionalist nature of iconicity it constitutes a brand's inner logic (11.3.2), let us proceed with the expansive outlook to the mirroring process, from brands to culture, and consumers in between.

This mirroring process has been theorized by Luckmann as lying at the heart of the internalization process of social structures: "through processes of "intersubjective mirroring" which are based upon the fundamental reciprocity of the we-relation" (Vaitkus 1990: 122). Even if one does not agree with the so-called internalization hypothesis (which I do not find plausible), Luckmann's insightful conceptualization, from a sociological point of view, does have its counterpart in Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the mirror phase is conceptualized as "an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito* (Lacan 1977)" (Dolar 2003: 3), an individuation process that begins with the infant's reflection in its mirror image, and conditions the evolution of subjectivity throughout adult life (a process that largely accounts for the phenomenon of contagion and the viral, pre-reflective[4] diffusion of brand imagery through inter-subjective identifications; cf. Rossolatos 2015d).

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[4] An analogon of how such pre-reflective mirroring functions toward the generation of a collective identity in the face of a music artist as brand may be found in Rossolatos (2015d). In that study, Lacan's Schema L that maps how individual subjectivity is formed inter-subjectively through multi-directional gazing encounters among fans and between fans and a semiotized musical act as brand on stage was applied against the background of participant observation and in-depth interviews.

The mirror stage, insofar as it is indeed formative of the function of the I, demonstrates that the I, the ego, is a place of an imaginary blinding, a deception; far from being the salutary part of the mind that could serve as a firm support of the psychoanalytic cure, against the vagaries of the id and the superego (such was the argument of ego-psychology), rather, it is itself the source of all kinds of fantasy formations. If such is the nature of the I, then it must be most sharply opposed to cogito, with its inherent pretension to self-transparency and self-certainty. (Dolar 2003: 3-4)

It should be noted that this conceptualization of inter-subjective mirroring is of social ontological orientation, as a primordial mode of being-with, which antedates and underlies social psychological conceptualizations of pre-reflective mimicry as "social glue that promotes communication" (Janiszweski 2008: 405).

This foundational identificatory mirroring is an exemplary case of the imaginary constitution of subjectivity, as remarked by Silverman (1983: 157), which is reflected, in turn, in the inter-subjective constitution of the subject (particularly important for communicative memory, as will be analyzed in Section 11.4). As shown quite vividly by Taylor (2004: 23), "the social imaginary is that common understanding [my note: tacit and pre-reflective] that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."

The Brand Imaginarium is an attempt to expand the scope of this mirroring as all-encompassing iconic condition of cultural textual production, that includes an account of the interplay between cultural (collective) memory and individual memory (which relationship is effaced or noted *en passant* in cogito-centric cognitivist models). To understand how this mirroring works, we need to dig deeper into the relationship between imagination, memory and what Castoriades called imaginary social significations as constitutive of culture.

The semiotically inflected thesis formulated by Castoriades resonates the fundamental Aristotelian distinction between primary (productive) and secondary (re-productive) imagination, where the former functions ontologically as primary condition for creativity (McLean 2003) or, as called by Castoriades (1985), radical imagination or originary phantasmization (which resonates Heidegger's assimilation of productive imagination [phantasia] to the originary act of truth's movement as bringing forth from unconcealment; cf. Rossolatos 2013h).

By virtue of imagination's semi-dependence on sensory 'stimuli' and semi-dependence on already stored memories or images, *imago* or icon is by definition 'erroneous', as noted by McLean (2003), as it does not correspond *stricto sensu* to either of these sources of memory formation. As will be shown later on, this 'erroneous' nature of images, and the imaginary that spawns them, are in fact ontologically necessary for the subject's mis-recognition of itself in another, a pre-reflective mirroring that is responsible for sustaining a cultural imaginary and the figurative constitution of brand language that is mirrored in imaginary social significations (Castoriades 1985).

Imagination performed a pivotal role in Kant's apparatus of Pure Reason[5] in the Chapter on Schematism in his first Critique, at the intersection between sensibility, perception and the formation of concepts of empirical understanding (also see Rossolatos 2013h). According to Kant (1781: 182) "it is schemata, not images of objects, which underlie our pure sensible concepts." No specific image could ever be adequate to a concept in its universality. Schemata, as acts of pure synthesis

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[5] Kant dwells on the role of imagination throughout his writings, including his moral and aesthetic philosophies. However, since here we are concerned primarily with a critique of cognitivist epistemology, the focus is laid on the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For critical discussions on the role of imagination in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*, see Freydberg (2005) and Kneller (2007) respectively.

of imagination, are responsible for furnishing such abstract universal concepts. Kant's schematism was a truly revolutionary philosophical (rhetorical) stratagem, insofar as he leveraged imagination not only as a faculty that produces empirically contingent images (brand images in our case), but as a faculty that by virtue of clinging onto the armory of Pure Reason, is burdened with producing purified, one might say, images that depend on Reason, and not on the senses (although imagination borrows from both sources). Nevertheless, judging from consequences, this is a case of Reason's deluding itself while investing the contingency of the singular with the cloak of necessity of the universal, which is why in the *civitas* of cognitivism imagination had to be effaced. Yet, within the contours of Kantian epistemology, imagination's synthetic activity was foundational in fleshing out empirical concepts. The synthetic activity of the faculty of imagination was called by Kant figurative synthesis, to which he referred as a hidden art in the depths of the human soul. Thus, not only the foundational character of imagination in furnishing brand languages was laid bare, as con- and transfigurations, but also as being responsible for configuring the social imaginary. Insofar as these configurations are incumbent on rhetoric, "rhetorical iconicity does not consist in a mirroring of objective reality, but in structuring reality" (Muller 2001: 307).   Not at all surprisingly, the Kantian figurative synthesis that resurfaced in Husserlean phenomenology as passive synthesis, was invested with the power to answer "'all the riddles of the "unconscious" and the various processes of "becoming conscious" (Elliott 2005: 54).

The schema that results from the figurative synthetic process of the imagination is akin to a second-order image, not simply as type of an empirical image (i.e., the type of tree that may be instantiated in various empirical images of trees), but as image of a pure concept in all its abstraction. For example, in terms of brand language, a schema of adventurousness that may include images of wild-life, jeeps, heat, etc. This interim faculty in

the cogito is pivotal for understanding how categories (ii) and (iii) in 11.3.1 (brand images and brand image) interrelate in the imagination (albeit in a restrictive fashion as regards the source of meaning of each category, and, above all, of their modes of configuration/transfiguration). However, it is a necessary stepping-stone, and not simply in terms of the history of ideas, for understanding the fashionable concept of schema in the context of cognitivism, and the role that schemata perform as super-ordinate containers of subordinate representations. "The schema, throughout its history, has been a concept shrouded in mystery. Kant's use of the term has been provocative but difficult to understand" (Rumelhart et al. 1986: 17). Despite the question-begging nature of this proclaimed 'difficulty', schematism raises questions as to why the faculty of imagination was later suppressed by cognitivism (but not schematism as such, at least not by all strands), only to re-emerge in more sociologically and psychoanalytically inclined perspectives, while having survived as traces in legacy concepts that were carried over to cognitive psychology, such as imagery (verbal and visual; see, for example, Anderson 2015: 79). An exegesis that looms quite plausibly in the horizon concerns the cognitivist need for acquiring scientific status, and hence, the need for doing away with any ambiguity in cogito's ability to obtain knowledge, rather than furnish epistemically ambiguous representations (due to, as explained earlier, being informed in its synthetic process by both prior memories and by actual stimuli). Insofar as the hybrid memories furnished by the imaginary might as well constitute the outcome of an 'evil demon' who draws on stored memories and defiles the sensory input of representations (a dual source of 'stimuli' that was coupled with *phantasia* quite recurrently from Plato until Kant; cf. Cocking 1991), imagination does not abide very neatly by cogito's demands. Let it be noted in passing that if imagination poses challenges to the integrity of cognitivist structures for these reasons, then cognitivism would be even more uncomfortable with Hegel's account of memory, recollection

and imagination, for whom "memory involves the repeated traversing of the associational pathways of the imagination" (Bates 2004: 104), but this is a wholly different chapter.

Returning now to Peirce, "the Icon does not stand unequivocally for this or that existing thing, as the Index does. Its Object may be a pure fiction, as to its existence (§ 4.531)" (Nöth 1990: 123). "Both existent things and non-existent, merely fictional or imaginary ideas can thus be the objects of a picture" (Nöth 2003: 7). The issue with the latter formulation is that it does not take account of the productive character of imagination in shaping the object in the first place, and hence employing a denigrating (to the imaginary) distinction between fictive (e.g., centaurs [cf. Nöth 2006] or unicorns [cf. Dureau 2000]) and non-fictive. This false dichotomy is what often gives rise to a mirage, as noted by Sartre, who adds that "I believe that the object of my consciousness is a complex of real but not externalized sensible qualities, whereas these qualities are perfectly externalized but imaginary" (Sartre 2004: 87). Yet, as suggested by the preceding analysis, the mirage is not the fictive, but the non-recognition of the imaginary's constitutive character with regard to non-fictive objects and concepts. This asymmetric conceptualization compared to the constitutionally pivotal role performed by imagination in the production of representations has been carried over to contemporary cognitive psychological theories of narrativity, such as transportation theory (cf. Green and Donahue 2009, and Ruiz Collantes and Oliva, this Volume).

11.4 Memory as iconic re-cognition and re(as)semblance

If iconicity is the overarching brand textuality condition whereby heterogeneous expressive units are correlated with specific brand image concepts under the aegis of a brand name, the question emerges as to how this 'formalist' condition is reflected on an individual level in brand-related memory. Extensive answers have been provided by cognitive psychology to this end, in terms of stimuli processing under variegated experimental conditions,

which have fuelled consumer/advertising research studies, nevertheless, as is customarily the case, not absolutely conclusively (due to variations in samples, test-conditions, etc.).

Although the branding literature thrives with associationist models as adaptations of the increasingly popular perspective of connectionism[6] that has sought to explain at least aspects of brand memory, still these applications employ terminology of 'mixed origin', one might say, that is by assuming as elementary units whereby test subjects are primed for responses 'stimuli', that are half inspired by information theory *qua* signals, and half inspired by a naturalistic, medicinal paradigm *qua* sensory input from an external to a human organism environment (but also macaque, rat, etc., organism, depending on the species of the test subjects by experimental occasion and without taking into account that these species are not brand-savvy; or at least we think they are not).

This fundamental assumption about the elementary units of memory formation and retrieval is one among the various points where connectionism is at odds with the paradigm of brand textuality, and for semiotically valid reasons. As noted repeatedly by semiotic scholars (e.g., Eco, Nöth, Rastier; cf. Rossolatos 2014a), in human communication (whence stems the 'input' for the formation of brand associations, rather than from some hazily conceived 'external environment'), the elementary units are not signals, but signs, or, as framed thus far in this Chapter, 'multimodal expressive units' (e.g., a print ad, a hierarchically subordinate expressive unit of a print ad in a multiply articulated structure or a shot/frame/sequence from an ad film). Let this be considered as the most foundational difference between cognitivism and brand textual semiotics, the importance of which will become increasingly compelling as the argumentation progresses. In the following Section, we delve

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[6] cf. Rossolatos 2013c, 2014a for a literature review, and McClelland 2000; McClelland & Cleeremans 2009 for an overview of connectionist models, regardless of their adaptation to branding.

further into the most eminent differences between the cognitivist perspective of connectionism that is currently dominant in brand image (and equity) research and the propounded brand textuality approach, against the dimensions of memory formation and memory retrieval. The deploying argumentation will pave the way for a revision of memory towards a more culturologically pertinent direction.

But, first, let us define memory in the light of iconicity as condition for brand textual signification. As explained in the previous Section, iconicity essentially accounts for how heterogeneous expressive units come to resemble a brand name and its image. This principle incited us to identify brands with rhetorico-semantic simulacra or as intra-iconic gestalts. The subject that is exposed to brand related expressive units (and not just stimuli, as non semiotically pre-formed syncretic entities; cf. Fontanille 1999), then, is not summoned merely to recall, but to reascribe meaning by resembling the presented units with the brand's structural gestalt (a resemblance that corresponds to Nöth's diagrammatic iconicity category as displayed in Section 11.3.1). What is not accounted for by the connectionist models to memory formation is the way whereby this resemblance is effected or how iconicity is fleshed out. The answer to this 'how' lies, while running ahead of ourselves, with modes of textual configuration or rhetorical figures as relata among a brand's multimodal expressive units. This is a massive weakness in the connectionist perspective that may be filled by the proposed brand textuality approach, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following Section, viz. that whereas connectionism assumes as sufficient explanatory ground for how links are created between nodes in memory their relative strength (regardless of any qualitative criteria that would further identify the nature of those links), the proposed iconicity approach qualifies these links as rhetorical figures, thus explaining why the highly figurative language of brands is responsible for their constitution as rhetorico-semantic simulacra.

Recollection, against the background of the overarching principle of iconicity, is tantamount to re-cognition as re(as)semblance of expressive units and image concepts, which re(as)semblance is brought about by a rhetorical figurative syntax that determines how expressive units are linked, and hence how they are assembled under the aegis of determinate image concepts. The more we move from primary iconicity to tertiary iconicity, as will be shown in Section 11.5, the more effortlessly this re-cognition as re-collection/re(as)semblance is enacted, not because of more solid memory patterns in the neocortex, but because of the attainment of the respective brand memory in becoming deeply rooted into cultural memory.

11.4.1 Individual memory formation and memory retrieval: Connectionism vs. brand textuality

In this Section we discuss key differences between connectionism (and more specifically the Parallel Distributed Processing [PDP] strand that is often evoked in brand associationist studies), and brand textuality, vis-à-vis the dimensions of memory formation and memory retrieval.

The process of memory formation according to the PDP perspective consists in "a set of changes in the instructions neurons send to each other, affecting what patterns of activity can be constructed from given inputs. When an event is experienced, on this view, it creates a pattern of activity over a set of processing units. This pattern of activity is considered to be the representation of the event" (McClelland 2000: 584). The generation of a recollection has been couched as follows: "under some circumstances as, for example, when the constructive process takes place in response to a recall cue, the cue may result in the construction of a pattern of activation that can be viewed as an attempted reconstruction of the pattern that represented the previously experienced event. Such a reconstructed representation corresponds to a recollection. The patterns themselves are not stored, and hence are not really

retrieved: recall amounts not to retrieval but to reconstruction" (McClelland 2000: 584).

According to the popular cognitivist PDP perspective, almost dominant in inherited conceptual frameworks (and, subsequently, constructs) in consumer behavior (including brand image research) from cognitive psychology, brand related representations constitute relational networks of nodes and links (akin to synaptic relations among neurons) that are stored in different parts of the brain, to be activated in the face of salient stimuli (cues) such as priming a test subject with a brand name. "In PDP models […] the patterns themselves are not stored. Rather, what is stored is the connection strengths between units that allow these patterns to be re-created […] For learning, the implications are equally profound. For if the knowledge is the strengths of the connections , learning must be a matter of finding the right connection strengths so that the right patterns of activation will be produced under the right circumstances" (McClelland et al. 1986: 31-32). The 'perception' of a brand name automatically triggers a process of recognition in the form of co-occurring processes of retrieval of relevant properties from memory, pertaining to the concerned brand, that is properties that have been stored in memory with stronger links among them than others.

The stimuli with which subjects are primed may be a brand name or expressive units from its advertising. The latter presents a more complex scenario and, largely, empirical studies of activation patterns have been enacted against the background of brand names, rather than complex configurations of ad stimuli. As noted repeatedly by cognitivists, this is a simulation of synaptic processes[7] and not an exact replication of the processes

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[7] "Connectionist models are like simplified maps of cognitive systems inspired by the organization of the brain. They are not atlas-like maps of the nervous system, but relatively abstract representations that seek to capture key functional features of neural information processing" (Flusberg & McClelland 2014).

that deploy in different parts of the brain in the light of multifarious configurations, rather than simple stimuli. And the more complex the stimuli, as "configurations of cues" (van Osselaer 2008), the less canonical the activation patterns, given that such models are robust only against the background of a limited number of satisfaction constraints. The same inverse relationship between added layers of complexity in a model (in terms of endogenous or exogenous variables) and the fulfillment of the criterion of parsimony has been noted in structural equation modeling (cf. Bagozzi et al. 1991).

Each memory (and its recollection), according to the connectionist model of memory, is made of processing units (microfeatures). Although not explicitly recognized as such, this approach to the building blocks of memory follows an atomistic rationale, viz. that a concept is formed atomistically by combining individual units. It is just that instead of positing an additive process whereby this combinatory is achieved, connectionists opt for a networked approach among individual units, based on values that reflect the weight of their inter-connections. The reason why connectionists hold that what is stored in memory is just units, and not patterns, is that they have not incorporated schemata (i.e., 2nd order, grouping representations, as per Section 11.3.3) in their approach. On the contrary, as amply shown by the gestaltic camp, representations tend to form on the grounds of an interplay between individual units and abstract schemata, i.e., gestalts that organize them in higher levels of abstraction.

The recalling subject, at least as regards the figurative language of brands (which are not comparable to objects, such as chairs, that are regularly evoked by cognitivists to illustrate how memory works: see, for example, Brakus 2008), does not activate a network of atomistic units in knitty-gritty structures that are distributed in different parts of the 'brain', but, each time

one is exposed to a salient expressive unit, one is driven to re-configure it in a figurative structure of nodes and links, where different nodes are linked by dint of rhetorical figures as figurative relata. If this were not the case, and if we were concerned with simple instances of decoding, rather than of complex textual destructuration (cf. Rossolatos 2013g), then we would not be encountering so many cases of aberrant positioning and incorrect association of ad messages with their semantic content. And here we are not referring simply to metaphorical/metonymic relations which have been the sole (figuratively related) province of cognitivism (also applied to ads), which was presaged by the Freudian theory of the formation of the dreamwork (and which it hardly managed to surpass; cf. Rossolatos 2014 for parallels between the dreamwork and the 'brandwork'), but to a much wider roster of figures that have been establishing all sorts of nuanced relations across modes and expressive units in brandcomms vehicles (cf. the model //rhetor.dixit// in Rossolatos 2013f, 2014c).

What is of particular interest at this juncture is the exclusion from connectionism of schemata (McClelland et al. 1986: 7) or higher order representations in memory. This exclusionary tactic, alongside the most alarming exclusion of imagination[8], as already noted in Section 11.3.3, contravenes the very essence of brand image concepts. As explained in Section 11.3.3, a brand image concept (e.g., adventurousness) is meaningful against the background of individual brand images, with which it relates iconically (through endophoric iconicity) and without which it is not meaningful. The main task of brands is to solidify these transfigurations between concrete brand images and brand image concepts, in a manner that thwarts similar

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[8] And yet, most remarkably, Flusberg & McClelland (2014) invite their readership to "**imagine** that activations   of units are   updated continuallyin time, just as the position of a   moving   object changes continually." (my emphasis)

dovetailings by the competition. Hence, not only brand image concepts, by definition, may not be atomic units, but, quite contrary to a basic assumption made by connectionist psychology, they should be stored as patterns in memory in a gestalt that includes brand name, brand image concepts and their corresponding brand images (or multimodal expressive units). Otherwise, during the recall stage, there is no guarantee or no way of calculating probabilistically that through spreading activation, the priming of a subject with a brand image will trigger a superordinate brand image concept, in a manner that also connects this 'co-firing' with the even more superordinate brand name. Thus, a simple network approach, completely cut off from any hierarchical relations among the 'units' themselves simply does not make sense, from a branding point of view. In other words, a brand image concept cannot be included in a network as unit of the same level of abstraction as brand images as units (and the same holds for a brand name).

But the differences between brand textuality and connectionism do not stop here. Assumptions are radically divergent as regards: (i) the connectionist precarious imbrication of mind with brain (ii) the localization of the source of stimuli at the level of the 'external environment' and concomitantly (iii) the expulsion of imagination and schematism from the mind's apparatus (iv) the adoption of an information theoretic perspective as against a semiotic one in terms of the nature of minimal units, viz. signals rather than signs (v) the identification of cues with simple stimuli (mostly objects and simple names) rather than with rhetorical relata and complex states of affairs (vi) the dislocation of the processing subject from any inter-subjective sphere of interaction and sub-conscious, pre-reflective modes of imposing iconic similarities (vii) the dependence of individual memory on cultural memory and the power of the latter to furnish schemata for subsuming stimuli as signs that do not depend on individual brain processes, but on culturally defined aspects of seeing or seeing *as* (cultural memory will be

displayed in the following section) (viii) As a consequence, whereas connectionism follows a reductionist path to knowledge formation, a brand textuality approach recognizes that the source of meaning of 'representations' lies with the distinctive cultural practices in which a situated individual engages, including power structures that provide orientation markers as to how representations will be configured and transfigured in patterns that are independent of brain-related formative processes (and hence conditioning of retrieval cues). And the praxiological meaning of signs tends to change often radically based on which cultural practice angle it is seen from (ix) the importance of a-typical representations (singular associations) for brand language renovation and infusing life into a culture, rather than a 'problematic' and maladjusted/able aspect of network homeostasis, or, in connectionist lingo, "catastrophic interference." Let us now consider these points in greater detail.

As regards (i), Descombes' (1990) sweeping arguments against cognitivism have been instrumental in demonstrating the lack of any causal relationship between a material substratum (brain) and a manifest phenomenon (mental processes) that would legitimate us to assimilate the mind with the brain. This is a most naively realist instance of naturalized epistemology, whereby faculties that have been traditionally assigned to the Mind (as a non-physical entity) throughout millennia of philosophizing, suddenly, and in utter disregard of lengthy philosophical discussions as to why such an imbrication is not permissible, cognitivism chose to reify philosophical concepts. Suffice it to point out, for the sake of historical antecedents and solutions to such problematic imbrications, that Kant's transcendental idealist epistemology sought to overcome the impasses of the prior philosophical perspectives of realism and idealism. Kant rejected any material dimension of the Mind, as by doing so he would reduce the Mind to a *res extensa* which is a property of empirical objects that are cognized (construed) by the Mind, and not of the Mind itself. Surely since Kant's time

epistemological perspectives have arisen that have challenged transcendental idealist premises, while involving the entire body in the process of cognition (e.g., Varela 1991; also see Petitot et al. 1999), however the reason why it merits invoking Kant is that cognitivism's reductionist approach of mind to brain is very similar to pre-Kantian naïve realism (which largely informs any form of biologism), rather than post-Kantian perspectives.

As regards (ii), the localization of stimuli in a hazily conceived external environment, rather than signs that are part and parcel of cultural fields and their attendant cultural practices, and hence already semiotized according to specific contexts of use and exchange, has been coupled with the possibility of blending stimuli as 'raw sensory material' or 'brute facts' with images stored in memory, thus producing illusory perceptions ("conditions exist in which normal subjects also produce substantial illusory conjunctions" Henderson and McClelland [2011: 162]). Not only this thesis is utterly inadmissible from a brand textuality point of view, but also, as shown in the context of imaginary schematism, any 'input' constitutes an already quasi-elaborated re-enactment of or assimilation to schemata stored in memory. As shown in 11.3.3, not recognizing this by definition mixed origin of representations is the source of 'mirages', rather than assuming fictive representations as 'real'.

The difference from the brand textuality paradigm is that what connectionists tag pejoratively as 'illusory correlations' reflects the very essence of imaginary textual structures, from which viewpoint, quite on the inverse, what is 'illusory' is the presumption of the 'reality' (a most naïve form of realism indeed) of connectionist associative patterns, whence stems the term so often used by Barthes, Greimas, Rastier, among others, viz. 'referential illusion'. And if the most striking manifestation of these presumed illusory correlations is the so-called "catastrophic interference principle", viz. "any attempt to add arbitrary new information into connection weights" (McClelland 2000: 18), where connection weights "are generally viewed as the repository

of prior experience that survives the patterns of activation produced during the experience itself" (McClelland and Cleeremans 2009), then this principle reflects the unease experienced by connectionists in the face of highly singular configurations and transfigurations at the level of primary iconicity. The bad news is that this principle is the principle of ad creativity that fuels brand languages and that is responsible for their renovation, inasmuch as for infusing life into cultural forms. Highly figurative brand language may be said, according to the connectionist rationale, to be catastrophic, as in the context of constant and often radically new configurations among expressive units (as 'input') and the intended equally novel transfigurations into brand image concepts, they do confer oscillations in linked units in memory. Rhetorical configurations are surely catastrophic for the ideal, repetitive type envisioned by the connectionist model, that assumes a very restrictive notion of similarity, akin to the most naively realist version of Peirce's theory, as outlined in Section 11.3.

The connectionist solution (cf. McCleland 2000) for circumventing such catastrophic interferences is the (speculative) suggestion of another memory system, compared to the neocortical slow-learning one, where such potentially catastrophic stimuli for the maintenance of more stable episodically stored memories are provisionally contained, prior to either being forgotten or integrated into episodic memory based on a process of interleaving (cf. McClelland 2000: 592). "The fast learning MTL system, working together with the neocortical system, thus provides a way to eventually knit the newly formed memory into the fabric of what is already known to the slow-learning neocortical system" (McClelland 2000: 19). Ultimately, "possible fixes (allowing changes only in certain layers of weights or using different learning rates in different layers) could be proposed" (McClelland 2013: 14), such as the heuristic of "sparse random conjunctive coding [that] allows rapid learning of new memories in a very simple way. It assigns a distinct representation,

minimizing overlap with other memories" (McClelland 2000: 584), however a final solution to this 'principle' is still pending.

As regards (iv) and (v), as stressed earlier, connectionism integrates units in networks based on their strength of connection, while leaving unaccounted for any qualitative dimension of these connections. The metric of constantly re-adjusted connection weights masks a plethora of processes of configuration and transfiguration whereby brand images are linked syntagmatically (horizontally) and transformed in brand image concepts. These modes of brand language configuration are incumbent on rhetorical operations and rhetorical figures as shown in Rossolatos (2013c,d,e,f; 2014a). From a brand textuality point of view, we are not concerned merely with making suggestions about which expressive units are connected with what semantic content, but, even more importantly, with qualifying these modes of connectivity with rhetorical modes of configuration.

"We assume very simple connection strength modulation mechanisms which adjust the strength of connections between units based on information locally available at the connection" (McClelland et al. 1990: 32). On the contrary, a textual memory approach qualifies these links in a number of ways: as (i) production techniques – regarding ad films (ii) rhetorical relata (figures) (iii) logical relations (e.g., follows, is preceded by, explains etc.). And this account is far more nuanced than the simplified PDP approach. For example, is a set of cues strongly correlated with a concept because it has been communicated as such through the differential employment of a pun or a hyperbole (considering competitive discourse and a category's diachronic communications)? Was a strong link registered in memory because of this exact figurative stratagem that enhanced the probability of its recall when presented with the correct stimuli? Unless a perspective is potent enough to answer such questions, chances are that the simplified account offered by the cognitivist perspective will simply afford to level off what

matters most in brand communications, that is the rhetorical constitution of brand language and, by extension, the figurative construal of its receiver as partaking of the structural edifice of brand language.

An ad cue or 'stimulus' is never presented in isolation, but as already configured in a textual setting by employing figurative relata. Nowhere and never is it possible to present exactly the same configuration in a new ad film, for example. This is also due to the inherently erroneous, as previously noted, nature of imaginary significations that are partly conditioned by material stimuli and partly by an inventory of already configured signs in memory. Hence, the presentation of a stimulus is never a simple case of re-producing a faithful image based on exactly the same input. Surely the same expressive units may be identified, but the appeal of the message is incumbent on its configurational modes, and not, atomistically, on expressive units

Relata, from a structuralist point of view (and let it be reminded that PDP functions within a structuralist mindframe), are more important than units. Unless these relata are accounted for, in a more nuanced fashion than calculating their strength, then it is impossible to account for differential modes of brand textual configuration. Hence, a brand textuality perspective in brand image generation and modes of storage/retrieval should at least be considered as being on a par, in terms of importance, with the cognitivist/connectionist approach that addresses similar matters. Whereas a PDP model works in branding terrain within a neatly identified roster of schemata that are populated by representational units that are linked in their clearly identified domains at a disproportionately higher level than other links/modes/ patterns, textual memory recognizes the figuratively rich and tropically unpredictable employment of networks between expressive units (rather than stimuli) and semantic content. Indeed, whereas when they refer to syntax Rumelhart et al. (1986) consider only grammatically correct syntactical configurations, textual memory also considers

figurative/rhetorical correlations, that are highly idionsyncratic, idiolectal and often akin to private languages (that may not even be expressed in verbal terms).

The brand textuality paradigm, by virtue of assuming as point of departure for the generation of semiotic constraints cultural practices, problematizes the type/mode of minimal units that should be posited as expressive elements, as well as how such units will branch off both to lower and toward higher strata. McClelland (2000) contends that connectionist units and whole connectionist networks can be construed as optimal Bayesian estimators of conditional probabilities, without having elaborated on the nature of 'units' that may be accommodated by such probabilistic models in the first place; and at this juncture, Metz's remark that it is impossible to delineate a priori a minimal unit in filmic language (and, by extension, ad filmic language, as key source of brand language), should be 're-called' as a ubiquitous challenger to connectionist assumptions: "The minimal unit is not given in the text; it is a tool of analysis. There are as many types of minimal units as there are types of analysis" (Metz 1974: 194).

The entire cognitivist explanatory endeavor appears to be a clear case of what Zizek (1992) has called, with reference to the unconscious, retroactive causality, which constitutes a recurrent instance of the logical fallacy of affirming the cause from its consequences (rather than from direct observation). Indeed, this is how the notion of the soul that preceded that of the Mind in classical antiquity was coined, that is via a sheer nominalistic procedure by Aristotle in *De Anima* in the face of an aporetic argumentation about what is that human faculty that may move an entire organism without being moved by external stimuli, that is the soul (to the same extent that the mind may spawn memories of representations which, in turn, may be traced to, or wishfully reconstrued as 'external stimuli').

11.4.2 Breaking through to the culture side: From individual, to communicative and cultural memory

In order to address points (vii) and (viii) that were raised in the previous Section, two additional to individual memory types will be considered, viz. communicative and cultural memory.

Assmann (2008), by drawing on Halbwachs' seminal concept of collective memory, divides it more sharply into "communicative" and "cultural memory". These two forms complement his tripartite division of memory into individual, communicative, cultural, while remarking that the only recognized form of memory ever since the 1920s has been the first type (which is the case with cognitivism).

The reasons why cultural and communicative memory are more important than individual memory as explanatory mechanisms both of identity formation and of the ways whereby brand meaning is shaped, may be elucidated by attending to Assmann's discussion of each of these two types in turn, while linking them to the cognitivist primary material on which memory works, that is the 'stimulus'.

Thus, from the point of view of cultural memory, as noted by Assmann (2008: 111) "things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other lieux de memoire." This explanatory remark is crucial as it points out clearly to the fundamental precondition for shaping individual memory, that is the essence of a stimulus. Thus, what is hazily referred to as stimulus of the external environment by cognitivism is not a thing or some sort of culturally unqualified 'sensory manifold' (as Kant would term it), but, instead, an always already culturally mediated and meaningful artifact that is related to concrete cultural practices.

This position holds even more forcefully for states-of-affairs, rather than objects, and let it be noted that a major reason why epistemology in Kant's first Critique took a

naturalistic path, rather a social one, is that his focus lied with conditions of possibility of knowing 'objects', rather than states of affairs, and/or objects as dislocated from states of affairs, e.g., how the empirical concept of a tree is formed, regardless of the discrete functions of trees, as decorum, as oxygen-providers, as sources of fireplace wood. In short, Kant never deemed that the culturological context of use of an object is largely responsible for determining this object as such and such, rather than a faculty of the Mind.

This lack of perspective spawned the same impasses that plagued Husserlean solipsism, viz. how come different individual minds form the same representations or the same meaning of objects (an impasse that social phenomenologists set out to overcome precisely by seeking recourse to what Assmann called in the above distinction communicative memory, rather than individual memory)? The same holds for the term 'advertising stimulus' that is standardly employed in quantitative and qualitative advertising studies, where stimulus is also used for a finished creative execution. Firstly, a finished ad (say, print) is not an individual stimulus, but an ensemble of stimuli that have been concatenated according to a specific combinatorial rationale, and, hence, the atomistic term stimulus (if not complex stimulus), does not hold by definition. Second, even if we employ a term such as 'complex stimulus', still we fail to account for how its components have been concatenated, or their combinatorial rationale, or their existing meaning(s) according to specific contexts of use. Surely no stimulus is projected in an ad message in the absence of specific assumptions that undergird its mode of configuration. Hence, any study that sets out to gauge consumers' perceptions of different stimuli without having explained what is the intended meaning of the stimulus, suggests that the process of rendering a percept meaningful is simply a process that depends on consumers' 'minds'. This, evidently, is not the case, as either stimuli are loaded with specific, perhaps more than one, meanings and hence are parts of a cultural

memory, or constitute novel configurations, in which case they depend on communicative memory. In either case, individual memory is the last resort for understanding where lies the repository of meanings of stimuli, or, rather, cultural artifacts. And if stimuli are already loaded with meaning, then we are not concerned with 'brute facts' or 'sensory input', but with more or less well-formed signs. And if the Mind is incited to recollect or form associations based on re-presented signs, then the Mind is not the cause of representations, but an intermediary between receiving and storing signs, either temporarily in a buffer zone as parts of short-term communicative memory, or more permanently in long-term memory as parts of cultural memory (until revised in a constantly evolving learning curve that involves forgetting).

There is ample conversational analytic evidence on how recollection (and forgetting) are enacted in ordinary communicative interaction (cf., for example, Middleton and Brown 2005: 84-100), a crucial aspect that, again, may not be captured by focusing on individual cogitations. Attempts have been made by the so-called discursive psychological field to appropriate this interactionist approach to memory formation (cf. Brown and Reavey 2015), as of late. However, its historical formation and the disciplinary framework wherein it was born and developed are traceable to social phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (and still practiced within these disciplines). Either way, signs are constantly renegotiated as to their interpersonal meaning in the context of regular engagement in communicative memory settings.

In this context, communicative memory is key in understanding how cultural memory morphs in a repository of meanings, and how this repository is, in turn, engraved in individual memory. It corresponds, in a sense, to the individual acts of parole which may crystallize in a system of meanings, in Saussurean terms, but may also perish as momentary and fanciful exchange of signs. In this respect, as noted by Assmann (2008), communicative memory is neither formalized, nor

stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited duration. We shall not examine which messages and why do not attain to become part of cultural memory, as this is a wholly different topic that by far eschews the limits of this analysis, save for highlighting the indispensable role this interim form of memory, that is between cultural and individual, performs in furnishing 'stimuli' for recollection. Communicative memory produces fleeting imaginary stimuli, inasmuch as reproduces symbolic representations that are culturally meaningful as parts of a collective repository and hence recognizable without particular effort (according to what Eco [1975] calls *ratio facilis*) by their recipients.

As Greimas has stressed repeatedly (see Rossolatos 2014a) structures are primarily responsible for the organization of the imaginary. According to Keller (1998), brand knowledge structures draw largely on cognitive psychology. Could the aforementioned Greimasian structuralist semiotic tenet be dissonant, one might ponder, with the cognitive psychological underpinnings of Keller's conception of brand knowledge structures? An ineradicable bifurcation inheres in the answer to this question. This bifurcation consists in the role performed by the imaginary in the formation of brand image. In the context of Keller's cognitivist approach there seems to be little space for the epistemic accommodation of the imaginary. In fact, imagination appears to have been expelled from the epistemic dimension that the construct of brand knowledge structure seeks to encapsulate. The suppression of this faculty within the contours of Keller's cognitivist approach that passed under the critical radar, constrains our ability to account for how brand image emerges through a highly figurative discourse, such as advertising.

Not at all oddly, but sadly truthfully, the majority of idiolectal brand communications produce memories (according to the function of communicative memory) by employing expressive units that partake of both the symbolic, as well as the imaginary.

But given that cultural memory depends on communicative memory for its formation, we may surmise that the symbolic is in fact produced by the imaginary. And, by implication, individual memory, which does not simply and uncritically reproduce existing symbolic cues from a cultural repository, but actively and 'imaginatively' recreates existing symbols, but also coins novel signs that are inserted anew in the trajectory of communicative memory, the subject and its individual memory are formed via the faculty of imagination. In other words, the subject does not process, it is rhetorically configured through communicative and cultural memory, with which it engages re-configuratively. This virtuous circular relationship amongst the three types of memory affords to elucidate how Castoriades' (1985) imaginary social significations are brought about and circulate in the social imaginary.

The communicative memory, proposed by Assmann, on the one hand, accounts for the missing link between how Halbwach's collective memory is reflected in individual memory, while, on the other hand, affords to shed light to why perception is not concerned with stimuli as 'brute facts', but as already semiotized through a "rhetoric of collective memory" (Erll 2008: 392), and, hence, pre-mediated through an inter-medial rhetoric (Erll 2008). This rhetoric is capable of being transformed into parts of cultural memory and, hence, through habituation to shape individual memory (which is why it has also been called 'habit memory' [Connerton 1996: 24-30], explicitly distinguished from individual/cognitive memory).

In these terms, individual memory is not the causative mechanism that produces meaning by processing stimuli, but shaped through communicative memory in interactional contexts. Communicative memory furnishes the mirror where meanings engraved in a cultural repository are reflected, inasmuch as the locus where signs become part of a cultural repository. To conclude this Section, individual memory should not be the focus of research into the process of meaning formation of 'stimuli' (or,

cultural artefacts), but a phase in the circular process of meaning generation, involving cultural and communicative memory.

11.5 The pathway to the Brand Imaginarium: Primary, secondary, tertiary brand iconicity

The preceding textual qualification of memory and its dislocation from the strict confines of 'ego-psychology' was intended to bridge an often encountered criticism against textual approaches that is launched by, not at all surprisingly, psychologism's exponents (that is ego reductionism in lieu of text reductionism). Surely methodological questions are involved regarding the operationalization of these types of memory, but such issues may not be addressed in disrespect of similar issues that still plague ego-psychology, such as the naturalized epistemological premises that undergird the localization of knowledge structures in brain structures: "Neurons and synapses constitute the physical substrate for our active mental states and our memories" (McClelland 2011). This localization constitutes at best a nebulous imbrication in the context of a scientific imaginary that posits levels of approximation in a self-expressed horizon as absolute identification of mind and brain, that is, from a deconstructive viewpoint, another limit metaphor that seeks to recuperate a virtual totality through an ideational transposition in a utopian space that, yet, performs a regulative function as to the degree of the totality's reification. Such yet unresolved issues that beset cognitivism, though, by far eschew the focus of this Chapter.

In continuation of the delineation of the communicative and cultural memory types, as essential complementary facets of the inherited ego-psychological concept of individual memory, we shall now endeavor to link these types to the three types of brand image, viz. brand images, brand image and iconicity as brand textuality condition. The resulting relationships amongst the components of this conceptual model constitute the Brand Imaginarium, as an expansive textual precondition for what Keller

(1998) calls 'brand knowledge structures' from a restrictive individual memory point of view.
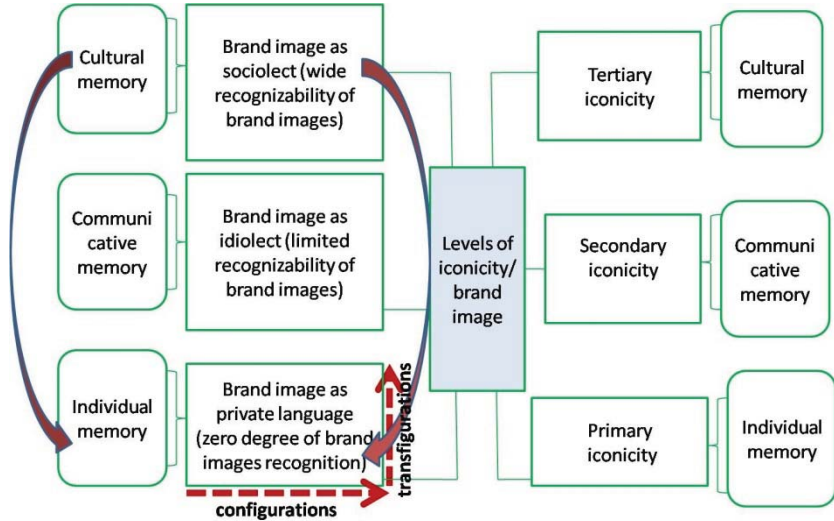
Figure 11.1: The pathway to the Brand Imaginarium: Relationships between brand image and brand images on different levels of iconicity and memory types

The Brand Imaginarium consists of three distinctive and inter-locking levels of iconicity, viz. primary, secondary and tertiary iconicity. Each level is responsible for shaping brand language (as its textual condition) in different ways.

    Primary iconicity designates the endophoric resemblance between multimodal expressive units to a brand structure, as rhetorico-semantic simulacrum, with zero degree of recognizability or assimilation/re(as)semblance by an intended target-group. This is the stage where a brand is born in the imaginary of a Creative Director and which resembles a private language, if not by virtue of minimal units (given that such units may have been sourced by existing and recognizable cultural milieus, thus not being wholly alien to potential receivers, e.g.

slice-of-life brand images), at least due to the invented correlational patterns with brand image concepts. This is the province of a Creative Director's individual memory, yet informed by and in constant interaction with cultural (or collective memory), as suggested by Fig.11.1.

Primary iconicity, at its most exemplary, may also be viewed as an instance of what Groupe μ (1970) called 'rhétorique folle' (crazy rhetoric), that is atypical configurations, yet without deviating from the scope of acceptable assimilations within its definitional contours. In this case, primary iconicity as assimilation, or, more aptly, as re(as)semblance is very close to the Deleuzian notion of *assemblage* as a form of hyper-hybridism (cf. Rossolatos 2015e; Deleuze and Guattari 1987), a concept that recently found its way in brand cultural research through Latour's socio-technical agencements (Bjerrisgaard et al. 2013). "An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows […] and the only assemblages are […] collective assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 2). Such configurations, anyhow, lie at the heart of creativity (singular lines of flight, according to Deleuze and Guattari; cf. Rossolatos 2015e) and radical innovation and, hence, are germane to the constant rejuvenation of a brand language, to rhetorical *inventio* (i.e., coining new brand languages and new expressive elements onomatopoetically), as well as to the coinage of novel transfigurations. Hence, the interpretative value of primary iconicity is to be located at an ontogenetic level. However, given the irreducibly cultural constitution of subjectivity, it is also located at a phylogenetic level, or, more aptly, as Moles (1984: 69) has framed it, at a mythogenetic level.

And the reason why this level of iconicity is akin to a private language is not attributed to the non-recognizability of minimal units (in standalone mode), given that as noted in Fig.11.1, individual memory is always in interaction with and conditioned by cultural (group or collective) memory, but due to the as yet unrecognizably novel modes of (a) rhetorical

configurations among individual units (b) their transfiguration into brand image concepts.

Levels of iconicity have been suggested in the past, for example by Moles (cf. Eco 1978), albeit with a wholly different rationale to the one proposed in this model, viz. according to the level of abstraction between copy and original, and with regard to individual signs, rather than patterns of configuration and transfiguration. Furthermore, this conceptualization of iconicity is not consonant with Eco's (1975) code theory and the three levels of codedness (also adapted by Groupe μ [1992], as demonstrated elsewhere; cf. Rossolatos 2014b: 202-205), which I applied to the Generative Matrix of Equity Potential model (cf. Rossolatos 2012b).

In greater detail, as regards differences from Eco's code theory, it should be noted that code theory did not address how multimodal signs resemble each other in a brand language as rhetorico-semantic simulacrum or how they are transfigured into abstract concepts, save for noting that biplanar elements (or functives of a sign-vehicle as cultural unit) are combined based on more or less explicit combinatorial rules. For Eco, combination is not an issue of resemblance, but of encoding and decoding. The (de)coding rationale, however, on the one hand, inherits the step-wise information processing legacy (which has been found to be heavily dependent on a presumed principle of goal-directedness at the expense of incidental exposure), while, on the other hand, it is rooted in the by now antiquated hierarchical propositional model of Quillian, that, as noted by McLelland (2000), was prominent when Eco's *Theory of Semiotics* was written (1975), but by now largely overridden by connectionist models.

Re(as)semblance and assimilation were posited earlier as key aspects of iconic memory, whereby re-cognition of emitted brand-related multimodal expressive units is sought. Recall, and here we have already proceeded to the explication of **secondary iconicity** (Fig.11.1), presupposes re-cognition, and re-cognition

assimilation/re(as)semblance of brand related con- and transfigurations with other brand or category related con- and transfigurations in memory. The emitted con- and transfigurations may become assimilated to consumers' cultural ethos in communicative settings if their modes of co-occurrence resonate positively with consumers' textually configured cultural milieu. This is a particularly sensitive aspect, as this assimilation does not take place consciously[9] (or in a goal-directed fashion in a process that moves from attentiveness, to interest arousal, to comparison among alternatives, to choice, to storage in different parts of memory [episodic/semantic]), but tacitly based on stored (in a cultural unconscious) modes of rhetorical configuration that allow for latent analogies between the ways novel brand textual configurations fire together in such ways as to be recognized and iconically re(as)sembled. Is this an untestable hypothesis? It surely is, inasmuch as cognitivist testable hypotheses about the workings of memory are enacted against non salient hypotheses (for the highly figurative brand language) about the incidence of a step-wise process against isolatable bits of information, rather than configurations that have been interwoven on the grounds of rhetorical relata, and for which there is not even explicit proof of literacy (beyond the trope of metaphor and perhaps metonymy) on behalf of assimilators/recallers.

This awkward inasmuch as realistic scenario of communicative memory and secondary iconicity, in the face of a highly figurative mode of discourse, where a zero degree of iconicity is highly local, and not global (cf. Rossolatos 2013a), already attains to bring the 'Other' into the process of memory formation/retrieval (either as physical interlocutor or as evoked cultural inventory) that has been lacking so far from solipsistic cognitive processing models. This is also the iconicity level where a brand language is greatly in a state of flux, and hence more

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[9] "Much relevant fantasy life and many key symbolic meanings lie just below the threshold of consciousness" (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982: 36).

akin to an idiolect, that is a language with limited recognizability from a wider audience, but also where semi-symbolic structures are manifested at their most prominent, that is as structures that oscillate between idiolectal imaginary configurations/transfigurations and inassimilable (unrecognizable) ones.

The above may be illustrated by the communicative circulation of puns that are often featured in ad films and that may be reiterated by interlocutors in ordinary communicative settings in a humorous fashion, albeit not tied up with the concerned brand language. In this manner, the pun has been recognized tacitly as rhetorical mode of configuration of a brand text by recourse to an embedded cultural memory, but not attributed to the brand. Hence, it constitutes a more idiolectal facet of a brand language that has not yet attained prominence among its target audience (or it may be the case that this punning replication is an incidence of off-target recollection).

Finally, **tertiary iconicity** is a case of a brand language's having attained sociolectal status, that is being re-cognizable by a wider target audience and hence assimilable to a cultural ethos that is partly conditioned by the unique idiolectal aspects of the brand language with which it is in constant interaction, and partly conditioned by already existing cultural practices and the respective product-category discourse, brand image concepts and modes of configuration/transfiguration.

This level of iconicity constitutes a textual condition of brand signification by dint of cultural memory, that is more deeply engraved in a cultural unconscious as configurational and transfigurational schemata that include inter-textual references, over and above strictly brand related ones (which textual semiotic conceptualization differs greatly from the social psychological approach to cultural knowledge as, simply, stock of cultural representations; cf. Chiu and Hong [2007: 786]). The 'processing unit' of this cultural memory is not the sum of individual processing units as individual social actors or monads who

'happen' to be processing the sociolect's configurations and transfigurations in the same manner (by dint of a rhetorical stratagem called, in Husserlean terms, Lifeworld).   Rather, the subjects are bound in a common cultural predicament by virtue of a pre-reflective, and non-conscious, mirroring effect that constitutes, at the same time, a radical act of misrecognition of their identity in the face of another.

This misrecognition is a necessarily erroneous conflation of a primary narcissistic drive for identification with another as oneself. In other words, the subject is duped by its own will for introjection of the 'external environment' and assimilation to itself, which are manifested in an impersonal mirror of misrecognition as inter-subjective mirrorings. Tertiary iconicity brings about re(as)semblance among culturally situated subjects on the grounds of brand image configurations/transfigurations, not due to mimicry, but to a will for identification with oneself, an impossible task that would amount to drowning, just like Narcissus. Thus, the subject re(as)sembles itself through brand-related configurations/transfigurations that are part and parcel of an impersonal mirror that sustains inter-subjective mirrorings, as mass mis-recognition. This is equivalent to saying that every act of re-cognition is a repetition of a missed encounter, between a subject and itself, where self, *pace* Lacan, does not consist in the subject as substratum of language ('the sub-ject that is sup-posed to know'), but as conditioned by language (the impersonal mirror); and, by implication, by figurative brand language through which the subject does not come to know, but becomes con- and transfigured alongside other subjects that are commonly conditioned in the same cultural milieu.

In these terms, the processing correlate of cultural memory is the social imaginary, and not an individual's imaginary. "Social imaginary significations cannot be thought of on the basis of an alleged relation to a 'subject' which would 'carry' them or 'intend' them. They are not the noemata of a noesis -- except in a secondary and inessential way" (Castoriades

1985: 230) and "points up the impasses awaiting any attempt to 'explain' the social on the basis of the individual' (Castoriades 1985: 231) cogito.

The subject that re-cognizes the brand's sociolect is compelled to do so by the mirror of the sociolect's social imaginary significations which it mis-recognizes in lieu of itself. Thus, the subject is lost (gone missing) in the process of recognizing itself in the mirror of collective memory that it does not actively re(as)semble, but mirror (*simpliciter*). The subject is configured in the text that it configures. As argued by Erll (2008a), memory or re-collection is a metaphor, that is a figurative process whereby the subject is transposed to the milieu of cultural memory.

The subject remembers by being transposed to a repository of cultural memories and hence its memories are always assimilated to a cultural machine, rather than being haphazard, purely individual impressions on a fleeting sensory manifold or stimuli. And it is no accident that Castoriades (1985: 232) assigned to social imaginary significations the status of conditions of possibility of cogito-centric representations, in the same manner that we identified here iconicity as textual condition of possibility of a brand language, and given that the former was posited as the 'processing' correlate of the latter.

The highly figurative language of brands, as explained throughout this Chapter, consists of configurations and transfigurations, and, hence, the social imaginary processing correlate of cultural memory at the tertiary iconicity level that produces social imaginary significations "emerges as otherness and as the perpetual orientation of otherness, which figures and figures itself, exists in figuring and in figuring itself, the creation of 'images' which are what they are and as they are as figurations or presentifications of significations or meanings" (Castoriades 1985: 232).

All three levels of iconicity are inter-dependent, while a brand language evolves diachronically as it passes from one level

to another. This evolution is not necessarily reflected in a brand's growth (in sales and market share terms), as highly recognizable and culturally significant brands may be niche-market or even obsolete or even configurational vestiges from another phase in a product's life-cycle (but still constituting staples in a cultural ethos). This is why it is important to approach brand language in terms of its iconic textual condition, as the interpretive depth afforded by iconicity resonates not simply with individual memory and individual recollection processes, but, even more importantly with communicative memory and cultural memory, while putting in branding perspective the fundamental cultural semiotic tenet (and more widely key culturological premise) concerning the conditioning of an individual by a collective memory; yet, while taking into account, at the same time, how collective or cultural memory is constantly refueled by individual creativity at the level of individual memory in the self-reinforcing virtuous circle of the Brand Imaginarium.

11.6 Conclusions

In this Chapter an attempt was made at disentangling the notion of brand image from the web of confusion that besets it, by recourse to the semiotic concept of iconicity. The preliminary definitional clarification of brand image resulted in distinguishing between three interlocking aspects, that is brand image as abstract concepts that make up a brand's semantic content, as multimodal expressive units (brand images) that populate its expressive inventory and as iconicity, or condition of brand textual signification. The highly figurative and motivated nature of brand language urged us to consider it from a pan-rhetorical semiotic viewpoint, both horizontally in terms of expressive concatenations as rhetorical configurations, as well as transfigurations through which expressive units become correlated with brand image concepts.

The highly figurative nature of brand language is amenable to structuration alongside structuralist tenets,

according to which we are concerned with structures of the imaginary. If this is so, then iconicity must be somehow linked to the imaginary. The ensuing discussion sought to identify this intricate relationship by engaging critically with the cognitivist (connectionist) approach to memory formation and retrieval, from which the imaginary has been expelled. An attempt was made to restore the role of the imaginary, by retracing its function in key philosophical writings, such as Aristotle's and Kant's, with an ultimate view to demonstrating that not only brand texts (from a sheer materiality viewpoint) are inherently imaginary rhetorical configurations, but the subject of enunciation is concomitantly an imaginary construct, by dint of being imbricated in brands' figurative structures.

The release of subjectivity from the isolated, monadic processing constraints where it has been placed by cognitivism and the demonstration of the importance of imaginary social significations for shaping subjectivity, culture and, by implication, of the embeddedness of brand language in this nexus, that draws on existing cultural artifacts, while constantly renewing cultural forms through rhetorical *inventio* and idiolectal configurations/transfigurations, paved the way for defining three levels of iconicity. These levels were shown to be involving different ways of memory formation (other than individual), viz. communicative and cultural. Ultimately, brand image was shown to be part of a more encompassing Brand Imaginarium that includes distinctive levels of iconicity as textual condition for shaping brand language, as con- and transfigurations, in the context of social imaginary significations that form a constantly renewed virtuous circle between cultural and individual, through communicative memory.

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The Handbook of Brand Semiotics furnishes a compass for the perplexed, a set of anchors for the inquisitive and a solid corpus for scholars, while highlighting the conceptual richness and methodological diversity of semiotic perspectives.

Written by a team of expert scholars in various semiotics and branding related fields, including John A. Bateman, David Machin, Xavier Ruiz Collantes, Kay L. O'Halloran, Dario Mangano, George Rossolatos, Mercè Oliva, Per Ledin, Gianfranco Marrone, Francesco Mangiapane, Jennie Mazur, Carlos Scolari, Ilaria Ventura, and edited by George Rossolatos, Chief Editor of the International Journal of Marketing Semiotics, the Handbook is intended as a point of reference for researchers who wish to enter the 'House of Brand Semiotics' and explore its marvels.

The Handbook of Brand Semiotics, actively geared towards an inter-disciplinary dialogue between perspectives from the marketing and semiotics literatures, features the state-of-the-art, but also offers directions for future research in key streams.