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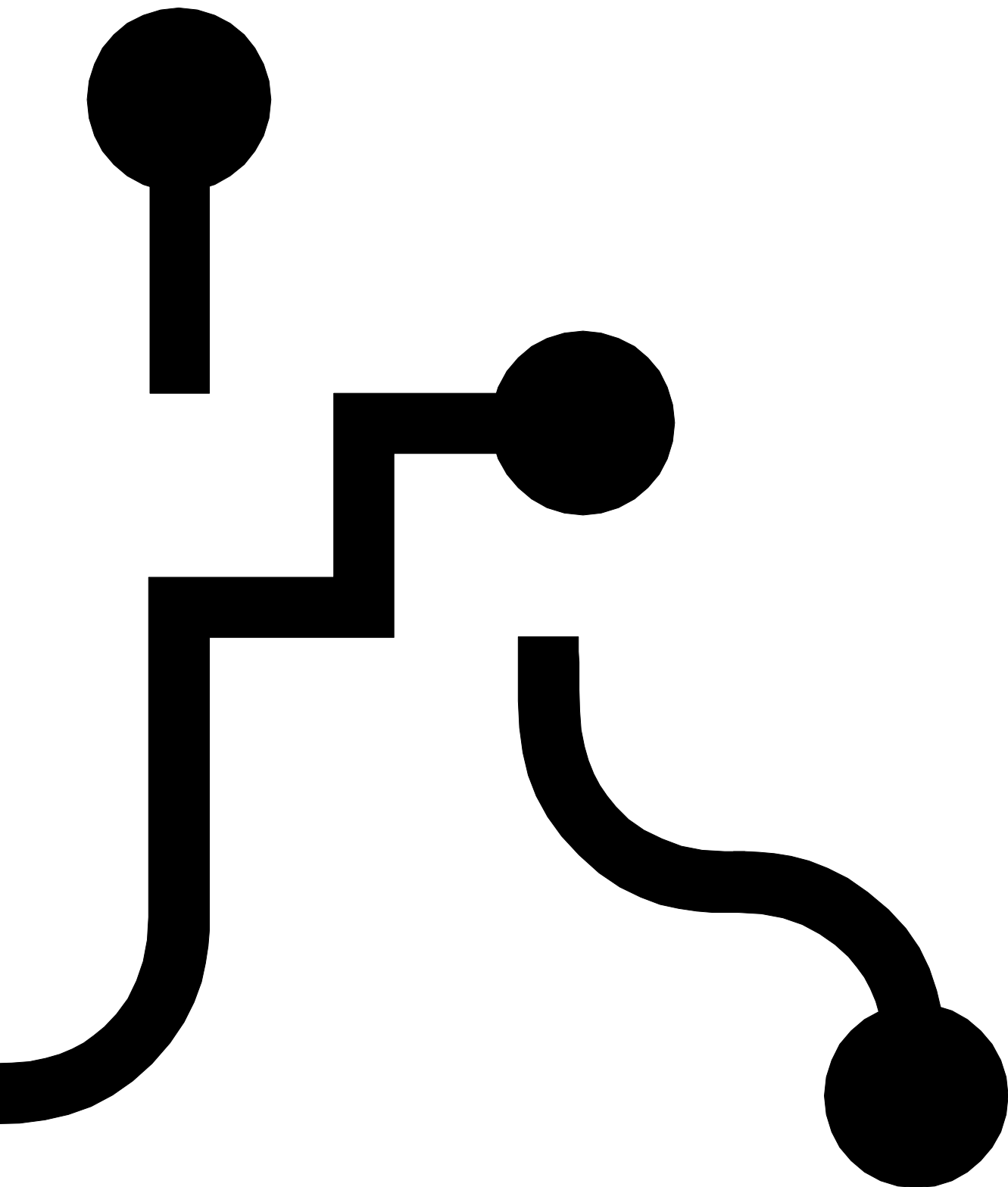
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# Introduction

Marketing semiotics is currently a discipline in rapid development, with a recent, yet resourceful scholarly history. The major challenge for marketing semiotics over the past twenty years has been to prove its credentials amidst a heavily fragmented and multi-perspectival landscape that is indicative of the current status of qualitative marketing research. Confronted with the not necessarily conflicting agendas of disciplines that have managed to make inroads into marketing theory and practice and which have been catapulted to mainstream research streams, such as anthropology and ethnography, semiotics has been faced with the challenge of proving its credentials and its ability to furnish unique perspectives on existing marketing issues, while also unearthing latent research needs.

We consider the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics* as being foundational, with an intent to promote scholarly research in all of the 4 or 5 P's, by drawing on the rich conceptual and methodological armory of various semiotic schools of thought. We are not aiming at rewriting marketing in semiotic terms, but at demonstrating how distinctive research areas and practices that have or have not as yet been tackled by traditional marketing scholarship, may be thought through and elaborated semiotically. At the same time, as the merits and the practical relevance of marketing semiotics must be highlighted, we opted for hosting practitioners' viewpoints along with academically oriented papers, in an attempt to demonstrate that marketing semiotics may only thrive through a dynamic interplay between theory and practice.

In the light of the above, Göran Sonesson's essay *Two strands of rhetoric in advertising discourse: A cultural semiotic account* kicks off the issue with a sweeping account of the cultural nuts and bolts of advertising discourse, by drawing on such divergent strategies as those of Absolut Vodka and IKEA, while taking a detour through metaphorical transfers between burgers and jeeps. By examining the various parts of rhetoric and how they developed throughout the millennia, culminating in the two pillars of contemporary rhetoric and rhetorical semiotics, that is Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric* and Groupe µ's rhetorical treatises, and by combining rhetorical with cultural analysis, most notably the strand that

derives from the Prague School of semiotics, the author issues a plea for further research in cultural semiotics with view to deepening our understanding about the often silent, yet resonant and occasionally conflicting argumentative underpinnings of advertising discourse.

Cultural analysis of advertising messages continues in the paper by Eviropides Zantides and Evangelos Kourdis *Representations of children in food advertisements in Cyprus: A sociosemiotic perspective* that furnishes an outlook on the structural components of Cypriot print advertising targeted to children (and/or their parents), while showing how local and global cultural values are reflected in the employed advertising executions by local and multinational brands. By pursuing a largely sociosemiotic perspective, while taking into account the relevant marketing literature and paying heed to inaugural structuralist texts that spawned extensive cultural semiotic research, the authors delve into how children are represented in print ads, while deconstructing salient facets of the modes whereby representations of the intended target-audience are formed, from hair-color to typographical features.

Semiotic cultural analysis and interpretation of advertising messages is further expanded by Jennie Mazur in her paper *IKEA: Ego and its Alter in inter-cultural communications*, who adopts an inter-cultural perspective in marketing communications, while focusing on how IKEA managed to take by storm its intended target-audience in the German market by leveraging its concept of not necessarily Swedish swedishness. While drawing on Sonesson's model of Ego and Alter culture and on an extensive list of analytical categories for dissecting ad texts, she demonstrates how the company's indubitably clever advertising strategy that built both on embedded cultural mores, but also on an invented notion of Swedishness that brought forward novel stereotypes, attained to consolidate in the existing consumer ethos through a humorous and occasionally self-ironic discourse. An intensive analysis of 48 IKEA commercials spawned three communicative territories that matched different phases of the deployment of the brand's communication strategy in the German market, while highlighting, 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.

By further exploring the contribution of rhetoric in making sense of distinctive modes of ad textual configuration, George Rossolatos in his paper *An anatomy of the multimodal rhetorical landscape of the world's most valuable brands* puts forward the //rhetor.dixit// model, which aims at furnishing a concrete methodological platform for analyzing and interpreting the multimodal rhetorical structure of ad filmic texts. Amidst the ongoing dialogue as to whether rhetorical analysis in the light of multimodal texts should stop at the level of rhetorical operations or drill down to individual figures, adapted in such a manner as to account effectively for the particularities of the visual mode, but also for verbo-visual interactions, //rhetor.dixit// follows the second route, while addressing the needs of a largely viso-centric discourse. The propounded model that draws on an extensive corpus of ad films from the world's most valuable brands (based on BrandZ 2012), combines content analysis with the aid of atlas.ti with an interpretive approach. The author puts forward three novel rhetorical figures (accolorance, reshaption, pareikonopoeia) in an effort to account for the bespoke configuration modes of ad filmic texts, while furnishing a novel methodology for conducting rhetorical analysis of advertising filmic texts, by dissecting and coding ad films segment-by-segment, according to uniformly applicable criteria. In addition, the model provides a string of useful statistics that emphasize the strength of co-occurrence of one or more figures in the same filmic syntagm(s), while offering a coherent perspective that combines verbo-visual rhetorical figures with argumentation strategies.

Moving on to the practitioners' corner, Marcie Connan and Crystal Sarantoulis of the DIGInsights semiotic agency guide us through how archetypical analysis of brand personality may yield alternative and more credible positioning territories for brands, by drawing on a case-study from the home repair market. By combining a brand storytelling approach with actual consumer research that aimed at gauging consumers' identification of different design propositions with brand personality features, the company managed to single out the most appropriate archetype for their client brand and reflect this appropriately in their value proposition.

Last, but not least, Cinzia Ligas and Fausto Crepaldi of the Lux agency introduce the 8<sup>th</sup> P through their Semiomarketing approach that aims at unlocking the unconscious mechanisms whereby perceptions about fashion and luxury objects are formed. To this end they recruit their 'warpframe', among other methods, which is intent on dimensionalizing the narrative structures that are responsible for conditioning addressees' perceptual mechanisms. Warpframe, a semiomarketing technique used to optimize video communication, is made up of ten items that have to be taken into account before producing a storyboard or writing a script, viz. identity, relationship, style, signs, codes, figures, roots, roles, balance and sub-limen. The authors show how narrative structures condition the 8<sup>th</sup> P, perception, through an analysis of Regina's advertising.

George Rossolatos

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# Two strands of rhetoric in advertising discourse: A cultural semiotic account

Göran Sonesson

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# Abstract

There are two interpretations of rhetoric that are backed by a long tradition: as the theory of argumentation and persuasion, which is how it was born in Antiquity, and as the taxonomy of rhetorical figures, which is the form in which it reigned supreme from the 16th century onwards. In both of these senses, advertising discourse today is the favoured, and in fact almost exclusive, domain of rhetoric. In this essay, we consider the revival in recent decades of both traditions, by Chaïm Perelman and Groupe  $\mu$ , respectively, and their importance to publicity, in particular to advertising pictures. In both senses of the term, rhetoric relies heavily on the presuppositions that are to a greater or lesser extent shared between the initiator of the message and its recipients. In the case of rhetorical figures, it is the organisation of the world of our experience according to topological properties such as neighbourhood, sequence, enclosure, and the like that has to be taken for granted; in the case of persuasion, more particular socio-cultural values have to be shared. We will see, however, that publicity occupies a paradoxical position from this point of view, since it has to rely on a consensus to have any influence, but must at the same time redefine the objects of our experience. As we will see in the case of Absolut Vodka, it was redefined for the international consumer as part of a rich European heritage, while car service was redefined for a Turkish audience into the likeness of fast food.

**Keywords:** rhetoric, presuppositions, source adaption, target adaption, rhetorical figures.

## 0. Introduction

The term rhetoric evokes many different associations. In popular usage, something is rhetorical when it is prolix, but does not contain any substantial information, and/or when it trades in falsehoods. But rhetoric is also an academic discipline, whose official history dates back, with several interruptions, to at least 25 centuries. As the history is long, it is not surprising that it has led to many bifurcations of meaning, the result being that today there are two different senses of rhetoric, each backed by a long ideational history.

There is no doubt that rhetoric started out, at least officially, in Ancient Greece, as the art of persuasion – or as some latter-day luminaries of that branch of rhetoric have said, as the art of getting someone to adhere to the propositions advanced by another. A common conception that dates back to Ancient Greece was that the principal means for convincing somebody was through the use of figurative language, and when rhetoric was revived in the Middle Ages, the theory of figures soon came to the forefront. Petrus Ramus seems to have been the pioneer of this new usage, and for the next 500 years, rhetoric was more or less synonymous with the taxonomy of figures.

At the beginning of the 20th century, rhetoric was supposed to be stone dead. Around the middle of the last century, revivals of both traditions of rhetoric took place, but even today, the two traditions have not really come to terms with each other. Several British and North American authors made some attempts to renovate rhetoric as the theory of persuasion at the beginning of the last century, but a real new beginning was only made by Chaïm Perelman (1977), who was the one who reformulated



persuasion as an attempt to get others to adhere to one's propositions. Meanwhile, in the ideological jungle of French structuralism, Groupe  $\mu$  (1992), combining the inspiration of structural semantics and mathematical set theory, proposed a new way of analysing the classical rhetorical figures into fundamental operations, which was already ground-breaking as applied to verbal language, but became even more radical when it was adapted to media not dreamt of by the Ancient Greeks, such as, notably, pictures and other visual phenomena.

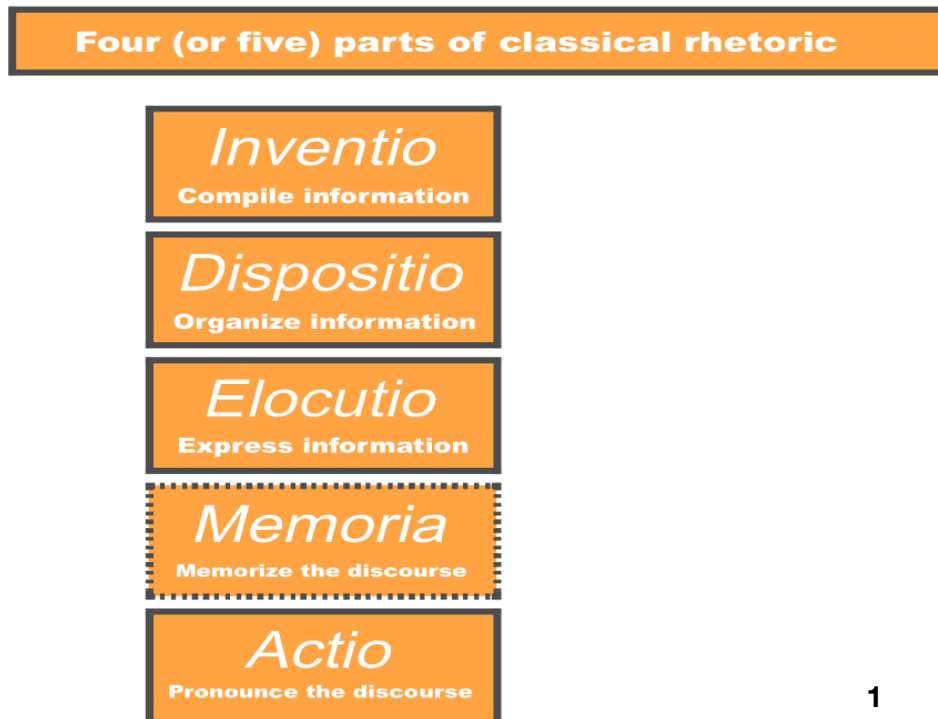
The Greeks said there were three kinds of rhetorical discourse, i.e., the political speech, the juridical argument, and panegyrics. This is repeated even today in the courses of rhetoric that are given at our universities. But, in fact, our lawyers and politicians do not use much rhetoric in any of the received senses, and even though they may still do some panegyrics, they do not contain much invention, which is the beginning of rhetoric in any sense of the term. So whatever we may think of publicity from other points of view, publicity discourse is today practically the only domain in which rhetoric is alive and well – in both classical senses of the term, that is, as both *dispositio* and *elocutio*. And this, I think, is particularly true about publicity conveyed by pictures.

## 1. Rhetoric as communication

We will have a look at the traditional division of rhetoric, two parts of which have in recent centuries competed at being the whole of rhetoric, and we will then go on to suggest that rhetoric, in the first sense of the term, just like semiotics and hermeneutics, is only a particular perspective on the situation of communication, in the sense in which meanings are transacted between different subjects. This will prepare us to encounter the world taken for granted in the next section, which has to be shared between the subjects involved in communication, and particularly so in the case of publicity.

### 1.1 *The parts of rhetoric*

In its original, classical form, rhetoric has four parts: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, and *actio* (cf. Barthes 1970: 197; Reboul 1984: 20ff), to which later, *memoria*, the technique of memorising the discourse, was added. Already in Antiquity, the means developed within these specialities were made to serve purposes other than strict persuasion, such as, most notably, aesthetic function and philosophical argument. We can here dispense with any further discussion of *actio*, since, in the case of pictures, as in that of written language, it cannot be divorced from *elocutio*, and has thus not given rise to any generalisation within more recent rhetorical theories. The same applies, even more obviously, to *memoria*.



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**Fig. 1.** The four (or five) parts of rhetoric.

*Inventio*, of course, is the art of finding out what to talk about, but it also already involves a certain organisation of the material, taking into account both social and psychological aspects, such as what is taken for granted within society (the *topoi*) and the way to influence people (*ethos* and *pathos*). This is an aspect that so far has been more or less neglected in the attempt to create a visual rhetoric; in the following, however, I will be particularly concerned with the former aspect, to the extent that I will seek recourse to the notion of the Lifeworld, also known as the ecological sphere.

*Dispositio* more specifically consists in putting discourse in order, and thus it has something to do with what we today would call the structure of the argument. One of the different “new rhetorics” developed in recent times, that of Chaïm Perelman, conceives of rhetoric as a theory of argumentation, but so far it has not been directly applied to pictures (except, in passing, by Meyer 2005; ed. 1999). Indeed, if, as Perelman (1977) claims, the purpose of rhetoric is to produce *adherence* to the proposed arguments, then the scope of rhetoric will go far beyond that which is usually suggested by the term persuasion. Clearly, even pictures, and not only openly propagandistic pictures, aim at producing adherence to the values of their producers. And yet, it is important to establish whether pictures are capable of giving expression to an argumentative structure, which is something that has often been denied in theory, but seems to be borne out in the present-day practice of the mass media. It is conceivable that, fundamentally, an argument can be carried out in an identical manner in pictures as in verbal language, but it is also possible that the pictorial argument takes quite a different form from the verbal one.

As for *elocutio*, which is the stylistic elaboration of the argument, it involves, most notably, rhetorical figures, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and many others. There have been numerous attempts simply to apply the existing repertoires of rhetorical figures to other domains, such as pictures, but the result has never been satisfactory. If not at the level of argumentation, pictures are certainly entirely different from language at the level of “style”, that is, more properly speaking, as far as the semiotic resources at their disposal are concerned. There is, to begin with, nothing similar to words and sentences in pictures. In fact, the differences are even more wide-ranging: there is even a sense in which rhetoric is more immediately present in pictures and other iconic signs than in verbal language. It is in the nature of the iconic sign to posit at the same time its own resemblance and dissimilitude with respect to its object: because of the first feature, the sign creates an expectation of identity that, by means of its second aspect, it necessarily disappoints. That the iconic sign is essentially motivated and just marginally conventional is something that I have tried to show elsewhere, against authorities such as Eco and Goodman (cf. Sonesson 1989; 2006; 2010a), and with regard to the different ways in which the iconic sign may modulate its similarities and dissimilarities (cf. Sonesson 1996a, b; 1997; 2001a; 2004a, b; 2005; 2008; 2010b).

The second tradition of “new rhetorics” is the one initiated by Groupe  $\mu$ , which attempts to go beyond the traditional figures, to discover a set of general operations responsible for the functioning of these figures in verbal language, which can then be seen to work in another way, given the kind of resources offered by other semiotic domains, such as pictures. There is nothing new about this rhetoric, to the extent that it continues a part of rhetoric present in the Greek tradition and dominant in Western thought since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is new, however, in that it furnishes us with the tools for analysing *how* such expression is brought about, going beyond the level of figures, and permitting a meaningful application to domains other than verbal language. My own work in pictorial rhetoric has basically concerned this tradition, trying to go beyond Groupe  $\mu$  in the enterprise they have initiated (cf. Sonesson 1996a, b; 1997; 2001a; 2004a, b; 2005; 2008; 2010b).

## **1.2 The communication model**

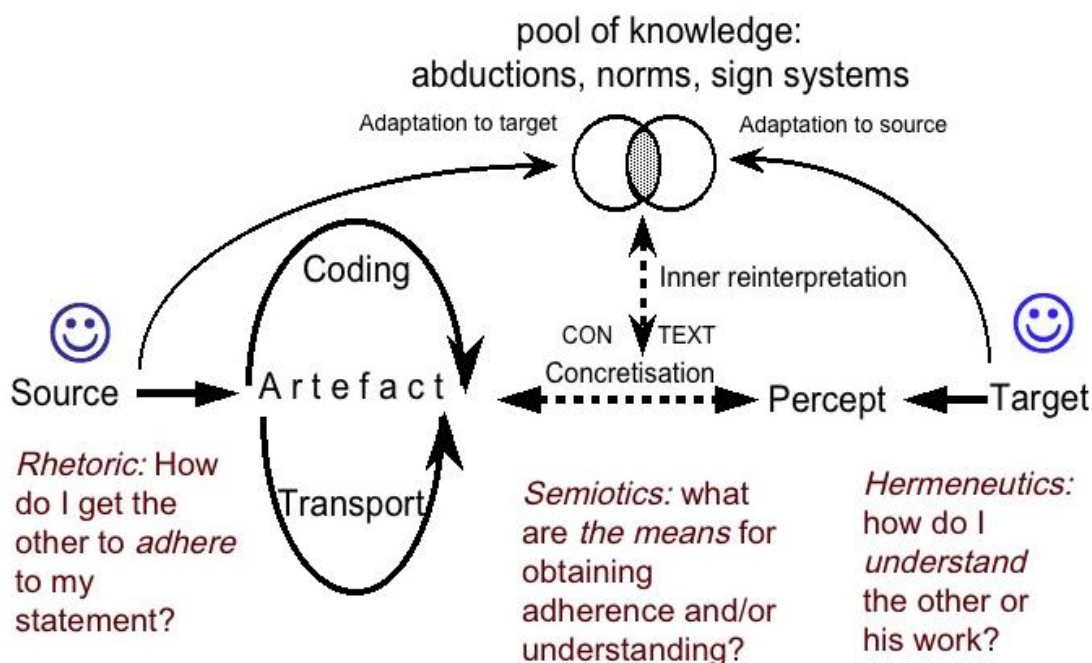
Complementary to its various facets, rhetoric has of course a communicative function, in the sense in which one subject conveys a meaning to another subject, though not necessarily in the sense of an artefact being transferred from one place to another, as suggested by the so-called “conduit metaphor” (cf. Reddy 1979). The mathematical theory of communication has created a lot of confusion as far as the meaning of communication is concerned. A letter is of course an instance of communication in both senses of the term. Communication in this sense does not require encoding either. A telegram, in the classical meaning of the term, is, however, an instance of encoding, as well as of communication in both senses of the term. If there is a transmission, it may very well involve the transplantation of the initiator of the communication or its receiver. A publicity poster will send its message each time somebody passes by it on the street, and an advertising message can only be sent once the journal in

which it appears is acquired by somebody and that person starts turning over the pages. The only thing that is necessary for communication to take place, in this sense, is that someone sets a task of interpretation to somebody else.

Instead of a continuous process initiated by a subject and affecting another, communication really should be seen as a *double set of acts*, which may coincide spatially and/or temporally, but often do not, and which are initiated by at least two different subjects, the sender and the receiver, or, to choose more appropriate terms, the *creator* and the *concretiser*. Curiously, the case of the radio, and to some extent even the telegraph, should really have suggested this model: no matter how much a program is broadcast, no communication will take place until somebody puts his radio receiver on. Nowadays, when we have to start up our computer, connect to the Internet service provider, start the e-mail program and then pick up the mail from the server, we get an even more acute idea of the double initiative required for communication to take place.

According to the conception of the Prague school of semiotics, as it was notably developed by Mukařovský and Vodička, *norms*, which in part are purely aesthetic, and in part have an extra-aesthetic origin, determine the production of the *artefact* by its creator, both directly, as a *canon*, or set of rules, and in the form of a *repertory of exemplary works of art* which are offered for imitation. In order to become an *aesthetical object*, or as we shall say generalizing the term, a *percept*, the artefact must be perceived by the public, and this process of perception, termed *concretisation*, itself depends on the existence of norms, which are ideally more or less identical to those employed by the creator. More commonly, and more interestingly, the norms may have been modified and even exchanged for others since the artefact was created, in which case a new interpretation of the artefact will result. Concretisation involves the determination of the *dominants* appearing in the structure of the work of art, that is, the elements that are to receive emphasis and which will then organise the remaining elements of the structure according to their purpose; it also allows the perceiver to fill in lacking details from his own experience. In these terms, what the Prague model says is that the two subjects involved in a process of communication may initiate their acts in time using different sets of norms. One tends to think of cultures as individuated in space, but of course we may also distinguish cultures in time; indeed, cultures may be dispersed in time, as well as in space, to the extent that they correspond to different subcultures, interest groups, and so on. This is a way of saying that the meaning that is there for the receiver is not exactly the meaning that was there for the sender. In terms of the conduit metaphor, what goes in is *not* what comes out.

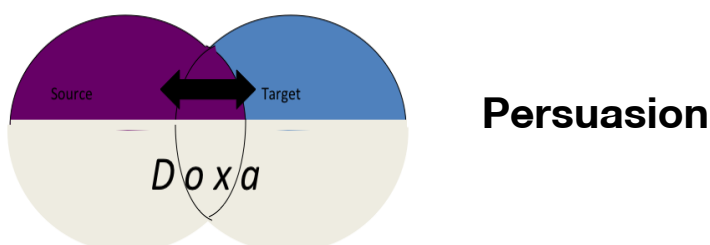
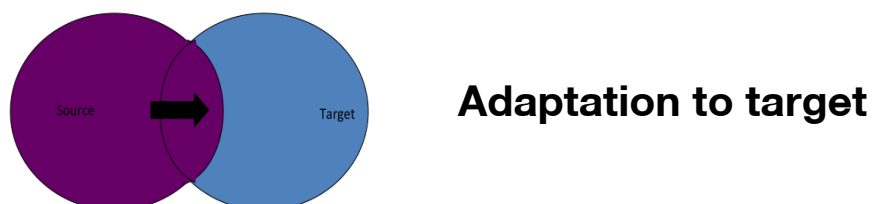
## General Model of Communication



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**Fig. 2.** Communication model, as suggested in Sonesson 1999, and related to the rhetoric, hermeneutic, and semiotic poles.

According to an idea, suggested by Jury Lotman, the sender and receiver in any situation of communication start out with "codes" — or, as I would prefer to say, systems of interpretation —, which overlap only in part, struggling to homogenise the system of interpretation as the communication proceeds (cf. Fig. 2. and Sonesson 1999). We can extend this idea by referring to the conception elsewhere propounded by Lotman and his collaborators in the so-called Tartu school, according to which cultures may be sender-oriented and receiver-oriented, and by transferring these properties to situations of communication. As proposed by Sonesson (1999), the communicative act may then be said to be *sender-oriented*, to the extent that it is considered to be the task of the receiver to recover that part of the system of interpretation, which is not shared between the participants. It will be *receiver-oriented*, to the extent that the task of recovering knowledge not held in common is assigned to the sender (cf. Fig. 3). Art, as conceived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been characteristically sender-oriented; mass media, in the received sense of the term (which is not really applicable to all modern media), have been noticeably receiver-oriented. The situation of teaching is clearly receiver-oriented. Publicity, however, is in a rather strange situation, because in order to attain adherence, it needs to share a lot of presuppositions with those it targets, but at the same time it needs to convince them of things which they certainly will not easily take for granted, such as that Absolut Vodka carries with it all the values of traditional European culture, or, as we shall see, that car service may be as good as a hamburger.



**3**

**Fig 3.** Retrieval of message as adaptation to source, adaptation to target, or mutual adaptation on the basis of background information and presuppositions (“doxa”).

With reference to this model, it is easy to see that rhetoric, semiotics and hermeneutics are situated at different points of the communication process. They all partake of the whole process, but from different perspectives. Rhetoric takes the point of view of the creator of the message: it asks how one is to express oneself in order to obtain adherence on the part of the receiver. Hermeneutics takes the point of view of the receiver: its question concerns how to understand the message of the other (and/or his work). Semiotics takes up a position in between, that is, within the phase going from the artefact to its concretisation: it asks what resources are available for bringing about the process.

It is misleading, of course, to say that rhetoric is only concerned with the creator: on the contrary, it concerns the relationship of the creator to the receiver, mediated, or not, by the resources at their disposal. The real question, then, is how the creator has to act in order to produce adherence in the other or, alternatively, how he is to use the resources at his disposal in order to obtain that same adherence. The hermeneutical question really involves what the receiver is to do in order to be able to understand the other (or the work of the other) or, alternatively, how he is to make use of the resources available to be able to understand the other (or his work). The semiotic question, finally, relates to the nature and kind of resources being available at the moment of communication or, alternatively, to the way in which the thoughts of the creator have been mediated by available resources to the receiver. The alternative versions of the rhetorical and hermeneutical questions are



semiotically informed variants. The alternative version of the semiotical question is a rhetorically and hermeneutically informed variety. At the centre of semiotics, then, is the question *how*: in what way is meaning produced, conveyed, and collected.

### **1.3 Conclusions**

Communication, in the sense in which it interests us here, is primarily a task of interpretation set by one subject for another. Rhetoric, hermeneutics, and semiotics may be considered different perspectives on the communication process, which take the entire process into account, but with an emphasis on the sender, the receiver, and the resources of interpretation, respectively. Historically, rhetoric, hermeneutics, and semiotics have evolved as separate traditions. Rhetoric was split in two directions, by concentrating, on the one hand, on the theory of advancing arguments (not necessarily logical ones) with view to aligning others with one's propositions, and, on the other hand, on rhetorical figures, which in recent times has meant going beyond a simple taxonomy to find the general principles that allow for the creation of figures. In contemporary advertising discourse both orientations are pursued, the latter in particular in the form of advertising pictures.

## **2. Meanings taken for granted**

All communication rests on certain shared presuppositions. To the extent that all subjects involved are human beings, there are a lot of things they all take for granted. Phenomenology has called this the *Lifeworld*, and James Gibson (1982) has talked about the *world of ecological physics*. In the rhetorical tradition, this is known as *doxa*. Others have used terms such as "background", "presuppositions", "commons", etc. In the Lifeworld and in ecological physics, contrary to the world described by modern physics, the sun goes up every morning and down every evening. We certainly have to take that for granted, if we are going to know when to switch on the light to browse through a paper, but that may not be among the most obvious presuppositions of advertisements (cf. Sonesson 1989; 2001b). There are also presuppositions which are specific to particular socio-cultural Lifeworlds, which may correspond to countries, such as Germany, Sweden, or Turkey, or to wider domains such as Europe or the Occident, and even to groups of people within a particular Lifeworld. Since advertising's focus is on the ways whereby a public may be brought to adhere to the propositions of the sender, rhetoric has been interested not only in presuppositions shared by all human beings and by people in a particular culture, but in the presuppositions taken for granted by a particular targeted audience during a particular act of communication – the public in Perelman's (1977: 32) sense of all those whom the initiator of the act wants to influence.

## 2.1 Vodka and European values

Elsewhere, I have often used a particular publicity campaign involving Absolut Vodka, the so-called “European cities” series, which disguises the distinctive bottle of Absolut by using shapes which are, in one way or another, also recognizable as scenes taking place in one or other European city with well-known history (cf. Sonesson 1996a, b; 1997; 2001a; 2004a, b; 2005; 2008; 2010b). As I have pointed out elsewhere (Sonesson 2010b), the most general procedure underlying all rhetorical figures could best be described as *the production of meaning resulting from a divergence in relation to that which is expected*. At the level of rhetorical figures, the divergence concerns the divisions of experienced reality: on the one hand, what we are accustomed to experience as complete and independent objects, or “substances”, to adopt Gibson’s term, only appear in part, and sometimes in other orders and proportion than in perceptual reality; on the other hand, something which is clearly one “substance” to normal perception appears as being both that thing and another quite different one. In one extreme case, “Absolut Naples” (reproduced, along with the following Absolut examples, in Sonesson 2004a; 2008, cf. Lewis 1996), the Absolut bottle is made up of a combination of a street lantern and cords spanned over narrow streets on which laundry is suspended. What is on one level a single substance, the bottle, is thus on another level several different substances, also of different types. Order and proportion may also be affected, as is the case with “Absolut Athens”, where the bottle consists of parts of a Greek column, but in a different order and with different proportions than the parts have in the column.

Groupe  $\mu$  (1992) tried to account for this kind of rhetoric, suggesting a cross-classification of elements which are absent or present, and which are conjoined or disjoined. They have thus taken the important step of abandoning the taxonomy of figures, instead defining some general principles, which may account for all instances of figurative rhetoric. These principles are certainly partly implicit in the traditional classification of figures, but they are new as they stand, and, beyond that, as they are formulated, they allow us to dispense with the particular figures altogether. Elsewhere, I have suggested that the particular principles they proposed are not quite adequate for the task. First of all, in most cases there is both the absence of one element that is expected and the presence of another, unexpected element. Thus, in “Absolut Rome”, there is an absence of an expected bottle cap, and the presence of unexpected handlebars of a Vespa. This may be more obvious in cases in which parts of different substances (in Gibson’s sense) are mixed in the representation, for instance when bottles are present where the pupils of Captain Haddock’s eyes should be. In the second place, there would seem to be many different modalities and intermediaries of disjunction and conjunction. Indeed, all kinds of relationships defined by mathematical topology, such as proximity, separation, inclusion or interiority/exteriority (that is, encasing and envelopment), succession, and continuity, are relevant here (cf. Sonesson 2010b). We expect an onion to be made up of onion parts, but it may also consist entirely of hands and feet. Something may be both a cat and a coffee pot, which are made to share some parts, while others are peculiar to one of the interpretations. It is also possible for substances to be present integrally, but combined in surprising ways. It is normal for ice to go together with an ice-



pail, but rather strange for the ice-pail to be exchanged for the Coliseum. A lot could be said about the perceptual reorganisation occasioned by rhetorical figures in pictures.

There is however quite another level of the Absolut publicity, which I have hardly touched on. From the point of view of argumentation and persuasion, the important issue is of course why the initiator of the message should have chosen to create a picture suggesting a similarity between the Absolut bottle and different parts of culturally rich places in Europe – for this similarity is certainly created, since it would hardly emerge spontaneously in our perception of the real world. Indeed, it is just as much created by the picture as the near-identity of a cat and a coffee pot in Julien Key's "Chat noir", of the similarity between a woman's face and a trunk produced by Magritte's "Le viol". The external, perceptual similitude is no doubt there to induce the idea of there being a deeper similitude, between Absolut Vodka (the content rather than the bottle – or, rather, the mark) and the cultural values which these European cities represent. In the real world, it is not at all clear what the European cultural heritage has to do with an alcoholic beverage produced in Sweden. Absolut Vodka is fabricated in the small municipality of southern Sweden called Åhus. There is no advertisement called "Absolut Åhus" (that is, not in the "European cities" series). There is, however, an "Absolut Stockholm", which predictably shows one of the traditional boats cruising the Stockholm archipelago, the shape of which is curiously reminiscent of the Absolut bottle. Åhus is more than 560 kilometres south of Stockholm. Long before the Absolut bottle was invented, there was a kind of Swedish liquor called, in literal translation, "absolutely purified alcohol". It was never called vodka, because that is a Russian term, which is however more internationally recognized than the Swedish "aquavit", or, to make a literal translation once again, "burnt wine". There was evidently a lot of packaging going on well before the advertisement series "European cities" and any other advertisement pictures featuring Absolut Vodka. Indeed, there never was any publicity for "absolutely purified alcohol", since all publicity for liquor was – and is – prohibited in Sweden. The characteristic bottle serves to separate Absolut Vodka from "absolutely purified alcohol". The name vodka does not necessarily make Absolut into something Russian, but certainly into something more international than "aquavit". But none of the above is sufficient to make Absolut Vodka the carrier of any particular values.

Absolut Vodka is clearly being sold as a European product, enriched with the long traditions of the combined European cultures. There is a paradox to this, since Sweden, which is nowadays a part of the European Union, only became a member after a long internal discussion, during which some Swedes advanced the argument that Sweden was not really a part of Europe. Historically, this is of course quite unfounded, but it may reflect the political reality of this country having been more ideologically connected to the US than to the rest of Europe since the end of the Second World War. This poses the question: why would anybody want to sell a Swedish product as being part of the European cultural heritage? I can only offer the following explanation: the Absolut Vodka argument depends, in its visual presentation, on a widely recognized *topos*, according to which Europe is "the old world" with its rich cultural heritage, as opposed to the U.S., which, in turn, is the more modern part of the world. This *topos* no doubt today seems somewhat dated, mostly flourishing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and

at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its *locus classicus* being, notably, the novels of Henry James. If so, it is no accident that the Absolut publicity appears exclusively in American news magazines such as Newsweek and Times, as well as in the in-flight magazines found on international flights. This serves to delimit somewhat the public which the initiator of the message (whether we take this to be “Vinoch spritcentralen” owned by the Swedish state at the time, the publicity agency which created the series, or the photographer who made the specific pictures) wanted to influence – to get it to adhere to certain values transferred to the merchandise, as Perelman described it. For the advertisement to work its magic, this *topos* must still be surviving in some part of the American public that reads news magazines and that goes on flights to Europe – at least in the projected ideal audience, to use Perelman’s term. There is no reason to think that anybody would take such a *topos* seriously nowadays: it may be exchanged between the parties as an internal joke. Whether this *topos* has any relevance for other passengers is difficult to know. One would hardly imagine Chinese people looking at Europe as being any kind of old culture.

There is of course a third party, which, in terms of our communication model, is neither the source nor the target of this message, and that is Swedish people in general: what does it do for them? As European values have been transferred by the advertisement series to the Swedish aquavit, there has perhaps been, to adopt a Freudian term, a counter-transference: just as the international fame of Ingmar Bergman and Astrid Lindgren have added to the international image of Sweden, as has the IKEA publicity, the Absolut Vodka advertisements may well have made Sweden a little more European – at least in the eyes of the members of other cultures.

## 2.2 A difficult burger to chew

To understand how much is taken for granted in the Absolut publicity, nevertheless, it is worth considering an advertisement that appeared in a country which is not a prototypical Western culture, although, as most cultures at present, it is certainly very much influenced by Western culture: Turkey. Indeed, it may even seem that educated Turks are imbued with Western values. At a conference in Izmir, in Turkey, in 2002, where I was invited as a plenary lecturer, a Turkish scholar commented on an advertisement, which, from the point of view of figurativity, manifested a similar organization to that of the Absolut Vodka advertisements (Fig. 4). In his lecture, my Turkish colleague Yusef Devran expressed himself in terms similar to the ones found in the acts of the conference: after observing that the advertisement “may not be decoded properly by the readers who don’t have enough information about the Western food culture”, Devran (2002: 219f) goes on to write: “A person who eats a cheeseburger satisfies his hunger and this person’s body functions in a much better way. Therefore, if you care for your car, as you care for your body, your car will function much better and will be much safer”. He is right, of course, that if you do not know that burgers are a kind of fast food, you do not understand the analogy in the publicity. At the same time, however, people who “have enough information about the Western food culture” would hardly see the consumption of burgers as a way of properly taking care of your body and would thus not make the analogy to taking good care of your

car. So, if Devran is right, it seems that the intended public must, in addition, have information about what Turkish people think about Western food culture.



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\* Boya ve kaporta işçilikleri hariç.

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**Fig.4.** Turkish advertisement for (as it turns out) rapid car service. The text reads as follows: "Big choice – 1-15 December – Chrysler and Jeep Winter maintenance days – Free check-up – 20% discount for the workers' wages and spare parts – Original spare parts guaranteed in workers efforts at our authorized Services – The authorized services of the Chrysler and Jeep Company" (translation courtesy of Yusuf Devran, email to the author on June 12, 2002).

Let us, therefore, start by taking a close look at the advertisement, avoiding, as far as possible, all prejudice. Always, when two substances (again in the Gibsonean sense) are combined in a picture, there is an ambiguity as to which one is meant to lend its values to the other. In the Absolut campaign, we know that the Absolut bottle is the theme, because Absolut Vodka is that which the advertisement is out to sell, so it is clear that the values of the European cities are to be transposed to the bottle, not the other way round. But which is the tenor and which is the vehicle of this figure? What we see is a burger confected out of automobile parts. If the goal of the advertisement is to sell burgers, it is a

mystery how the creators of the advertisement imagine that anybody should find it tempting to buy this kind of food because of the suggested similarity to spare parts of a car. One rather gets the impression that this particular burger will be somewhat hard to chew. If they are selling cars, what positive values might be transferred from burgers to cars? Perhaps the car is as cheap as a burger, but then it would seem to follow that whatever is the equivalent of nutritional value for a car must also be as low as in a burger. That the cars, or something involving the cars, are the theme of the advertisement becomes clear even to those of us who do not read Turkish when we see the words “Chrysler” and “Jeep”. But, at least to me, it still remains difficult to understand how any positive values can be transferred to cars from a burger. But this is of course because I have in fact not avoided the prejudice of Western values, and perhaps even those of a certain group of Westerners.

Once the meaning of the Turkish text has been explained (see caption to Fig. 4), we understand that the idea is to suggest that in this place the servicing of the car is as rapid as the serving of food in a hamburger bar. I cannot judge whether to a certain audience this meaning is evident even without reading the text (as I think the Absolut Vodka publicity is). Even so, the logic of the argument puzzled me. Rapidity may be a positive value, but how can you transfer it from burgers without at the same time evoking a series of negative evaluations, such as bad taste, nauseating smell, low nutritional value and perhaps even big chains selling goods of poor quality? When I pointed this out in Izmir, it turned out that the other invited (European and North American) lecturers agreed with me, but the Turks, who were in the majority, did not see the problem. I have since then shown the picture at many conferences in Europe and the Americas, and it seems that my reaction is widely shared. I cannot of course demonstrate that this is a difference between the values of a Turkish audience and a Western one generally, for which a different approach would be necessary, but it suggests at least that such a study may be worth-while.

## 2.3 Selling Swedishness

As explained by Jennie Mazur (2013; this volume), the publicity produced by the Swedish furniture company IKEA is different in different countries, and is thus produced with a specific, and certainly non-Swedish, public in view. Contrary to the Absolut publicity, the IKEA publicity does not try to hide the Swedish origin of its products, but on the contrary uses it as an argument to sell its products. Not Europeanness, but Swedishness, is the higher value that IKEA wants to associate with its products. There is a paradox to this, since the products are most of the time fabricated in some other part of the world than Sweden, but, as the label always reads, “idea and design” remain with IKEA Sweden. As Mazur also observes, the idea of Sweden featured in the IKEA publicity, at least in Germany (and I think that is also valid for at least some other countries, such as, notably, France), consists mostly of stereotypes, i.e., the kind of things people outside Sweden may believe they know about Sweden, but which all Swedes know to be untrue. Thus, this publicity occupies a complex position between two cultures: the values that they transfer to their products are not real Swedish values, but values projected by Germans to a Swedish culture. So, although the senders of the message are Swedes, it

is an outside view of Sweden they try to sell. IKEA originally used – and still uses – the same strategy within Sweden. The first IKEA department store was situated in Älmhult, a small town itself located in the province of Småland ("the small counties") in southern Sweden (but still to the north of Åhus). In Sweden a traditional stereotype says that people from Småland are very thrifty, or, perhaps, rather extremely miserly. IKEA explicitly makes use of this stereotype, selling their products as being from Småland. This is made to explain that IKEA products are so inexpensive in spite of being of such high quality. Of course, this information is normally not available outside Sweden, so, when going outside the country, IKEA had to invent something else. They counted on stereotypes about Swedes, but not concerning people from Småland. In France, the slogan was "these Swedes are out of their mind", selling such good products for so little money. As Mazur shows, this is also, in part, the spirit of the German IKEA publicity.

There seems to be several dangers to this strategy. First of all, how can IKEA sell their products with Swedishness, if Absolut Vodka had to shed its Swedishness to become an international brand (similar to how IKEA has to liberate itself from its origin in Småland)? In the second place, how can IKEA avoid transferring negative values to their products, which is after all what makes up much of the content of stereotypes, in the sense of being an outside view of a culture or cultural group? The answer to the first question is probably that IKEA is playing at another level than Absolut. IKEA wants to be homely, but Absolut wants to cover itself in the prestige of the whole European culture. They are directing themselves to different intended audiences.

The second question is more difficult. First, you have to pick your stereotypes. The Turkish company that advertised their service using an analogy to burgers would no doubt have to think again if it had intended to address a wider audience than the Turkish one. According to some common stereotypes, Swedes, in spite of having sex all the time, lead a very boring life, which explains that they drink a lot of alcohol and end up committing suicide. These are not the stereotypes featured by IKEA. Most of these stereotypes do appear, however, in the "Banned IKEA publicity" available on YouTube (cf. Mazur 2012: 223ff). Second, you can present some of the stereotypes you marshal with a distinct ironical distance: you present it as something we have all heard, but we know it does not really apply. There is the risk, of course, that some people in Germany really believe you have to fear for your life if you go out on the street in Sweden on the 20th day after Christmas, known in Sweden as "Knut", when Christmas trees are dropping all around. But perhaps the initiator of the message may have reason to think that most people will see this as an ideal type of a stereotype, i.e., an exaggerated example of what is really going on. This will not help, however, if the recipient takes all the message of Swedishness at the level of jokes. He or she must really believe in the seriousness pertaining to the Swedishness of the "idea and design by IKEA of Sweden". To the extent that this communication is really, most of the time, felicitous, this has probably not much to do with the particular message, but with the structure of the world taken for granted, and the extent to which it corresponds to expectations in the concerned cultures. If so, this means that we need to make more progress in fundamental research with respect to cultural semiotics.



Cultural semiotics, on which I have written many articles, is about the relationship between cultures, as shaped by the ideas one culture entertains about the other, and vice-versa. The origin of cultural semiotics is found in the Tartu school of semiotics, and, beyond that, in the Bakhtin circle and the Prague school of semiotics. I have tried to develop this branch of learning, suggesting that there is a difference between two kinds of relationship a culture can have with another culture: either it treats the others as being *Alius*, which is more or less the same as identifying its members with dead things; or it treats them as *Alter*, as being different, but still within the limits of the circle of those with which it is worth talking to (cf. Sonesson 2000; 2002; 2004c; 2012 as well as Cabak Rédei 2007 and Mazur 2012). This double duality is, of course, an over-simplification, but it already goes beyond the subtlety of standard and, in particular, postmodern approaches to the relationship between cultures. What we need now is really more fundamental research into cultural semiotics, i.e., the relations between cultures as conceived in the terms of these very cultures. This is important, not only for the classical humanistic and humanitarian reason of understanding better the world in which we live, but also as a background for the analysis of publicity pictures, the issues resulting from migration, and all kinds of intercultural relations.

## 2.4 Conclusions

All communication depends on knowledge taken for granted. If we assume the point of view of the initiator of the message, the rhetorical perspective, we have to consider what knowledge is accessible to him or her, which he or she can also suppose to be present in the receiver. Similarly, from the point of view of the receiver, the hermeneutical perspective, we have to ask whether the knowledge accessible to the receiver may also have been present in the initiator. Rhetoric as *elocutio* basically reorganises the perceptual world, its substances, wholes, and parts, and thus the kind of knowledge involved is mostly common to the human Lifeworld, the ecological niche of the human species. Rhetoric as *dispositio*, on the other hand, has more to do with the specific traits of each particular socio-cultural Lifeworld, and thus the possibility of the same information being available to both the initiator of the communication and its target depends on both of them being members of the same culture, in space and/or in time. Publicity messages that cross cultural boundaries may easily go completely wrong. Where such messages adapt to other cultures, and trade on stereotypes, there is a risk of communication's being overwhelmed by negative associations. Thus, from the point of view of advertising discourse, it is mandatory to filter the *topoi* that underpin ad messages through the palette of hermeneutics, rhetoric and semiotics.

### 3. General conclusions

Two long since segregated parts of classical rhetoric have undergone a revival in the past half-century. *Dispositio* as the theory of adherence according to Perelman, and *elocutio* as the general theory of divergence from that which is expected as suggested by Groupe  $\mu$ . I have tried to bring these traditions together in this essay, while laying emphasis, as I have never done before, on the *dispositio* side. I have picked my examples from the domain of publicity, which in contemporary society would seem to be the standard bearer of both kinds of rhetoric. Both conceptions depend on background conditions, in other words, on the Lifeworld, the world taken for granted. Rhetorical figures are divergences from the general principles of the Lifeworld, the laws of ecological physics, while argumentation rather centres on specific presuppositions within singular socio-cultural Lifeworlds. In the semiotics of culture, the issue that now looms large is how we are going to understand the structure of this knowledge taken for granted. It may not be too difficult to understand why Swedishness can be a selling argument for some kinds of products, but is better eliminated in other cases; but how are we to understand that such messages may deal with stereotypes, while avoiding transferring negative, rather than positive values to the products they are intended to promote? This is a fundamental question that is inviting of further research in cultural semiotics.

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# **Representations of children in food advertisements in Cyprus : A sociosemiotic perspective**

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# Abstract

This paper presents a sociosemiotic approach to analyzing representations of children in food advertisements, applied through visual content analysis. In particular, we examine the representation of children in Cypriot print advertisements as main subjects in the construction of advertising messages for food. The selected target group is mainly parents or adults who have children. The present study focuses on the iconic dimension of verbal and non-verbal signs of twenty-six advertisements. Our study shows that advertisements for children's food in Cyprus localize global cultural values such as family, safety and food quality for children through codified iconic (plastic visual) signs that connote characteristics of "Cypriotness".

**Keywords:** advertising, children's food, content analysis, iconic signs, cultural values.

## 0. Research objectives

This study constitutes a semiotic analysis of food advertising for children in Cyprus based on a selected corpus of 26 print ads from four weekly magazines (TV Mania, Down Town, OK, Tiletheatis). We selected iconic sign systems and processed them using the SPSS 19 program for statistical analysis in social sciences. These magazines were distributed free of charge every weekend with local Cypriot newspapers over a period of two years (2009-2010) and were chosen because they have the highest circulation in Cyprus and are therefore read by the majority of the population<sup>1</sup> (TV Mania has 57% readability on Saturdays and Down Town 45% on Sundays). The objective of the study is to explore how second order significations are assigned through codified iconic (plastic visual) signs in the construction of food advertisements that make use of children to target adults. This is achieved by examining the iconic dimension of verbal and non verbal signs of the selected corpus, such as the colour of human features and its dominance in the overall composition, facial expressions and gaze, the location of children in advertisements and the representations of family life, the location of logos and typography.

## 1. Semiotics and nutritional practices

Food has been the focus of many studies, and as a subject it has been explored from a variety of cultural and semiotic perspectives. According to Parasecoli, it is just one of the semiospheres that constitute culture, interacting with, and at the same time defined by language, technology (including agriculture), politics and economics, and many other domains of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Theorists have

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgos Agapiou, "What Cypriots are reading," *Filelefteros tis Kiriakis*, October 11, 2009, p.21 <http://www.philenews.com/AssetService/Image.ashx?t=2&pg=13758&>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Fabio Parasecoli, "Savoring Semiotics: food in intercultural communication," *Social Semiotics* 21, no.5 (2011): 653.

highlighted the cultural aspect of food, its symbolic character<sup>3</sup>, subject to discourse and interpretation. Furthermore, food is considered as exclusive a human behaviour as language, since, according to Levi-Strauss, “if there is no society without language, neither is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food”.<sup>4</sup> Levi-Strauss adopted a structural approach to food, devoting three volumes to his study, in which he stressed the significance of transforming a natural object such as raw food, into a cultural one, namely cooked food.<sup>5</sup>

Focusing more on a semiotic approach in his *Mythologies*, Barthes studied milk and wine, burgers and chips, and referred to alimentary signs that are connected to national symbolisms, with connotations such as Frenchness (*francité*).<sup>6</sup> Researchers such as Douglas later approached food as a social code, stating that “if food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed”.<sup>7</sup> Parasecoli remarks that “a semiotic analysis of food can help us achieve a more nuanced and holistic interpretation of semiosis as a process that involves not only the mind but also the whole embodied experience, well beyond sensory perceptions”.<sup>8</sup> Food is indeed a deeply cultural code, a complex cultural form of communication, and it would be very interesting to see how this cultural code can be promoted through print advertisements.

## 2. Advertising and children's food

Kitchen observes that in the process of marketing and advertising children's food “the concept of children's food is historically recent. In many cultures childhood was considered merely a prelude to adulthood rather than a meaningful phase of human development in itself”.<sup>9</sup> Advertising food to children is not only a sensitive issue because of its target audience, but also an interesting subject where we can explore the semiotic perspective of the advertising language used. For instance, as Elliot stresses, this is possible through concrete modes such as creating a funny atmosphere in the advertisements.<sup>10</sup>

The assignment of meaning to selling goods is common practice in advertising, and companies need to be careful about what food products they sell to children, and how they do it. Valentine remarks that

<sup>3</sup> Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, “Semiotics of the 20th century,” *Sign Systems Studies* 36, no.1 (2008): 213-214.

<sup>4</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, “Le triangle culinaire,” *L'Arc* 26 (1965): 22.

<sup>5</sup> Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Mythologiques 1. Le cru et le cuit*. Paris: Plon, 1964.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Mythologiques 2. Du miel aux cendres*. Paris: Plon, 1966.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Mythologiques 3. L'Origine des manières de table*. Paris: Plon, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp. 71, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Myth, Symbol, and Culture, Daedalus* 101 no.1 (1972): 61.

<sup>8</sup> Parasecoli, “Savoring Semiotics,” p. 661.

<sup>9</sup> Philip J. Kitchen, *Marketing Communications: Principles and Practice* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Charlene Elliot, “Marketing Fun Foods: A profile and Analysis of Supermarket Food Messages Targeted at Children,” *Canadian Public Policy-Analyse de Politiques* Vol. XXXIV, No. 2 (2008): 270.

“anyone who markets to kids or researches the youth market will be aware that children live in a culture of their own, created by, and for this age group. [...] It has therefore become a research holy grail to find ways to understand this world and track how the changing cultural context influences young people’s responses to brands”.<sup>11</sup> We also need to consider that young people and kids are not yet exposed to visual culture as much as adults are, and as Valentine observes, “[it] is, in effect, the constructed images of the self within their [the children’s] own culture that determines how kids “see” themselves and how they will want to be seen by others. They look, as it were, into a cultural mirror to find who they are”.<sup>12</sup> She also adds that “several things flow that are key to the semiotics of youth marketing.”

In another study regarding the reading of food advertisements, Tresidder observes that “[u]nderstanding the production and consumption of the images contained within food marketing requires the exploration of the complex layers of discourses and influences that socially and culturally embed the language of food and gastronomy within contemporary society,”<sup>13</sup> and that this language is utilized by both the individual and the industry “to exchange the meanings and significance within both commercial and cultural settings”. This might be the reason why Beasley and Danesi remark, “[t]he feature that characterizes the business of modern advertising is that it has joined forces with marketing science in the business of getting products and services from producers to consumers in the most effective way possible [...] The work of the advertiser and marketer is, fundamentally, the work of the semiotician”.<sup>14</sup> But how can Semiotics serve this work?

### 3. From Roland Barthes to Groupe µ

The increasing number of semiotic studies that examine the way meaning is constructed in advertisements demonstrates how Semiotics could give answers to the previous question. The first complete semiotic analysis of an advertisement is considered to be found in Barthes’ essay *La rhétorique de l’image* (1964), where he classified the advertisement’s signs or messages into two main types: *verbal* and *iconic* signs/messages. He then categorised iconic signs into *non-codified iconic* and *codified iconic signs*. For Guidère, Barthes’ division of signs turns advertising language into an advertising giant, a cluster of disparate signs.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the signs are disparate but they have a common purpose: to promote connotative meanings through their synergy.

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<sup>11</sup> Virginia Valentine, “Using Semiotics to build powerful brands for children,” *Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers* 4, no. 2 (2003): 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Tresidder, “Reading food marketing: the semiotics of Marks & Spencer!?,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 30, no. 9 (2010): 483.

<sup>14</sup> Ron Beasley and Marcel Danesi, *Persuasive Signs: The Semiotics of Advertising* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> Mathieu Guidère, *Publicité et traduction* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000), p. 39.

Barthes did not develop further his classification of iconic signs, however this synergy, not only of disparate signs (verbal and iconic), but also of signs that share common characteristics (codified iconic and non-codified iconic) were marked by the Belgian Semioticians known as Groupe  $\mu$ . Thus, almost thirty years later, Groupe  $\mu$  (1992), in their famous work *Traité du signe visuel* (1992), elaborated on Barthes' classification, categorising iconic signs into *iconic visual signs* (Barthes' non-codified iconic signs) and *plastic visual signs* (Barthes's codified iconic signs) such as colour, form and texture. Groupe  $\mu$  defines the relationship between iconic visual and plastic visual signs in the following way: "the plastic, being phenomenologically the signifying of the iconic signs, enables the identification of the iconic. In turn, the iconic, once identified, enables one to attribute content to the plastic elements which don't belong to the iconic type."<sup>16</sup> According to Groupe  $\mu$ , signifiers of an iconic entity coincide as a rule with signifiers of a plastic entity, and vice versa. Furthermore, there is a relation between the two types of visual signs. For Groupe  $\mu$ , there is an *iconoplastic relationship* between iconic visual signs and plastic visual signs, and this relation

"is evidence that the plastic element is autonomous from the iconic representation. In fact plastic and iconic elements complement each other. Because it is the phenomenological signifier of the iconic sign, the plastic element allows viewers to identify the iconic, while the iconic element thus identified makes it possible to discover content in the plastic elements that do not belong to iconic types."<sup>17</sup>

In our study, we adopt Barthes' classification by emphasising the iconoplastic relationship between iconic visual signs and plastic visual signs, as proposed by Groupe  $\mu$ . More precisely, we examine the plastic visual dimension of verbal signs, logos, colours, gazes, facial expressions, location of children in advertisements, family representations, and typography. The study of these plastic visual signs is based on our research objective, that is to investigate whether they are carriers of specific cultural connotations and values in food advertisements that use children, in order to facilitate the promotion of a product in the Cypriot market.

## 4. The plastic visual signs of the advertisements

As Kitchen highlights, non-verbal messages (like music or pictures of happy pretty children) are often employed by advertisers to signify values in children's advertisements for food, which will appeal to the

<sup>16</sup> Groupe M., *Traité du signe visuel. Pour une rhétorique de l'image* (Paris: Éditions Seuil, 1992), p. 361.

<sup>17</sup> Groupe M., "A rhetoric of visual statements", in *Advances in visual semiotics: the semiotic web 1992-93* by Thomas-A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), p. 597.

parents (especially the mother) who buys and prepares the child's food.<sup>18</sup> On this basis, Channon<sup>19</sup> stresses that this type of advertising had to communicate successfully at two levels: young mothers with children under 12, who are looking for new ideas to feed children and to children under 12 who are attracted by the novelty and playful appeal of the product. We are interested in seeing how the non-verbal signs function in the promotion of a product in Cypriot advertisements for children's food, to whom they appeal, and if these signs are culturally selected by advertisers to ensure the advertisement's success.

#### 4.1. The plastic visual dimension of verbal signs and logos

The extension of analysis from the verbal to the non-verbal messages is of central interest to semiotic advertising research. In this study we will not be focusing on the linguistic content of the verbal message, but on its visual aspect. Many scholars have stressed the visual dimension of the language system, from Welby who in her discussion of translative-interpretative processes stated that "[...] we are forgetting that while language itself is a symbolic system its method is mainly pictorial,"<sup>20</sup> to Barthes who stated "I have a disease: I see language."<sup>21</sup> According to Petrilli, all of these scholars evidenced an aspect of verbal signs that is irreducible to indexicality or to conventionality.<sup>22</sup> Especially in advertising, language is imbued with visual significance. More specifically, not only the typography of verbal signs (as we will see later), but also the location of the verbal sign is yet another important aspect that should be taken into account when analysing the iconic signs of the advertisements under scrutiny, since "every text is itself an image, an observable surface."<sup>23</sup>

As regards the linguistic aspect of the verbal signs of the studied advertisements, they are mainly in Greek (69%), belonging to Cypriot advertisements, and the rest in English (31%), targeting non-Greek reader groups as well. In respect of the location of the verbal signs in our corpus, in more than half (54%) the verbal sign is located in the lower part of the advertisement, in 31% in the middle and in the remaining 15% in the top part. Since the verbal sign is mainly positioned in the lower part of the studied advertisements, it performs what Barthes defines as *anchorage function*,<sup>24</sup> that is with view to clarifying what the iconic messages in the advertisements stand for. At the same time, it is interesting

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<sup>18</sup> Philip J. Kitchen, *Marketing Communications: Principles and Practice* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Channon, *Twenty advertising case histories, second series* (London: Cassell, 1989), p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> Victoria Welby, *What is Meaning? Studies in the Development of Significance* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1983 [1903]), p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, "Iconicity, Otherness and Translation", *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 7, no1 (2012): 20.

<sup>23</sup> Dominique Maingueneau, *Analyser les textes de communication* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007), p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> Roland Barthes, "La rhétorique de l'image", p. 45.



to remark that, as described by Kress and Van Leeuwen, “what has been placed on the top is presented as the Ideal, and what has been placed at the bottom is put forward as the Real.”<sup>25</sup> The majority of the verbal signs placed at the bottom of our advertisements give practical and detailed information, showing and explaining ‘what is the real’ aim/purpose of ‘ideal’ iconic messages placed at the top.

Furthermore, one of the signs in an advertisement is also the logo, the role of which is to identify and build a product’s visual identity. According to Guidère,<sup>26</sup> a logo is a brand’s iconic aspect, while its name is its verbal aspect. In the advertisements under study, more than half of the logos (64%) were placed close to the advertised product (see Table 1). It is believed that advertisers choose to place logos close to the product in order to enforce the connection between them. It is also observed that logos are often used in contrast to the ephemeral iconic themes of the advertisements that change for each campaign.

		Position of logos		
Origin of the advertisement		Not-close	Close	Total
	Cypriot	35%	65%	100%
		6	11	17
		60%	69%	65%
	Foreign	45%	55%	100%
		4	5	9
		40%	31%	35%
	Total	36%	64%	100%
		10	16	26
		100%	100%	100%

**Table 1.** Crosstabulation of the origin of the advertisements and the position of logos.

<sup>25</sup> Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Reading images: The grammar of Visual Design* (New-York: Routledge, 2006), p. 186.

<sup>26</sup> Guidère, *Publicité et traduction*, p. 40.

## 4.2. Colour as a plastic visual sign

Another intensely cultural aspect is the plastic visual sign of colour. Hornung supports in a very simple way how colour is used in food advertisements for children to make the product look appealing and to reinforce values such as multiculturalism and egalitarianism.<sup>27</sup> Perceptions of food are also associated with colours, for example the flavour of cakes and ice creams are often anticipated from their colour<sup>28</sup>.

As Van Leeuwen remarks,

[...] a quality of an object (e.g., colour) is then recognized as coming from a particular context (a particular culture, a particular historical period, a particular activity, particular group, etc.), and conveys ideas and values that are commonly associated with that context in popular culture and hence familiar to anyone who is at all exposed to mass media.<sup>29</sup>

For this reason, the qualitative features of the children (such as eye and hair colour) appearing in advertisements are selected on this basis. In the food advertisements, which appeared in Cypriot advertisements, the children's eye colour is unclear in 31% of the cases, 38% seem to have brown eyes and 31% blue. Things become much clearer when it comes to the hair colour of the children. In this case, 54% have brown hair, 31% have blond hair, 8% black hair and another 7% red hair. Dark colours seem to dominate in the studied advertisements, as shown in the example (Fig. 1), where this conclusion is reflected.

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<sup>27</sup> David, Hornung, *Colour: A Workshop for Artists and Designers* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005), p. 133.

<sup>28</sup> Dawn Burton, *Cross-Cultural Marketing: Theory, practice and relevance*. London, New York: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Theo Van Leeuwen, *The language of colour. An Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 86.



**Figure 1.** Cypriot print advertisement for mineral water (DDB Cyprus, TV Mania 2009, issue 803, p.43).

Furthermore, it was noted that in more than half of the advertisements the dominant colours in the compositions were black and white. This is in contrast to what Wright mentions about children's advertisements, in other words, if customers are children then a mixture of bright, happy, attractive colours might as well be the best approach in advertisements.<sup>30</sup> More specifically, black was used in 27% of the advertisements, white was used in 23%, red in 15%, blue in 11%, yellow in 8%, and brown, green and orange, each in 4% of the advertisements. The remaining advertisements (4%) used more than three colours, which were usually bright. This is very interesting since many everyday objects for children, such as toys and books are painted with bright colours, as Van Leeuwen mentions.<sup>31</sup> Given that the advertisements focus on children, we expected brighter colours to be used. Van Leeuwen remarks that "black can also gain meaning, like white, it can be interpreted as *not* being a colour, as negating or suppressing the more extroverted emotionality of vivid colour, and therefore as 'restrained' or 'modest.'"<sup>32</sup> It is, however, likely that the advertisers chose black and white not for their modest characteristics, but rather because the two colours endow an advertisement with realism. For Kitis, the black and white of the photo adds to the realism of the picture<sup>33</sup> and Taylor and Baldry consider that black and white also represents naturalism.<sup>34</sup> This choice may be seen as an effort to show that they are not being deceitful, especially as regards such a serious matter as children's nutrition.

<sup>30</sup> Ray Wright, *Consumer Behaviour* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> Van Leeuwen, *The language of colour*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Eliza Kitis, "Ads-part of our lives. Linguistic awareness of powerful advertising", *Word & Image* 13 (1997): 307.

<sup>34</sup> Chris Taylor and Anthony Baldry, "Computer assisted text analysis and translation: a functional approach in the analysis and translation of advertising texts," in *Exploring*

### 4.3. Facial expression and gaze as plastic visual signs

Non-verbal signs worth studying are also facial expressions (see, for example, Fig. 2) and gaze (see, for example, Fig. 3) which constitute plastic visual signs. As Nöth stated “facial expressions seem to be largely universal but are nevertheless culturally variable to a certain degree.”<sup>35</sup> It would be interesting to examine in our corpus whether facial expressions are culturally related to the Cypriots. It is observed that, in 8% of the cases, the facial expressions are unclear, while 81% of the children appearing in advertisements are smiling and 8% are calm.

A happy atmosphere is connoted by the presence of children and it also has a positive effect on how the advertised food product is perceived. This finding shows that most of our advertisements could be described as *emotional*, since, according to de Mooij, in advertising theory, emotion is used in the rough classification of advertising in “rational” or “emotional”, where emotional means feelings, pleasure or mood.<sup>36</sup>

Argyle and Cook state that cultural differences in gazing behaviour appear in both frequency and length of eye contact.<sup>37</sup> The gaze direction also comes under this category, and we have ascertained that 42% of children look directly at the advertisement's reader, whereas 58% do not. As regards the gaze, Fabbri observes that the personal and impersonal (content category) can become apparent in the way that images are organised in some cultures, through the contrast between a direct gaze and a profile shot, in the same way that the pronouns ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘he’ or ‘she’ are used in language.<sup>38</sup> Both direct and indirect communication seem to have been adopted as creative practices in the examined advertisements.

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*Translation and Multilingual Text Production: Beyond Content* by Erich Steiner and Colin Yallop (Berlin and The Hague: Mouton, 2001), p. 296.

<sup>35</sup> Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 402.

<sup>36</sup> Marieke de Mooij, *Consumer Behavior and Culture: Consequences for Global Marketing and Advertising* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage, 2011), p. 185.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Argyle and Mary Cook, *Gaze and Mutual Gaze* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976), p. 26-34.

<sup>38</sup> Paolo Fabbri, *Le tournant sémiotique* (Paris: Lavoisier, 2008), p. 118.





**Figure 2.** Cypriot print advertisement for fruit drink (Wellspring Trading Ltd, TV Mania 2009, issue 814, p.37).

#### 4.4. Children's location in advertisements and family representations

The location of children and the number of faces participating in the advertisements connote meanings. As regards their location in the picture, 92% of the portrayed faces are located in the centre-front and 8% of faces to the left. This centralisation of faces in the ads is interesting as Kress and Van Leeuwen remark “[f]or something to be presented as Centre means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are in some sense subservient.”<sup>39</sup> This supports the view that location is not random, but semiotically determined, since the great majority of advertisers in our corpus choose to make the child the focal point of the iconic message, a choice that connotatively shifts weight from the product's advertisement to the child itself.

Moreover, in 50% of the advertisements, the child appears on its own, in 12% there is another child in the picture, in 30% a parent and in 12% of the cases there is one more child and another parent. In 27% of the cases, the parent is a woman, while in 23% both sexes are represented. It may be opined that when a child appears on its own, advertisers might connote his/her uniqueness for the parents, whilst when accompanied by another child could connote his/her innocence/naivety. The use of more individuals, both children and adults, connotes iconically a family atmosphere, whereupon advertisers rely to promote food for children.

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<sup>39</sup> Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Reading images: The grammar of Visual Design*, p. 196.



**Figure 3.** Cypriot print advertisement for ice-cream (Regis Milk Industries Ltd, Down Town 2009, issue 142, p.81).



## 4.5. Typography and graphics as plastic signs

It is worth mentioning that in Barthes' classification, the verbal message is premised in relation to the iconic messages, since "writing and speech are always complete terms of informational structure"<sup>40</sup> and because it confronts the polysemic character of the image. Besides its information structure, writing is actuated by typography. According to Goddard, "[...] the verbal language can suggest particular qualities as a result of how it appears: in other words, writing is a form of image-making, too. It could be said to have its own paralanguage, as a result of 'clothing' the copywriter has chosen for it."<sup>41</sup>

The aforementioned position is adopted in this paper as well as the importance of typography and graphic design in the context of advertising, since both constructs visualize a mental idea, a concept, which must reach its audience successfully. There are unlimited combinations of graphic elements and any variation in the content or placement of an image or images, and in the type and space of an advertisement would lead to a different visual outcome which, in turn, would result in a different interpretation. Usually, the major constituents of a typical advertisement are: headline, caption/subheading, illustration/photograph/image, body copy, logo/symbol/name-style, slogan and name/address/website.

According to Bertin, graphic parameters contribute to the semiotic structuring and transference of meaning in design applications such as shape, scale, value (tone), texture, color, orientation and location.<sup>42</sup> Through these parameters an advertisement uses specific typefaces and styles for headlines, sub-headings or body copy and we believe that these choices are essential when striving to achieve a certain tone of voice and attract a particular target audience, as in our case children and their parents.

Many researchers have examined the semiotic attributes of typography. However, studies looking specifically at typographic characteristics in the context of food advertisements for children in Cyprus are limited. Our focus is on display typography since its major role is to attract the viewer's attention. In the current study a series of typographic variables was set in respect of a visual content analysis, as described above. McCarthy and Mothersbaugh observe that typography is a function of typeface characteristics, spacing and layout and that these dimensions have semantic associations.<sup>43</sup> Because of the unlimited combinations of these dimensions, we have defined our typographic aspects based on specific typographic characteristics described by Van Leeuwen such as serif and sans serif, script,

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<sup>40</sup> Roland Barthes, "La rhétorique de l'image", p. 43-44.

<sup>41</sup> Angela Goddard, *The Language of Advertising* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Bertin, *Semiology of Graphics* (California: Esri Press, 2011[1967]), p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> McCarthy S., M. and L., D. Mothersbaugh. "Effects on Typographic Factors in Advertising-Based Persuasion: A General Model and Initial Empirical Tests." *Psychology & Marketing* 19, no. 7-8 (2002): 663-691.



decorative, irregular, italics/slope, curvature, texture and connectivity.<sup>44</sup> We have also included in our coding procedure the typographic characteristics of upper and lower case to see the use of display type set in capital letters or not for this type of advertisement. It is common knowledge in typography that most of the time lower-case letters are more easily legible than upper-case letters.

This practice is noted in our results, as 85% of our adverts use lower-case characters to attract attention, 11% upper-case and 4% both. This finding, that verbal messages targeting children are written in lower-case letters, makes sense in respect of the writing and reading that kids learn at first-level elementary school classes and with which they are consequently better acquainted.

Italic writing is often used to differentiate information within running text, to signify handwriting or to assign importance to that which is written. Almost all of our adverts (92%) use roman characters, which are upright, rather than italicized or oblique, compared to 8% that use italic characters. According to Jackson “the attitude in vertical writing is natural and free whilst in sloping writing it is twisted and awkward,”<sup>45</sup> and this supports our previous finding as well as facilitates and supports legibility in the major part of our corpus.

In terms of typeface attributes dealing with serifs, script, decorative or irregular characteristics, we observed that most of our advertisements (73%) use sans serif letterforms, 12% use serif fonts and 15% use script writing. Interestingly, we found no advertisements using decorative or irregular typefaces, and this, in our opinion, has to do with legibility. Thus, the avoidance of complicated or confusing letterforms is expected in children’s advertisements.

This is also supported by our findings on the use of textures in letterforms: 96% are plain, flat and two-dimensional, 4% are three-dimensional and none of our advertisements use patterns within the typefaces. Sans serif roman fonts are usually a safe approach for this kind of advertisement. The use of script writing (15%) is probably based on the fact that it is associated with handwriting, and this makes the messages look more ‘child-like’. These forms of typeface may be said to add innocence and purity to the verbal messages used for targeting the buyers, who—in the selected corpus—are mainly parents or adults who have children.

In terms of curvature, we found that 77% of our adverts are using predominantly rounded letterforms and 23% angular. As Van Leeuwen remarks, “[r]oundedness can come to signify “smooth”, “soft”, “natural”, “organic”, “maternal”, and so on, whereas angularity “abrasive”, “harsh”, “technical”,

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<sup>44</sup> Van Leeuwen, Theo. “Towards a semiotics of typography.” *Information Design Journal and Document Design* 14, no. 2 (2006): 239-255.

<sup>45</sup> John Jackson, *Upright Versus Sloping Writing: Being an Inquiry Into the Respective Merits of Sloping and Upright Or Vertical Writing* (London : S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington), p.6.

“masculine”, and so on.”<sup>46</sup> As a result, we believe that this finding enhances the messages with a friendly iconicity, thus making them more attractive and familiar to parents or adults who have children.

Looking at the letterforms’ connectivity, it is observed that 92% of the advertisements have connected and 8% disconnected letterforms. Like in script writing, as Van Leeuwen<sup>47</sup> remarks, connectivity is associated with handwriting and has its own metaphoric potential, while external connection might suggest ‘wholeness’, or ‘integration’ depending on how it is used and in what context. In general, the selection, size, placement and design of typefaces often add second level significations in the writing of verbal language.

## 5. Food advertisements and cultural values

The semiotic study has revealed valuable information about the cultural context of these Cypriot print advertisements. In fact, as Fontanille states, “the relation between *semiotic* and *cultural* is not only an inclusion [...] the cultural could generally be the operator of transformations of the semiotic.”<sup>48</sup> In other words the cultural produces semiotic interpretations and in this context it would be very interesting to see whether this aspect derives from our corpus.

The age groups of children in the selected sample have their own semiotic dimensions. We can see that in 8% of the advertisements children are up to one year old, in another 8% the children are between two and four years old. In 42% of the advertisements children are between four and eight years old and the same percentage (42%) exists in the group of children between eight and twelve years old. We can therefore infer that advertisers are using the age group of four to twelve years old (84%) in which other foods can be easily promoted as they might not be subject to the nutritional restrictions imposed by specialists for children up to four years old. Of course, this does not mean that parents will be more lax about the food their children in this age group eat, but, as Shimp remarks, children between the ages of 6 to 11 “[...] influence their parents’ choices of clothing and toys and even the brand choices of products such as toothpaste and food products.”<sup>49</sup>

The values promoted in the advertisements under study constitute, in the Barthesian sense, social myths: these values are quality of life (23%), with which certain foods are closely linked; the realisation of children’s dreams (14%); health (11%), since some foods are promoted as helping children’s natural

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Fontanille, “Introduction,” in *L’explosion et la culture* by Juri Lotman, translated by I. Merkoulouva (Limoges: Pulim, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Terence A. Shimp, *Advertising, Promotion, and Other Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications* (Mason: Cengage Learning, 2010), p.111.

growth, whereas other foods are less beneficial; care (2%), which parents appear to show to their children when they select the appropriate food for them; the trust (2%) they place in certain foods and the preference given to less processed and more natural foods (2%). In our opinion, the value of 'quality of life' embraces all of the aforementioned values, as the main consideration of parents is to ensure that high quality of life and a sense of security are offered to their children.

Finally, the selection of internal or external settings in the advertisements is also of semiotic interest. In particular, 62% of the studied print ads portray an internal home-environment, whereas only 38% external spaces. We see that the iconic code of the home is stronger than the iconic code of nature, because a home implies protection and security, particularly where children are concerned. Additionally, we believe that 38% of the advertisements using exterior locations reflect the Mediterranean (Cypriot) way of life, where warm temperatures allow for family activities outside of the home environment.

## 6. General remarks

Bignell mentions that "advertisements make use of signs and social myths which are already in circulation, and ask us to recognize and often to enjoy them."<sup>50</sup>

The inclusion of other people in the advertising compositions, whether they are children or women or a combination thereof, and the preference shown for home environments purposely emphasizes the value of family. It is worth mentioning that family is considered to be a core value in Cyprus.

Where the typography of advertisements is concerned, we have noted that letterforms can be used connotatively, not only because of their historical and contextual background, but also because of their design, placement and layout on paper or screen. Typefaces reflect trends, styles and attitudes. They can be related to various forms of ideologies and second level significations. Typographic and layout combinations between verbal and non-verbal components in advertisements are unlimited and even the smallest alteration can play a significant role in visual interpretation.

In general, the letterforms that are used have high levels of legibility, are viewer-friendly and have similar colours and aesthetics that are not only near to what children are exposed to in their everyday life in many of their books, but also connote qualities like innocence, naivety and sensitivity to the parents. Lower case, roman, sans serif, no-textured, rounded and connected typefaces are mainly used for written language. We think that further research can be similarly carried out by incorporating additional typographic characteristics and design parameters, as well as using a bigger corpus from other areas, such as children's packaging, comics, toys and other related products.

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<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics. An Introduction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 31.

## 7. Conclusion

According to Levitt “companies must learn to operate as if the world were one large market-ignoring superficial regional and national differences.”<sup>51</sup> However, Cannon remarks that “[...] because of the rapid impact needed from advertising, the fact that we find national associations being used, would seem to indicate a belief on the part of advertisers that such associations do serve a purpose.”<sup>52</sup> We are in agreement with Cannon’s position since our study has shown that food advertisements which present young children as major participants do in fact target parents or adults who have children under their care. Within this context, advertisers adopt the practice of localization in relation to plastic signs, and in particular to the figurative features of children and their parents. However, the promoted cultural values are global and involve values such as family, security, safety and food quality.

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<sup>51</sup> Levitt, Theodore. “The Globalization of Markets.” *Harvard Business Review* 61, no. 3 (1983): 92.

<sup>52</sup> Jackie Cannon, “Supra-Nationality and Sub-Nationality in Spanish Advertising,” in *Advertising and Identity in Europe. The I of the Beholder* by Jackie Cannon, Patricia Odber de Baubeta and Robin Warner (Bristol, Portland: Intellect, 2003), p. 18.

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# **IKEA: Ego and its Alter in intercultural communications**

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# Abstract

The present article discusses how the Swedish furniture company IKEA deployed its communication strategy in Germany, and how it became established in the German market as a Swedish brand. In 2012 Germany still is the top-selling country for IKEA. In fact, today, many people in Germany directly associate IKEA with Sweden, mainly due to its audiovisual advertisements. By analyzing audiovisual advertisements which were aired by IKEA in the mass media of television and the Internet, including YouTube, during the period 1997-2007, it will be shown in detail how the company draws on, but also how it constructs German stereotypes about the Swedes and the Nordic countries. But the company also picks up important and frequently discussed themes, which can be encountered in contemporary German society. In order to grasp the interaction between the Swedish company and the German consumer culture, Göran Sonesson's cultural semiotic approach and particularly the concepts of Ego- and Alter cultures are employed.

**Keywords:** IKEA, Swedishness, ego- and alter, dialogue, culture, Germany.

## 0. Introduction

Modern consumers show an increasing interest in home design and in designing their own homes. Amidst a highly competitive landscape, it is often hard for companies to stay in business. They have to invest time, money and effort to reach out to different targets successfully. Building a brand name and a differentiated brand image, which is connected to positive feelings and associations, is therefore one of the most important issues for companies competing in the home design market. This is achieved through intensive public relations, the recruitment of trend-setting agencies, ongoing market research and the launch of innovative advertising campaigns. A crucial communication vehicle for the achievement of this objective is the audiovisual commercial, which contains explicit and implicit messages. From a semiotic perspective commercials contain verbal, visual and audio elements, which form different signs and are used intentionally. Not only do commercials express direct messages about products, features and prices, but they also contain underlying messages, which reflect different cultural values and beliefs. Messages are therefore dependent on social and cultural norms and value systems.

Semiotically speaking, every culture may be seen as a system with a set of rules or its own supply of signs that make life understandable and create a sense of belonging. Members of a specific culture generally use typical signs produced in that culture to communicate and interact with each other to make life easier, to gain organization and structure in life. A culture may be seen as a group of members who create, accept and share specific traditions, values, laws, norms, languages, dialects, religion, etc. Such groups range from entire countries and organizations to political parties and football fan clubs. Occasionally members from different cultures with a different supply of signs engage in dialogue, which may or may not work. When it comes to advertising, the makers of commercials make use of the supply of signs from the target culture.



# 1. IKEA and the construction of the “Swedish” culture

The Swedish company IKEA, which is famous worldwide, managed to carve a unique niche with its “Swedish” construction. IKEA calls this “Swedishness”. Today IKEA has about 298 stores in over 29 countries. Over 154.000 people work at IKEA worldwide and their total revenue for the year ending 2012 was over € 27 billion. In Germany, which is still its top selling country, the company attained a very prominent status with its construction of “Sweden” and “the Swedish way of life”. In fact, 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 market-share 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 my thesis *Die “schwedische” Lösung*<sup>1</sup> (The “Swedish” Solution) I examined the process of establishing IKEA as a “Swedish” brand in Germany through its audiovisual advertising in the mass media of television and the Internet, including YouTube. The analysis of 48 audiovisual commercials, published by IKEA during the period of 1997–2007, shows that the company intentionally and purposefully draws on various notions of “Swedishness” and on Nordic stereotypes. A striking example of this “Swedishness” is the campaign launched by IKEA on St. Knut’s day, the date that traditionally ends 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.<sup>2</sup> In the following I will discuss some of the most important aspects of this “Swedish” construct from IKEA and how it affected German consumer culture.

In the above mentioned humorous commercial from IKEA, one can see a man in boots and a fur coat walking down a house block at wintertime, somewhere in “STOCKHOLM”, as explicitly stated. The man just walks there alone and doesn’t notice that a number of Christmas trees are falling down from the

<sup>1</sup> Jennie Mazur, *Die “schwedische” Lösung. Eine kultursemiotisch orientierte Untersuchung der IKEA-Werbspots in Deutschland* (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Since I have only been given permission to publish images from the commercials in my dissertation, I refer in this article to my thesis (2013) and a few commercials available on YouTube. Jennie Mazur, *Die “schwedische” Lösung. Eine kultursemiotisch orientierte Untersuchung der IKEA-Werbspots in Deutschland* (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann 2013) p.190-208, and YouTube, “Knut, IKEA, Werbung“. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge9HiWdGBOo>, accessed June 2013.

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. 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 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 there is a black icon of a falling Christmas tree. In the end, when the man finally reaches the porch, he stumbles on a Christmas tree that is lying on the ground. Ironically, the friendly off-speaker adds: “Also schau auf IKEA.de” (“Look out/up for IKEA.de”).

This invented tradition is remotely grounded in real-life: until some decades ago, it was certainly common to throw the Christmas tree out of the balcony, to avoid the tree shedding all its needles in the staircase, but this custom has been completely forbidden for security reasons, although the scenes shown in the video spot with numerous trees dropping down on the passers-by in the narrow street have never taken place. In any case, the objective was certainly not to make place for new IKEA furniture, but simply to terminate the Christmas season. 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 of IKEA in their own shows and commercials.<sup>3</sup> This is a good example of how IKEA has constructed a model of itself as a “Swedish brand” and – when reaching the target consumer – how it enters into a dialogue, not only with the German furnishing market, but also with several discourses within the German society. How could this be established and why was it so successful?

To identify how IKEA created a model of itself – an “Ego culture” as the semiotician Göran Sonesson<sup>4</sup> calls it – how the company projected its “Swedish” self-image in Germany and how it engaged in a dialogue with the German market/culture (“Alter culture”), I conducted research within an interdisciplinary framework of primarily modern cultural semiotics<sup>5</sup>, intercultural communication studies

<sup>3</sup> For example YouTube, “Bäumschen raus, Schnäpschen rein!!!”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=koj-Svx71rM>, accessed June 2013, YouTube, “Werbespot IKEA Knut mal anders!”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUGBEXUwTVw>, accessed June 2013 and YouTube, “Mömax - Unsere Tannen leben noch”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDYGPXtRBBY>, accessed June 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Göran Sonesson, “Ego meets Alter: The Meaning of Otherness in Cultural Semiotics.” *Semiotica* 128 (2000): 537-539.

<sup>5</sup> Göran Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser* (Lund, Studentlitteratur 1992), “Livsvärldens mediering. Kommunikation i en kultursemiotisk ram.” *Medietexter och medietolkningar. Läsningar av massmediala texter*. (Nora: Nya Doxa, 1995):33-78, “Ego meets Alter: The Meaning of Otherness in Cultural Semiotics.” *Semiotica* 128 (2000): 537-559 and Anna Cabak Rédei, *An Inquiry into Cultural Semiotics: Germaine de Staël’s Autobiographical Travel Accounts* (Diss. Lund: Division of Semiotics at the Department of Art, History and Musicology, Lunds universitet, 2007). Also see Roland Posner “Kultur als Zeichensystem. Zur semiotischen Explikation kulturwissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe”. *Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument* (Frankfurt/Main, Fischer 1991) p. 27-74, and Winfried Nöth, *Handbuch der Semiotik* (Stuttgart –

with a focus on Sweden and Germany<sup>6</sup> and advertising research<sup>7</sup>. Especially the theoretical concepts of “Ego culture” and “Alter culture”, as characterized by Sonesson and used by Anna Cabak Rédei were employed in order to grasp the interaction and communication between the Swedish company and the German consumer culture. In order to analyze such a complex sign as an audiovisual commercial, I also developed an analytical model, primarily based on key insights from Stefan Müller-Doohm, Klaus Kanzog, Lothar Mikos, Anders Björkvall and Bo Bergström.<sup>8</sup> I will return to this model later in this article.

A fundamental task of cultural semiotics is to study cultures as part of a semiosphere. Every culture is a dynamic sign system created and changed by its members in order to make life understandable, organized and more manageable. A sign can be seen as a unit, which consists of two dimensions: the signifier (material substance) and the signified (mental concept) – and the relation between them

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Weimar, Metzler 2000). Also compare Klaus P. Hansen, *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft*. (Tübingen – Basel: Francke. K. P. 2003 [1995]).

<sup>6</sup> Important for the study were for example Margit Breckle, *“In Schweden ist die Kommunikation weicher“*. *Zur deutsch-schwedischen Wirtschaftskommunikation unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Imagearbeit* (Göteborg: Institut für Deutsch und Niederländisch, Göteborgs universitet 2004), Bernd Henningsen et. al. *Wahlverwandschaft. Skandinavien und Deutschland 1800 bis 1914* (Berlin: Jovis Verlagsbüro 1997), Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Interaktion, Fremdwahrnehmung, Kulturtransfer* (Stuttgart – Weimar: Metzler 2005), Sylvia Schroll-Machl, *Die Deutschen – Wir Deutsche. Fremdwahrnehmung und Selbstsicht im Berufsleben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007 [2002]), Stefan Müller and Katja Gelbrich, *Interkulturelles Marketing* (München: Vahlen 2006), Jürgen Gerhards, *Kulturelle Unterschiede in der Europäischen Union. Ein Vergleich zwischen Mitgliedsländern, Beitrittskandidaten und der Türkei* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006 [2005]), Gert Hofstede, *Lokales Denken, globales Handeln: Interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit und globales Management* (München: dtv 2006), Thomas Winkelmann, *Alltagsmythen vom Norden. Wahrnehmung, Popularisierung und Funktionalisierung von Skandinavienbildern im bundesdeutschen Modernisierungsprozess*. (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Especially important were Gabriele Bechstein, *Werbliche Kommunikation. Grundinformationen zur semiotischen Analyse von Werbekommunikaten* (Bochum: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer 1987), Alf Björnberg, “Sign of the Times? Om musikvideo och populärmusikens semiotik.” *Svensk tidskrift för musikkforskning*, 72. (1990): 63-84, Erling Bjurström, Lars Lilliestam, *Sälj det i toner. Om musik i TV-reklam* (Vällingby, Konsumentverket 1993), Hermann Sottong & Michael Müller, *Zwischen Sender und Empfänger: Eine Einführung in die Semiotik der Kommunikationsgesellschaft* (Berlin: E. Schmidt 1998), Guy Cook *The Discourse of Advertising* (London – New York, Routledge 2001), Angela Goodard, *The Language of Advertising. Written Texts* (London – New York, Routledge 2002), Jürgen Felix, *Moderne Film Theorie* (Mainz Bender 2003), Anders Björkvall, *Svensk reklam och dess modellläsare* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International 2003), Bo Bergström, *Effektiv visuell kommunikation. Hur man far ett budskap i text, bild, film, form och färg att nå fram* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Stefan Müller-Doohm, “Visuelles Verstehen. Konzepte kultursoziologischer Bildhermeneutik.” *“Wirklichkeit“ im Deutungsprozeß. Verstehen und Methoden in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1993) p. 438-457, Klaus Kanzog, *Einführung in die Filmphilologie* (München: Diskurs-Film-Verlag Schaudig und Ledig, 1997 [1991]), Anders Björkvall, *Svensk reklam och dess modellläsare* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International 2003), Bo Bergström, *Effektiv visuell kommunikation. Hur man får ett budskap i text, bild, film, form och färg att nå fram* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2004). Lothar Mikos, *Film und Fernsehanalyse* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft 2008 [2004]).

creates meaning, as Saussure described it.<sup>9</sup> Social coexistence within a culture presupposes a classification of signs, which is shared and valued by its members. Signs are therefore connected to each other by arbitrary conventions within a certain culture. Sonesson built his cultural semiotic concept against the background of the theories of the Tartu School, the Russian Formalists, Bakhtin and the Prague School.<sup>10</sup> In the original theory of the Tartu School, for example, culture can be understood as “order” and “structure”, as something “familiar” and “usable”. It is also about the perception of “otherness”. For the Tartu School, culture necessarily stands in opposition to a “Non-culture”, which for the Tartu-School also means “chaos, “not understandable” and “disorderly”. Sonesson writes:

It is taken for granted that, in the ordinary case, members of any Culture will think of themselves as insiders, while persons from other Cultures are outsiders. On the inside, life is ordered and meaningful; outside of it, it is chaotic, disorderly and impossible to understand. Also, the inside is normally more highly valued.<sup>11</sup>

According to Sonesson, there can be perceptions of this “otherness” and at its best also an interaction (dialogue) between culture and its “otherness” – that is if two cultures perceive and accept each other as at least another culture or “Extra-culture”. Extra-culture, according to Sonesson, represents a certain degree of disorder, but not to the same extent as Non-culture. A culture is social, material and mental. It is dynamic and constantly changing. It also includes a cultural memory with past texts and a generative mechanism for concepts both in the present and the future, already found in the storehouse of the past. Therefore, culture is both synchronic and diachronic. Diachronic, because a cultural heritage continues from generation to generation, while being modified and developed. Some issues lie in the center of a culture, while others move in the periphery or disappear. Occasionally, new or modified influences from outside are integrated – if they are accepted by the members of that culture. Culture is therefore always in the process of excluding and including. Since it is the members of the “own culture” who decide what constitutes culture, culture is always egocentric. The own culture, or the Ego culture, is often defined as “better” than the other. In my study, this is indeed a very interesting aspect because of the fact that the German customers, as part of their own Ego culture, really seem to think that this “other” – that means the communicated message from IKEA about “a Swedish better culture” – is already something good, meaningful, understandable and already “inside”, that is within the German Ego culture. One might expect that a German consumer will look at the “other” (Swedish

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<sup>9</sup> The two parts (signifier and signified) are not separate entities but exist together. It is the relationship between them that creates meaning. Signs are arbitrary and motivated by social conventions. Each sign must therefore be put into a cultural context to generate meaning (it arises within a cultural context and is something collective). A language for example is a sign system, which is shared within a culture and comes from thoughts, ideas and values within that culture.

<sup>10</sup> See Göran Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser* (1992) and “Livsvärldens mediering. Kommunikation i en kultursemiotisk ram.” *Medietexter och medietolkningar. Läsningar av massmediala texter* (Nora: Nya Doxa, 1995): 33-78.

<sup>11</sup> Göran Sonesson, “The Notion of Text in Cultural Semiotics.” *Sign System Studies* 26, (1998): 84.

way of life) with more critical eyes, perhaps as something totally strange and “outside” the own Ego culture. This is obviously not the case here.

To some extent, this phenomenon corresponds to what Sonesson has called the “inverted model” of culture, according to which it is the culture in which the subject itself is not located that is treated as being ordered and meaningful or at least most highly valued. Sonesson exemplifies this view with the attitude of Peter the Great towards the Occident and with Americanization as a trend in contemporary societies.<sup>12</sup> The case with Sweden and Germany, however, is special in this respect, for these are two countries, which have many common traits and a long history of exchanges.<sup>13</sup> After World War II, however, this special relationship became more tenuous.

The main concern for Sonesson was to describe cultural semiotics theoretically and secondly to examine the different models that members of a culture construct in order to understand cultures (their own and others’). For Sonesson and Cabak Rédei the Ego culture is a construct or a model and a portable center (stationed where the Ego is situated mentally). It does not even have to be “true” – yet members often try to live up to the components of the model to some degree, for different reasons and purposes. For Sonesson cultural semiotics is therefore not just about culture per se but about:

the model members of a Culture make of their Culture; and that this model itself is more involved with relationships *between* cultures (as well as subcultures, cultural spheres).<sup>14</sup>

To this “model-making” Sonesson adds the very important aspect as to what cultural semiotics is about – the human interaction, the communication between different cultures. In his inverted model this aspect is emphasized. In a communication situation with another more or less foreign culture, specific aspects are selected and constructed into a self-image, which is intentionally projected onto the foreign culture. When the communication succeeds, a dialogue between cultures is established – between the Ego culture and the Alter culture, as Sonesson describes it.

The sender (culture X), in this study IKEA, by presenting as I see it, a “deformed” and idealized “Swedish culture” establishes a dialogue with Germany (culture Y) by choosing certain “artifacts”<sup>15</sup> from

<sup>12</sup> Göran Sonesson, “The Globalisation of Ego and Alter. An Essay in Cultural Semiotics”, *Semiotica* 148 (2004), p.153-173 and “The Pronominalisation of Culture. Dyadic and Triadic Models of Interculturality in the Conceptions of the Tartu School, Bakhtin, Cassirer and Peirce.” Conference contribution. Les signes du monde: Interculturalité & Globalisation: Actes du 8<sup>ème</sup> congrès de l’Association Internationale de sémiotique, 07.12.2004. Lyon. 2007.<http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=975566&fileId=975594>, accessed June 2013.

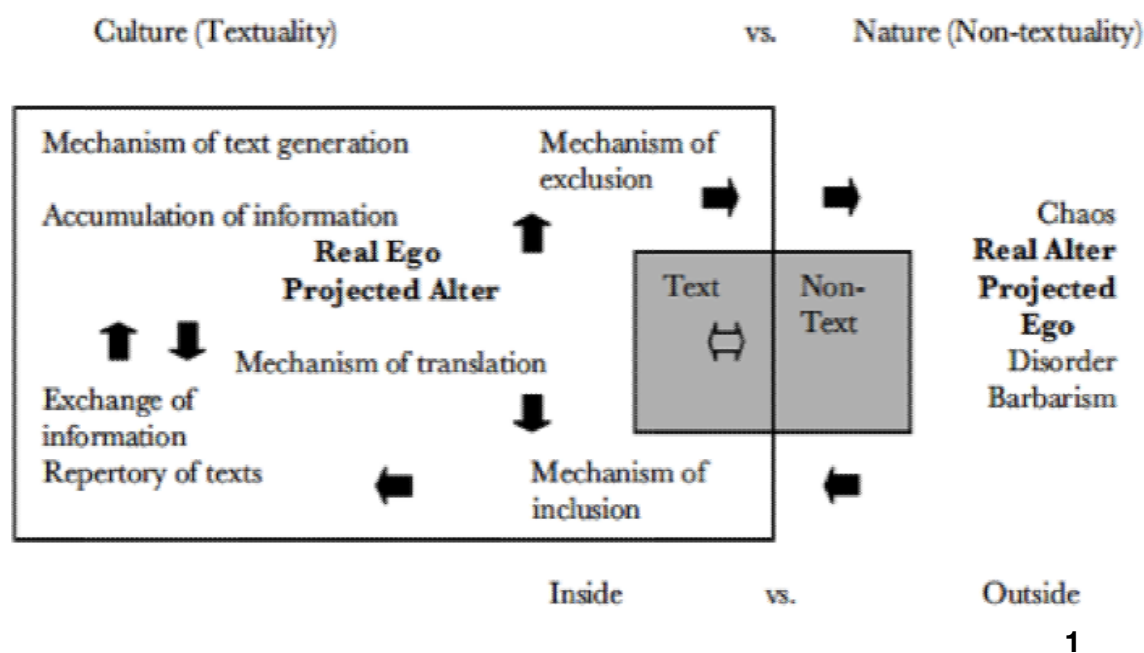
<sup>13</sup> See Bernd Henningsen et.al. *Wahlverwandschaft. Skandinavien und Deutschland 1800 bis 1914*. (Berlin: Jovis Verlagsbüro, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Göran Sonesson, “Ego meets Alter: The Meaning of Otherness in Cultural Semiotics.” *Semiotica* 128 (2000): 537.

<sup>15</sup> For Sonesson an artifact is a central idea and implicates everything, which is produced by a certain Culture. An artifact can therefore be something material like a book, a movie, a law, a picture and so forth but could also be immaterial like norms, traditions etc. Everything that exists in a certain culture means textuality, organization, and understanding for its members.

a mutual “source of knowledge”. In order to develop specific messages, the sender IKEA transforms and develops artifacts into a message for a predefined German model reader before actually sending the message. To be as successful as possible in creating specific and suitable messages, the sender should find out about the desires and thoughts of the general receiver. IKEA often claims that it develops messages that are typically “Swedish” and does not pay attention to what is typical for the target country. However, my study demonstrates that the company really knows the “other”, the Alter target culture very well and therefore develops messages accordingly by just using artifacts especially known and used in that specific country. The chosen artifacts of what IKEA designate “Swedish culture” do not even have to be authentically “Swedish”, but are often based on real stereotypes in the target country about Sweden and the Swedes. Interestingly, the IKEA commercial makers also often make use of artifacts, which already exist in the German culture. The Christmas tree and the Maypole are indeed examples of this, but so are other issues, such as gender themes and family politics.

If one takes a closer look at Sonesson’s inverted model, Sweden and Germany know each other quite well from hundreds of years of interacting with each other, even though stereotypes are also included. There also exist many notions and views about one another, which are sometimes positive, sometimes negative – and sometimes without factual grounding. The two neighboring countries already have had and still have a close relationship in different respects. At least they look up to each other as Ego and Alter cultures, and not as “Non cultures”. They are already in dialogue.



**Figure 1.** Sonesson’s inverted model (projection of Ego onto the other culture), reproduced from Anna Cabak Rédei.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Anna Cabak Rédei, *An Inquiry into Cultural Semiotics: Germaine de Staël’s Autobiographical Travel Accounts*. (Diss. Lund: Division of Semiotics at the Department of Art, History and Musicology, Lunds universitet, 2007), p.54.



A German receiver lives in his or her real Ego culture, which is naturally “German”. From an IKEA point of view (as an Ego culture) of course this is known. The message, which IKEA creates, is therefore intended for a model receiver that is German (Alter culture: German). At the same time the message is organized or built on the assumption that this is a much better and also a “Swedish solution”, or a “Swedish” better alternative. This strategy holds considerable risk and could end up being a disaster. Another target culture (as an Ego culture) would probably have resented this strategy. In Germany this is obviously not the case. Perhaps because IKEA initially presented this “Swedish way” with a fair portion of humor and self-irony, which attained to circumvent any offence to the German receiver. Secondly, as mentioned above, IKEA only works with positive artifacts already established in Germany about Sweden, and makes them its own.

## 2. Germany and Sweden – two cultures with a history of interactions

The positive image of Sweden as a country with its healthy, beautiful nature, its light, tall and kind, blond people, the welfare system, neutrality, equality between genders, democracy, individual liberty, quality of life, cool attitude and naturalness, old traditions, openness, modernity, innovation, sense of affiliation, still resonates with certain consumer segments in Germany. Even though it's a construct, this is the Swedish-Image, which even today is communicated and also perceived in other countries.

The interactions between Sweden and Germany have a long history. Even though it is primarily Sweden, which has often been inspired by German institutions, values, 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-capital idyll” was intensified and communicated. The red cottage on the countryside, cows living in nature, the stone church in the background were popular Swedish-Images, which back then were 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 was also internationally well known because she stood for a new type of home style associated with simplicity, functionality, naturalness, space and for bringing light into the home. Other positive images were spread through world exhibitions, movies and so forth. Later, with the advent of the social democrats, changes in social policy became widely known, such as social pensions, unemployment insurance, health insurance system, parental leave, child care, rent control, longer holidays and so on. The German political scientist Bernd Henningsen speaks about “Wahlverwandtschaften”<sup>17</sup> or elective

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<sup>17</sup> Bernd Henningsen, “Das Bild vom Norden. Eine Einleitung.” *“Wahlverwandtschaft. Skandinavien und Deutschland 1800 bis 1914* (Berlin: Jovis Verlagsbüro, 1997):15.

affinities between the two countries. According to the ethnologist Thomas Winkelmann<sup>18</sup> “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, originating from authors like Astrid Lindgren, equality, education, and family policy issues are often discussed in Germany with Sweden still as a role model.<sup>19</sup>

Even though there are many affinities between Sweden and Germany, in terms of language, customs and traditions, there are still many differing cultural phenomena. Different studies show that Germany, when compared to Sweden, has a vertical societal structure.<sup>20</sup> Values such as challenge, income, prestige, knowledge, progress, performance, assertiveness and ambition are important in the 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.<sup>21</sup>

After this short excursus into some common aspects between Swedish and German cultures, I proceed with an exposition of the methodological framework used in this study for analyzing advertisements, and then to a more detailed analysis of how IKEA built its “Swedishness” construction by drawing on my model and on Sonesson’s cultural semiotic model.

### 3. Methodological framework for analyzing advertisements

Commercials are interesting to analyze for a variety of reasons. They include both visual and auditory texts, which communicate different messages and reach out to ever new audiences. A commercial is often very short and can consist of still and moving images; written and spoken text elements; music

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Winkelmann, *Alltagsmythen vom Norden. Wahrnehmung, Popularisierung und Funktionalisierung von Skandinavienbildern im bundesdeutschen Modernisierungsprozess*. (Frankfurt/Main ...: Lang, 2006) p. 241.

<sup>19</sup> See Christine Frisch, *Von Powerfrauen und Superweibern. Frauenpopulärliteratur der 90er Jahre in Deutschland und Schweden* (Huddinge: Söderström Academic Studies, 12. 2003) and Jennie Mazur (2013) p.127-130.

<sup>20</sup> See Margit Breckle, “In Schweden ist die Kommunikation weicher“. *Zur deutsch-schwedischen Wirtschaftskommunikation unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Imagearbeit* (Göteborg: Institut für Deutsch und Niederländisch, Göteborgs universitet 2004), Sylvia Schroll-Machl, *Die Deutschen – Wir Deutsche. Fremdwahrnehmung und Selbstsicht im Berufsleben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007 [2002]), Jürgen Gerhards, *Kulturelle Unterschiede in der Europäischen Union. Ein Vergleich zwischen Mitgliedsländern, Beitrittskandidaten und der Türkei* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, <sup>2</sup>2006 [2005]), Thomas Winkelmann (2006) *Alltagsmythen vom Norden. Wahrnehmung, Popularisierung und Funktionalisierung von Skandinavienbildern im bundesdeutschen Modernisierungsprozess*. (Frankfurt/Main ...: Lang, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Margit Breckle (2004) p. 116, 148 and Jennie Mazur (2013) p. 123-127.



and background sounds. The aims of audiovisual commercials consist of attracting attention and generating emotions, thus influencing brand choice.<sup>22</sup> Commercials contain a number of different signs, which provide information about both sender (the company) and intended recipient, but also give information about the current socio-cultural context.

Kanzog describes the film as a temporally organized combination of visual and acoustic signs that form specific meanings through pictures, written texts, as well as sounds, music and spoken texts. From a semiotic point of view, a film can be seen as a secondary semiotic system, which uses the 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, in which it was made and may therefore also influence consumers in the “real world”.<sup>23</sup>

To generate a meaningful and interesting analysis of a commercial, it is important to methodically deconstruct it in detail. Such an approach will provide information about the intended recipient, messages and the constructed Ego culture of the company. This requires an appropriate model of analysis, which should be adjusted to the research questions.<sup>24</sup> By using a variety of models from various disciplines, it is possible to combine and develop them into a new model suitable for this research.

Klaus Kanzog<sup>25</sup> suggests in his book to set up “protocols” when analyzing audiovisual texts because it is easier to describe different aspects, such as dramaturgy, narratives, characters, aesthetics, order of sequences, sounds etc. Since it is usually difficult to obtain permission for reproducing visual material due to copyright, one often has to describe the visual text in writing. Since I have been granted permission to publish images from the commercials in my dissertation, I have also been able to include a storyboard in my model. Based on Müller-Doohm, my analysis model is divided into three main steps:

### **1. Description**

### **2. Reconstruction**

### **3. Interpretation**

Step one is about obtaining an initial ‘feel’ for the commercial, by describing background information and giving a brief summary of the content. Step two is about identifying and evaluating explicit and implicit aspects and messages in the commercial. In the reconstruction, all components are

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<sup>22</sup> For more information about what each type can contribute see Jennie Mazur (2013) p. 42-50.

<sup>23</sup> Klaus Kanzog, *Grundkurs Filmsemiotik* (München: Diskurs-Film-Verlag Schaudig und Ledig 2007) p.49.

<sup>24</sup> Also see George Rossolatos, *An anatomy of the multimodal rhetorical landscape of the world’s most valuable brands*, this volume.

<sup>25</sup> Klaus Kanzog, *Einführung in die Filmphilologie* (München: Diskurs-Film-Verlag Schaudig und Ledig 1997) p.137ff.

distinguished and described: first, in a storyboard; and then, separately. With such an approach, it is possible to determine which components occur when, where and for how long. This is important for further in depth analysis. In this way, the analytical reconstruction, gradually and systematically reaches to the very core of the commercial. The last step is the interpretation of the commercial. Here, results and issues are addressed and discussed, especially those that emerged in the reconstruction and those that lead to the constructed ego-culture. The following tables summarize the steps involved in the model:

**Table 1. Description** <sup>26</sup>

**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	

<sup>26</sup> Jennie Mazur, (2013) p.144-148.

**Table 2. Reconstruction**

**Storyboard<sup>27</sup>**

Sequence	Visual text	Sound (music and noise)	Linguistic text
Time			M = monological (verbal)
Setting (place/scenery)			D = dialogical (verbal)
Camera perspective			W = written
Shot: Full-Shot Panorama			
Close-up, low- angle-shot, high- angle-shot, medium-close-up, extreme-close-up.			
Top-Shot. etc.			
Coloration			

**Communicative text parts**

**Visual text - What you see**

**Spatial image elements**

Size	
Perspective	
Redaction	
Camera settings	

**Visual aesthetics**

Color setting	
Objects	
Characters	
Other details	

<sup>27</sup> Also see Jennie Mazur (2013), p. 170-172, 194-198, 210-213, 238-240, 245-250.

**Auditory text – Music, sound, noise**

Music	
Noise	
Background talks	
Background/Foreground	
Other details	

**Verbal 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-Speaker	
Interaction	
Product information	
Logo	
Slogan	
Other details	

**Written text (visual 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 shaping

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 individualists)	
Home style	
Relationship to the objects in the room	
Other details	

Humor/Overstatement/Under- Statement/Irony	
Other	

**Table 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	

**Presented Ego-culture of the company**

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## 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“.<sup>28</sup> Of course, all kinds of stereotypes, “perfect life”, love stories and various plots have been communicated, which belong to a standard repertoire of commercials. But, 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 at the end of a spot. Many messages are also indirect and humorous, including understatements. Women – both Swedish and German – are always the “stronger” and emancipated ones, usually portrayed in leading positions. IKEA often jokes about “soft” men in the commercials – without being too rude.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes though, you can notice that IKEA – perhaps without knowing it – shows stereotypical traditional notions of men and women. One example is when a wife hits her husband and she is the “bad guy”.<sup>30</sup> The products are shown as normal parts in an “everyday” environment. Just one or two products from this surrounding are explicitly shown together with their names in capital letters and the special price in bold.

In the context of the “In the beginning” category IKEA indicated a Swedish, i.e., better solution by merely writing the text “Schwedische Lösung.” (“Swedish Solution”) in blue and yellow and by ending with the logo “IKEA” in the same colors along with 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”. One example of this is the light room with a little laughing girl with blond hair in white dress with a saw in her hand, pointing at the black and white carpet (a product from IKEA) on the floor. There is a filthy old monster on the right side of the carpet, resembling the monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which approaches the girl (on the left-hand side) in order to eat her, but quickly falls into a black hole together 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,

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<sup>28</sup> ibid. p. 135-253.

<sup>29</sup> For example: YouTube, “Oh Klaus”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lUlamznIkw>, accessed June 2013.

<sup>30</sup> YouTube, “Ikea Mücke”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIYlItNpgvY>, accessed June 2013. Also see Jennie Mazur *Die „schwedische“ Lösung. Eine kultursemiotisch orientierte Untersuchung der IKEA-Werbepots in Deutschland*. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013) p. 237-243.



innovative and old fashioned, female and male etc., where IKEA in the end of course always takes the “positive” “nicer”, “winner”, “innovative”, “softer”, “relaxed”, “white and clean/natural” part.<sup>31</sup>

With category two, “Swedish traditions”, IKEA expands its messages about “Swedishness”. From now on the written text about a “Swedish Solution” is put aside, and instead both visual and audio texts are prioritized. These so called “obvious Swedishness” commercials – like the Knut and Midsummer spots – all take place in Sweden, but are not conceptualized and presented in disrespect of the German notion of Sweden and the Swedish traditions. From now on a 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?”) occurs. Interestingly, there are only two “Swedish traditions” which IKEA employs while addressing its German target-audience: Midsummer and Christmas<sup>32</sup> (theme: Knut’s day) – traditions, which by following a closer examination also exist in Germany but are practiced in a different way. In fact, the Maypole once came to Sweden from Germany, like the Christmas tree. In the commercials with “Midsommar” as a theme, there are always stereotypical happy blond Swedes – men, women and children – mostly in folk, national costumes or dressed up celebrating this (according to IKEA) “typical Swedish” tradition outside 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) etc. By special occasions like “lunch in the nature”, “midsummer dance around the maypole”, “cow bingo” or “moped race” something bad or strange happens, which of course has a concrete effect on the old wooden furniture (it all breaks) used for the 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 party can go on as if nothing happened. In these commercials IKEA really jokes about the Swedes, the Swedish culture and about themselves, as they proudly present their innovative furniture and special prices at the same time.

In the third category, IKEA has already “moved in” to the German home.<sup>33</sup> From now on IKEA communicates that it is an already existing 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. Here, many associations to the old paintings by Carl Larsson and the works of Ellen Key are presented at the same time and often in a modern way: light, functionality, innovation, modernity – cottage style together with ultra modern living.<sup>34</sup> However, the mostly blond people, places and events at home that

<sup>31</sup> Jennie Mazur, (2013) p. 164-189.

<sup>32</sup> For example: YouTube, “Knut”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge9HiWdGBOo>, accessed June 2013, YouTube, “IKEA Midsommar”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stL0rLBC3S4>, accessed June 2013, YouTube, “IKEA Werbung: TV Spot 2007 „Kuh-Bingo an MIDSOMMAR””, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48518pEUO24>, accessed June 2013 and YouTube, “IKEA MIDSOMMAR TV-SPOT “MOPED RACE””, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxaDsbN4c2o>, accessed June 2013. Also see Jennie Mazur, (2013) p. 190-224.

<sup>33</sup> Jennie Mazur, (2013) p. 223-254.

<sup>34</sup>For example: YouTube, “Ikea Landhaustraum”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn77BMykYcg&NR=1&feature=endscreen>, accessed June 2013.

are represented in these spots stem from the intended German Target-culture. Interestingly, the characters do not look like or represent a stereotypical construction of the Target-consumer, even though IKEA claims that this is the aim. Instead it looks as if IKEA (again) wants to be associated with Nordic stereotypes and also with “wealth” and “innovative design” and therefore reach out to a group of people with high income, which of course at the same time is a typical method of adding “more value” to the company and its products.<sup>35</sup> Children are featured less frequently in this category of commercials, which are also more direct and extend to a larger number of products. Wherever 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 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.

Overall, the IKEA commercials that have been aired in Germany share the following general characteristics:

- they describe everyday situations in Germany
- they portray everyday, mostly blond people
- 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 structure in which there is an issue and a certain problem that is always solved by IKEA
- they often contain pairs of opposites, a before-after principle and surprises
- the locations for “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

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<sup>35</sup> This is different from IKEA in Sweden and also from the Image IKEA has in Sweden. For example: YouTube, “Ikea Mücke”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIYlltNpgvY>, accessed June 2013.



- many products are shown in the background in their “normal” environment at home
- one or two products are highlighted and shown explicitly, together with the product name and price in written, bold and capital letters
- 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).

## 5. Concluding remarks

In the analysis, it turned out that IKEA indeed made use of already existing artifacts from both cultures (Sweden and Germany), which contributed to the company’s success. The company constructed a model of Sweden, which consists of well-known collective ideas and myths in German culture about the north and the “Nordic culture”. But they also borrow contemporary aspects from the German consumer culture, such as gender discussions. With a great sense of humor, consisting of self-irony and self-distance, but also by adopting an informal approach, it became possible to enhance likeability on behalf of the targeted German consumers. Perhaps this may be attributed to the employment of indirect communication. The chosen communication forms, the well-planned strategy of using artifacts from both cultures, resulted in IKEA’s, at least between 1997–2007, standing for youthfulness, originality, innovation, amusement, harmony, tradition, nature, Scandinavian design, fellowship, democracy, humor, “down to earth”, equality, childish, autonomous, light, goodness, as dominant among other attributes for German consumers.

However, even if it looks like IKEA presents a “whole Swedish model or solution” (because they communicate this) in all categories, this never entails an “extreme makeover”. What IKEA really does is to pick up the most important artifacts from *both* cultures, mix them and transform them into an IKEA construction and present them more or less visually as a “Swedish solution”. The term “IKEA-solution” would have been just as fitting. The dialogue between Ego- and Alter has continued. When IKEA noticed that Germans started their own “traditions” for example by filming their own “Knut-traditions” which they uploaded on YouTube, it started developing new commercials on this theme.<sup>36</sup> Many books

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<sup>36</sup> For example: YouTube, “Bäumschen raus, Schnäpschen rein!!!”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=k0j-Svx71rM>, accessed June 2013 and YouTube, “Bäumchen rein Schnäppchen rein” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olcDpq6yyAA>, accessed June 2013.

from authors used parts of the famous IKEA-slogan in their own titles<sup>37</sup> and as I mentioned above, even other companies started their own campaigns using IKEA's commercials as templates. The "IKEA effect" went so far that German football fans – that is in another totally different context – during the 2006 World Football Cup, when Sweden played and lost against Germany in Munich, shouted slogans like: "Ihr seid nur ein Möbellieferant, Möbellieferant, Möbellieferant" ("You are only a furniture supplier, furniture supplier, furniture supplier"). Here we can see how Sonesson's model works and functions in practice.

Today, in 2013, IKEA has become increasingly "German". For example, the typical self-irony is not as present, although still very important as a communication skill in Sweden and Swedish advertising. The company also seems to be more direct in its messages, while having shifted from insinuations towards a greater focus on products themselves. However, the construct of "Swedish culture" still accompanies the company in Germany.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 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.*

<sup>38</sup> YouTube, "IKEA Werbung: TV Spot "MIDSOMMAR Schlussverkauf" 2013", [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w57\\_3hqzn3E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w57_3hqzn3E), accessed June 2013.



## Appendix 1- IKEA facts and figures (Annual summary 2012)<sup>39</sup>

Category	The IKEA Group 2012	IKEA Germany 2012										
Revenue 2012	27 billion EURO	3,88 billion EURO										
Growth	9,5 %	6,3 %										
IKEA co-workers	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	<table><tr><td>1. Germany</td><td>14%</td></tr><tr><td>2. USA</td><td>12%</td></tr><tr><td>3. France</td><td>9%</td></tr><tr><td>4. Italy</td><td>6%</td></tr><tr><td>5. Russia</td><td>6%</td></tr></table>		1. Germany	14%	2. USA	12%	3. France	9%	4. Italy	6%	5. Russia	6%
1. Germany	14%											
2. USA	12%											
3. France	9%											
4. Italy	6%											
5. Russia	6%											

## Appendix 2- IKEA advertisements on YouTube

YouTube, "IKEA - Zuhause arbeiten",

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZyzSatKhtM>, accessed June 2013.

### "Knut"

Youtube, "Knut." television advertisement for IKEA in Switzerland,

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# An anatomy of the multimodal rhetorical landscape of the world's most valuable brands

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## Abstract

This paper furnishes an anatomy of the rhetorical configuration of representative advertising narratives from the most valuable brands (based on WPP's BrandZ 2012 Report), while seeking to demonstrate the usefulness of classical rhetoric in understanding narratives that involve other than verbal modes and to contribute to the ongoing research on visual, verbo-visual and multimodal rhetoric on both conceptual and methodological levels. The filmic syntagms are segmented by applying the rhetorical taxonomy of operations (adjunction, suppression, substitution, permutation) that was adapted by Groupe  $\mu$  (1970) from Quintilian, with the aid of the content analytic tool Atlas.ti 7, and a list of 39 rhetorical figures that partake of these operations. The definitions of the involved figures are expanded with view to providing (partial) answers to the ongoing plea for adapting traditional figures in a highly visio-centric culture, of which advertising filmic narratives constitute a remarkable example. Furthermore, three novel figures are put forward, viz. accolorance, pareikonopoeia and reshaption, with view to capturing salient facets of this visio-centric culture. The ensuing discussion draws on the findings of the content analytic study, while highlighting not only which figures recur most frequently in the selected corpus, but, moreover, how they surface in different modes and interactions among modes, thus yielding a 'rhetorical first mover advantage'.

**Keywords:** multimodal rhetoric, advertising narratives, content analysis, branding.

## 0. Introduction

In the context of a vastly visio-centric culture and the by now consolidated 'pictorial' or 'iconic turn' (Mitchell, 2005; Moxey, 2008), as the successor of the time-hallowed linguistic turn, argumentation techniques in TV advertising have been progressively shifting focus from the verbal to the visual mode. "Documentary evidence suggests that [...] emphasis on pictures over words has steadily increased throughout the last century" (McQuarrie & Philips, 2004, p.113). "Television commercials to-day show between one and four dozen different moving visual images in a 30-second spot [...] it would be impossible to express 30 different propositions verbally in 30 seconds" (Blair, 2004, p.51).

Scholars from various research streams concerned with analyzing the rhetoric of ad narratives have been making repeated pleas for either coining new rhetorical figures or adapting existing ones (e.g., Forceville, 1996) to this visio-centric predicament, as well as inviting further research into how such adaptations may occur beyond print ads (e.g., McQuarrie and Philips, 2004). Furthermore, the bulk of research in multimodal rhetorical analyses of advertising texts, and particularly ad filmic texts, has focused largely on the four master tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony). By extending the scope of multimodal rhetorical analysis, an attempt is made at demonstrating that traditional rhetorical operations and figures, over and above the four master tropes, may be applied effectively to ad filmic narratives. Moreover, as a response to the suggestion for coining new figures that may encapsulate salient facets of the bespoke configuration modes of ad

filmic narratives, three new figures are put forward, viz. accolorance, pareikonopoeia and reshaption, as defined and illustrated in the Methodology and Discussion Sections. The analytical/interpretive route that is pursued in this paper emphasizes the applicability of traditional figures to verbal, visual and music modes, with a focus on verbo-visual interactions, thus yielding a 'rhetorical perspective' (Foss, 2005, p.145) on the con-figuration modes of the rhetorical landscape of the most valuable brands, as reported in BrandZ<sup>1</sup> 2012 (WPP Report 2012).

## 1. Background literature

Various perspectives, typologies and taxonomies spanning different disciplines have been offered in order to account for the modes of rhetorical configuration of both static and moving images (see Rossolatos 2012b, 2013a), such as Foss's visual rhetoric (2005), Groupe  $\mu$ 's *Traité du Signe Visuel* (1992; from a rhetorical semiotic point of view), Kostelnick's & Roberts' (2010; from a visual design point of view), Mick's & McQuarrie's and McQuarrie's & Philips's (1996, 2004, 2008; from a consumer research point of view), but also, less concerned with rhetorical analysis, sociosemiotic readings of the grammar of visual design and filmic texts (e.g., Van Leeuwen & Kress, 1996; Almeida 2009; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2011) and the list may be expanded. Groupe  $\mu$ , in their *Visual Rhetoric* (1992), provided an updated account of the rhetorical operations (adjunction, suppression, substitution, permutation) that were featured in their first rhetorical treatise (1970), while applying them to visual signs (mainly artistic images) that had been introduced in the first treatise (1970), with further qualifications (see Rossolatos, 2012a, 2012b).<sup>2</sup>

The rhetorical perspective that is offered in this paper has been edified on the operational taxonomy of Groupe  $\mu$ 's first rhetoric (see Table 1), while taking into account for analytical (and not taxonomic) purposes how operations function in general in the province of visual signs, as the primary focus rests with adapting figures to multimodal rhetorical discourse and not operations at large (even though operations have also been coded, as hyper-variable groupings of individual figures, as will be shown in the Methodology Section). Furthermore, the definitional and operational scope of the involved operations and figures was expanded in order to address the syntactical and semantic particularities of ad filmic narratives as indispensable aspects of commercial branding discourse, rather than purely artistic texts. This extended application of

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<sup>1</sup> BrandZ is an annual report published by the WPP group of companies that lists the top 100 corporate and/or product brands, ranked according to their brand equity standing on a global basis. High equity brands are characterized by particularly strong emotional ties with their target audiences, over and above the recognition of superior functional attributes stemming from product use. Hence, the brands featured in the BrandZ study constitute a pertinent pool for understanding how highly valued brands shape their advertising narratives from a rhetorical point of view.

<sup>2</sup> These key operations stem from a long tradition, starting with Quintilian (see Sloane, 2006 and Nöth, 1990). A similar strategy of retaining operations, but dropping figures was pursued by McQuarrie & Philips (2004) in their taxonomy of operations in print ads.

rhetorical operations and their respective figures aims to unearth identifiable patterns in configuration modes of representative ad filmic narratives from the most valued brands, as analyzed in the Discussion section.

Groupe  $\mu$  (1992) recognized that it is difficult to apply directly classical rhetorical figures to moving images, with the exception of the master tropes (see Rossolatos 2012 d; 2013 a,c,d). Efforts have been undertaken at extending the application of traditional figures mostly to static images (e.g., visual metonymy; Willerton 2005) and print advertisements (e.g., Durand, 1970, 1987; McQuarrie and Philips, 2004). The extension of figures to moving images and advertising filmic narratives has been mostly limited to visual metaphors and visual metonymies (e.g., Forceville, 2007, Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2008).<sup>3</sup> By adopting a common classification framework for visual and verbal elements, both purely verbal, purely visual, but also verbo-visual figures and operations may be discerned as being operative in ad filmic narratives, while taking into account the evocative powers of the visual mode, viz. "immediacy, verisimilitude, and concreteness that help influence acceptance in ways not available to the verbal" (Foss, 2004, p.314). To this end, the rhetorical figures were redefined in order to encapsulate visual components, but also modes of interaction between visual and verbal modes in ad filmic texts, as laid out in Table 1. By taking on board Forceville's (1996) recommendation for coining new figures in the light of the particularities of the visual mode in the context of the ad filmic text, three new figures are put forward in this paper, viz. accolorance, reshaption and pareikonopoeia (Table 1). These figures aim to encapsulate salient and frequently recurring modes of rhetorical configuration of ad filmic narratives.

## 2. Methodology

A representative commercial from each of the key brands making up the BrandZ 2012 list was selected, yielding a sample of 87 effective TV commercials<sup>4</sup>, after an initial screening phase of at least five commercials per brand. The majority of the selected commercials are corporate and non product-centric, thus focusing on key messages that reflect a company overall (or a specific umbrella brand, in cases of brands involving more than one variants)<sup>5</sup>. The vast majority of the selected ad filmic narratives were selected from the US/UK markets, with the exception of films from brands that operate solely in their native countries (i.e., Movistar/Spain, MTN/Uganda) and spanned the period between 2010-2012, in order to ensure as greater temporal proximity as possible.

The coding of the selected ad filmic narratives with rhetorical operations/figures took place

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<sup>3</sup> The boundaries between metaphor and metonymy are not always clear-cut. In any case, as noted and analyzed by various scholars (Eco, 1972, Groupe  $\mu$ , 1970, Ducrot & Todorov, 1972) metaphors emerge through a process of double metonymy.

<sup>4</sup> With the exclusion of non-English speaking ads, which were not featured in the analysis due to the author's non-mastery of the language involved.

<sup>5</sup> With exceptions that are reflective of the wider advertising strategy of different product/service categories, e.g., cars, where ad narratives tend to focus on specific models, yet featuring a corporate brand promise as payoff line (first or second credentials card).

with the employment of the CAQDAS content analytic program Atlas.ti 7, by drawing on a new methodology<sup>6</sup>, focusing on rhetorical analysis, not currently on offer by popular multimodal analysis programs (e.g., O'Halloran et al., 2010, Tan et al., 2012) and was enacted in two phases. During the first phase an a priori list of 50 figures was used, while each individual filmic syntagm<sup>7</sup>/sequence out of the total of 561 that resulted from the segmentation of the 87 commercials was inspected in the light of the definitional components of each figure. After completing the first phase, the list was reduced to 39 figures, by rendering redundant and/or merging figures that were minimally differentiating (e.g., omitting synaesthesia, given that the majority of films employ visuals in tandem with verbal/narrated segments).

The 561 filmic segments were coded with one or more figures, based on whether the corresponding figure occurred in the syntagm itself as relatively autonomous thematic unit (e.g., an alliteration that occurs within an individual segment) or by reference to the directly preceding sequence (e.g., an anaphora or an antanacsis) or retrospectively, by taking into account the global semantic/thematic context of the film (e.g., a visual sequence acting as a visual metonymy for a key product attribute or product benefit in a mid-filmic syntagm, which may be coded as such retrospectively in the light of the pay-off line in the ending sequence of the film). Primarily and predominantly visual and verbal filmic expressive elements were taken into account while coding sequences with rhetorical figures. However, in instances where musical expressive elements were dominant in streamlining the semantic orientation of a film, they were also taken into account, as will be shown in the Discussion Section.

The figures were defined by allusion to various rhetorical treatises, such as Groupe µ's (1970, 1992), Fontanier's (1977), Aristotle's, Quintilian's, Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's (1971), but also to entries in collective works, such as Sloane's *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (2006), as well as to taxonomies that were coined by scholars in the advertising rhetoric literature (e.g., McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, McQuarrie & Philips, 2004, Huhmann, 2008, Durand, 1970, 1997). The employed figures, their definitions and the rhetorical operations of which

<sup>6</sup> The methodology //rhetor.dixit// is offered by the semiotic consulting agency //disruptiVesemiOtics// and features an extensive suite of multimodal rhetorical analytics, customized for distinctive categories of advertising filmic narratives.

<sup>7</sup>Note that the offered rhetorical perspective is embedded in a filmic grammatical framework (see Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, Rossolatos, 2012a), which derives from a rich structuralist semiotic tradition in film analysis (e.g., Metz); it considers methodological principles and methods of analysis that are established in textual linguistics, inasmuch as semantics, syntactics, pragmatics (e.g., conversation analysis), but is not constrained by them. In this framework, the filmic syntagm, rather than sentence, has been posited as the minimal unit/segment of analysis (which engulfs oral sentences, e.g., voice -overs or written sentences, e.g., supers). The filmic syntagm is equivalent to a sequence that may include one or more different shots, in line with filmic analysis (where, certainly, methods tend to vary, such as Bellour's frame-by-frame analysis- see Rossolatos, 2012a). This framework prioritizes relations and interactions among modes and figures that occur in distinctive syntagms and contribute to the structuration of an ad filmic narrative, rather than resting at the level of pinpointing individual figures (an analytical task that is included in the analytical suite, while not being exhaustive of its integral and/or ad hoc applications).



they partake are portrayed in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Rhetorical figures and operations employed in the analysis of the ad filmic corpus.

	<b>Rhetorical figures (name-definition)</b>	<b>Corresponding rhetorical operation</b>
1	Aphesis: Omission of one or more sounds or syllables from the beginning of a word.	Suppression*
2	Apocope: Omission of one or more sounds or syllables from the end of a word.	Suppression
3	Ellipsis: Suppression of one or two elements that are necessary for a complete verbo-visual syntactic arrangement, without impacting necessarily on the semantic closure of the message	Suppression
4	Zeugma: Grammatical coordination of two words or visuals that possess opposing senses <sup>8</sup> .	Suppression
5	Asyndeton: Loosely constructed sentences that occur in filmic syntagms, such as the juxtaposition of words separated by commas.	Suppression
6	Litotes: Quantitative diminution of a property of an object, the significance of an event or a state-of-affairs.	Suppression
7	Suspension/Silence (or aposiopesis): Intentional omission of a word/phrase that would complete the meaning of a message (contrary to expectations).	Suppression
8	Rhetorical question: A question that includes its	Suppression
9	Neologism: Formed by the addition of at least two words or visuals.	Adjunction**

<sup>8</sup> Semes constitute the minimal units of multimodal semantic content (Rossolatos 2012a).

10	Paronomasia: Employment of consonant words with a different sense. In visual terms, a paronomasia may take place through an optical illusion, where similarly sounding words may appear differently as a result of the employment of blurred fonts.	Adjunction
11	Pareikonopoeia: Employment of similar images with different senses; similarity is conferred by the employment of different actors in different filmic sequences/ syntagms with similar postures, usually enhanced by the employment of the same production techniques (e.g., all syntagms featuring close-ups or medium shots or alternating close-ups/medium shots), who repeat the same underlying theme under different manifest narratives.	Adjunction
12	Epenthesis: The insertion of an extra sound into a word.	Adjunction
13	Alliteration: Repeats the same consonant sound in three or more subsequent words or the majority of words in a filmic syntagm	Adjunction
14	Assonance: Repeats vowel sounds within the majority of words in a phrase or sentence.	Adjunction
15	Accolorance: Repetition of the same color in the majority of visuals in a filmic syntagm or across syntagms. Usually employed with view to highlighting either a color that is part of a brand's visual identity or of an ad film's aesthetic orientation.	Adjunction
16	Rhyme: Repetition of sounds at the end of words and/or phrases.	Adjunction
17	Reshaption: Repetition of the same shape in the majority of visuals in a syntagm or across syntagms.	Adjunction



18	Antanacsis: Repetition of a single word, but with different meanings each time. Repetition may involve visuals or verbo-visual schemes.	Adjunction
19	Anaphora: Repeats the same first or middle word or phrase or sound (in the case of sonic markers) or visual marker (e.g., balloon) or setting (in the case of background settings) or object (e.g., beer bottle) in the same or in various filmic syntagms.	Adjunction
20	Epiphora: Repeats the last word(s) or visuals in a syntagm.	Adjunction
21	Parenthesis: (VERBAL-voice-over) The insertion in a syntagm of a distinct thought not totally unrelated to the subject at hand (VISUAL) The insertion of an extra shot in a syntagm that relates contextually to the narrative, but is not strictly speaking part of it.	Adjunction
22	Expletion: Enrichment with adjectives that make explicit in axiological terms why an object should be valued.	Adjunction
23	Personification: Attributes human qualities to an inanimate object.	Adjunction
24	Polysyndeton: The opposite of asyndeton, i.e., the use of many particles.	Adjunction
25	Hyperbole: Quantitative augmentation of one of the properties of an object, state-of-affairs; may be encountered purely verbally or visually or as the employment of a visual that augments the importance or the argumentative force of a voice-over.	Adjunction

26	Antithesis: Correspondence of two antonyms, which comprise opposing senses; may be encountered purely verbally or visually or as an antithesis between what is uttered in a voice-over and what is portrayed in a visual in the same or in succeeding filmic syntagms.	Adjunction
27	Metaphor: Substitution of an abstract concept with a concrete word or visual. Employment of a word or visual in a different sense to its habitual one, in order to effect a contrived similarity between them. <sup>9</sup>	Substitution***
28	Metonymy: Employment / displacement of the semantic nucleus of words and / or visuals to designate/highlight a property that is shared between them.	Substitution
29	Synecdoche: Employment of a word or visual in a sense that designates a relationship of part-to-whole (e.g., sail-for-ship; a special case of metonymy).	Substitution
30	Oxymoron: Co-occurrence in the same syntagm of two antonyms, without implying the incidence of a truism or a topos (may be evinced either purely verbally or visually or verbo-visually) and without the necessary incidence of coordination markers..	Substitution
31	Irony: Intentional employment of a word or visual in an antonymical sense.	Substitution
32	Paradox: The syntactical co-occurrence in the same syntagm of two words or phrases or visuals that appear to be contradictory, but contains a truism or topos.	Substitution

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<sup>9</sup> Note that parables were not included in the list, as they constitute long metaphors, based on traditional rhetorical definitions. A case of a micronarrative that is deployed in an entire long-take sequence functioning as a parable (as in the case of the featured Vodafone filmic narrative) essentially constitutes a long visual metaphor.

33	Pun: (VERBAL PUN) The transference of semic attributes through wordplay (e.g., Why weight for success? <sup>10</sup> ) (VISUAL PUN) A setting and/or the actors involved in a setting and/or other filmic elements (e.g., colors, movements) that emit one or more intended senses through visual play.	Substitution
34	Onomatopoeia: Substitution of naturally occurring sounds with descriptive words (e.g., Mazda's 'Zoom- Zoom').	Substitution
35	Anacolouthon: A component that does not cohere syntactically with a sentential structure (e.g., introducing a sentence with an adjective instead of the subject for added emphasis) in a filmic syntagm.	Permutation**** <sup>11</sup>
36	Anagram: Transposition of the letters of a meaningful word resulting in another meaningful word (e.g., Mary/Army)	Permutation
37	Tmesis: Splitting thematically correlated (verbal/visual) elements.	Permutation
38	Inversion: Permutation of the elements of a syntactic construction contrary to expectations; the inversion may also concern visuals (i.e. the inversion of a sequence of events leading to an expected state of affairs) or the inversion of the role performed by a syntactic element in a multimodal syntax involving music and visuals.	Permutation

<sup>10</sup> Cited in McQuarrie & Philips, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Note that whereas Groupe  $\mu$  (1970) classified anacolouthon under the operation of substitution, I am classifying it under permutation, as its function essentially consists in changing the grammatically correct expected order of a sentence (with provisos made for expected non-grammatically correct incidences of such stratagems in ordinary discourse, which implies that a syntagm will be coded with the figure anacolouthon if and only if it is intentionally and repetitively employed in a film for adding emphasis to adjectives at the beginning of sentences)- see further comments in the Discussion section about the general linguistic economy of advertising discourse.

39	Antimetabole: Reversal of the word and/or visual structure of one syntagm in another.	Permutation
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\*Suppression: Two expressive units (verbal/visual) are completely substitutable at the same place of the sequence/syntagm.

\*\*Adjunction: Two expressive units (verbal/visual) occupy the same place in a filmic sequence/syntagm, but are either not substitutable or are partially substitutable.

\*\*\*Substitution: An expressive unit completely substitutes another in a filmic sequence/syntagm, either morphologically or syntactically or at a semantic level.

\*\*\*\*Permutation: Two expressive units are included in a different order than expected in a filmic sequence/syntagm,

The final stage of the content analytic part featured the production of descriptive statistics pertaining to (i) the relative incidence of rhetorical operations in the selected corpus (ii) the relative incidence of individual figures (iii) the relative co-occurrence of figures, as displayed in the ensuing Section.

### 3. Main findings

In total 545 incidences of rhetorical figures were found to be operative in the 561 segments that make up the selected corpus of 87 advertising films from the most valuable brands. As per Table 2, the majority of figures partake of the operation of adjunction (67%), followed by substitution (17%), permutation (11%) and suppression (6%).

**Table 2.** Incidence of rhetorical operations in the selected corpus.

	Count	%
<b>adjunction</b>	364	67%
<b>permutation</b>	60	11%
<b>substitution</b>	91	17%
<b>suppresison</b>	30	6%
<b>tll</b>	545	100%

An above average incidence of adjunction operations was noted in the financial services/insurance, oil/gas, soft drinks/beer and technology sectors (Table 3), while permutation figures prominently in the cars, fashion/apparel, personal care and telecoms sectors. An above average incidence of substitution figures was noted in the cars, fashion/apparel and retail/fast food sectors, while suppression was encountered most frequently in the financial/insurance, soft drinks/beer and telecoms sectors.



**Table 3.** Indexed incidence of rhetorical operations by sector (above average incidence highlighted in green).

	Cars	Fashion Apparel	Financial Insurance	Oil_ Gas	Other
adjunction					
permutation					
substitution					
suppression					

	Personal Care	Retail Fast Food	Soft drinks Beer	Technology	Telecomms
adjunction					
permutation					
substitution					
suppression					

In greater detail, the most often recurring figures in the entire sample were anaphora, pareikonopoeia, accolorance, metaphor, inversion, antanaclasis, epiphora, rhyme, metonymy, alliteration and reshaption.

**Table 4.** Contribution of each figure to each operation and to the total sample.

	% of each operation	% of total sample
<b>Anaphora</b>	30%	20%
<b>Pereikonopoeia</b>	13%	9%
<b>Accolorance</b>	11%	7%
<b>Antanaclasses</b>	7%	5%
<b>Epiphora</b>	7%	5%
<b>Alliteration</b>	5%	4%
<b>Rhyme</b>	6%	4%
<b>Reshaption</b>	5%	4%
<b>Antithesis</b>	5%	3%
<b>Personification</b>	3%	2%
<b>Expletion</b>	2%	1%
<b>Hyperbole</b>	2%	1%
<b>Parenthesis</b>	1%	1%
<b>Assonance</b>	1%	0%
<b>Epenthesis</b>	0%	0%
<b>Neologism</b>	0%	0%
<b>Paronomasia</b>	0%	0%
<b>Polysyndeton</b>	0%	0%
<b>adjunction total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Inversion</b>	50%	6%
<b>Antimetabole</b>	25%	3%
<b>Anacolouthon</b>	8%	1%
<b>Tmesis</b>	13%	1%
<b>Anagram</b>	3%	0%
<b>permutation total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Metaphor</b>	36%	6%
<b>Metonymy</b>	23%	4%
<b>Irony</b>	11%	2%
<b>Oxymoron</b>	12%	2%
<b>Pun</b>	12%	2%

<b>Synecdoche</b>	4%	1%
<b>Onomatopoeia</b>	0%	0%
<b>Paradox</b>	1%	0%
<b>substitution total</b>	100%	17%
<b>Ellipsis</b>	40%	2%
<b>Asyndeton</b>	13%	1%
<b>Litotes</b>	13%	1%
<b>Rhetorical question</b>	17%	1%
<b>Apheresis</b>	0%	0%
<b>Apocope</b>	3%	0%
<b>Suspension/silence</b>	7%	0%
<b>Zeugma</b>	7%	0%
<b>suppression total</b>	100%	6%
<b>Grand total:</b>	100%	100%

**Note:** 0 percentages denote either the non-incidence of the concerned figures in the selected corpus or are attributed to rounding.

Contrary to expectations about the incidence of the four master tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony), it was found that they accounted en masse for 13% of the entire figurative landscape of the selected corpus.

A different, yet equally insightful picture to the relative incidence of figures and operations was yielded by examining the co-occurrence of different codes. In this case it was found that particular figures that may not be occurring as frequently as others, yet when they occur, they tend to co-occur largely with others within the same segments. For example, as suggested by Table 5, which ranks figures according to their strength of co- occurrence, figures which do not occur as frequently in the total sample, such as epenthesis, apocope, rhyme, antithesis, rhetorical question, when they occur they tend to co-occur highly with other figures. This comparative analysis is particularly useful, as it points to directions for gauging which figures occur as master tropes and which ones as supplementary figures that aid in adding further directionality to the intended brand signification.

**Table 5.** Ranking of figures by co-occurrence strength index.

	% of total sample	Co-occurrence strength Index
<b>epenthesis</b>	0%	265
<b>apocope</b>	0%	265
<b>rhyme</b>	4%	239
<b>metonymy</b>	4%	226
<b>epiphora</b>	5%	198
<b>pun</b>	2%	198
<b>irony</b>	2%	181
<b>antithesis</b>	3%	165
<b>accolorance</b>	7%	137
<b>rhetorical question</b>	1%	132
<b>reshaption</b>	4%	114

**Note:** 0 percentages are attributed to rounding.

## 4. Discussion

In this section, the research findings are further elaborated with view to addressing the mode of verbo-visual (and occasionally musical) rhetorical configuration of the most valuable brands. A detailed account of how the ad filmic narratives that make up the selected corpus are configured is furnished alongside the incidence of either verbal or visual rhetorical figures. Moreover, emphasis is laid on how the interactions among verbo-visual figures take place, by drawing on indicative patterns of examples.

While addressing the mode of verbo-visual rhetorical configuration of each filmic narrative, three levels were selected for gauging the incidence of each figure, viz. (i) within individual filmic segments (ii) through interaction between succeeding segments and (iii) by recourse to the wider (or 'global') semantic context (Van Dijk, 1980) of the ad filmic text.

### 4.1 Incidence of rhetorical figures within individual filmic segments

**Anaphoras** within the same filmic syntagms occurred largely in verbal mode, such as the immediate repetition of the possessive verb 'have' (Wells Fargo), the repetition of adjectives/adverbs such as 'faraway' (General Electric), the repetition of entire phrases, such as 'I came to IBM...' (IBM). Mixed verbo-visual modes were noted in cross- segment anaphoras (see ensuing sub-

section).

**Alliterations** abound within the same syntagms, as in the repetition of the morpheme 'ma-' in the payoff line of the HP ad filmic narrative ('make it matter'), of the consonant 'p' in the Pampers payoff line ('Peaceful nights, playful days'), which also alliterates with the visual of the brand's logo, with exactly the same pattern repeated in the Toyota Prius commercial ('More Prius, more possibilities'). Likewise, alliterations occurred in the corpus through the repetition of consonants 'b' and 'd' in the Starbucks double espresso payoff line ('Starbucks double espresso premium drink-Bring on the day'), of the consonant 'h' in the Disneyland commercial ('happiest homecoming'), of the consonant 'b' in the mid-filmic syntagm of the State Farm narrative ('bungling, bustling, bundle benders') and the alliteration list can continue.

Interesting cases of **reshaption** occurred as a triangular vector formed by two succeeding visuals (giant wave and eye) in the opening sequence of the Red Bull commercial, while in the case of the O2 commercial the brand name's vowel 'O' is immediately redoubled in the form of a bubble in the closing sequence of the narrative.



**Figure 1.** Pampers alliteration.

**Figure 2-** Red Bull reshaption.

**Figure 3-** O2 reshaption.

**Expletion** is regularly employed with view to embellishing the claims raised in the course of the narratives with nouns and adjectives (often in the superlative) of grandeur and gravitas, such as 'incredible', 'other-worldly' (General Electric), 'the best a man can get' (Gillette), the world's 'toughest' energy challenges (Exxon), 'amazing' (Cisco, Pepsi, Disney), 'the best or nothing' (Mercedes).



**Figure 4-** Exxon expletion.



**Figure 5-** Orange hyperbole.

**Hyperbolically** accentuated verbal statements are noted in incidences such as the Orange narrative, where the key semic component of proximity in the modal proposition ‘you can stay close to those that matter to you’ is hyperbolically enhanced with the employment of visuals portraying significant others literally emerging from within oneself.

**Personification** is evinced verbally by referring to nouns such as energy by ‘her’ rather than ‘it’ (Shell), as well as by inviting consumers to make their walls talk (Home Depot). Traditional figures, such as **inversion**, are also evinced visually on an intra-filmic segment level, as in the case of the Visa narrative, where an actor’s attempt to pay by cash, rather than by Visa, inverts the harmoniously structured syntactical order of production schedules/consumption patterns in a café.



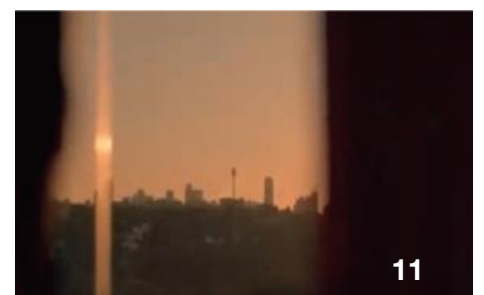
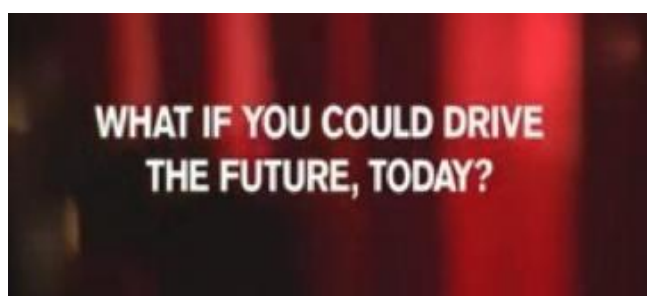


**Figure 6-** Paying by Visa caters for perfect synch/harmony.

**Figure 7-** Paying by cash instead of Visa.

**Figure 8-** Clients bumping onto each other in the café cue as a result of the actor's not paying by Visa.

Furthermore, the syntactical structure of ordinary activities, such as preparing a coffee, are inverted in favor of a dancing scene, with view to emphasizing brand benefits (i.e., buying from Walmart) or where bodily movements are totally inverted (as in the Microsoft commercial) or in the case of the opening sequence of the Nissan narrative, where the closed curtain of what appears to be a theatrical stage is succeeded by an actor's drawing a window curtain sideward.



**Figure 9-** Walmart inversion.

**Figure 10-** Microsoft inversion.

**Figure 11-** Nissan inversion.

**Visual metaphors** are employed within specific segments, as in the incidence of a woman punching a boxing-sack in the L'Oreal narrative (in tandem with the voice-over 'hair won't feel wrecked or ravaged') or in the incidence of a DNA structure's gigantic visual that enhances the illocutionary force of the accompanying utterance concerning 'solving challenging problems' in the IBM narrative or in the incidence of candies as visual metaphor for savings (ICICI).



**Figure 11-** L'Oreal Visual Metaphor.



**Figure 12-** IBM visual metaphor



**Figure 13-** ICICI Visual Metaphor.

**Visual paradoxes** occur in individual syntagms, such as the appearance of rain in the middle of the desert (Hermes); in the case of Goofy's being intentionally featured in a syntagm that portrays a gift-box with the inscription 'do not open' (as everyone knows that Goofy is intent on doing exactly the opposite things; Disney); in the case of the JP Morgan Chase narrative, where the voice-over 'Isn't life supposed to make life easier' is coupled with a technological dysfunction visual.



**Figure 14.** Hermes visual paradox.



**Figure 15.**Disney visual paradox.

**Litotic schemes** are encountered in individual syntagms either as enhancers of the value of one of two propositions that are raised in the same syntagm (e.g., ‘simply by doing good, can a bank in fact be great?’- Standard Chartered- where ‘doing good’ is underplayed in order to enhance the argumentative force of being great) or with view to underplaying the universal validity of a maxim, as in the second filmic syntagm of the featured Red Bull narrative, which stresses ‘I think it’s human nature to want to explore’, thus appropriating a maxim by diminution of its universal appeal within the axiological framework propounded by the brand (as against stressing impersonally ‘It is human nature to want to explore’).

Most notably, **antanaclasis** occurs in instances of immediate repetition of a preceding verbal proposition in the same syntagm in a different mode and different sense, as in the case of the syntagm from the featured McDonald’s narrative, where the imperative proposition ‘do the twins’ refers both to double cheese-burgers, but also, as suggested by the visual anchoring of the proposition in the concerned syntagm, to human look-alikes. A similar verbo-visual antanaclasis is encountered in the Intel commercial, where the adverb ‘well’ in the verbal super featured in the opening filmic syntagm is immediately succeeded by the visual of a natural well, thus intensifying the argumentative impact of a moral maxim (‘travel your life well’) by associating explicitly wellness with a ‘well-of-life’.



**Figure 16-** McDonald's Visual antanaclasis.



**Figure 17-** Intel visual antanaclasis.



An exceptional, infrequently occurring case, yet interesting by virtue of its scarcity in the selected corpus, is the incidence of **visual puns**, which create a sort of optical illusion, as in the case of the featured Pepsi commercial where a flashing banner with the word 'gas' reads 'can' from a distance, thus also giving rise to a paronomasia (in the context of intra- diegetic dialogues featuring recurrent allusion to 'can').



**Figure 18-** Pepsi visual pun (optimally seen at normal distance from TV screen).

It should be noted that it is precisely the less often recurring figures that should be attended to in a more detailed fashion, as they confer to an ad filmic narrative what may be called a **rhetorical first mover advantage**. Let us recall Rifatterre's dictum that a hyperbole in a hyperbolic context is not a hyperbole (see Rossolatos 2012a), which clearly indicates the truism that the more often a figure is employed (either by the same brand or across brands), the less effective it is likely to be, as it violates the very *raison d'être* of a rhetorical figure, which rests with imbuing recipients with an element of surprise, thus giving rise to a deviation from expectations<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See Rossolatos, 2012c,d for a discussion on variable contextualizations of the notion of rhetorical deviation.

## 4.2 Incidence of rhetorical figures through interaction between filmic segments

The newly coined figures of **accolorance** and **reshaption** are particularly useful for capturing salient aspects of how nuanced anaphorical relationships are structured in the visual rhetoric of ad filmic narratives. Accolorance (which occurred in 7% of cases in the entire corpus) surfaces either as repetition of the same colors across filmic syntagms (e.g., recurrence of light blue and pink in the Apple commercial), or as corporate colors inscribed in actors' clothing, but also in background setting, peripheral filmic elements (e.g., cars), as in the cases of the Target and the McDonald's commercials; by superimposing a geometrical shape with corporate colors (e.g., line) on top of the featured visuals (Citibank), but also by color filtering the natural settings of visual sequences with corporate colors (MTN).



**Figure 19-** Target accolorance.

**Figure 20-**McDonalds accolorance





**Figure 21-** Citi accolorance.

**Figure 22-** MTN accolorance.

In terms of reshaping (that is repetition of the same shape functioning as figurative connector among succeeding syntagms), a knee-shaping pyramid in the opening sequence of the featured China Construction Bank is repeated uniformly in all subsequent filmic syntagms, while spherical shapes are repeated across the Sberbank narrative



**Figure 23-** China Construction Bank reshaption.



**Figure 24-** Sberbank reshaption.

**Antanaclases** are no longer merely the province of verbal statements. As attested by a significant portion of ad narratives from the selected corpus, the alternating verbo-visual repetition of the same visuals/words with different meaning, affords to invest brand discourses with ever ramifying

semantic twists and turns. For example, the SAP narrative repeats the word 'run' in two predominant senses both within and between filmic segments, in the sense of speeding up, as well as in the sense of executing or operating a program. A most remarkable example of how an entire ad filmic narrative is configured around antanaclases that are operative both within individual segments and across segments, but also in constant interaction between verbal and visual modes, is the ad film of U.S. bank. The narrative oscillates constantly between the logo, the brand name and the very meaning of the personal pronoun 'us', thus creating a verbo-visual osmosis that attests to how a first mover figurative rhetorical advantage may be yielded not only by the employment of less frequently recurring figures, but, moreover, by different combinations of highly recurring figures in dynamic verbo-visual interactions.



**Figure 25-** U.S. Bank antanaclases.

A similar figurative strategy that revolves around antanaclases across filmic segments is pursued by Verizon Fios, that repeats the bifurcated meaning of the verb 'to get' throughout its narrative, in the sense of 'obtaining the service' and 'becoming enlightened by the benefits that stem from



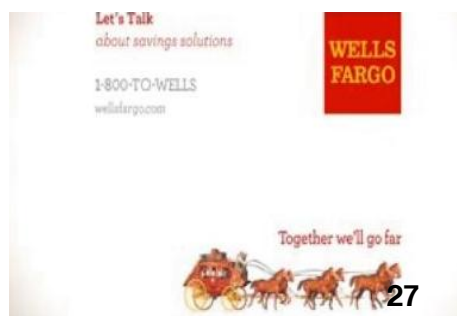
its usage', facilitated by a change in voice-over tonality<sup>13</sup> in each of the two incidences. Especially the latter use of the verb rises above a simple exemplification with slice-of-life visuals in a contextually forceful manner (and hence not amenable to explicit argumentation) that is suggestive of an underlying proposition (macro-proposition, in Van Dijk's terms) that unless the product is obtained, then one does not have access to a topos that is over and above the simple possession of the service. In this sense, 'getting it' is about sharing with others and being recognized for having got it, rather than simply having obtained the service. This is a remarkable example of how the standout employment of a common figure attains to institute a silent/salient topos.



**Figure 26-** Verizon frame from narrative featuring antanaclases.

As regards traditional verbal figures, **antimetaboles** occur predominantly in payoff lines (e.g., Wells Fargo: 'Together we'll go far'; Visa: 'more people go with Visa, Visa pay wave'; Standard Chartered: 'what profit a bank makes, but how it makes that profit'). However, such traditional figures also apply in a visual rhetorical context, as in the case of the KFC commercial, where the beginning of the second filmic segment that portrays an opening door constitutes an inversely structured visual sequence of the end of the preceding syntagm that featured a closing door.

<sup>13</sup> Note that voice-over tonality, as employed in rhetorical analysis, should not be confused with the advertising planning term 'tone-of-voice' that constitutes industry jargon.



more people go with Visa. Visa payWave

28



**Figure 27-** Wells Fargo antimetabole.

**Figure 28-** Visa antimetabole.

**Figure 29-** KFC antimetabole.

FedEx employs **verbo-visual irony** throughout its entire narrative, where visuals subvert ironically the statements that are put forward 'bona fide' by two actors (opponents in a political rally), a direct competition strategy that is also employed in the Mastercard narrative, where direct allusion in the voice-over to American Express's (key competitor) commitment to the 'craft' is ironically subverted in the same syntagm by portraying a restaurant concierge who politely ('gladly') fends off prospective clients from making reservations.

**Verbal metonymies** are encountered throughout the Santander narrative, where each syntagm features a variety of actions (e.g., playing, sowing, inviting), which are all displaced metonymically to a saving action, even if no saving sense inheres customarily in these actions.

On the level of inter-segment figurative relationships that are instituted in the narrative through a figure of **visual-sonic inversion**, we notice in the Telcel ad narrative that whereas in the initial three segments the selected musical theme functions on the background of a deploying visual narrative, it suddenly shifts to the foreground, as a band is portrayed to be performing the same theme live (first on the street and then in a gig venue). Such a verbo-visual stratagem still abides by the definitional tenets of the inversion figure, that is an alteration of the expected syntactical construction of a syntagm, yet (i) it displaces the notion of syntax from its

traditional grammatical contours to the expected grammar of ad filmic narratives within a larger semiotic economy of advertising (ii) in the context of ad filmic grammar it inverts the function of music from conditioning background mechanism that enhances rhetorical appeals to foreground actor.



**Figure 30-** Telcel visual-sonic inversion  
(background music shifting to live band performance).

**Epiphoras** also furnish the semantic glue between succeeding filmic segments, as in the repetition of the attitudinal descriptor 'positive' at the end of the two closing sequences of the Carrefour narrative. Interesting examples of **anaphorical** figures occurring as a result of multimodal sonic/visual interactions in two succeeding filmic syntagms were noted in narratives that featured a medium-shot of a store's front with a giant sticker featuring the message 'Click and collect', which was succeeded in the ensuing filmic syntagm by the clicking sound of a passing-by bicycle (Tesco). The repetition of the same verbal statement (e.g., product claim '60% less sugar') also attains to create anaphorical coherence between two succeeding filmic segments.



**Figure 31-** Tesco visual/sonic epiphora.

**Ellipsis** is particularly demanding, given that advertising discourse is elliptical throughout. Ellipsis, inasmuch as other traditional figures, such as anacolouthon, asyndeton, polysyndeton, silence/suspension are part and parcel of the general advertising semiotic economy (where standard grammar rules do not furnish the requisite benchmark for gauging the incidence of a rhetorical deviation), hence one must be particularly selective when coding filmic syntagms with this figure. In the selected corpus syntagms were coded with ellipsis only in the incidence where this figure was intentionally employed as enhancer of the manifest plot and not as part of expected deviations that are notable in advertising language (such as the omission of pronouns, connectors, etc.). Examples of such intentional uses of ellipsis, and particularly of visual ellipsis, may be encountered in the case of the featured ICICI narrative. In this example, the emphasis on the visual of an empty pocket (close-up by camera movement) in a filmic segment that features a little girl (key actress) who is unable to complete a candies purchase act, yet who is handed the intended purchase item free-of-charge by the merchant, is rendered comprehensible once we are exposed to the payoff line of the narrative, which promises unexpected rewards by following a savings plan. Hence, what is required in order to close off semantically this segment and at the same time what is omitted in this syntagm,



functions as an ellipsis. In order to account for this ellipsis a viewer must wait until the semantic gap has been filled in by the brand promise. A similar elliptical configuration is encountered in the case of Scotia Bank, where a mid filmic syntagm omits mentioning how much one would have to pay for a particular type of home in 2020, while inviting viewers to fill in the missing information by taking into account the exponentially increasing home purchase prices that were exposed in the previous syntagms. In a similar vein, the Airtel narrative features a syntagm where W.Churchill is portrayed to be raising his right hand and forming the peace symbol while addressing a crowd. The super 'Two can win a war' runs in parallel. In this case, the subject to which the count noun is ascribed is intentionally omitted, not only for textual economic reasons, as it may be inferred from the previous syntagm (which explicitly posits 'finger' as the subject of the sentence), but due to the fact that the intentionally elliptical sentence constitutes at the same time a pun that plays on the polysemy of the subject of the ellipsis (given that, literally, two figures cannot win a war, hence another subject must be evoked for closing off the sentence's semantic structure, such as two persons, two armies or, generally speaking, a structural coupling).



**Figure 32-** Airtel verbo-visual/ellipsis.



**Figure 33-** ScotiaBank verbo-visual/ellipsis.

Silence/suspension demands equally prudent coding as ellipsis, given that it is part and parcel of the general advertising semiotic economy. However, there are cases where it is intentionally used and where it is more proper to code the respective segments with this figure rather than ellipsis (of which it stands in an analogically hypotactic relationship, in the same fashion that accolorance, for example, is a special case of anaphora, both being part of repetition figures; see Groppe 1984). An indicative example of a powerful use of silence/suspension in our corpus is the closing syntagm of the Facebook narrative, which intentionally ends in silence, while omitting the repetition of the predicate 'alone' from the previous sentence ('The universe is fast and dark and makes us wonder if we are alone. So maybe the reason why we make up all of these things is to remind ourselves that we are not...'). In this case, the predicate is suspended verbally, while the sentence is completed by the appearance of the brand name 'Facebook'. Hence, it is not a case where the predicate is omitted, as the sentence is filled in with 'Facebook', but of substituting 'not alone' with Facebook, to which end the employment of the suspension/silence figure is conducive.

The newly coined figure of **pareikonopoeia**, which recurs in 9% of all filmic segments and features different actors and/or settings that converge semantically on the univocally implied message behind manifest variations, uniformly facilitated by the employment of recurrent production techniques (e.g., alternation between medium-shots and close-ups, same on-screen placement), was found to be particularly prevalent in slice-of-life ad narratives, but also in cases where the same message was repeated with thematic variations (e.g., IBM's plea for building a smarter planet, featuring rotating employee narratives of why IBM solutions are smart, Subway's 'Eat Fresh' single minded proposition underlying - see Johnson and Mandler, 1980 - various menu choices, in-home slice-of-life visuals revolving around consumers' interaction with Sony Bravia, people making ironically promises they can't keep in the Commonwealth Bank commercial, aspects of not being treated as expected in the KFC commercial, oxymoronic

incidents of technology malfunction in the Chase commercial).

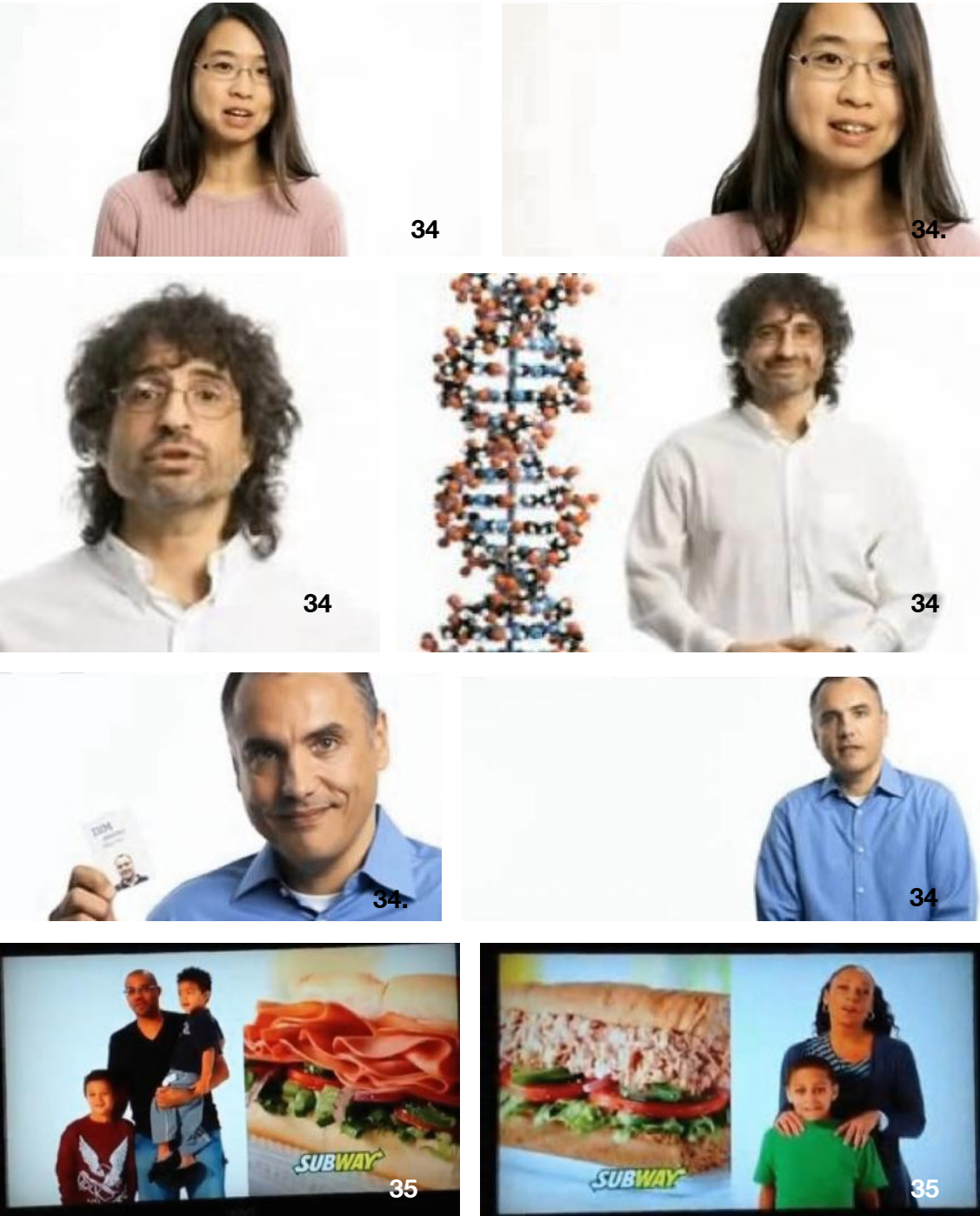


Figure 34- IBM pareiknonopoeia

Figure 35- Subway pareiknonopoeia.



### ***4.3 Incidence of rhetorical figures by recourse to the 'global' semantic and syntactic context of the ad filmic text***

Verbo-visual anaphoras, which constitute the most often recurring rhetorical figure (of the adjunction operation) function as syntactic markers of the multimodal rhetoric pursued by the majority of the most valued brands. Indicative examples of visual anaphora as syntactic markers that confer a unique semantic structure to the ad filmic narrative, by analogy to the syntactic markers as customarily employed in textual linguistics (e.g., Swanson 2003, Gonzalez 2012), consist of (i) recurrent product shots, embedded in slice-of-life, experiential moments (see Rossolatos 2013a, b) featuring the advertised brand, in a considerable portion of the filmic segments (e.g., Budweiser bottle and/or logo) (ii) recurrent same visuals (under different camera angles) with a color coding that is indicative of the featured brand's color codes (e.g., Telcel giant balloon).



**Figure 36-** Budweiser anaphora.





**Figure 37-** Telcel anaphora.

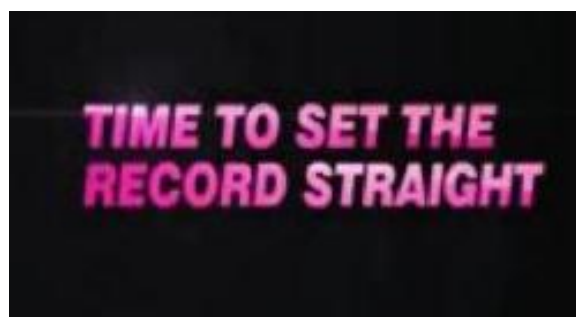
A **visual metonymy** is formed hyperbolically in the DHL commercial between the corporate yellow color and the yellow flash that is indicative of the speed at which DHL delivers its orders. Making sense of why the yellow flash functions as a visual metonymy presupposes that the audience has been exposed to the wider semantic context, featuring the brand's corporate colors and its brand promise as engraved in the narrative's payoff line ('Excellence simply delivered'). By the same token, the prior incidence of the 'flash' is a necessary condition for understanding why the qualification of the delivery mode with the addition of 'simply' in the payoff line functions as a litotic scheme that adds a tone of modesty to the hyperbolic visual statements that precede it. An analogon of verbo-visual figurative interaction, but on a same segment level, is encountered in the American Express narrative, where the hyperbolic incidence of the main actor's appearing on the scene like deus-ex-machina in a fly-in mode, equipped with all the paraphernalia he bought with American Express (featuring a canoe) is coupled oxymoronically with the co-actresse's statement 'It's too much'.



**Figure 38-** DHL visual metonymy.

**Figure 39-** American Express visual hyperbole.

An example of **verbo-visual antithesis** as the outcome of interaction between visual and verbal modes by recourse to a wider semantic context occurs in a mid-filmic segment from the T-Mobile narrative. In this instance, whereas the super that appears on-screen states 'Time to set the record straight', the appeal to straighten one's record is in marked contrast to the portrayal of a business-woman turned into night-time vigilante. Hence, not only a verbo-visual antithesis attains to accentuate a cultural value about 'straightness', but a new semic dimension is added to 'straightness' in the brand's discourse, which liquidates oppositions and refreezes them in a novel manner.



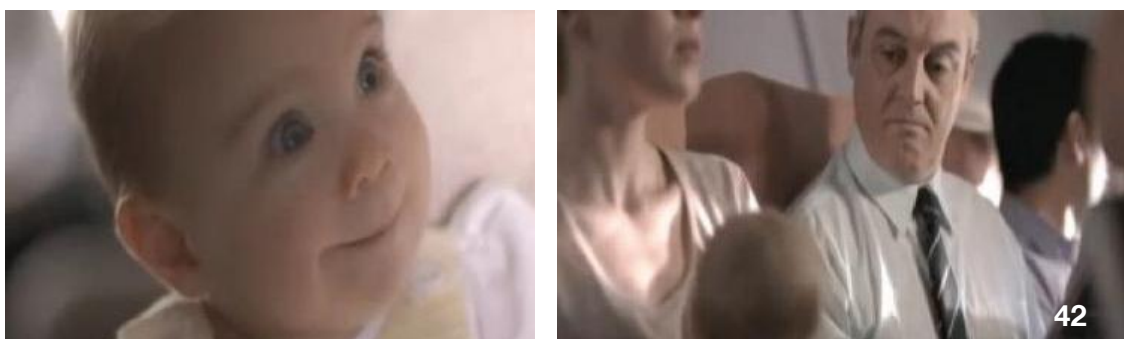
**Figure 40-** T-Mobile verbo-visual antithesis

A striking example of verbo-visual antithesis also emerges in the context of the Starbucks narrative, where a rock-band is employed as the voice of the featured actor's conscience (or superego), Glen, a low-to-mid manager in a corporate environment. The antithesis that emerges by the juxtaposition of two divergent lifestyles is further reduced to an oxymoron, as the two lifestyles that are coupled with antonymical semes ('abundantly expressive' for rock band versus 'reserved' for employee, among other potentially antonymical semes) converge in the manifest plot under a novel hybrid semantic synthesis. This hybrid verbo-visual oxymoron is tropically enhanced by the co- occurrence of figures of rhyme, irony, epiphora.



**Figure 41-** Starbucks verbo-visual antithesis.

The Aldi narrative also plays repeatedly throughout the various filmic segments with antithesis, in the light of the payoff line 'ready when you're not', which makes sense retrospectively, once the antithetical images of babies who are ready to fulfill a 'basic corporeal need', when parents are not, have been referred back to the payoff line.



**Figure 42-** Aldi visual antithesis.

Certain figures, such as verbal **hyperbole**, also function as the holistic figurative backdrop of ad narratives. This is the case with the Louis Vuitton commercial, where the hyperbolic verses

(brought about by oxymorons, such as 'I make medicine sick', personifications, such as 'hospitalized a brick') of poet/boxer Mohammed Ali are leveraged with view to augmenting the dreamy atmosphere that is fleshed out through the employment of the visual metaphor of the boxing ring as oneiric scaffold. This co- occurrence of personification-cum-hyperbole is reminiscent of the by definition excessive content of a repressed wish fulfillment in a dream's unconscious that 'fights' to make itself manifest in the hyperbolic content of conscious speech (yet only attaining to surface as oxymoronic excess that invokes the impossibility of this surfacing; see Rossolatos 2012c).



**Figure 43-** Louis Vuitton oneiric scaffold.

**Visual personifications** bring brands to life, as in the case of dancing Apple ipods, humanized bears (Coca-Cola), anthropomorphized colors (who express their personality through kinesics) or with stadiums that 'get it' (Verizon) (see Rossolatos 2012c for further analysis of anthropomorphism strategies). **Visual inversions** are also noted as syntactic markers that confer cohesion to separately placed segments within a filmic narrative's temporal structure, as in case of



ebay, where sequential inversions of movement in physical space are employed in order to enhance the impact of the argument about convenience and flexibility of navigation in the online commercial environment of ebay.



**Figure 44-** ebay visual inversions.

Figures that function as syntactic markers that solidify textual cohesion are encountered in cases of **epiphora**, such as in the case of UPS, where each verse of the sung narrative ends with the phrase 'That's logistics', but also in the case of epiphoras in the narrative of Santander, where the majority of the featured verses end with the phrase 'you save', thus enhancing mnemotechnically the key brand promise about savings.

Regarding the visual incidence of tmesis in the context of the rhetorical strategy employed in the narrative for Toyota Prius, an interpolated filmic syntagm disrupts correlated syntagms that are edified on the transition amongst the four seasons, by portraying an a-seasonal visual, against the background of the drawing of an ancient edifice with classical architectural rhythm. In this manner, the diachronic value of the brand is highlighted in the course of the transition amongst synchronically salient stages (such as seasons), while adding a twist of modern/classic by portraying an ancient building (symbolic of heritage) in drawn free-form. Again, the operational value of the employed figure, in this incidence, makes sense against the background of the wider semantic contours of the entire narrative.



**Figure 45-** Toyota visual tmesis.

In the case of Nike, the entire film plays around **tmeses** that interrupt correlated sequences of action. Shots related to different product categories on offer by the brand freeze action in distinctive 'nows' (thus replicating the payoff line 'Now') across the entire narrative (1<sup>st</sup> freeze on shoes on a display, 2<sup>nd</sup> on a ball, 3<sup>rd</sup> on a t-shirt), thus urging consumers to purchase now in order to continue being part of the ongoing game.



**Figure 46-** Nike visual tmeses.

Occasionally, figures function by recourse to the wider semantic context of an ad filmic narrative as entire sequences. This is particularly the case with visual metaphors, as in the incidence of an entire sequence featuring a young boy and a girl who form an instant connection via the gaze and then by the former handing over to the latter a scarf that had been removed from her neck by a strong wind. This 'long metaphor' (of parabolic nature, where a micro-narrative states how instant connections may be formed in mundane circumstances) and at the same time visual synecdoche, stands metaphorically for the core brand promise of instant connections that is made in the narrative's payoff line.



**Figure 47-** Vodafone visual metaphor.

In the Facebook narrative, the explicit **verbo-visual metaphor** of chairs is employed by transferring the attribute of the recipient of a chair's functionality (e.g., 'chairs are for people') to Facebook in a rarely explicit manner (i.e., by not suppressing similes). The entire narrative deploys against the background of equally binding least common denominators, which, yet, function as verbo-visual synecdoches that display aspects of means whereby people are connected (e.g., bridges) for the whole, that is Facebook. In this instance, the brand is posited in the narrative's rhetorical topography as the universal least common denominator by analogy to its synecdochic parts.



**Figure 48-** Facebook visual metaphor.



**Figure 49-** Facebook visual synecdoches.



In a similar manner, that is where visual metaphors make sense as such ex post facto, that is once semantic closure has been effected in a narrative's payoff line, the Accenture narrative effects a metaphorical transfer of the attributes convention and invention qua 'rules of the game' from a golf-course game to business practice.



**Figure 50-** Accenture visual metaphor.

By the same token, the individual filmic syntagms in the Volkswagen narrative that range from a beetle's helping pull a school-bus to a beetle's chasing a villain function retrospectively, that is once the statement 'They say if you are good in one life, you are rewarded in the next' has been established, as visual metaphors for 'goodness' or doing 'good deeds'.



They say if you are good in one life,  
you are rewarded in the next.

51

**Figure 51-** Volkswagen visual metaphor.

Even though in the majority of cases in this analysis segments were coded, for methodological consistency, with figures in a manner that resonates primarily the local context of the ad narratives, opening up interpretation to a wider cultural milieu essentially affords to widen the interpretive horizon, while allowing the connotative aspects of ad narratives' configuration to

seethe even more forcefully into the interpretive canvass. For example, the shadow projected from the McDonald's logo banner that stands on top of the store's roof in the featured narrative also functions as a visual metaphor insofar as it sanctions the brand within the filmic discourse to act as the social space wherein all aspects of summer-related activities (given that all featured visual sequences are related to the 'Do Summer' payoff line) may be enacted, while natural protection from the sun opens up to a cultural milieu qua security, safety and protection.



**Figure 52-** McDonalds visual metaphor.

Such an interpretive opening up to a wider cultural context also attains to elucidate why the most valued brands afford to invest their narratives with a cultural capital that catapults them to arche-signifiers or gate-keepers of a cultural order, while pointing to how a value system or plenum of rhetorical topoi is instituted in ad filmic narratives.

## 5. Conclusions and areas for further research

It is hoped that the interpretive and operational applicability of the majority of traditional rhetorical operations and figures to a visio-centric predicament, wherein ad texts are embedded, has been substantiated through the arguments put forward in the preceding analyses. The world's most valuable brands were found to be making ample and intensive use of a wide roster of verbo-visual rhetorical techniques that are instrumental in shaping their ad filmic narratives. The propounded rhetorical perspective provided partial answers to the call for coining new figures that may encapsulate how distinctive modes of visual rhetorical configuration are brought about, while paving the way for a bespoke and expanded taxonomy, in the context of a still vibrant and thriving rhetorical tradition that posited *inventio* as an indispensable complement of *elocutio*.

On a methodological level, the adopted coding and analytical route that favors individual filmic segments' analysis, rather than treating ad films as standalone analytical units, turned out to be a viable option for capturing the multiplicity of and the interaction among the rhetorical figures that are operative in various parts of individual ad filmic narratives. The output of this analysis points to a clear need for attending closely to how the configuration of an advertising narrative may be molded with reference to the relative incidence of figures, operations and moreover co-occurring figures in a multimodal rhetorical landscape, with view to obtaining a first mover rhetorical advantage.

The benefits to be reaped by using rhetordixit may be hardly underplayed. An account planning team may keep track in a minutely detailed fashion of how competitive brand communication strategies were fleshed out throughout time by producing aggregate reports about the relative incidence of distinctive profilmic elements and/or rhetorical figures. In this manner, a planning team is in a position to make informed decisions about which elements to avoid repeating, as well as about which profilmic elements may be used for truly standout communications (see Rossolatos 2013 e,f). Last, but not least, a brand management team may monitor through statistical analyses the relative impact of the employment of different creative elements and rhetorical strategies on market share and soft metrics, such as brand image, brand familiarity and brand involvement.



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# Applying archetypal frameworks to brand identity & packaging research

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# Research objectives

This research project was designed to guide the visual identity and packaging design for a leading brand of home repair and maintenance tools. While the brand is an established player in the market, the project team was concerned that it had lost resonance with consumers on a deeper level as the category became increasingly crowded with competitive launches. Given the product would receive little in the way of advertising support, the visual design cues employed were pivotal in communicating the brand story through colour, logo treatment and on-package symbols.

The overarching objective of the research was to identify a package design for Brand X<sup>1</sup> that would stand out on shelf, communicate a relevant rational and emotional message, and drive purchase consideration. More specifically, the objectives were to:

- Identify the archetype embodied by the brand's existing visual identity and package design;
- Explore options to shift the brand to a more favourable archetype and positioning by testing several new variations of the visual identity and package design;
- Understand what the package communicated in terms of features and benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Brand name non-disclosable due to confidentiality reasons.

## Conceptual framework & research methodology

Brands are stories. The premise behind the use of archetypes in market research is that consumers choose brands in part because they help them to tell stories about themselves, while some chose to buy brands that tell others a story about how the consumer wants to be seen. Brands are a complex system of symbols that fulfill consumer's desires for an intangible experience beyond the tangible product benefit (Oswald 1996). Archetypal characters are the basic building blocks of these stories.

When working with archetypes, DIG Insights leverages the twelve archetypes from the book "The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes". DIG Insights has collected archetype data on more than 35 different brands and has been able to demonstrate the difference between a well-communicated brand story (where the brand and the consumer archetypes are aligned) and a poorly-communicated brand story (where they are not) and how this impacts the brand's overall perception.

Each of the brands shown to the right communicates a clear brand story through a defined archetype. For example, Apple communicates the Outlaw archetype because it is seen as a radical brand that likes to reinvent things and break the rules established by less revolutionary brands. Nike is the Hero archetype which communicates that the consumer would feel confident, competitive and brave when wearing Nike clothing.

Advertisers work to develop communication strategies that instill a sense of connection between a brand and its target consumer group (Pinson, 1998). Marketers and brand stewards are challenged to design products, packaging and marketing strategies that speak to the unmet needs of their consumers. There are, however, a number of different, often implicit, symbolic relationships between products and their consumers, making the task of reinvention a challenge. Archetypes can provide marketers with a framework from which to assess the 'fit' of these communication elements with the intended brand identity.

The research was conducted online among a national sample of 2,340 adult Canadians who were actively seeking for tools, intended for home use. In total, eight different product & package designs were tested, including the incumbent Brand X package and competitive designs.





The research employed a blind, monadic evaluation of each concept, with ~300 unique evaluations per concept. Respondents evaluated the concepts in terms of breakthrough on-shelf, appeal, perceived advantage, purchase likelihood, and fit with brand expectations. In determining the identity and character of Brand X, a series of profiling questions were included to gauge brand archetype perceptions (how consumers perceive the brand), and to determine consumer archetype perceptions (who consumers think buys the brand). This allowed us to narrow in on communication opportunities and identify designs which supported a rich brand story.

## Research outcomes

Our research revealed the incumbent design was positioning Brand X as the friendly, down-to-earth Everyman archetype among the target consumers. Although aligned with the brand's heritage as an approachable product for light to medium do-it-yourselfers, the brand skewed toward the negative expression of this character: plain, boring, a follower, and less expressive, confident and thoughtful than its competitive set.

The research identified an opportunity to shift the brand character toward more ego-driven archetypes: the Ruler (mastery & standards), the Sage (teaching) and the Hero (quest & success), with little risk of alienating the core customers. These alternative archetypes proved to be better aligned with how consumers saw themselves in the realm of the do-it-yourself category, driving improved brand relevance and engagement. Importantly, the research allowed the Marketing team to understand which colours, visual cues and design treatments were important in communicating these archetypal identities, and how they might translate the brand archetype across various consumer touch-points.

## Managerial implications

Quite often, market research is conducted in established and hyper-competitive categories, where products cannot sustainably differentiate themselves on features and price alone. Building brand stories around archetypes allows advertisers to imply rather than assert claims (Geis, 1982). This semiotic approach to brand identity research and strategy may provide marketers with a means for clarifying the competitive differences between brands, identifying their consumers' unmet emotional needs, and developing tactics that support consumer perceptions of a brand's value and associations. Identifying an archetype that is aligned with how consumers view themselves in a category creates opportunities for connecting both with irrational and rational choice-drivers, while yielding a platform for shaping a consistent, impactful brand identity.

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# **Semiomarketing and Fashion Semiology: the business language of Fashion and Luxury**

**Cinzia Ligas & Fausto Crepaldi**

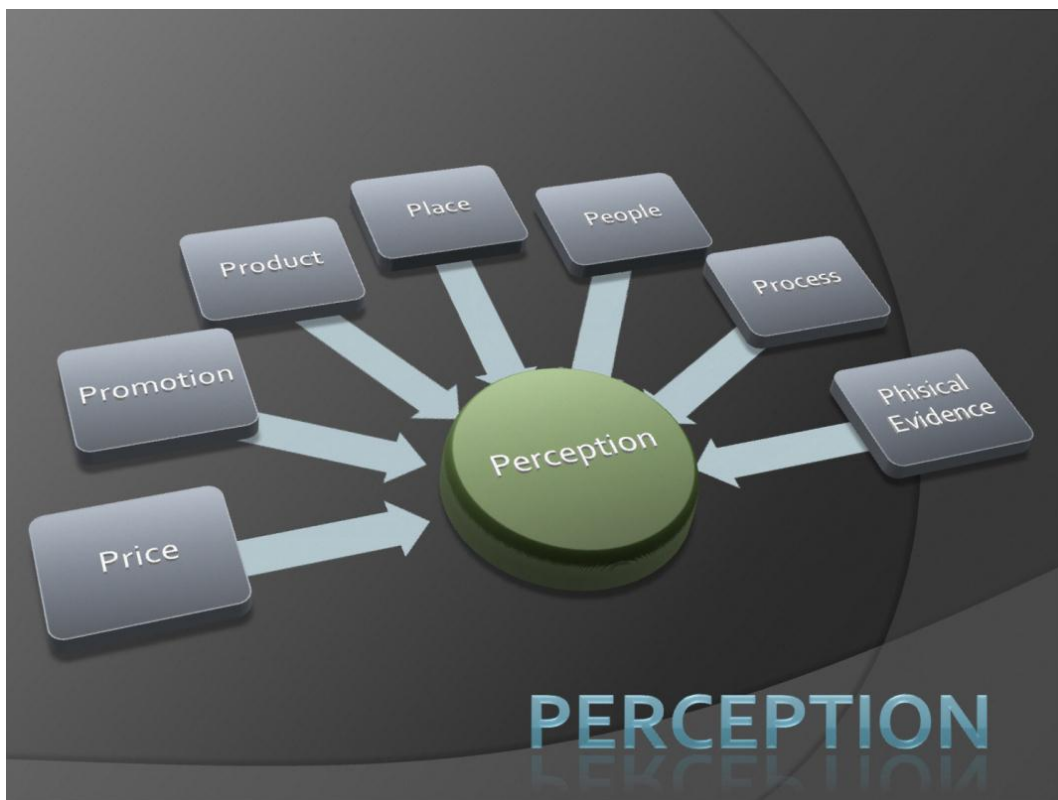
**Cinzia Ligas (Istituto Marangoni, Fashion Design, Paris, [cinzialigas@semiosis.it](mailto:cinzialigas@semiosis.it)), Semiotician, and Fausto Crepaldi (Istituto Marangoni, Fashion Design, Paris, [faustoportatile@hotmail.it](mailto:faustoportatile@hotmail.it)), Digital Media Director, are among the foremost experts in Italy in luxury communication. They are consultants in semiomarketing, fashion semiology, fashion video advertising and virtual fashion, and lecturers at various prestigious University institutes, such as IESEG, IED, Domus Academy, Style and Design College, University of Bologna.**

# What is the mission of Fashion Semiology?

Fashion Semiology helps to understand and learn how to use the secret language of luxury objects, fashion clothing and accessories; a language of forms, symbols, icons, codes and colours, which has subconscious effects on the perception, attitude and purchasing desire of the target. Semiomarketing is the branch of marketing originating in the application of semiotic survey to market research, a methodology based on the polysemantic analysis, decomposition and recomposition of verbal and visual texts (advertising, internal communication, Web), while analyzing consumer profiles and expectations. Its aim is to optimize the communication/sales processes.

## Perception: The 8<sup>th</sup> P

An effective business communication plan is typically based on the balanced management of Product, Place, Price and Promotion (complemented, according to the latest marketing mix theories, by People, Process and Physical evidence), without neglecting the fact that marketing is nowadays increasingly underpinned by an eighth P, which permeates the other 7: Perception (Figure 1).



**Fig.1.** Perception: The 8<sup>th</sup> P.

Putting the analytical features of semiotics together with the pragmatic features of marketing, the aim of semiomarketing is equivalent to a Business Communication Optimization (also known as BCO) process, through all those activities that aim at augmenting the target-client conversion rate or the rate of customer loyalty through specific B2C or B2B strategies.

BCO acts on the visual, textual morphological elements, on clothing or staff gestures, on product layout and presentation and on other elements affecting human perception, amplifies and optimizes them, and ensures that whatever emanates from a particular brand (product, press campaign, fair stand design, digital or video advertising communication strategy) is semiomarketing-oriented, in other words, capable of generating in consumers an idea of positivity, convenience, authenticity, professionalism, reliability, with view to effectively communicating corporate values and engendering business growth and customer loyalty.

## How does Semiomarketing work?

Practically, through the use of codes, symbols, icons, discourse categories, and semiotic frames, semiomarketing elaborates various luxury and fashion video and advertising, semiotic-communicative structures that are marketing oriented, aimed at optimizing business communications in order to improve the target-client conversion process, a magic moment in corporate life, without which the company no longer sells and, with time, ceases to exist.

Semiomarketing de-composes and re-composes written and visual communication in a modular manner using sophisticated analysis techniques, such as **art semiology** (for a marketing oriented visual communication), **logosemiotics** (for a marketing oriented verbal and written communication), **warpframe** (for a marketing oriented video communication) and **net semiology** (for a marketing oriented web project) and through scientific and cognitive instruments, such as **extrabrand**, (for the extrapolation, the creation and the re-positioning of brands), and **sintext**, (for digital synthetic and SEO - Search Engine Optimization - oriented writing, with a highly evocative value) that are more flexible and far-reaching than conventional communication and marketing theories.

Semiomarketing is the fast track for optimizing the target-client conversion rate and customer loyalty. Fashion Semiology is its stylistic, communicational and marketing-oriented interpretation in the world of High Fashion and Luxury. For instance, the window of a department store is the medium par excellence to place brands and products on display. A series of interrelated codes are applied in this space. Fashion Semiology techniques are very often used by fashion and luxury brands for their advertising, including Dolce and Gabbana, Fendi and Gucci.

## Case-study: application of warp frame

A very interesting fashion semiology tool is the 'warpframe'. The term warpframe is made up of warp and frame and refers to all those visual and conceptual communication techniques that act in depth within a video narration, and whose stories they support.

Just like a tambour, in order to have a fabric, you need the threads of the warp to be weaved with those of the plot, and likewise the creation of an advertising video results in an emotional response, while infusing in the minds of the addressees certain desires. The purpose is the generation of unconscious associations, which require deep perceptive and narrative structures.

Warpframe, a semiomarketing technique used to optimize business video communication, is made up of ten items that have to be taken into account before producing the storyboard or writing the script, as follows:

**Identity** determines the role that the issuer wants to play in the communication flux regarding the addressee.

**Relationship** establishes the kind of relationship between issuer and addressee in order to reach the goal intended by the video.

**Style** puts the communication in the proper style in order to convey the chosen identity and relationships.

**Signs** indicate the symbols, icons or indexes necessary to reach the goal.

**Codes** indicate what mimetic, proxemic, kinetic or other elements are necessary to insert in order to reach the video's goal.

**Figures** concern the visual rhetoric figures that suit the story, in order to stimulate a positive feedback.

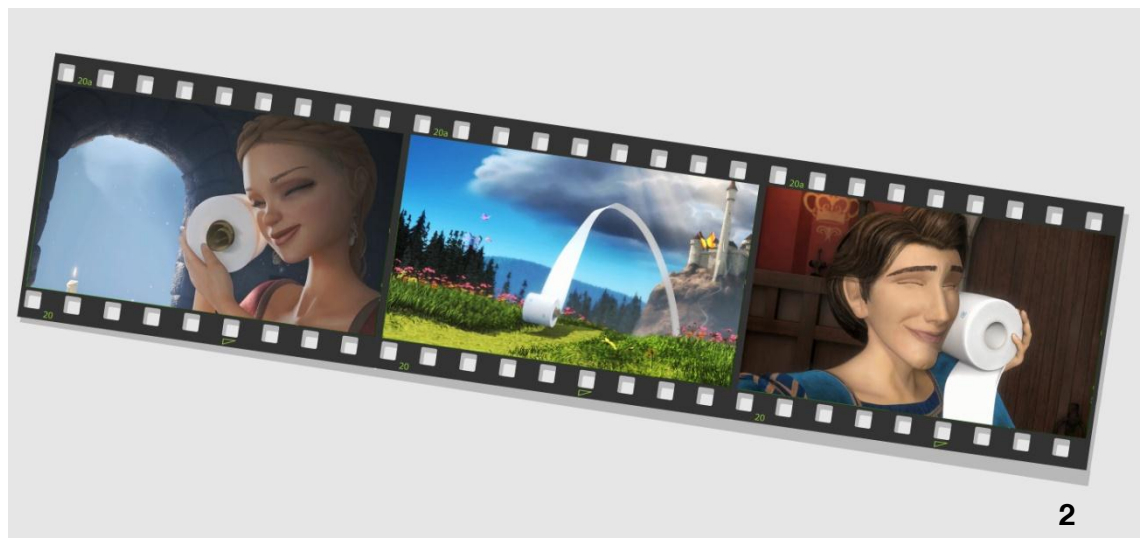
**Roots** concern the archetypal models that must be inserted in each story to make it more effective, while appealing to a collective unconscious.

**Roles** are about actantial models that must be used in order to structure the story in such a manner as to be involving for the audience.

**Balance** represents forces that give dynamism to the story through the construction of balances between the different actants, that imply elements of contradiction, contrariety and complementarity.

**Sub-limen** concerns down deep messages, visual and textual, made of inferences, denotations and connotations, preconceptions that influence deeply the perception of the video by its target.

An interesting case of warprame in action is the advertising of Regina (a brand of toilet paper) realized in Los Angeles by the agency Saatchi & Saatchi, under the direction of Raul Garcia, with the animations of Secret Plan.



**Fig.2.** Frames from Regina advertising.



The warpframe structure of the video is as follows:

### **Identity**

The issuer, the brand "Regina", is the protagonist, represented by the icon of the paper roll that develops all the way through the story. What is underlined here is the constant presence of the issuer, not only as portrayed in the advertising, but during the entire user's life.

### **Relationship**

The relationship between issuer (Regina) and addressee (public) is confidential and smooth styled. The communicative style was studied to be similar to that of a fairy tale, but also ironic, polite and tactful.

### **Signs**

The paper roll is the symbol of the brand, and an icon of softness. The prince embodies the end client, while princess Rapunzel with her long plaits (not as long as the paper roll, though) embodies Regina's competitors. Butterflies are icons of lightness, the squirrel of agility, the owl of knowledge (knowledge acquired by the company over the years), while at the same time recalling the night atmosphere that surrounds the castle of the old witch, where the princess is imprisoned. The message that Rapunzel puts inside the paper roll is a symbol of the other toilet papers produced by the competitors, too short and rough (discarded by the prince/client that prefers Regina toilet paper).

### **Codes**

The codes of clothing and architecture (castles) lets us know that the two subjects are a prince and a princess. Gesture and mimetic codes both make us feel the softness of Regina toilet paper. Kinetic codes were studied in order to underline these features (the toilet paper jumps, bounces, bends, envelops, gets stretched for days and days - represented by the moon and the sun - as if it would never stop, until reaching the prince).

### **Figures**

Hyperboles were introduced (a never-ending toilet paper) always present like trademarks of the products, as well as comparisons (Regina toilet paper is longer than Rapunzel's plaits that embody the competitors) and softer than the paper she sends to the prince and inserts inside the Regina's paper roll.

## Roots

The archetype of the wandered was used, embodied by the toilet paper roll that wanders to reach the prince's castle. Even the archetypal figure of the secret message was used.

## Roles

The subject is the princess (competitor) that wants to reach the prince (client) to offer him her paper (the secret message) inserted in a "magic" roll of toilet paper (helper). The opponent is the distance from the prince's castle and naturally her being imprisoned in a place that cannot be reached. The issuer is the Regina brand, while the addressee is the target-audience.

## Balance

There are forces that confer dynamism to the story through the construction of a balance between the different actants, but also contradiction, contrariety and complementarity. The following forces are present:

### **long/short and not long/not short:**

long

- Regina paper roll

short

- secret message written on a piece of paper

not short

- the long and winding road

not long

- the waiting of the prince

It is obvious that the paper roll (long) is an idea that is complementary to non short (the road), contrary to short (the message that symbolizes other paper rolls) and in contradiction to not long (the waiting of the prince/client for the Regina paper roll to become part of his life).

### **Sub-limen**

It is one of those deep visual messages that influence the perception of the video by the public. Here we have the preconceptions: the meaning of the video is fully understood by those who know the fairy tale of princess Rapunzel. There are various references to fairy tales: The Sword in the stone, Bambi, the Frog Prince. The magical value of Regina paper is also underlined by making the water lily bloom and shine after being touched, as if it had been touched by a magic wand.

Shapes, at a perceptual level, convey ideas of softness (the curvy bouncing of the paper, underlined by the curvy bridge and the wings of the butterflies), but together with sensation of sturdiness determined by straight lines (the sword in the stone, that also recalls another middle age story; the tower where the princess is imprisoned, the candle on the window).

Fashion Semiology represents a method for evoking in targets, in a modern manner and with a language tailored to the new digital mass media, the emotions produced by the refined and sophisticated world of Fashion and Luxury.



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