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Cognitive Semiotics:

An emerging field for the transdisciplinary study of meaning

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of ongoing research and key characteristics of Cognitive Semiotics, an emerging field dedicated to the “transdisciplinary study of meaning”, involving above all researchers from semiotics, linguistics, developmental and comparative psychology and philosophy. The combination of the following features distinguish it from other synthetic approaches: (a) integration of theoretical and empirical research; (b) ontological pluralism and methodological triangulation; (c) influence of phenomenology; (d) focus on dynamism and (e) the ambition of true transdisciplinarity. Its ultimate goal is to provide new insights into the nature and culture of human beings, as well as other meaning-making creatures.

1. Introduction

Cognitive Semiotics (henceforth CS) can be defined as an interdisciplinary matrix of (sub-parts of) disciplines and methods, focused on the multifaceted phenomenon of *meaning*. It is an emerging field with the ambition of “...integrating methods and theories developed in the disciplines of cognitive science with methods and theories developed in semiotics and the humanities, with the ultimate aim of providing new insights into the realm of human signification and its manifestation in cultural practices”, as stated on the home site of the journal *Cognitive Semiotics: Multidisciplinary Journal on Mind and Meaning* (www.cognitivesemiotics.com, August 17, 2011). This admittedly already broad definition could be further extended to include investigations of “non-human signification”. As shown in this review article, while CS practitioners indeed focus on what is specific about human forms of meaning-making, there is widespread agreement that this can only be properly understood in a comparative and evolutionary framework.

Thus understood, CS cuts through and stretches across existing disciplinary divisions and configurations. For example, it is *not* to be seen as a branch of the overall field of semiotics, defined either in terms of “domain” (in the manner of e.g. biosemiotics, semiotics of culture or social semiotics), or “modality” (e.g. visual semiotics, text semiotics). Not belonging to a single discipline, it is not a particular semiotics “school” (e.g. Peircean, Saussurean, Greimasian), and even less a particular theory (e.g. Existential Semiotics). Unfortunately,

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these are common misinterpretations of the label “cognitive semiotics”, given its instantiation of the modifier-head construction. But labels, while useful for organizing both concepts and fields of knowledge, are not essential. As will be shown in this review article, many *de facto* CS practitioners do not attach the label “cognitive semiotics” to their research.

Finally, CS is not just a new and fancier name for (traditional) cognitive science. The relationship between the two interdisciplinary matrixes is complex and deserves more attention than can be given here. There is considerable overlap, and in a number of ways the relation is still open to negotiation. But in a nutshell, cognitive science has from its onset in the 1950s adopted an explicitly *physicalist* (computational and/or neuroscientific) take on mind, connecting to the humanities quite selectively, and above all to philosophy of mind with a distinctly reductionist bent (e.g. Dennett 1991). CS is, as we will see, considerably more pluralist in its ontological and methodological commitments, and thus, with a firmer foot in the humanities.

The following two sections present a non-exhaustive survey of CS research, in order to give the reader a broad overview of the field. The first section is organized on the basis of groups and academic institutions that have provided a basis for the academic establishment of CS. Then I turn to a few particular research areas, summarizing the work of key contributors. This overview is by no means all inclusive, but I believe that a diverse, emerging field such as CS is best approached “extensionally”, i.e. by specific examples. Having done this, I offer a number of generalizations on *what* CS deals with and *how* it does so, which is the topic of the penultimate section. Finally, we will return to the questions of *why* CS is needed and what its ultimate contributions to knowledge could be.

2. Research Centers

2.1 “A cognitive approach to semiosis”

Given that semiotics is usually defined as the study of *signs*, or more generally *meaning*, and the polysemy (and current popularity) of the term “cognitive”, just about any semiotic theory – from those of Peirce and Saussure to Eco (1999) and Hoffmeyer (1996) – could qualify as a “cognitive semiotics”. However, in the sense outlined in the introduction, CS truly appeared only in the mid-1990s. A seldom acknowledged pioneer is Thomas Daddesio, whose major work bares the characteristic title *On Minds and Symbols: The Relevance of Cognitive Science for Semiotics* (Daddesio 1995). In it, the author sets out both a conceptual/methodological and an empirical goal for his project: namely, to “...demonstrate both the feasibility and utility of a cognitive approach to semiosis by setting forth a cognitive theory of symbols, which I will then apply to a particularly difficult area of inquiry, the development of symbolic communication in children” (ibid: 2). In a useful historical overview, the author shows how persistent attempts to “de-mentalize” notions such as sign, semiosis and meaning in the 20th century contributed to a separation between semiotics and cognitive science. While “computation” and “information-processing” were the central concepts of the latter, there was not much to draw on for a “cognitive approach to semiosis”. But in the last two decades of the century, researchers from developmental and cognitive psychology (Bates, Bruner, Tomasello) and linguistics (Langacker, Talmy, Lakoff) turned increasingly to “experiential”

notions such as schematization, (joint) attention, metaphor, and narrative. The ground was thus set for a rapprochement. Daddesio was one of the first to state this explicitly, and furthermore, bring in concepts from semiotics to dwell on a “particularly difficult area of inquiry”: children’s semiotic development. This was, of course, addressed insightfully by classics such as Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1962, 1978), but new concepts, methods of investigation and a wealth of data have made it a very fruitful area, as described in the following section.

2.2. Centre for Semiotics (CfS), University of Aarhus

Around the same time and apparently independently, CS emerged at the Center for Semiotics in Århus, Denmark (<http://www.hum.au.dk/semiotics/>). The Center’s long-term research director, Per Aage Brandt, had in a number of publications combined ideas from the “dynamic semiotics” of René Thom and from cognitive linguistics of predominantly West-Coast US pedigree, involving notions such as “construal”, “force dynamics”, “image schemas”, and “conceptual blending”. These have been put to use mostly in the analysis of linguistic semantics, in particular with respect to puzzling phenomena such as subjectivity, iconicity, metaphor, and fictive motion. A major publication is that of P.Å. Brandt (2004) *Spaces, Domains and Meanings: Essays in Cognitive Semiotics*, where CS is described as “a new discipline dedicated to the analysis of meaning”. A recent PhD dissertation, developing some of these ideas while drawing on the French tradition of “enunciation”, is that of L. Brandt (2010).

The work of another long-term member of CfS, Svend Østergaard, shows the growing influence of a cognitive – in the sense of psychological – approach to meaning. In *The Mathematics of Meaning* (1997), Østergaard discusses narration and temporality – as reflected in the classical literary works of Borges and Proust – seeking parallels with fundamental properties of mathematics such as infinity. More recently, Østergaard has turned to ideas from developmental psychology and the study of face-to-face interaction. Currently, Svend Østergaard, Kristian Tylén and Riccardo Fusaroli are collaboratively pursuing a “dynamical account of linguistic meaning making” combining conceptual models from dynamical systems theory and distributed cognition with corpus linguistics and experimental methodologies. Language is investigated as a coordinative activity, where symbolic patterns are aligned and negotiated to facilitate and constrain social coordination (e.g. Tylén *et al.* 2010; Fusaroli & Tylén in press). The work of these and other researchers at the center, such as Mikkel Wallentin (e.g., Wallentin *et al.* 2011) explicitly combines ideas from linguistics, semiotics, experimental psychology and neuroscience, thereby demonstrating that CS is ongoing practice and not just a programmatic enterprise.

Not all CS research needs to be experimental – or even “empirical” in the narrow sense of observation-based – as shown by the work of Peer Bundgaard in his articles on *image schemas* and *force dynamics* (*Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, 2009), Husserl’s theory of language (Bundgaard 2010), and aesthetic cognition. The current research director of the CfS, Frederik Stjernfelt, likewise pursues a more purely “qualitative” tradition of conceptual analysis (not in the narrow linguistic sense), including interpretations of Peirce’s ideas on

icons and above all diagrams, linking these to Husserl's phenomenology (Stjernfelt 2007). At the same time, both Bundgaard and Stjernfelt apply their semiotic analyses to empirical phenomena of concern for CS, such as aesthetics, mental imagery, animal communication, and human gestures.

CfS is the only academic institution so far offering an MA program in CS (both in name and content): "Cognitive Semiotics is first and foremost an interdisciplinary program which draws on neuroscience, philosophy, logic, linguistics, anthropology, cognitive science and literary theory" (<http://www.hum.au.dk/semiotics/>). The program has an impressive number of students and guest lecturers, and contributes to the reputation of CfS as a vanguard of the field. Still, an "emerging paradigm" can hardly be confined to one or two (geographically close) institutions.

2.3 Centre for Cognition and Culture (CCC), Case Western Reserve, Cleveland

At the beginning of the millennium, Per Aage Brandt relocated to Case Western Reserve, where the Department of Cognitive Science was headed by Mark Turner, one of the authors of the cognitive semantic "blending theory" (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Together with Todd Oakley, Brandt established the Centre for Cognition and Culture (CCC), which "...studies art, design, music, language – both as grammar, as text, as literature, and as speech and discourse – sign structures and communicative meaning production in general, differentiated and variable within the unifying potential of the human mind – and applies to this effect a comparative methodology that can be characterized as semiotic in a cognitive perspective: as a cognitive semiotics" (<http://www.case.edu/artsci/cogs/CenterforCognitionandCulture.html>, August 17, 2011, original emphasis). Todd Oakley integrated cognitive linguistic concepts with a thorough investigation of the role of attention processes in a recent monograph: *From Attention to Meaning: Explorations in Semiotics, Linguistics, and Rhetoric* (2008). As suggested by the title, his analyses concern a much wider range of phenomena than the usual "blending" analyses of standard examples such as "my surgeon is a butcher".

The most notable fruit from the collaboration between Oakley and Brandt was the establishment of the journal *Cognitive Semiotics*, which began in 2007. The volumes published so far have been devoted to topics such as agency, consciousness, and cognitive poetics, and have featured prominent authors from both the cognitive sciences and the humanities. However, the journal has not so far received a broad readership, and its current "impact factor" can be much improved.

2.4 Centre for Language, Cognition and Mentality (LaCoMe), Copenhagen Business School

An interdisciplinary group – departing from linguistics while expanding to visual communication, gesture, and behavioral studies on consumer preferences – was established in 2007 at the Copenhagen Business School, with Per-Durst Andersen as research director (<http://www.cbs.dk/en/Research/Departments-Centres/Institutter/lacome>). Søren Brier joined the group, coming from a background in ethology and cybernetics and bringing in an evolutionary and system-theoretic perspective. Brier's book *Cybersemiotics: Why Information is Not Enough* (Brier 2008) presents an ambitious attempt to achieve a synthesis of

Peircian semiotics and second-order cybernetics, with the aspiration of unifying all domains of human knowing: from those of the physical and biological to the subjective/personal and the intersubjective/cultural. What remains is to spell out how such a framework can change the day-to-day practice of scientists, in particular of linguists and psychologists concerned with notions such as *meaning construction* and *sense making*. Brier is pursuing some efforts in this direction in collaboration with Ole Nedergaard and other members of the group.

Per Durst-Andersen recently crowned a long period of research in “language, cognition, and mentality” with a theoretical synthesis, *Linguistic Supertypes: A Cognitive-Semiotic Theory of Human Communication* (2011). At the center is a linguistic sign concept inspired by the trichotomies of Peirce and Bühler. Durst-Andersen proposes that the grammatical meanings of any particular language tend to orient towards one of the three semiotic poles: *Reality*, *Speaker* and *Hearer* and thus that all languages can be characterized as belonging to one of three “linguistic supertypes”. This controversial proposal is supported by a good deal of linguistic data, as well as references to research within cognitive psychology. Empirical studies – e.g., on predicted cognitive differences between speakers of the different language-types along the lines of “linguistic relativity” research – are underway.

The research of Viktor Smith, a third prominent member of the group, is considerably more “bottom up”, with studies on the semantics and pragmatics of compound expressions, interpreted under different contextual conditions and experimental settings. Smith is concerned with bringing CS to matter for “the real world” – as in the FairSpeak project, where legal-normative, experiential, and behavioral aspects of food marketing are being pooled together, with the aim of improving producer-consumer communication (Smith *et al.* 2009).

2.5 Centre for Cognitive Semiotics (CCS), Lund University

The Centre for Cognitive Semiotics at Lund University is a six-year program (2009-2014), bringing together researchers from semiotics, linguistics, cognitive science, and related disciplines on a common meta-theoretical platform of concepts, methods, and shared empirical data (<http://project.ht.lu.se/en/ccs/>). A staff of 10-15 senior and post-doctoral researchers and a larger number of affiliates coordinate their research under five interrelated themes – evolution, ontogeny, history, typology, and experimental psychology – adopting as much as possible a CS approach to their specific topic. For example, the typology theme deals not only with linguistic typology but also with patterns of correlation in multiple “semiotic resources” such as speech, writing, gestures, pictures, music, and cultural artifacts.

The research director of CCS, Göran Sonesson, states: “I have been involved with phenomenological cognitive semiotics from the very start of my career without knowing it – or rather, without using the term” (Sonesson 2009: 108). Sonesson’s writings since the late 1970s, in particular his comprehensive monograph *Pictorial Concepts* (1989), can indeed be seen as forerunners of CS in several respects. In particular, he has consistently argued for the primacy of perceptual meaning over other kinds of meaning – including signs – and elaborated a definition of the sign concept on the basis of phenomenological notions such as experienced asymmetry and differentiation. At the same time, Sonesson has maintained that

the study of meaning cannot be purely “eidetic” or “autonomous” but must also be based on psychological studies. For the purposes of his analyses of pictorial signs (his specialty), he often refers to Gestalt psychology as well as the ecological psychology of the Gibsonian tradition.

Still, CS cannot be based only on a meta-analysis of the results of the cognitive sciences; for it to come into its own, it should go hand in hand with them to motivate specific empirical studies. In this sense, CS research at Lund University got underway during the first years of the millennium, thanks to collaboration between Sonesson and researchers from linguistics such as the present author and cognitive scientists, such as Tomas Persson, a primatologist who applies CS concepts to the study visual perception and pictorial competence in non-human primates (Persson 2008).

My own road towards CS has been guided by the conviction that language – its nature, evolution and development – cannot be understood outside the context of a more general approach, taking both meaning and mind seriously. Influenced by the work of Merlin Donald (see below), I have tried to elaborate the concept of *bodily mimesis*, arguing for its central role in both ontogeny and evolution (e.g., Zlatev 2008). More recently, I have struggled with the proverbially “hard problem” of consciousness. In agreement with Sonesson, I see phenomenology as providing tools to address the complex interrelations between bodily experience, sociality, and language (Zlatev 2010). Consistent with the work of Thompson (2007, see below), one may formulate an evolutionary “semiotic hierarchy”: the autopoiesis of *living systems* is at the basis of all meaning in the universe, followed by the emergence of *conscious experience* (at least with mammals), which on its side is a precondition for the evolution of *sign use* (emerging with *Homo erectus*) and *speech* (in our own species). Such evolution is essentially bio-cultural, with cultural processes playing a leading role in the evolution of language.

A number of empirical studies on *mimetic schemas* and children’s gestural development have been carried out (e.g., Zlatev and Andrén 2009). Mats Andrén’s (2010) PhD Thesis *Children’s Gestures Between 18 and 30 Months* is the group’s most synthetic fruit so far. In it, Andrén provides detailed descriptions of five Swedish children’s gestural repertoires in the tradition of Adam Kendon (see below), with CS concepts serving to delineate gestures from action and “body language” on the one hand and from signed language on the other. Quantitative analyses show patterns in the developmental trajectories of pointing, iconic, and emblematic gestures with respect to speech and the use of physical objects. The study substantiates claims for an intimate interrelation between and parallel development of speech and gesture.

For reasons of space and fairness, the research of all CCS researchers cannot be summarized here. To give a flavor of the variety of subjects pursued, I mention the research by Gerd Carling and Arthur Holmer on correlations between linguistic and other semiotic resources in Amazonia; Junichi Toyota on possible interactions between religious beliefs and tense-aspect systems; Anastasia Karlsson on prosody and information structure in East Asian and Southeast Asian languages; Sara Lenninger on the development of children’s use of pictures;

Anna Cabak Rédei and Lars Kopp on visual perception and emotion; Gunnar Sandin on the affordances and signs of city architecture; Joel Parthemore on enactive concepts; Elainie Madsen on non-manual forms of pointing; Michael Ranta on visual narratives... If successfully integrated – the major challenge to CCS – such research can serve as the basis for a viable CS tradition at Lund University. As a further step, it will be necessary to secure the program’s “cultural transmission” through an MA program such as that of CFS. Hopefully, the recent guest professorship at CCS of Chris Sinha (see below) may contribute to this.

3. Research Topics

3.1 Gesture

The study of gestures – involving various degrees and kinds of iconicity, indexicality, and conventionality – has from the start called for a more or less explicit semiotic analysis (*cf.* Kendon 2004). Efron (1941) and later Bouissac (1973) provided some early proposals for how such analyses could be made more systematic, in part through the availability of new technology for recording and analysis. During the 1980s, thanks to the concerted work of Adam Kendon (1980, 2004) and David McNeill (1992, 2005), *gesture studies* began to emerge as a more or less independent interdisciplinary field.

McNeill’s approach is more explicitly psychological, with references to developmental and neuroscientific evidence and links to cognitive linguistic concepts such as *image schemas* and *conceptual metaphors*. His long-time concern is the integration of gesture and speech in a single cognitive system, though with a degree of division of semiotic labor: gesture being more “imagistic” and speech/language more propositional. In *Gesture and Thought* (2005), McNeill echoes Vygotsky’s classic *Language and Thought* and argues for a broader concept of language, combining the more static and systematic aspects of Saussure’s *langue* with a more dynamic and imagistic side, made visible above all through gesture.

At the same time, it is fair to say that the influence of Kendon’s work runs deeper, both for gesture studies and CS. Originally working in ethology and then in human interaction, Kendon has over the years developed a framework – or perhaps a style – of analyzing live, multimodal interaction that is difficult to match in terms of sensitivity to relevant detail. Combined with a “comparative semiotic” method, his studies of face-to-face interaction, alternate signed languages in Australian aborigines, and gestures of Neapolitaneans are considered classics in the field. Many of these are summarized in his magnum opus *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (2004). Kendon is also editor of the journal *Gesture* since its inception.

Cornelia Müller, head of the Berlin Gesture Centre, is perhaps the most prominent inheritor of the different strands in gesture studies – from linguistics and semiotics to neuroscience and primatology – and thus clearly qualifies as a practitioner of CS. This can be seen from an ongoing project, *Towards a Grammar of Gesture: Evolution, Brain, and Linguistic Structures*, which aims at “the development of fundamentals for a multimodal grammar and its neurological and evolutionary foundation within specific sub-areas” (<http://www.togog.org/en/>, August 17, 2011). A forthcoming publication: “Gestural modes of mimesis: Mimetic techniques and cognitive-semiotic processes driving gesture creation”

make the connection to CS even more explicit. Her work further concerns what is sometimes called “multimodal metaphor”, a topic on which she has collaborated with Alan Cienki (Cienki & Müller 2008).

3.2 Child development

As mentioned in the introduction, the pioneering figures in developmental psychology clearly adopted a cognitive-semiotic approach by investigating interrelations between sensorimotor skills, imitation, imagination, and communicative signs (Piaget); or between thought, “inner speech”, and the semiotic mediation of cognition and development by socio-culturally transmitted sign systems (Vygotsky). This tradition underwent a significant renewal in the 1970s through the work of (among others) Trevarthen, Bruner and Sinha (see below). Subsequently, however, the child’s mind was “modularized” and “nativized” and it became unfashionable to look for “domain general” capacities, stages, and transitions. Language and cognition were to be kept apart and studied separately.

If we fast-forward to the present, the picture looks quite different, with body, affect, and socio-cultural environment all seen as indispensable for growing minds. Colwyn Trevarthen’s long-term research and theorizing on infant and child intersubjectivity (Trevarthen 1979; Bråten and Trevarthen 2007) has been one of the key inspirations for this turn. In collaboration with Stein Bråten and others, Trevarthen has described the first years of development as characterized by increasingly complex layers or levels of intersubjective engagement with others in “trusting relations of companionship” (see Table 1). Inspired by Julia Kristeva, Ulrike Lüdtke (*in press*) adds to these a zero layer of “primordial intersubjectivity” preceding birth; she conceptualizes the progression as one of decreasing corporeality and emotional markedness with increasing abstraction and referentiality. Daniel Stern (2000) has likewise emphasized interpersonal relations and emotion, contributing to puncturing (if not tearing down) the wall between therapeutic and cognitive psychology – thereby making it possible to argue that emotional contact and sympathetic interaction serve as “the cradle of thought” (Hobson 1996).

Table 1. Levels of intersubjectivity in the first years of development, adapted from Bråten and Trevarthen (2007: 3).

Level	Capacities
Tertiary intersubjectivity - From 2 years	Symbolic conversation with actual or virtual companions... leading to 2 nd order abilities for mental simulation.
Secondary intersubjectivity - From 9 months	Objects of joint attention and emotional referencing are brought into play within trusting relations of companionship, sometimes leading to imitative learning.
Primary intersubjectivity - From birth	Direct sympathy with actual others’ expressions of feelings in intimate reciprocal subject-subject contact.

Somewhat less concerned with empathy, and more with sharing cultural meanings, are developmentalists such as Jerome Bruner – whose *Acts of Meaning* (1990) marked a turning point for some practitioners of cognitive science – and *Chris Sinha, who as early as* 1988 published *Language and Representation: A Socio-Naturalistic Approach to Human Development*. Sinha builds on Piagetian and Vygotskian ideas to develop an experimentally supported “pragma-semiotic” account of language development and evolution within a general theoretical approach named “epigenetic sicionaturalism”. Sinha has since become a prominent figure in Cognitive Linguistics, contributing to its “social turn” (Harder 2010), including the use of cross-cultural and ecologically valid data. He has addressed the evolution of language as a “bio-cultural niche and social institution” (Sinha 2010).

From the side of semiotics proper, development has been insightfully addressed by Patricia Violi. Inspired by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Violi (*in press*) argues for an extended sense of “embodiment”, in which the body itself becomes enculturated, as well as “extended” through artifacts (as also emphasized by Sinha).

3.3. Bio-cultural evolution

As long recognized, there is an intimate relationship between the development of individuals and the evolution of species. One of the insights of the “new synthesis” of developmental and evolutionary biology (*evo-devo*) is that “all important changes in evolution are alternations in development” (Thompson 2007: 195). Modern concepts of evolution have moved beyond the (ex-) “modern synthesis” focused on gene selection, to consider that evolution can take place on many levels (such as groups): relaxing, if not erasing, the differences between biological and cultural evolution.

Several theoreticians with a background in neuropsychology and developmental psychology have addressed the perennial question of the “descent of man” within an extended, bio-cultural perspective on evolution, often explicitly involving concepts from semiotics. An important publication in the area is Merlin Donald’s (1991) *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Human Culture*, presenting an integrated bio-cultural theory of human evolution. A key idea is that a domain-general capacity for skill learning, imitation, and gestural communication lies at the roots of uniquely human cognition and semiosis: “Mimetic skills or mimesis rests on the ability to produce conscious, self-initiated, representational acts that are intentional but not linguistic” (Donald 1991: 168). Speech and language evolved only later, partly through cultural evolution, without relying on innate adaptations. External representations gave way to writing in relatively recent history, making what Donald calls “theoretical culture” possible. Even from this brief summary, it can be seen that Donald’s approach is clearly cognitive-semiotic: the goal is to understand not only the “origins of the modern mind” but how new semiotic layers have transformed that mind into the unique “hybrid” construction that it is (see also Donald 2001). The role of artifacts, external representations and technology in general for “supersizing the mind” (Clark 2008) has been discussed for some time, and is on one level generally acknowledged. However, the more precise nature of artifacts and technology in relation to thinking has been the subject of

controversies in philosophy (“internalism vs. externalism”) and cognitive science (“extended mind”) and can therefore be pinpointed as a target area for future CS research.

Terry Deacon’s work in evolutionary anthropology relates explicitly to semiotic theory. His widely influential *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (1997) draws on ideas from Peirce to propose that interpretative processes follow a progression of *iconism* (i.e. recognition), *indexicality* (space-time contiguity, as in the pairing of stimulus and response in classical conditioning), and most complexly – indeed, unique to our species – *symbols*. What Deacon exactly means by “symbols” has been a matter of much discussion. He has attempted to clarify this recently: “To interpret the wax impression as a symbol of social position, one must also understand these social conventions, because nothing intrinsic to the form or its physical creation supplies this information. The symbolic reference is dependent on already knowing something beyond any features embodied in this sign vehicle” (Deacon, *in press*). Thus, it is not arbitrariness *per se* that makes a sign into a symbol but culturally shared knowledge, which Deacon often describes as constituting a “web of symbolic relationships” – at least implicitly drawing on the structuralist tradition emanating from Saussure (*cf.* Sonesson 2006). Furthermore, he has introduced the intriguing notion of *semiotic constraints* that are neither innate nor learned but *a priori* features of symbolic reference. Through such constraints, Deacon proposes to account for language universals such as predication and recursion. A final key concept to his evolutionary theory of human origins is *relaxed selection*, which implies that rather than becoming more genetically determined, our brains have become less so: thus, more flexible and adaptive to the different cultural niches we live in.

Michael Tomasello must also be mentioned as representative of this research area, with his important contributions directing experimental research in developmental and comparative psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig since the mid-1990s. His two major publications over this period, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (1999) and *The Evolution of Human Communication* (2008), have likewise proved influential. Tomasello prefers to stay in a more mainstream current of psychology and cognitive science and refrains from using terms such as “signs”, “semiosis”, and “consciousness”. Still, his key concepts include symbols, joint attention and shared intentionality and it does not require much to see his theories in a CS context. Being heavily dependent on experimental results, Tomasello’s ideas have changed over the years. Human cognition is no longer characterized by “understanding intentions” but rather by a combination of motivational factors for sharing (from food to attention and knowledge) and a cognitive capacity for maintaining *joint commitments*. Thus, it can be said that Tomasello’s ideas on infant intersubjectivity have largely converged with those of Trevarthen and others, outlined earlier. In emphasizing the role of gestures in establishing a basis for language evolution, Tomasello’s evolutionary theory is also reminiscent of Donald’s.

Thus, there appears to be an emerging consensus that what is distinct to our species – both cognitively and semiotically – is a unique form of *sociality*. Still, few have attempted an explanation of the evolutionary conditions that would lead to this. Deacon (1997) has speculated that it could have been a change in reproductive strategy: from polygamy (typical

among the great apes) to monogamy. This, however, is unsupported by the archeological evidence and at least controversial for the anthropological evidence: (serial) monogamy seems a much more recent, culturally transmitted, non-universal phenomenon. A more persuasive argument for the evolution of a human-specific form of intersubjectivity is presented by Sarah Hrdy in *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* (2009). Reviewing the ethological, anthropological, and developmental psychology literatures, Hrdy builds up a case for the proposal that the crucial reproductive turn that occurred with *Homo erectus* nearly two million years ago was not to monogamy but to *alloparenting* or “cooperative breeding”. That would account both for the greater gregariousness of our species towards non-relatives and the willingness of infants to bond and communicate with other than biological parents.

3.4 Embodiment

In parallel with – and similar to – the rapprochement between the cognitive sciences on the one hand and “semiotics and the humanities” on the other, as outlined above, there has been a movement of integrating ideas and methods from cybernetics, theoretical biology, and phenomenology, at least since the publication of *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (1991) by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. According to the broad definition involving “integrating methods and theories” offered in the introductory passage, this tradition could even be seen as falling under CS. Unfortunately – at least until recently – there has been little interaction between the Embodied Mind scholars and those more overtly involved in CS. Perhaps this is due to the radically anti-representationalist stance in the early stages of the Embodied Mind movement, when the central concept was that of *enaction*: “a history of structural coupling that brings forth a world... [t]hrough a network consisting of multiple levels of interconnected, sensorimotor subnetworks” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991: 206). Rejecting the excessive (unconscious) representationalism of standard cognitive science (i.e., cognitivism), the enactivists were suspicious of any concept that sounded similar to representation, such as that of *sign*. Their empirical focus was on the *direct experience* of perception and action and on resolving the “hard problem” of consciousness – not on sign-mediated meaning. More recently, however, with the addressing of topics such as mental imagery and enculturation (Thompson 2007) as well as gesture (Gallagher 2005), it has become obvious that the classical phenomenological distinction between *presentation* and *representation* needs to be respected and theoretically addressed. From the CS side, phenomenologically oriented semioticians such as Sonesson (2011) have been making similar arguments, while focusing on the representational (e.g., pictorial) aspects of meaning. Given the mutually consistent, complementary and anti-reductionist orientations of the CS and Embodied Mind approaches, one should expect to see more interaction between them in the near future. Here, I only mention the names and work of a few prominent figures – the first, Francisco Varela, prematurely deceased.

Varela played a key role in establishing the Embodied Mind paradigm. With his background in theoretical biology and in collaboration with Humberto Maturana, Varela co-authored some of the key ideas of autopoiesis theory: “Our proposition is that living beings are characterized in that, literally, they are continually self-producing. We indicate this process when we call

the organization that defines them an *autopoietic organization*” (Maturana & Varela 1987: 43). For reasons that still need to be clarified, there was a rift between the two scholars around that time. Varela proceeded to elaborate the related notion of *enaction* (Varela *et al.* 1991) and, importantly, to link his biological theory with a deeper appreciation of phenomenology than present in the 1991 volume. In an oft-quoted paper, Varela (1996) formulated the research program of *neurophenomenology*, in which first-person data, obtained by experimental subjects trained to be aware of and reflect on their experiences – i.e., to “perform the phenomenological reduction” – was to be correlated with the third-person data of brain imaging. A number of insightful studies have used and elaborated on this framework (*cf.* Lutz and Thompson 2003).

With Varela’s untimely death, Evan Thompson picked up the torch in formulating a new synthesis for *mind science*, culminating in his impressive *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (2007). The major theme of the book is “the deep continuity of life and mind”, expanding on the notion of autopoiesis as the minimal condition for both life and meaning and pre-figuring the basic structures of consciousness, such as intentionality. Throughout the book, Thompson skillfully weaves together ideas and findings from “biology, phenomenology and the sciences of mind”, addressing topics such as time consciousness, mental imagery, emotions, and intersubjectivity. On that last point – influenced by the work of the phenomenology scholar Dan Zahavi (2001, 2003), who has successfully argued that Husserl’s mature work included a rich analysis of “being with others” and the *lifeworld* – Thompson enriches the methodological pluralism of neurophenomenology, arguing the need for “second-person methods” in the study of consciousness and meaning. As spelled out below, such theoretical and methodological “triangulation” is characteristic of CS research.

Meanwhile, Shaun Gallagher has elaborated upon a central theme of phenomenology, associated most often with Merleau-Ponty (1962), by combining it with empirical and, above all, clinical research: that of the central role of the living body for all forms of experience and meaning. In *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (2005), Gallagher elaborates experiential distinctions such as those between body schema and body image and between bodily agency and ownership, showing that by “front loading” phenomenology in experimental research – rather than using it to interpret existing findings – one can achieve a productive interaction between first- and third-person methodologies. Gallagher has criticized the traditional “theory of mind” perspective on social cognition – both of the theory-theory and simulation-theory varieties – proposing instead an enactive *interaction theory* in which basic interpersonal understanding is the product of perception and action processes, while more elaborate understanding of others’ motives and goals is due to a shared familiarity with narratives – as also proposed by Daniel Hutto (2008). Together with Zahavi, Gallagher has published *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (2008), in which many of the basic ideas of phenomenology – along with empirical applications – are presented to a broader audience. This is something that CS would clearly benefit from emulating.

4. Characteristics of Cognitive Semiotics

On the basis of the (non-comprehensive) overview in the previous two sections, one can discern a number of characteristics of CS research. These can serve to narrow down the broad definition of CS as “integrating methods and theories developed in... cognitive science with methods and theories developed in semiotics and the humanities”. At the same time, they are not meant as a “classical” definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions but rather as a prototype-based one: i.e., not every CS practitioner should commit to all of the following five features.

4.1 A productive combination of (semiotic) theory and empirical research

In a broad (and trivial) sense, all research is both theoretical and empirical. However, semiotic theory is particularly concerned with explicating higher-order concepts such as *meaning*, *sign use*, *representation*, *language*, *intersubjectivity*, etc., along with their interrelations. It is anything but trivial to bring in empirical research that both contributes to such an explication and, at the same time, benefits from it in a way that produces new insights. It is such “mutual enlightenment” – in the words of Evan Thompson – that is the central characteristic of CS. All who have been involved in the study of phenomena such as imagination, gesture, metaphor, etc. will know that it is anything but trivial to combine conceptual and empirical analyses of their nature. There is a natural pull, one could say, to treat these as *meaningful phenomena* and explicate their features, constituent structures, types, etc. by engaging in systematic conceptual/eidetic analysis. On the other hand, psychologists tend to rush to “operationalize” the concepts, formulate hypotheses, perform experiments, and arrive at theoretical conclusions. But the outcome has often been that behind the same terms (e.g. “imagery”, “motion”, “symbol”) very different, and often diffuse, concepts have been lurking, with resultant cross-talk both across and within disciplines.

How is CS to avoid this? The answer lies in formulating concrete research programs such as “neurophenomenology”, that not only state programmatically that the “methods and theories” of the humanities and sciences need to be integrated but actually *go ahead and do it*. This is important enough to be listed as separate feature.

4.1 Methodological triangulation

At the heart of my own conception of CS is the kind of methodological “triangulation” shown in Table 2 (*cf.* Zlatev 2009). Rather than fight wars on the proper methods for investigating the object of study, as has been done for over a century in linguistics (e.g., whether or not to use native-speaker intuitions), or define fields on the basis of their respective methods (philosophy as first-person, ethnomethodology as second-person, classical sociology and experimental psychology as third-person, etc.), the goals of methodological triangulation are (a) to acknowledge the validity of all methods within their respective domain of inquiry, (b) to acknowledge the epistemological priority of first- and second-person methods in the study of meaning (since what one wishes causally to explain must first be understood as well as possible, in order to avoid the cross-talk mentioned above), and (c) to integrate the three kinds of methods in the same project (e.g., Andrén 2010).

Table 2. The central task of Cognitive Semiotics: integrating methods, derived from one of the three perspectives, in the study of particular semiotic phenomena, along with their interrelation.

Perspective	Methods	Usually applied to
First-person (“subjective”)	* Conceptual analysis * Phenomenological methods * Systematic intuitions	* Perception * Mental imagery * Norms (in language)
Second-person (“intersubjective”)	* Empathy * Imaginative projection	* Other persons and “higher” animals * Social interaction
Third-person (“objective”)	* Detached observation * Experimentation * Brain imaging * Computational modelling	* Isolated behaviours (e.g. spatiotemporal utterances) * Biochemical processes

From the perspective of CS, the problem with the “classical” humanities has been a resolute rejection of third-person methods in the study of cultural world as, at best, limited, and at worse as “objectivist” and distorting of the phenomena. While much can be said in favor of such a critique, the steady progress of the sciences, including the study of the “mind/brain”, has given such an attitude a distinctly old-fashioned – if not reactionary – flavor. But on its side, (natural) science has tended to be myopic and dogmatic and has, unsurprisingly, hit a wall in extending the Galilean method to issues of value, meaning, norm and consciousness. It has also performed first-person and second-person methods *implicitly*, often without knowing it: you will not find sections on the use of intuition and empathy in the “methods” section of experimental psychology textbooks.

The challenges to success in practicing such non-reductive unification of knowledge are many – not the least institutional. CS runs the risk of being caught in the crossfire between the traditionalism of the humanities and the hubris of the sciences. But on the positive side, CS could make a contribution to “mending the gap between science and the humanities”: the subtitle of the last book of the evolutionary scientist Stephen Jay Gould (2003).

4.3. Influence of phenomenology

Another common aspect to most CS research is a greater or lesser degree of indebtedness to the philosophical school of phenomenology, as founded by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century. There are multiple schools and types of phenomenology, but the basic idea is to *depart from experience itself*, and to provide descriptions of the phenomena of the world, including ourselves and others, as true to experience as possible – rather than constructing metaphysical doctrines, following formal procedures, or postulating invisible-to-consciousness causal mechanisms that would somehow “produce” experience.

There is a continuity between the epistemological challenges of CS outlined above, and those dealt with by Husserl, leading him to develop phenomenology as a possible resolution to what he called the “crisis of European sciences”, caught between the extremes of positivism and relativism. The emphasis on perspective in Table 2 was meant as a reminder that all knowledge is relative to a subject – or an “observer” as Humberto Maturana likes to phrase it (though not as dependent on language as assumed in his theory). This does not entail any form of “monadic” subjectivism for at least three reasons. First, we do not live in separate bubbles made up of “representations”, but in a meaningful lifeworld, co-constituted through our perceptions and actions. This is obvious for cultural meanings, such as those of language, but it applies also to the most basic layers of perception (e.g., of color). Second, even the most subjective experience is communicable – on the type if not token level – “to sympathetic others” (Trevarthen). Third, accepting that the structures of experience as elucidated by phenomenology are “prefigured” in the principles of life itself – as argued by Thompson and others – opens the way towards a naturalization of phenomenology without the reductionism that usually goes with that term.

Apart from an affinity in its epistemological foundations, CS has benefited from phenomenology with respect to specific topic areas: the above-mentioned distinction between presentation and representation, analyses of imagination and “picture consciousness” (Stjernfelt 2007; Sonesson 1989; 2011), of the interrelations between the living body (*Körper*) and the lived body (*Leib*) (Gallagher 2005), of intersubjectivity (Zlatev *et al.* 2008), etc. What would seem to be a natural next step is to take stock of the more dynamic “genetic” (individual) and “generative” (cultural) developments of phenomenology, including analyses of *time consciousness* (understood as the fundamentally temporal nature of all experience), *passive synthesis* (opening the door to analyses of the “unconscious”), *sedimentation* (i.e., of cultural knowledge), etc. That would be consistent with the otherwise strong emphasis on dynamics, prevalent enough to deserve to be listed as a characteristic of CS.

4.4. Dynamism

At the risk of using a notion that has reached almost fetish status during the last decades (“everything changes, nothing is static”), one can make the generalization that CS studies meaning on all levels – from perception to language, along with the various forms of “external”, cultural representations (theatre, music, pictures, film, etc.) – primarily as dynamic *processes* rather than static *products*. Though the latter can be a convenient descriptive shorthand (e.g., of the “lexicon” of a language, or the “repertoire” of gestures in a community), nearly all CS scholars have made the point that viewing meaning in purely static, structural terms is insufficient for understanding the essentially relational, subject-relative, and (often) interpretive nature of semiosis. Unsurprisingly, various formulations have been used to capture the dynamic nature of meaning: *sense-making* (Thompson), *meaning construction* (Oakley), *linguaging* (Maturana), etc. It may also be reminded that the CfS scholars used the term “dynamic semiotics” prior to adopting “cognitive semiotics”. Thompson (2007) refers to the framework that he is developing as “embodied dynamism”.

There are at least five different time scales to the dynamic semiotic processes under study: (a) *microseconds* in the study of the emergence of the moment-to-moment experience of

meaning(-fulness) as in vision or speech; (b) *seconds* in the study of the production and understanding of meaningful wholes such as scenes and (oral and gestural) utterances; (c) *days, months, years* in the study of semiotic development in ontogenesis; (d) *decades, centuries* in the study of cultural-historic processes, as in language change and sociogenesis; and (e) *millennia* in the study of biological evolution (i.e., phylogenesis). The levels on which these processes apply are also various, from those of “subpersonal” processes in brains to conscious experience in individuals to co-constructions of meaning in dyads and groups to changes in whole populations and environments.

These are fairly standard scales and levels, not specific to CS. Perhaps what could be seen as criterial for a CS approach to any particular phenomenon (e.g., visual perception, gesture interpretation, or identity formation) is not to focus on a single time scale – and corresponding epistemological approach – but to consider several scales/levels in relation to one another (cf. Andrén 2010). In line with the point about the relational character of meaning, a basic CS tenet is that meaning is not “inside” brains, minds, groups, *or* communities but is a result of processes of self/other/world interaction.

4.5 Transdisciplinarity

In the opening line of this article, CS was preliminarily defined as an “interdisciplinary matrix of (sub-parts of) disciplines and methods”. Keeping to this definition, I discussed the combination of methods and levels of analysis. So: what are the “(sub-parts of) disciplines” involved? Judging from the background of CS practitioners, one can single out (1) *semiotics* (whether or not it should be seen as a single discipline), (2) *linguistics* (approaches viewing meaning as the essence of language), (3) *psychology* (mostly developmental, but also cultural, cognitive, and comparative), (4) *anthropology* (biological and, hopefully, cultural, despite its deeply ingrained resistance to “biologism”), (5) *enactive cognitive science* (including neuroscientific and dynamic modeling approaches), and (6) *philosophy* (above all, in the phenomenological tradition).

These are almost the same list of disciplines that combined forces to define cognitive science in the 1960s. But as stated in the introduction – and hopefully made clear in the article – the new synthesis of CS is quite different. For one thing, the “sub-parts of disciplines” involved in CS are often viewed as antagonistic to those that participated in the synthesis of cognitive science: so one finds cognitive vs. generative linguistics, epigenesis vs. nativism, enactivism vs. cognitivism, phenomenology vs. physicalism. At the same time, such oppositional thinking – and thus opposing CS to cognitive science – is much too schematic. After all, we are participants in ongoing processes of dynamic transformations of society, technology, and attitudes towards knowledge. While cognitive science may seem much more academically established than CS in terms of societies, journals, academic departments, and educational programs, it has not evolved into a self-sufficient discipline and remains in essence an *interdisciplinary program* with various constellations crystalizing as “paradigms” for a limited period of time: Varela *et al.* (1991) portray its brief history as passing through the stages of cognitivism, connectionism, and enactivism. With a little good will, CS could even be seen as a fourth stage.

More important for the self-definition of CS is whether it should involve a lower or higher degree of interdisciplinarity. A higher degree is often called *transdisciplinarity*, especially by those who see “interdisciplinarity” as a temporary coalition between members of different fields when something of considerable complexity is addressed (e.g., the brain as studied by neuroscience or evolution as studied by sociobiology) but without seriously affecting the participant disciplines or the broader field of knowledge. In contrast, transdisciplinarity “concerns that which is at once *between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond each individual discipline*. Its goal is the understanding of the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the overarching unity of knowledge” (*Transdisciplinarity*, Wikipedia, August 17, 2011). From such a perspective, CS can be seen as an emerging transdisciplinary field: *meaning* does not constitute a specific empirical domain but rather cuts “between and across” disciplines. What has so far lain “beyond” is a coherent approach that “mends the gap between science and the humanities”, in the words of Gould. As I wrote with some rhetorical flourish some years ago: “Our conception of *meaning* has become increasingly fragmented, along with much else in the increasing ‘postmodernization’ of our worldview. The trenches run deep between different kinds of meaning theories: mentalist, behaviorist, (neural) reductionist, (social) constructivist, functionalist, formalist, computationalist, deflationist... And they are so deep that a rational debate between the different camps seems impossible. The concept is treated not only differently but *incommensurably* within the different disciplines” (Zlatev 2003: 253). To the extent that CS lives up to the challenge of providing a coherent worldview uniting “biology, phenomenology and the sciences of mind” (in the words of Thompson) and even offering a foundation for the systematic study of fields such as visual art and music, it would deserve the label “transdisciplinary field”.

Furthermore, a feature often seen as crucial for transdisciplinary research is “the inclusion of stakeholders in defining research objectives and strategies in order to better incorporate the diffusion of learning produced by the research. Collaboration between stakeholders is deemed essential – not merely at an academic or disciplinary collaboration level, but through active collaboration with people affected by the research and community-based stakeholders” (*Transdisciplinarity*, Wikipedia, August 17, 2011). It is fair to say that, so far, CS has not achieved this, though there have been encouraging first attempts: Smith’s work with producers, consumer rights advocates, and legal experts in the Fairspeak project; work in Lund with minorities such as the Roma, on issues of group identity and integration; work in Århus on multiculturalism. Areas of crucial social significance, in which CS – with its participatory approach to knowledge – should be able to involve stakeholders include atypical development (e.g., autism), sex and gender, animal rights, and religion: notably all highly “sensitive” domains characterized by polarized views. Clearly, an approach such as CS, with its promise of mending the gap, could be beneficial.

5. Conclusions

The fact that similar ideas – and even the term “cognitive semiotics” itself – have emerged in different places over the last decades is hardly a coincidence. At some risk of exaggeration, CS can be seen as called for by historical needs, such as those suggested in this article: the

need to unify or at least to “defragment” our world-views, the need to come to terms with increasingly higher levels of dynamism and complexity, the need to understand better – and thus deal with – the dialectical relationship between individual freedom (autonomy) and collective dependence (sociality), etc.

In other words, if Cognitive Semiotics did not exist, we would need to invent it. Its potential as a transdisciplinary field integrating our understanding of life, mind, language and society is considerable. Furthermore, it can help integrate the participating disciplines internally – above all psychology and linguistics, divided as they are in conflicting sub-disciplines that treat their objects of study (i.e., mind and language) in, respectively, biological, mental, and socio-cultural terms. To emphasize again: CS is not a branch, school, or theory of semiotics, the latter understood as a self-contained discipline. It can make equal use of ideas from Peirce, Saussure, Jakobson, Greimas, von Uexküll – or from anywhere else – to the extent that those ideas are productive for empirical research leading to *new insights* into the nature (and culture) of human beings, as well as other meaning-seeking and meaning-making beings. It could perhaps be better called “semiotic cognitive/mind science”, if the phrase were not so cumbersome and “science” not so often taken to refer solely to natural science.

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Applying structuralist semiotics to brand image research

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to display a conceptual and methodological framework for brand image research by drawing on the discipline of structuralist semiotics. Upon a critical review of existing research from key authors in the brand semiotics literature and through an engagement with the concept of brand image as formulated by key authors in the marketing literature, a semiotic model is furnished for the formation of brand image and brand identity. By drawing on the structuration process of brand image along the three major strata in a brand's signification trajectory, and the key operations of reduction, redundancy, recurrence, isotopy, homologation, I focus more narrowly on how the chaining [enchaînement] of elements from the three strata is effected with view to addressing how brand image may be operationalised in structuralist semiotic terms vis a vis a brand's intended positioning, how it may be linked to a brand's advertising discourse and how the conceptual framework may yield a platform for ongoing brand image analysis and management.

1. Introduction

Brand image is a heavily researched topic in the marketing literature. In contradistinction to marketing semiotic approaches to brand image creation that do not assume as their point of departure conceptual and methodological frameworks embedded in the marketing literature, my contention is that a proper brand semiotic approach should engage critically with existing approaches in the marketing literature, alongside perspectives that have been offered within the semiotic discipline.

This paper assumes as a vantage point the fundamental principles of brand image creation by comparing and contrasting dominant perspectives in the marketing literature. Then it proceeds with an overview of key semiotic approaches to brand image creation, from a structuralist semiotic point of view, while pointing to areas in which they attain to complement existing marketing approaches. By recourse to discerned limitations in these semiotic approaches an attempt is made to fill in some of the conceptual and methodological gaps. The contribution of structuralist semiotics to brand image research is highlighted by exemplifying the proposed

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methodological guidelines in terms of advertising communication as a key source of brand image generation.

2. Marketing approaches to brand image

In this section key branding models in the relevant literature will be reviewed and fundamental branding terms will be defined. In particular, the issues of what is a brand, how it is formed, what is brand image and brand values, why brand identity as genetic programme is important in maintaining long term brand associations and how the different layers making up brand meaning may be identified and mapped out will be explored and critically discussed. Since the point of departure is marketing discourse, semiotic interventions will be kept at a minimum. Occasional semiotic reflections in the course of displaying branding approaches that stem from the marketing literature will pave the way for making sense not only of how a semiotic approach may yield different perspectives on the same branding phenomena, but how the very selection of a semiotic paradigm reframes radically the phenomena under scrutiny.

There are two major types of assets that generate value for a company, viz. tangible assets, such as buildings and manufacturing plants and intangible assets, such as brands and research and development know-how. «Brands are powerful entities because they blend functional, performance-based values with emotional values» (De Chernatony 2006: 5). «Brands are intangible assets that produce added benefits for the business» (Kapferer 2008: 9). Examples of functional values include «security, convenience, simplicity» (De Chernatony 2006: 6), whereas examples of emotional values include «friendliness, conservatism, independence» (idem). «A brand represents a dynamic interface between an organization's actions and customers' interpretations» (ibid: 8). Davidson (in De Chernatony 2006: 11) draws a sharper distinction between visible and invisible brand elements, which is rendered metaphorically in the form of an iceberg, whose visible components consist of name and logo, whereas its invisible components consist of its values and culture.

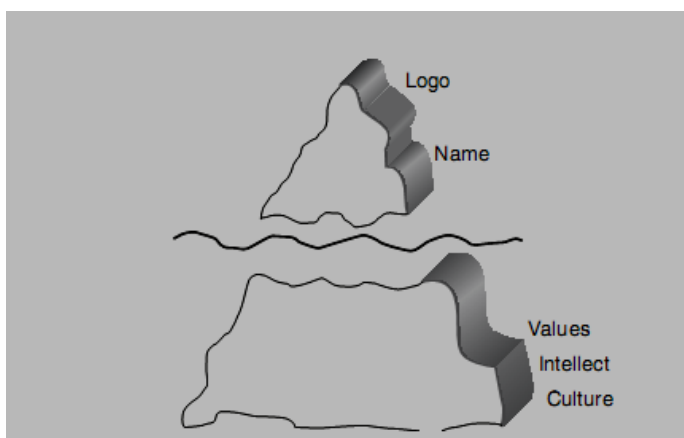


Figure 1: The branding iceberg (De Chernatony 2011: 11)

As name/logo, a brand constitutes a trademark. «A trademark is any sign capable of being represented graphically, that is capable of distinguishing one organization's goods or services from another» (ibid: 13). A trademark may consist of various types of signs, of visual, verbal, aural modality, such as words, letters, numbers, symbols, shapes, drawings, unique sound compositions. Furthermore, the visible part of the iceberg includes any signs that come to be associated with a brand through time in the context of brand communications, such as particular branded characters, anthropomorphic animals, cartoons, actors, jingles, unique colors/typefaces, but also unique ways of ordering and arranging elements.

The branding challenge rests with correctly identifying and relating the two parts of the iceberg, that is elements of the visible structure with concepts/values of the invisible structure, as well as effecting a transition from the commodity that is laden with functional values to that of a branded or, as it is called in the marketing literature, an augmented product, laden with intangible added values. «Added value is a relative concept that enables customers to make a purchase on the basis of superiority over competing brands. It is about recognizing how new clusters of benefits from the brand enable customers to have greater gains relative to smaller increases in sacrifices (e.g. money, search time, etc.)» (De Chernatony 2006: 45).

This transition from the one stratum of the iceberg to the other constitutes a multi-step transformation, starting with visible brand components and ending with image associations and brand values. These associations, according to De Chernatony, must be relevant and sustainable.

Brand image attributes are customarily represented in marketing discourse through the metaphor of brand personality, which consists in ascribing an anthropomorphic structure to a brand. The correspondence of a brand personality with actual consumers'/ brand users' personalities has given rise to the so-called brand/self congruence hypothesis (Birdwell 1968; Parker 2009; Solomon et al 2006; Sirgy 1982). «By using the metaphor of the brand as a personality, manifest sometimes through a celebrity in brand advertisements, customers find it much easier to appreciate the emotional values of the brand» (De Chernatony 2006: 40).

The cluster of image attributes a brand wishes to project, by virtue of which it attains to carve a distinctive territory in the market wherein it competes, constitutes its intended positioning. The level of congruence of these attributes with what is esteemed by the consumer segment(s) that lie at the receiving end of the communication spectrum constitutes a brand's actual positioning. «It is imperative to recognize that while marketers instigate the branding process (branding as an *input*), it is the buyer or the user who forms a mental vision of the brand (branding as an *output*), which may be different from the intended marketing thrust» (De Chernatony and McDonald 2003: 24).

«Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect» (Ries and Trout 2000: 3). But positioning is also a comparative concept, designating the demarcation of a distinctive space with reference to other brands in a given category and a set of characteristics making up the target-market against which it is positioned. Just like value systems in general, brands as constellations of value evolve, thus their positioning is dynamic and must be constantly

monitored against its saliency, differentiation, relative appeal. Thus, a demand for a coherent brand promise as consistent positioning is confronted with a dynamic market reality, which occasionally mandates that a brand repositions itself.

«Repositioning is how you adjust perceptions, whether those perceptions are about you or about your competition» (Trout 2010:10). Repositioning is an arduous and time-consuming endeavor and it does not occur overnight, insofar as it consists in replacing an existing nexus of values, functional and image attributes, benefits and associations stored in consumers' memory with a new one. The same holds for brand extensions, brand-stretching and diversification. In such cases a mother or umbrella brand proliferates alongside (i) different product/service categories through a logic of diversification (eg. Virgin, EasyJet) (ii) different variations in the same product category (eg. different Cadbury chocolate bar flavors, formats, sizes, packages) (iii) different brand promises, but with the same brand offering, for different consumer segments (eg. different perceptions of Nokia among men/women, 18-24/25-34 yrs old, business travelers/students and any other possible bases of segmentation).

Positioning concerns essentially the nexus of associations about a brand in consumer memory that makes up a battery of brand image attributes. As an ensemble these attributes constitute what is called brand image. Brand image may be further distinguished into category image, concerning associations about a product/service category in total and a specific brand's image. From a consumer based perspective, the associations most eminently related with a given product category constitute key perceptual value drivers (or critical success factors-CSFs). By benchmarking a particular brand's performance against the category's perceptual drivers, one may discern a brand's points of differentiation and points of parity. Points of differentiation contribute to carving a USP (unique selling proposition), the successful maintenance of which leads to a sustainable competitive advantage (cf. Keller 2008: 117).

Based on which value territories a brand intends to position itself, a distinction must be drawn between core and peripheral values. «A brand's core values are those values that the brand will always uphold, regardless of environmental change, and which will always be a central characteristic of the brand. By contrast, peripheral values are secondary values that are less important to the brand and which can be deleted or augmented» (De Chernatony 2006: 122). Core values make up a brand's essence. From a more holistic perspective, brand essence consists of a pyramid-like structure, encompassing attributes, benefits, values and the metaphorically projected brand personality as their synthesis.

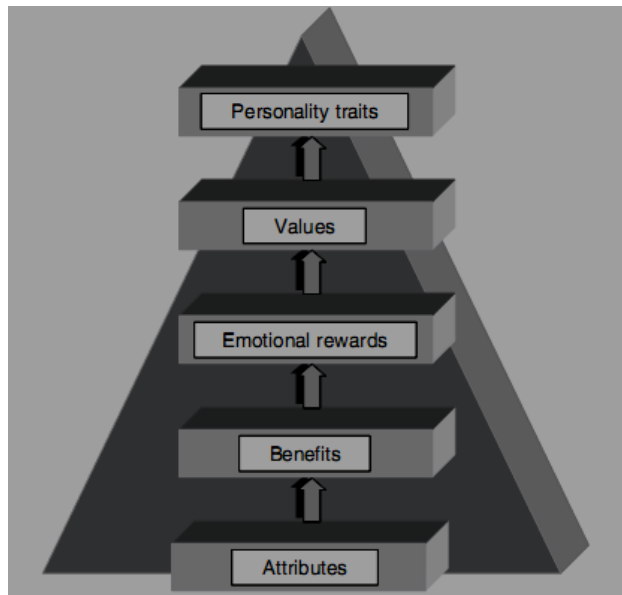


Figure 2: The brand essence pyramid (De Chernatony 2006: 226; also see Kapferer 2008; 34; Light and Kiddon 2009: 78-80)

The brand essence pyramid is a way of conceptualizing coherently the key aspects involved in a new brand (and not just product) development process insofar as it delineates the steps whereby product attributes are transformed into consumer benefits, which give rise to emotional rewards. In turn, emotional rewards are transformed into values in the form of an axiological framework. Values, once projected onto and recognized in the brand assume the form of brand personality traits, which are reflected in brand image attributes. The pathways whereby the layers of the pyramid interlock may be established inferentially through a laddering approach (see Kapferer 2008: 193). De Chernatony (2006: 227) suggests the employment of three «ladders» as a process of establishing the progressive ascent from attributes to personality traits, for each of the (up to) three key attributes making up a brand's core essence (cf. above on core vs peripheral values), obviously inspired by classical positioning theory (i.e. Ries and Trout) according to whom differential positioning should be based on no more than three distinctive attributes or properties.

The narrative that brings together the components of the pyramid in a short and concise manner (usually no more than one page long) constitutes the brand promise (also occasionally called brand positioning statement or brand mission statement). I shall call this narrative henceforth the **master brand narrative**, which functions as the conceptual backdrop behind an advertising concept, which in turn underpins an advertising script. The aim of a master brand narrative is to flesh out a distinctive brand positioning, which reflects a brand identity. Brand identity is not an unproblematic concept, since it points to something unaltered over time. Is brand identity feasible or is it just a heuristic concept? If it is feasible, how is it maintained over time and what determinants affect its uniformity?

Brand identity is not about repeating the same message over and over, but about maintaining a signification kernel throughout variable communicative manifestations. It is about the maintenance of identity through difference or the repetition of the master brand narrative

through different customized brand narratives. The master brand narrative manifests the underlying depth grammar of a brand, whereas individual brand narratives constitute a brand's multifarious manifestations. **As depth grammar a brand consists of immutable elements and a unique syntax whereby these elements are combined or its unique combinatorial rationale as brand code.** The more carefully crafted the less easy it is to copy a brand's depth grammar insofar as it is cloaked through various transformations. Thus, maintenance of brand identity must also be coupled with a surface grammar and a transformational rationale whereby the master brand narrative is uniquely anchored in distinctive surface brand narratives.

As a precursor to the brand essence pyramid, Hollis et al (1996) forged the Brand Dynamics Pyramid, consisting of five identifiable steps in building a relationship of brand loyalty (presence, relevance, performance, advantage, bonding), which later evolved into the WPP patented branding model Brand Z (cf. Kotler and Keller 2006: 280) .

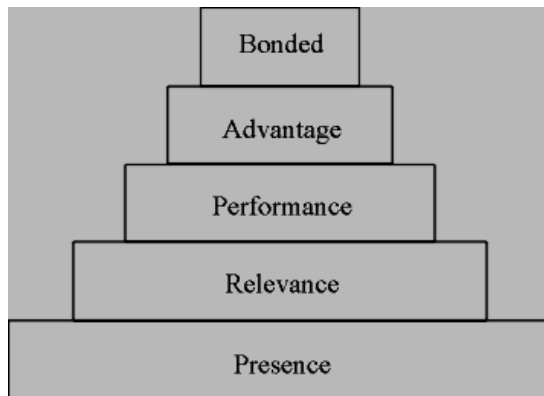


Figure 3: The brand dynamics pyramid (Hollis et al 1996; also see Hollis et al 2009 and Hollis 2008: 35-46)

Another metaphorical mode of portraying the coherence amongst the various strata and elements making up a brand is Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism. Its key point of differentiation from the brand essence pyramid (Figure 2) consists in its more inclusive character as regards brand mix elements, such as self-image and culture, as well as in an explicit portrayal of brand related aspects that were implicit in the brand essence pyramid.

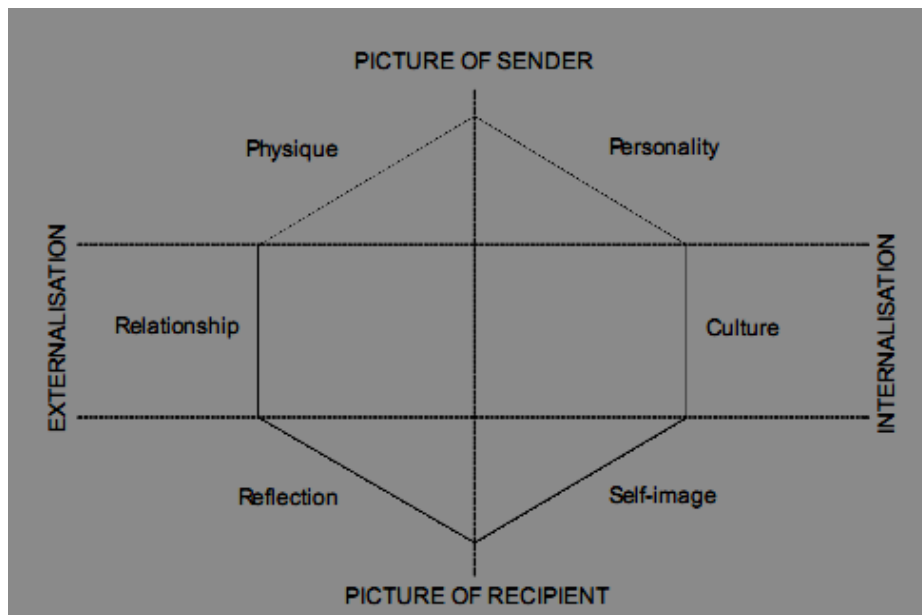


Figure 4: The Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer 2008: 183)

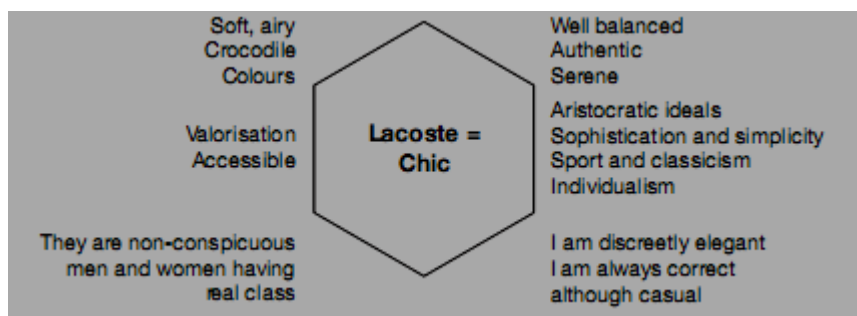


Figure 5: Applied Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer 2008: 188)

Physique refers to tangible elements or product attributes, personality to brand personality as previously defined, culture to a brand’s values, relationship to «the mode of conduct that most identifies the brand» (Kapferer 2008: 185), qualified in terms of what I shall later call from a semiotic point of view the relation between **manifest (logo, symbols, advertising cues or elements of a brand’s plane of expression) and depth structures (brand image attributes or the plane of content) of signification.** I deem that relationship is a key structural element, whose significance will be laid out extensively from a semiotic point of view, insofar as it points not only to elements making up a brand, but even more fundamentally, to the mode of elements’ relatedness or a brand’s combinatorial logic. From a structuralist point of view relationship as such is not a component of a structure, but a combinatorial rule or a brand syntax.

Continuing with Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism model, reflection refers to the user-personality projected by a brand as perceived by distinctive consumer segments and finally, self-image to «a target’s own internal mirror» (ibid:186), which is more or less a deflection of user-personality. Brand Prism takes into account both senders’ (or brand owners’) and receivers’ (or target audiences’) perspectives by inserting the branding process in a

communicative trajectory, while portraying the two interdependent and mutually reflecting facets of intended and received positioning.

From a terminological point of view, it is also quite crucial to notice that «identity reflects the different facets of brand long-term singularity and attractiveness» (ibid: 187). Identity is a multifaceted, dynamic concept that crystallizes over time against the backdrop of a long-term strategic orientation. Brand identity is not just a list of words alongside different dimensions strung on a piece of paper as a static snapshot of a brand promise. It is an evolving entity, whose evolution may be mapped out on conceptual platforms such as the Brand Identity prism. Equally importantly, the notion of brand identity points to the self-referential rationale of a brand's structure as a system of inter-related attributes, benefits and values or to the fact that «the truth of a brand lies within itself» (ibid: 192). However, this coherentist outlook towards a brand's essence does not imply that it is cut off from a wider value-system making up a culture. «A strong brand is always the product of a certain culture, hence of a set of values which it chooses to represent» (idem). A crucial term that is lurking in the background at this juncture, is that of «cultural codes». The notion of code is of fundamental operative value not only for understanding the dynamic interplay between brand values and culture, but also as the open horizon of semiosis that caters for a brand's long term sustainability. «Code» as culture is accounted for in Kapferer's version of the brand pyramid, that is portrayed in Figure 6:

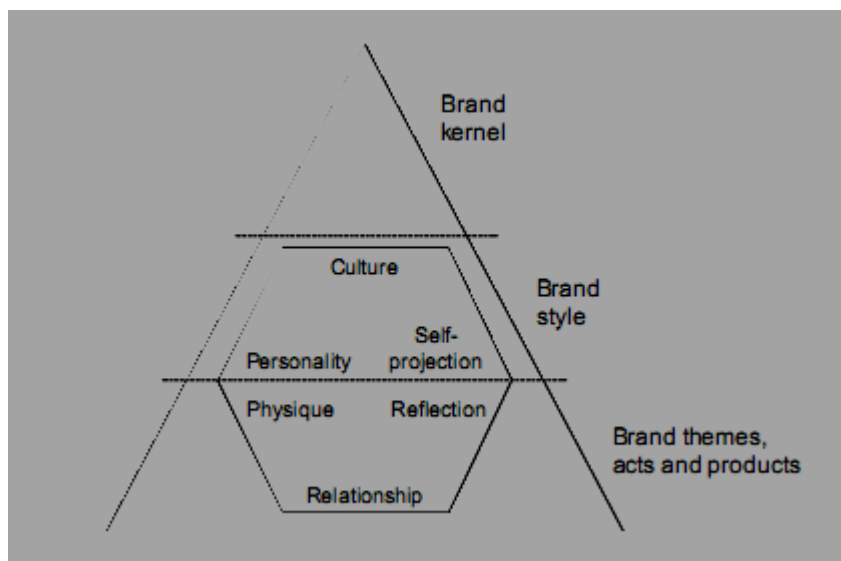


Figure 6: Kapferer's brand pyramid (2008: 291)

«At the top of the pyramid is the kernel of the brand, the source of its identity. It must be known because it imparts coherence and consistency. The base of the pyramid are the themes: it is the tier of communication concepts and the product's positioning, of the promises linked to the latter. The middle level relates to the stylistic code, how the brand talks and which images it uses. It is through his or her style that an author (the brand) writes the theme and describes him- or herself as a brand. It is the style that leaves a mark» (2008: 290). The notion

of code as a brand's stylistic elements is essential, but very restrictive in terms of the importance of the notion of Code for branding. By restricting the source of the notion of Code not only crucial aspects in a brand's master narrative remain underexplored, but the very driving force of a wider cultural context and its dialectical relationship with a brand's constitution as such is understated. Irrespective of whether this approach to the Brand Identity Prism reflects from a holistic perspective the shaping forces that are operative in a branding process or remains wanting, its merits lie in identifying brand identity as a multi-layered concept.

De Chernatony and McDonald attribute a more all-encompassing role to the notion of Code in their branding system, while stressing that « brands are part of the culture of a society and as the culture changes so they need to be updated» (2003: 129). However, despite the descriptive value of the links between brand and cultural codes, the notion is not operationalized with view to yielding an account of how the dynamic between these two codes (ie brand and culture) develops over time.

Keller yields a more consumer-centric conceptual model of brand building, compared to the Brand Essence Pyramid and The Brand Identity Prism, that of Consumer Knowledge Structure. The key point of differentiation compared to the aforementioned models consists in adding emphasis to brand-related consumer associations, which, as will be shown in due course, constitute a central concept and formative perceptual mechanism in building and maintaining a brand image structure. «Brand knowledge can be conceptualized in terms of a brand node in memory with brand associations, varying in strength, connected to it» (Keller 2008: 87) and portrayed in the following fashion:

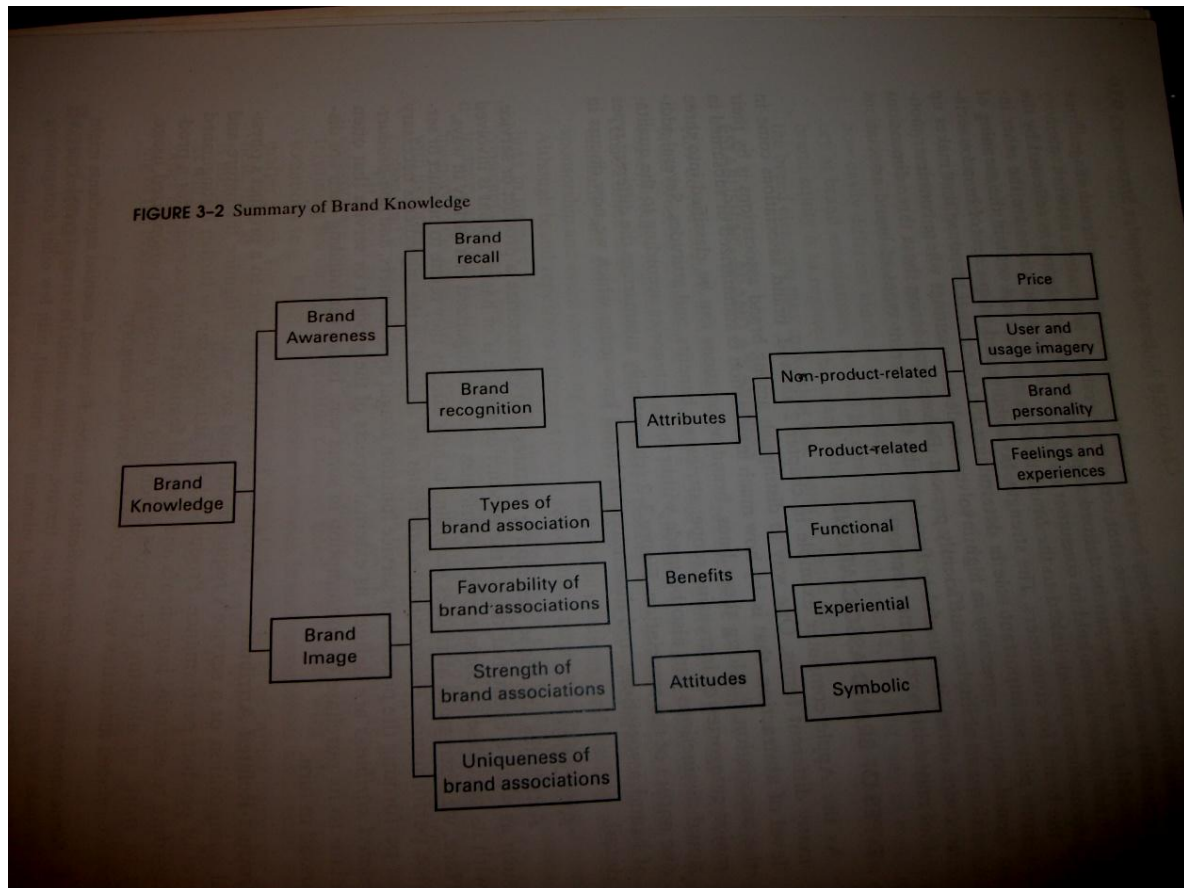


Figure 7: Keller's brand knowledge structure (Keller 2008: 94)

Keller's approach is structuralist in essence, from a semiotic point of view, even though not explicitly formulated as such. It emphasizes relations among elements in a brand system inasmuch as it outlines the distinctive value of the system's structural components. This model may be enriched from a semiotic point of view, primarily through a qualification of the various levels and modes of signification of brand image attributes, as will be shown in due course.

Let us now proceed with defining the components of the brand knowledge structure, while pointing out their relative structural value, as well as the way they interrelate and interact with view to yielding perceived added value.

Brand knowledge is fundamentally a function of brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is a threshold perceptual determinant of brand value and refers to «consumers' ability to identify the brand» (Keller 2008: 87). Brand recall relates to «consumers' ability to retrieve the brand from memory» (ibid: 88) when given a relevant cue, such as the product category's name. Brand recognition refers to the level of making purchase decisions when the brand is present. Another way of differentiating between modes of brand awareness is by drawing a distinction between aided and unaided brand recall. High levels of unaided brand recall, that is mentioning a brand name while being presented only with the product category as a cue, as well as the order of recall of brands, are indicative of the relative salience or

pertinence of a brand in a category repertoire. The relative standing of a brand in the order of unaidedly recalled brands in a given product category is manifested as a brand's top-of-mind awareness. Brand awareness, conceived of independently of brand image perceptions is a necessary, but by no means sufficient condition for differentiating a brand. «Brand image can be defined as perceptions about a brand, as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory» (Keller 2008: 93). Brand associations contain the meaning of a brand, hence their value is instrumental as determinants of brand signification. Brand association may be further classified into three categories, viz. attributes, benefits and attitudes.

«Attributes are those descriptive features that characterize a product or service, such as what a consumer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumption» (Keller 2008: 93) and may be further distinguished into product and non-product related. «Product-related attributes are defined as the ingredients necessary for performing the product or service function sought by consumers and non-product related attributes are defined as external aspects of the product or service that often relate to its purchase or consumption in some way» (idem).

The distinction between product and non-product related attributes is crucial from a semiotic point of view. The latter point to the brand's highly motivational status, in semiotic terms. There is nothing inherent in the brand determining the relationship between two sets of attributes. Non-product related attributes refer to «all kinds of associations that can become linked to the brand that do not directly relate to product performance» (ibid: 95) or, in semiotic terms, elements of the plane of content. This is what Baudrillard calls general commutation, which is an overarching principle in the language of brands viz. that any element of the plane of expression may potentially be correlated with any element of the plane of content. An attestation of this general commutability canon is the classic Coca-Cola slogan «things go better with Coke».

Non-product related attributes are classified into five types, viz. «price, user imagery (i.e. what type of person uses the product or service or who is the ideal user), usage imagery (i.e. where and under what types of situations the product or service is used), feelings and experiences and brand personality» (idem). In greater detail, non-product related associations arise both from direct contact with and usage of a brand, as well as from the imagery projected through brand communications.

User imagery characteristics may refer to any traits pertaining to the demographic background of the brand user (i.e. gender, socioeconomic class), psychographic/lifestyle traits (i.e. values autonomy in decision-making and is indoorsey vs outgoing), Feelings and experiences include feelings towards the brand generated through impersonal or one-to-many brand communications (i.e. TV, radio, outdoor, internet static banners), a brand's experiential events, such as roadshows, club-events, cinema promotions, but also through one-to-one brand communications (i.e. customized email marketing, social media, brand forums, CRM activities).

Brand personality refers to a personification of a brand, that is the ascription of human attributes and is built primarily through brand communications.

Benefits «are the personal value and meaning that consumers attach to product or service attributes» (Keller 2008: 99). Keller draws a sharper distinction between functional, symbolic and experiential benefits. Functional benefits correspond to product-related attributes, hence their relationship is more monosemic and less abstract. The relationship between attributes and benefits becomes polysemous once we turn to symbolic and experiential benefits. «Symbolic benefits relate to underlying needs for social approval or personal expression and outer-directed self-esteem» (idem). Symbolic benefits have been associated in the consumer research literature with the symbolic self, which denotes complementing one's notion of selfhood by identifying with the symbolic properties with which an object or brand is invested. By virtue of an ideational transfer of these values embedded in the product to the self the act of symbolic consumption is effected. Experiential benefits refer to the feelings arising from brand usage, relating to either product or non-product related attributes.

Last, but not least, brand attitudes reflect «consumers' overall evaluation of a brand» (Keller 2008: 100), and form the basis for actual consumptive behavior or brand choice. Brand related attitudes constitute generic background expectations and determine to a certain extent the receptivity to brand related cues, including advertising cues.

Keller's brand knowledge structure, by virtue of positing brand related associations at the very heart of a brand's structure, affords to yield a comprehensive account of the interrelations amongst attributes, benefits and attitudes, but also to shift the focal point of building and managing a brand from internal considerations pertaining to the choice of brand elements to the end result of this choice, that is the formation of strong, favorable and unique brand associations on behalf of consumers.

However, in order to yield a more comprehensive account of the interrelationships amongst attributes, benefits and attitudes, both with regard to resulting associations, as well as the elements used for creating such associations, one needs an encompassing theory of signification, which may be furnished by recourse to structuralist semiotics and more specifically by recourse to Greimas's trajectory of signification. In the ensuing section Greimas's influence on Floch and Semprini's brand semiotic approaches will be discussed, alongside other perspectives in the structuralist stream of brand semiotics .

3. Structuralist semiotic approaches to branding

In terms of the contribution of semiotics in branding theory and applied research De Chernatony and McDonald (2003: 146-158) recognize that the symbolic dimension of brands or how they function as cultural signs may be unearthed with the import of the science of semiotics. «If marketers are able to identify the rules of meaning that consumers have devised to encode and decode symbolic communication, they can make better use of advertising,

design and packaging» (ibid: 145). Brand symbolism is certainly a key area where semiotics may contribute, but not the only one. What is termed «symbolic consumption» in the marketing literature, from a semiotic point of view consists in a multifaceted phenomenon, also including, according to Greimas and Floch, semi-symbolic systems, but also imaginary constructs, with fluid symbolic boundaries. At the end of the day, as Greimas contends, a structure aims at organizing the imaginary. A structure is not necessarily a strictly coded system and is not exhausted in a strictly symbolic relationship between signifier and signified. As Eco has repeatedly demonstrated, there are various levels of codedness in a sign system and as Groupe μ , Sonesson, Hebert, Rastier, Barthes among others, have demonstrated there are various ways of organizing a sign-system (comprising multimodal signs), in terms of syntagmatic ordering, as well as the operations involved in the rhetorical transformations of signification. The usefulness of semiotics lies both in furnishing a typological classification of brands as signs, which is mostly the province of Peircean semiotics, as well as a conceptual and methodological platform for designing and managing brands as sign systems, which is mainly the province of structuralist semiotics.

3.1 Floch's brand semiotics

Floch pioneered in the application of Greimasian structuralist semiotics in marketing theory and research. His main work *Marketing Semiotics* that exemplifies his approach, which is complemented by *Visual Identities*, even though not furnishing a coherent branding theory, is interspersed with insightful conceptual and methodological remarks, borne out of his active involvement in applied semiotic marketing research. In this section an attempt will be made at reconstructing the most relevant branding arguments in a concise conceptual framework.

According to Floch, the first principle is that «the thrust of semiotics is the description of conditions pertaining to the production and apprehension of meaning» (Floch 2001: 2), in line with Greimas. The second principle (the so-called immanence principle, in line with Greimas and Hjelmslev) is that «semioticians look closely at the system of relations formed by the invariants² of these productions and apprehensions of meaning by analyzing specific components known as signs» (idem). «Semiotics seeks to work from texts, to work on and in that very place where signs signify» (ibid: 3). Floch, in line with Greimas's system, adopts the model of generative trajectory of signification, which consists in a topography of relations, starting with deep levels of signification and ending with the manifest text or advertising stimuli. «Like a word, an advertising concept constitutes only the small, visible tip of an iceberg of meaning» (ibid: 6). The **generative trajectory of signification** is portrayed in Figure 13:

² The same principle holds in the case of film semiotics. As Buckland (2004: 6) observes «Film semioticians define specificity not in terms of film's invariant surface (immediately perceptible) traits, but of its underlying (non-perceptible and non-manifest) system of invariant traits», even though invariance from a structuralist point of view concerns both planes of expression and content and not just the plane of content as Buckland holds.

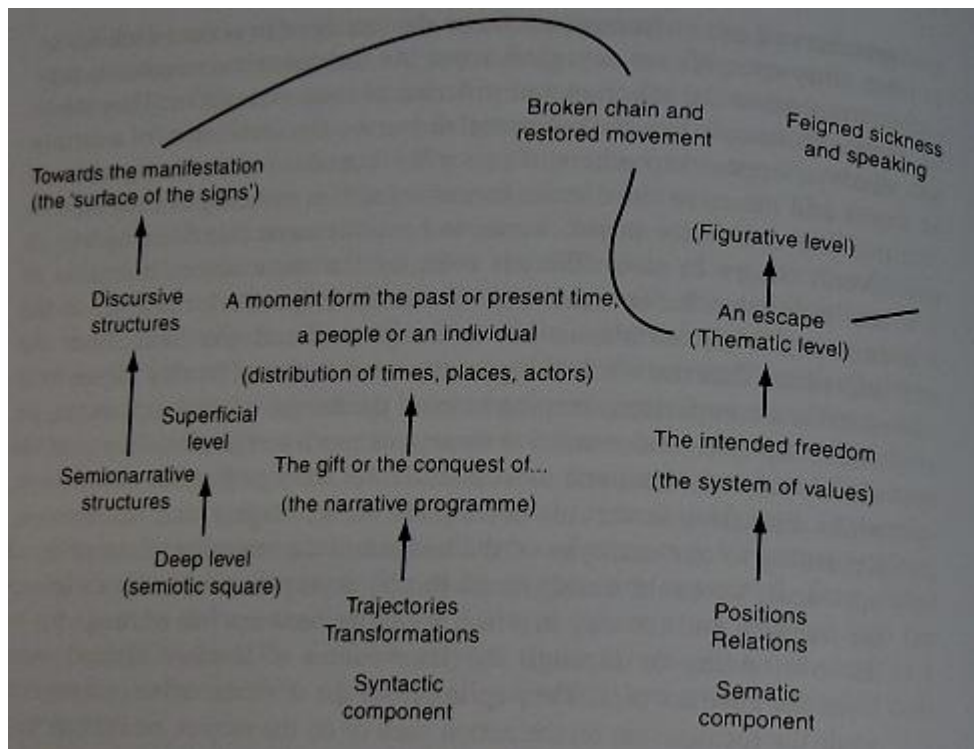


Figure 13: The generative trajectory of signification (ibid: 114)

The above rendition by Floch of Greimas's generative trajectory of signification constitutes the blueprint for the organization of brand signification. Floch's rendition focuses on semio-narrative and discursive structures, at the expense of the depth level of signification, which is deemed to be exhausted within the province of the semiotic square.

«The deep level of the semio-narrative structure, its superficial level and the discursive structures have two slopes or sides that reflect the two components of all grammars, a syntactic component (or what is derived from a logic of the trajectories) and a semantic component (or what is derived from a logic of the positions and values)» (ibid: 113).

Based on the generative trajectory of signification a brand acquires meaning by passing through different levels or structures, viz. depth structures, semio-narrative structures and discursive structures. «Semio-narrative structures consist of the entire set of virtualities the enunciating subject has at its hand; It is that supply of values and programmes of action from which he or she can draw in order to tell his or her story or speak of any given topic» (ibid: 112-113).

Discursive structures «correspond to the selection and ordering of these virtualities. They relate to the choice of a specific referential universe» (ibid: 113).

Another key Greimasian concept that pertains to semio-narrative structures and that was operationalised by Floch in his brand exploratory research is that of narrative schema. The narrative schema is a concept that attempts to encapsulate a narrative as an ordered sequence of interrelated formal episodes. The ordering does not correspond to the succession of events at the surface of a narrative, which was Propp's original conception of a narrative schema,

hence it is not only of a syntagmatic nature, but also of a paradigmatic nature, insofar as the syntagmatic sequences are reordered based on paradigmatic units or dominant themes that cut across the syntagmas. «By conducting a critical reexamination of the Proppian functions in this fashion, the idea of a directed arrangement was substituted for the notion of simple succession; a narrative, then, was thought to be imbued with a meaning, a direction» (Floch 2001; 50). The incidence of directionality as motivating principle behind the organization of a narrative schema is particularly relevant in the context of a brand master narrative, which is embedded in a highly motivated brand langue.

A major issue that surfaces, in my view, in Floch's attempt to put Greimas's narrative semiotics to branding practice concerns the direct migration of the metatheoretical concepts embedded therein to the reading of a brand's manifest discourse or its advertising texts, while not taking into account that the primary field of application of Greimas's narrative approach was the literary text and the inspiration behind the canonical narrative schema dwelt on the particular genre of the Russian folktale. Thus, narrative typologies such as 'hero' and 'opponent' are applied directly to the advertising text (and have been standardly applied until today to a plethora of structuralist semiotic advertising studies). Concomitantly, Floch's reading of advertising texts, rather than being selective with regard to the validity of Greimas's narrative metatheory in the face of the particularities of the advertising text and its differences from literary works, amounts to its uncritical validation. Floch imports directly Greimas's narrative schema as consisting of four identifiable phases, viz. establishing a contract between sender and receiver of the text, the qualifying test or the acquisition of the ability to realize a narrative program by the sender, the decisive test or the carrying out of the program and finally the glorifying test that seeks to recognise whether the narrative program has been completed. Greimas attributes a set of modalities to the above phases, such as the epistemic modality, that is established in the qualifying test in terms of the sender's know-how about the completion of the program.

On the one hand, this performance related modality may be established in a literary narrative cogently with regard to the literary work's internal structure on behalf of the receiver, as the choice of the receiver to accept the valorization of the object offered by the composer of the literary text does not have any material repercussions. However, in the case of consumer choice, opting for the acceptance of a mode of valorization of a brand as portrayed in an ad text has material repercussions, in terms of the monetary value involved in the act of exchange wherein the valorization is embedded, but also in terms of psychological value. In short, the sanction of an axiological framework established by a destinateur [sender] in a literary work is a risk free enterprise for the destinataire,[receiver], whereas in the case of the brand motivated ad text, risk is involved in terms of distinctive value territories.

On the other hand, the literary oeuvre is not necessarily motivated by a conceptual blueprint. Thematic isotopies may be discerned through a reconstruction of the narrative (as proposed by Barthes' code theory in S/Z), but this coding does not have to correspond to an a priori positioning blueprint. In the case of the ad text such a conceptual blueprint in terms of a brand positioning statement is a necessary condition.

Furthermore, narrative structures are accompanied not only by narrative elements, but also by a transformational syntax that regulates the transitions among the states of being of the key actants involved in the narrative. The transformational syntax in the case of the ad text is greatly influenced by advertising style (i.e. humouristic advertising vs call to action). Styles of advertising execution correspond to the paradigmatic axis of a brand's discourse. Each style has its own mode of effecting a valorization of the object or a brand and hence its own narrative schema. Style also constitutes the context as corpus through which textual signification is interpretively possible, according to Rastier (2003). The text points inevitably to genre as intertext. In this respect, importing directly Propp's canonical narrative schema as adopted by Greimas and in turn by Floch to advertising analysis obfuscates the crucial difference between the ad and the literary text in terms of the sender's motivational structure, as well as the fact that the middle term for decoding ad texts does not rest with the corpus of the Russian folk-tales, but with distinctive genres or styles of advertising execution.

In order to illustrate the above tentative criticisms of Floch's application of structural semiotics to advertising, let us cite the following passage:

«**literary works provide** numerous examples of very different kinds of competence depending on the echainment, the process of acquiring the necessary modalities to implement a given programme of action. For instance, there are 'heroes' who already possess a 'being-able-to' and a 'knowing-how-to', but are not yet competent- they will not be capable of fulfilling their mission until they have acquired a 'wanting-to' or a 'having-to'... **In this respect advertising** provides a marvellous diversity of competence that is syntagmatically defined» (Floch 2001: 53-54; my emphases).

It is evident from the opening and closing premises of the above statement that Floch conflates the literary and advertising modes of discourse. The outcome of this precarious imbrication is that the three modalities that have been posited as integral to the carrying out of a narrative program that is embedded in a narrative schema and which attain to differentiate the actions of the actors in the literary oeuvre are assumed to be capable of conferring signification to the actions of the actors (if any) in an advertising text. But this is hardly the case insofar as (i) in an advertising text the omnipresent actantial subject behind the manifest actors is the brand, which is assumed by default to possess all three modalities (i.e. having to, being able to and knowing how to). Hence, Greimas's modalities do not attain to differentiate a brand's narrative, as they are supposed *ex positio* to be endemic in brand discourse (ii) as per the previous argument the competence of a brand that is instituted in the brand narrative is not only syntagmatically defined, but also paradigmatically determined, based on the selection of an advertising style, the transformative syntax of which determines the syntagmatic ordering of surface elements.

Wrapping up our argumentation, brand discourse varies markedly from literary discourse in terms of motivation and intentionality behind the text's manifest structure, as well as in terms of discursive style. Not taking into account the motivational structure of an ad text has repercussions alongside the generative trajectory. The invariant functions and characters that were discovered by Propp and adopted by Greimas may not be uncritically assumed as

deductive principles for the semio-narrative reconstruction of an ad text³. The non universally applicable Proppian semio-narrative typology was vehemently emphasized by Rastier in his criticism against Greimas's uncritical adoption that appeared in *Sens et Textualité*. «His theoretical ambition is restricted by descriptive weakness: his universalism prevented him from discerning the specificity of texts, thus projecting the semiotic narrative schema as an a priori grid» (Rastier 1989: 69).

The impact of opting for each of the above approaches in the context of establishing brand coherence alongside the generative trajectory may be clarified by addressing the way Floch attempts to illustrate the usefulness of Propp's narrative functions in the advertising development in Chapter 3 of his book *Marketing Semiotics* (Floch 2001: 54-72).

The illustration draws on the actual case study concerning the bank brand Credit du Nord and its commissioning a project to a design agency for a new tagline (slogan) and a new logo. First, the case selected for illustrating the pertinence of narrative functions is completely different to the initial frame of discussion that aimed at establishing a relationship between the literary oeuvre and advertising discourse, as the case does not concern advertising, but logo and tagline, which are key brand properties, but may not be approached in isolation to brand discourse as deployed in advertising. Second, this divergence from the initial aim is further compounded by focusing on the interior space design of the bank's outlets. Third, the narrative function of 'helper' is dislocated from the semio-narrative stratum in the generative trajectory (which Floch reproduces in his book according to the Greimasian rationale) and conflated with a brand's depth grammar as a key seme, manifested in the tagline 'A big bank for a big region' (Floch 2001: 54). In this sense, 'helper' has nothing to do with the narrative function of 'helper', but with the adoption of /helper/ as a nuclear seme in the brand's semantic microuniverse. Fourth, Floch claims that the bank intended to position itself around the concept of 'clarity' and attempts to construct how clarity emerged through the elements of the aesthetic surface of the branches' interior design by recourse to a whole host of speculative remarks about the 'effects of sense' of pure surface structure elements, such as shapes, lighting, colors and their mode of combination. This reading that bypasses the strata of the generative trajectory constitutes a contradiction in terms on at least three levels: (i) on the level of Floch's line of argumentation in Chapter 3 that intends to clarify the adaptability of literary work narrative structures to the advertising text, a visual text is interpolated as exemplar (ii) on the level of assuming as point of departure the generative trajectory, an example is recruited that bypasses the strata of the trajectory; instead of demonstrating how brand signification or the intended nuclear seme of /clarity/ emerges through the three main levels of the trajectory (of which semio-narrative structures is the middle one) he jumps onto justifying how clarity emerges as an 'effet de sens' based on the syntagmatic ordering of visual stimuli or 'bricolage' (iii) by assuming (at least implicitly) as his point of departure not the generative trajectory, as deployed by Greimas and Courtes, but Greimas's later (1989 d) work on the semiotics of the figurative and plastic signs (in which case the collaboration of Floch was crucial), where the relative autonomy of the expression plane of the visual sign is

³ Let us note that Floch's import of Greimas's narrative typologies is still popular among current applications in advertising analysis. For example, see the Cillit Bang case study in Shairi and Tajbakhsh 2010.

argued for, along with a call for bespoke ‘reading grids’ [grilles de lecture] for constructing semiotically signification as an ‘effet de sens’ based on the surface play of visual signs.

Floch’s divergence from the generative trajectory of meaning and his increasing preoccupation with the production of signification as an *effet de sens* of surface structures became even more apparent in his later work *Visual Identities*. This transition makes sense in the context of Greimas’s call for an alternative reading grid in the case of the plastic and figurative sign (cf. Greimas 1989 d), as a result of the particularities of the visual sign. In this direction he heralded Floch’s work for furthering the project of structuralist semiotics in order to encompass the plastic sign. Whereas in his earlier work Greimas’s main preoccupation rested with furnishing a descriptive metalanguage of deductive validity the semantic kernel of which would rest with a depth grammar, in his later work he turned to the other extreme and examined the extent to which signification is purely a matter of style or surface structures pertaining to the plane of expression. Floch describes this turn as follows:

«Style is generally defined as divergence or deviation. In such an approach style is conceived as an opening, a way of taking liberties with a norm located outside the work. This approach is essentially paradigmatic and normative [...] However, in an approach more concerned with the work itself and centered more on text than context, style can instead be defined as closure. And this closure is linked to the syntagmatic dimension of the work. Moreover, this approach which takes into account the internal recurrences and consistencies of the work is by no means normative. Rather, it is the approach associated with those stylisticians closest to semiotics, an approach that is intended as purely descriptive and is concerned above all with relationships internal to the work itself» (Floch 2000: 139).

The diversion from a canonical narrative schema as a set of normative requirements regulating meta-theoretically the internal coherence of a text towards style as an associative rationale of surface structure elements also marks a distinction between the deductive validity of a canonical narrative schema and style as heuristic mechanism for making sense of the mode of signification of figurative discourse and the visual text as against the literary narrative form. Yet, they are both embedded in figurative discursive forms.

The issue of the relative autonomy of surface discourse versus its dependency on depth structures is a vexed one. Semiotics may contribute to the analysis and interpretation of a surface text’s organization and hence extrapolate rules for the maintenance of communicative consistency regarding the organization of advertising stimuli, albeit not dislocated from a brand’s depth structure, not as master brand narrative embedded at the semio-narrative level, but as coherent brand identity resting with immutable brand image attributes as a brand’s semantic micro-universe. What occasionally obfuscates the precedence of levels of analysis in the trajectory of signification is the circular interdependency of the depth and surface structures. Since the original inception of his multi-layered system in *Sémantique Structurale* (1966), Greimas rendered clear that depth and surface structures are mutually presupposing. A depth structure is the necessary condition for the existence of a surface structure, while a surface structure may not exist, structurally speaking, without a depth structure. Greimas also

made it clear that one may start building a structuralist sign system either way, that is by starting from a surface structure or a depth structure.

His argumentation came under attack from scholars, such as Ricoeur (1989), in the face of his programmatic declarations in *Sémantique Structurale*, according to which the metalinguistic theory of structural semantics aims at yielding a deductively valid theory of signification. The attribution of deductive validity to his metalinguistic theory concerned the internal structural coherence of the posited concepts, hence the immanentist nature of structuralist semiotics and not the ability to predict extra-semiotic phenomena. For example, the typologies that make up a canonical narrative schema are canonical, precisely by virtue of their uniform recurrence in the context of a given corpus (certainly with variations). The structuralist backdrop allows for the establishment of a set of background expectations about the deployment of a narrative schema, within a given corpus of analysis, whence stems its deductive validity. The canonical narrative schema is of deductive validity because it places constraints on the probability of a narrative program's deployment in a specific direction. However, the canonical narrative schema was invested with deductive validity upon observation of patterned regularities in a given corpus. The source of the deductive model consists in uniform «inferential walks», employing Eco's eloquent metaphor, that is in successive inductive chainings of the deployment of individual narrative programs. A structuralist semiotic system is deductive by reference to a given corpus, which adds further credence to the aforementioned problematic direct transfer of the typologies embedded in a canonical narrative schema as borne out of the corpus of the Russian folk tale to advertising discourse. Moreover, this approach to the formation of a deductively valid canonical narrative schema affords to dispel Ricoeur's (1989) criticism against Greimas that «movement from one level to the other thus loses all its deductive nature. The complex interplay of these two requirements gives the whole enterprise the ambiguous appearance of reducing narrative to logic or of seeing narrative as a surpassing of logic. The actantial model consists in an ex post facto reconstruction and not in an a priori valid model».

Ricoeur's criticism may be applied to three different areas regarding Greimas's semiotic system.

First, it is applicable at the level of reducing figurative discourse to logical analysis, which concerns the transition from the mid-level semio-narrative structure to the depth level of the semiotic square (based on *Du Sens I*) and the elementary structure of signification or semic axis (based on *Sémantique Structurale*). This transition is of particular relevance for branding discourse insofar as a brand's langue indeed consists of an interplay between a logically coherent text (i.e. its positioning statement or master brand narrative), and figurative discourse (i.e. its advertising executions). In this instance, reduction of a brand's meaning through the redundancy of contextual sememes is indeed a prerequisite for maintaining a uniform brand identity, as will be displayed in section 5.

Second, it concerns the circularity embedded in the notion of an a priori valid model. As Greimas contends, a semiotic trajectory may be constructed either bottom-up or top-down. The model is deductively valid insofar as irrespectively of whether semiotic (re)construction

begins from the depth level or the surface level, the elements of the strata of the trajectory will be related in exactly the same fashion. Let us recall that relations among elements are of primary importance for structuralist semiotics, and not the elements themselves. A structural component may be semantically invested in various ways, but not the relations among components. It is the particular modes of relatedness that furnish brand coherence, and not the visual and verbal elements involved (or, at least, not primarily). This may be perceived as an over-statement and an underplaying of the importance of surface discourse elements, but it will become clearer by allusion to the key structuralist operations involved in building a brand's signification trajectory, as will be illustrated in section 5.

As an extension of the second point, a structuralist system may be perceived as losing its deductive validity while moving, for example, from the surface to the depth level and vice versa, but this holds if we shift focus from modes of relatedness to individual signs. Certainly, a structuralist edifice may not be of predictive validity when attempting to determine why a depth structure's semic element is correlated with a manifest discourse's element, but, as already stressed, what is of primary importance in determining the deductive validity of a structuralist model is not individual components, but their mode of relatedness across strata. As will be illustrated in section 5, deductively valid structural coherence may be defined through a process of chaining multi-strata elements through key structuralist operations. Now, regarding the relationship between the reduction from the semio-narrative to the depth level of signification or the reduction of an actantial model to the logical square (where a concept as actant constitutes the initial term of a pair of contrariety that is the fundamental building block of the semiotic square) the following may be noted:

The reduction of a narrative to a semantic micro-universe is not equivalent to a reduction to logic, if by this statement Ricoeur means a filtering of narrative phenomena through formal logic. Greimas uses the eloquent term «logicosemantic simulacrum» as a proxy descriptor of the essence of the semiotic square. He borrows elements from formal logic, mainly basic notation of logical propositions, in an attempt to formalize the articulations of a semantic universe. He does not reduce structural semantics to formal logic. In fact, he lays claim repeatedly to the role of imagination and culture as key shaping forces of the semantic universe, he draws parallels between Freud's latent and manifest dream content when explaining the relationship between depth and manifest structures, while the starting point and key building block of his square is not logical opposition, but contrariety.

Contrariety involves both conventional and unconventional oppositions. In his dictionary he stresses explicitly that there are various kinds of logic (and informal logic counts among them) and structural semantics is a hybrid form. It does not surpass logic, rather it endorses logical fallacies as actantial probabilities. For example, if for traditional logic P and \neg P cannot hold true at the same time, from a propositional logic point of view, from a veridictory point of view (that is truth-telling) they both hold true at a plane of virtuality or virtual possibilities embedded in an actantial subject as virtual focal narrative point. Let us recall that the deployment of textuality is tantamount to the actualization of latent possibilities, as yet dormant at a plane of virtuality. At the beginning of a narrative an actantial subject is and is not predicated of a quality X, something that must be verified from a veridictory point of

view, while entering in a relationship of conjunction or disjunction with objects of desire and other subjects as actants. The deductive character of the semio-narrative level does not rest with an unequivocal anticipation of surface narrative sequences, but with streamlining anticipation according to narrative probabilities of becoming or transformations among states-of-being through actantial doing, which may be discerned only once contextual elements of the surface discourse have been rendered redundant.

The above analysis raises the crucial issue of how one reaches the «logical» level starting from manifest discourse. Floch, by analyzing mostly print ads in the pharmaceutical category of psychotropic medication found that «this discourse had not been put together in a haphazard way, but according to a very specific encoding, the awareness of which enabled us to avoid taking for granted the incorporation of such details as the stable nature of a line, the dissymmetry of a form, the graphics of a design or the contrast of two values» (ibid: 75). By drawing on recurrent stylistic patterns Floch identified twelve distinctive visual categories in psychotropic drug advertising, viz. «clear vs dark», «shaded vs contrasting», «monochromatism vs polychromatism», «thin vs thick lines», «continuous vs discontinuous lines», «definite vs vague planes», «simple vs complex forms», «symmetrical vs disymmetrical forms», «single vs multiple forms», «high vs low», «layouts in conjunction vs layouts in disjunction», «pictorial vs graphic techniques». However, binarist pairs in the visual sign are not as clear-cut, as Sonesson argues: «Oppositions may be in absentia, or true oppositions, or in praesentia, or contrasts. Thus, in pictures there is no obvious equivalent to the system of (constitutive) oppositions present in the phonological and semantic organisations of verbal language» (Sonesson 2011:44).

These patterns constitute what Greimas would describe as a ‘reading grid’ of an expressive surface structure, an approach he pointed to in his article on the semiotics of the plastic sign, where a marked contrast to his earlier cross-generative trajectory construction of signification takes place.

Another point that merits raising in the context of the aforementioned argumentative procedure employed by Floch concerns the way valorization of the selected surface text of Credit du Nord emerges in the institution of the visual brand discourse (at least at the level of a logo) and by implication the veridictory contract between brand as destinataire and consumers as destinataires. Floch postulates that by virtue of both the atomistic properties of the selected visual signs and their gestaltic interaction, the intended seme of clarity is successfully instituted and the axiological investment of the brand’s identity with /clarity/ is veridictorily recognized by its prospective audience. This assumption does not take into account the salience of the seme /clarity/ as intended key brand positioning element in the target audience’s value system. In fact, Greimas’s original contention is that valorization is instituted in the text, which in a sense is correct insofar as the way a brand assumes value depends on the effectiveness of its advertising texts. However, the valorization of an ad text also depends on the destinataire’s existing value system, which the ad text aims to maintain or change. Thus, valorization is not just a case of the ‘effet de sens’ of an ad text, but also of its ability to change or maintain the destinataire’s value system.

Last, but not least, Floch assumes largely a non product category-wide approach in his semiotic analyses, while focusing on single brands irrespective of category specific value systems. This constrains significantly the validity of the output of his semiotic readings as by not importing a competitive outlook no frame of reference may be discerned, compared to which brand associations may be gauged as being unique, strong and favorable (bearing in mind the three defining criteria of brand associations, as posited by Keller).

Continuing with Floch's structuralist conceptual and methodological toolbox, a crucial concept imported to marketing semiotics from structural linguistics is the commutation test. «Commutation is the use of the relation of reciprocal presupposition between the expression plane and the content plane of a signifying set, between the signifier and the signified» (ibid: 8). «Invariants are correlates with mutual commutation and variants are correlates with mutual substitution» (Hjelmslev 1969: 74). It is only in the process of looking for such correspondences between the two planes of signification that «we begin to take note of the actual visual or auditory qualities that constitute the aesthetic of a given brand» (Floch 2001: 8-9), while a brand's signifying or textual structure emerges through distinguishing between core or invariant and peripheral or variable signifying elements. «This kind of coupling between the expression and content of a language constitutes a semi-symbolic system» (Floch 2001: 75; also see Floch 2000:46).

The distinction between invariant and variable elements of signification is also responsible for establishing different levels of semiotic pertinence or, as termed in the marketing literature, saliency. Pertinence is by no means a disinterested judgment. As Floch stresses, «documenting is in fact an act of construction and the choices that figure into it already represent a certain degree of pertinence» (ibid: 17). Semiotic pertinence is by no means exhausted in brand aesthetics, which pertain to the surface level of signification, yet whose contribution to the entire generative trajectory of signification is undoubtable. The commutation test is of paramount importance in maintaining brand coherence, but may not account for the need for consistency among variable surface ad textual manifestations.

The second key methodological tool operative in Floch's approach to marketing semiotics is the Greimasian semiotic square, a 'constitutive model' that can be used «for synchronic studies, that analyze historical situations, as well as diachronic ones that retrace historical evolutions» (ibid: 11). The starting point for the construction of a semiotic square is the identification of two contrary terms (i.e. good vs bad) that are related as opposite poles in a semantic axis. The initial terms of the square that constitute a relationship of contrariety are further extended to include their contradictory terms. «And there, too, are its 'interdefined' positions resulting from just three relations: (1) the relation of contrariety, represented by a horizontal line as illustrated at the beginning (2) the relation of contradiction, depicted as diagonal lines and corresponding to negation and (3) the relation of complementarity, a vertical line that corresponds to the operation of assertion» (ibid: 21-22).

The second task fulfilled by the semiotic square from a brand semiotic point of view is that soon after projecting relations of contradiction, contrariety and complementarity, the square can be transformed into four quadrants, where each quadrant stands for a distinctive consumer

segment or consumer typology, based on that segment's valorization of the distinctive values represented by each quadrant.

The semiotic square from a communication point of view is complemented by the veridictory square and the veridictory contract. Floch furnishes examples of such squares, the first depicting the four travellers' typologies of the RATP (the Parisian underground) and the second depicting the values of Citroen, that emerged through a semiotic reading of brand-related four year advertising materials (which analysis was later adopted as a universal axiological framework by Floch himself in *Visual Identities*- cf. 2000: 120 and by Semprini, as will be demonstrated in due course):

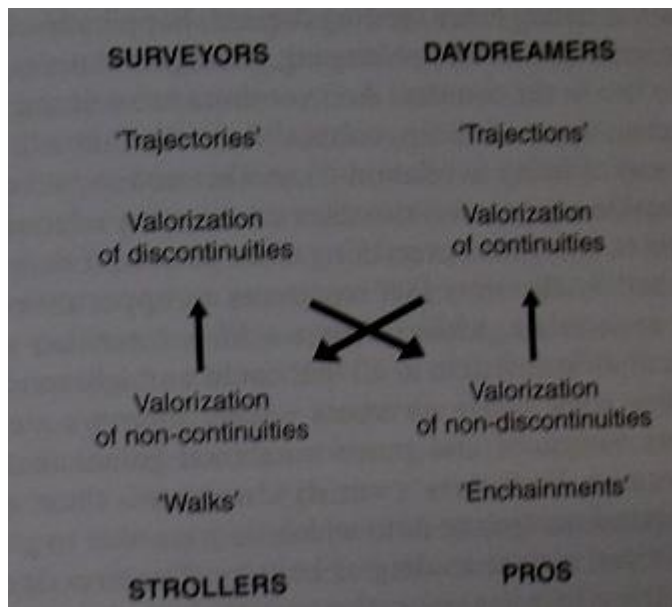


Figure 14: Typologies of RATP travellers projected on the semiotic square (ibid: 25)

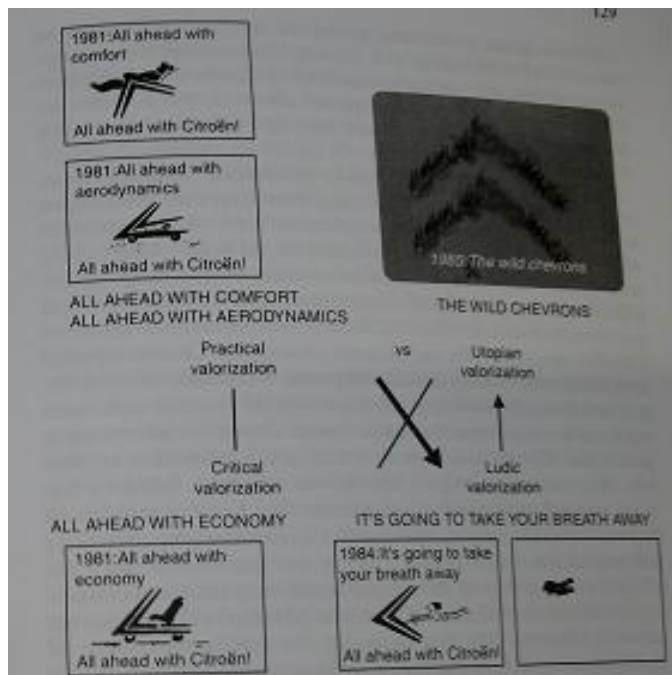


Figure 15: Citroen values as portrayed in its advertising between 1981 and 1985 (ibid: 129)

«The square is at once a static and a dynamic model» (idem). The purpose of a semiotic analysis is to map out «the network of relations organizing the semantic microuniverse» (ibid: 20) of a given product or service category. By obtaining a picture of what holds in a current market predicament the semiotician is capable of determining alternative brand positioning routes. Floch's applications of the semiotic square are undoubtedly exemplary. However, a critical dimension that is definitive of a brand's positioning and identity seems to slip from this applied perspective, viz. the incorporation of a competitive outlook. In both of the aforementioned cases Floch does not bring into the picture competitive brands' (and services in the case of RATP) positioning and communication and concomitantly their respective semic universe, their unique semio-narrative structure and their discursive structure in the form of manifest communications. Thus, his effort seems to be contained in a solipsistic universe, where the sole determinants of alternative brand futures are a brand's past and present communications, irrespective of competitive dynamics.

3.2 Semprini's brand semiotics

Semprini (1992) is perhaps the first author who attempted to furnish a comprehensive brand semiotic theory, by drawing in part on his predecessor Floch. They both assume as their point of departure Greimasian structuralist semiotics, the former rather implicitly and the latter explicitly. Semprini's purpose is to yield a theoretical base for unifying different aspects of branding, including positioning, segmentation, communication, but also to employ this theoretical base, rooted in semiotics, as a platform for long term brand management. The author christens this platform the «brand identity mix», comprising «the ensemble of elements that relate not only to the communications, but also to the wider marketing mix» (1992: 184), as well as to the discourse whereby this mix is manifested.

For Semprini a brand is essentially an intersubjective contract between sender and receiver in perpetual motion (1992: 31-34). Brands constitute semiotic constellations in virtually infinite configurations. The signification of brands, however, is not exhausted in the relationship between sender and receiver, but depends on the concurrence of a constantly shifting competitive landscape, which is compounded by cultural transformations that impact on the value-systems of a brand's audiences. These factors contribute to what Semprini calls by allusion to the 2nd law of thermodynamics the «entropy of the brand» (ibid: 37). Hence, «brand identity is the result of continuous interactions and incessant exchanges amongst three sub-systems that we call encyclopedia of production (sub-system A), environment (sub-system B), and encyclopedia of reception (sub-system C)» (ibid: 40).

Three conditions must be fulfilled for the maintenance of brand identity, viz. credibility, legitimacy and affectivity. The key requirement that must be fulfilled for the maintenance of credibility is brand coherence. Semprini conceives of coherence in a bifurcated manner, as linguistic coherence and as coherence in terms of systems of utilized representations.

Coherence is not a matter of truth / falsity in the sense of propositional logic, but of the internal coherence and the internal logic of a brand (Semprini 1992: 49). This position echoes Greimas's coherentist outlook of the text as logico-semantic simulacrum, even though not explicitly recognized as such by Semprini.

Legitimacy constitutes the continuity or diachrony requirement that must be met so that a brand may be recognized as credible. Lack of sufficient legitimacy in cases of positioning and repositioning, where a «brand seeks to appropriate a certain value or a certain type of discourse» (ibid: 129) is the primary driver behind brand failure. This attribute corresponds to what was termed earlier brand heritage, which concerns primarily the longevity of a brand in a given market and its relative standing in consumers' perceptions by virtue of its longevity.

The condition of affectivity concerns the emotional investment of a brand, which enhances the probability of brand selection and choice.

Semprini's structuralist semiotic heritage emerges quite forcefully in his account of how a brand identity system may be constructed. Evidently writing under the influence of Floch, but also drawing implicitly on basic Greimasian postulates, Semprini contends that a brand identity system is made up of a multiplicity of discourses, which mandates their hierarchical ordering. A brand discourse is made up not only of discrete elements, but also of differential relations among elements. In order to account for these relational structures among the elements making up a brand identity structure, Semprini proposes a three-level structural system that bears considerable resemblance to Greimas's system of signification as a multi-level generative trajectory. This system, exemplified in terms of Levi's brand signification structure, is portrayed in Figure 16:

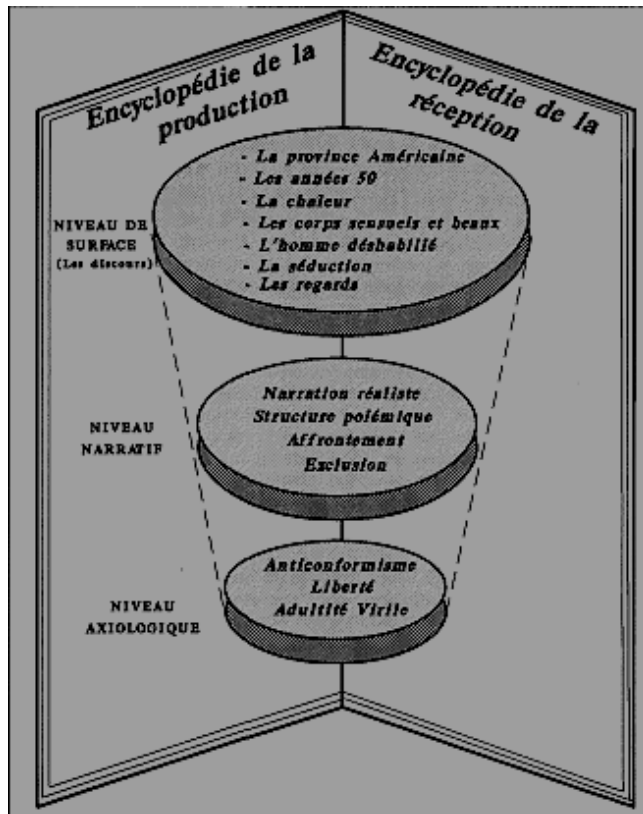


Figure 16: Semprini's brand identity system (1992: 59)

This perspective on brand identity distinguishes amongst three different levels of brand signification, in terms of depth/surface level signification, viz. the base or axiological level (also adopted by Hetzel: 2002), the narrative level and the surface/discursive level.

At the heart of a brand identity system lies the intermediate level of brand narrative. «At this level, the base values⁴ are organized in the form of narratives. A narrative grammar allows for the ordering of base values in relations of opposition» (ibid: 56). The narrative level allows for the endowment of abstract base values with concrete manifest representations, such as fleshing out the values of mastery and virility by situating the Marlboro brand myth in a rough and difficult environment. «The discursive or surface level is where base values and narrative structures are enriched by figures» (ibid: 54).. In other terms, the surface level is where a brand personality is invested with concrete features, such as face, bodily posture, profession, context of action and all the contextual elements that allow for a brand's identification and differentiation. For Semprini, following Levi-Strauss, there is no identity without difference, insofar as in order to confer identity to an object or concept it must be inserted in a system of objects and concepts (echoing Saussure). The figurative rendition at the surface level of a brand's narrative univocity and value identity fulfills exactly this requirement for identity through difference, which was identified in the previous section as one of the most tantalizing concerns in the maintenance of a brand identity structure and a

⁴ Note that in line with Floch, Semprini considers as base values those values in a consumer value system characterized by emotional and abstract associations, which in Keller's terms constitute secondary brand associations.

master brand narrative. For example, in the case of Levi's brand identity «the actor (figurative level) who incarnates the hero (narrative level) who stands for anticonformism and individual liberty (axiological level) is hardly ever the same throughout the various advertising films» (idem). Even though the kernel of a brand's signification lies at the axiological level, the discursive level is responsible for fulfilling the condition of affectivity and furnishing what Semprini calls an «iconic» identity to the brand, thus confirming the mutually presupposing nature of depth and surface levels, as postulated by Greimas. Semprini implicitly recognizes that iconicity is a matter of contrived similarity or metonymic contiguity when he stresses that «the music of Dim or the logo of McDonald's are the keys for accessing the respective brand universes, which they evoke metonymically» (ibid: 57).

At this juncture, it is particularly important to stress that what is of particular value in Semprini's approach and by default Greimas's structural semiotics, which condition conceptually and methodologically this approach, is the ability to identify opportunities and threats for a brand's positioning and the possibility for maintenance of a brand identity not only at the manifest level, but as a system of interactions amongst three discrete, yet interlocking levels of analysis and synthesis. Thus, when pretesting an advertising film or a new brand identity system in terms of its appeal/credibility/differentiation among a prospective consumer pool, not only isn't it sufficient to gauge consumers' preference for certain stylistic elements regarding the manifest text of a brand narrative, but what is of primordial importance is how such elements relate to the underpinning narrative structure and brand image attributes as a brand's depth grammar.

What such a multilevel analysis points to is that the focal point of branding research and the prospect of maintaining brand identity is not simply a matter of components or elements, but of the modes of their multilevel inter-relatedness. Additionally, in comparison with the standard branding models in the marketing literature reviewed so far, this semiotic approach enhances the prospect of attaining coherence and consistency by integrating surface level stylistic elements in the brand identity system with brand image attributes, while attempting to justify the reason why they constitute integral elements. For example, assuming as our frame of reference Keller's brand knowledge structure (cf. Figure 7), what is lacking in the otherwise comprehensive picture of a brand identity system is the additional linkages to manifest ad textual elements. Given that the process of building and maintaining a brand identity system is a process of co-creation between sender and receiver, as portrayed in Kapferer's Brand Prism (cf Figure 4) and further explored by Elliott and Ritson (1995) and by Semprini from a semiotic perspective, omitting ad textual stimuli from a brand knowledge structure amounts to excluding the actual communicative interface whereby a brand identity is fleshed out. Regarding the mode of exposition of the interlocking levels in a brand identity system in the context of Semprini's account, what is still missing is an account of the modes of relatedness amongst the elements of the three levels, especially given that a simple laddering approach does not suffice in the face of highly figurative, tropical discourses. As an attestation of the indispensable role performed by surface level signs in building and maintaining brand image, Semprini cites the figure of the Marlboro man. Additionally, one

may add anthropomorphic figures and cartoons, such as Kellogg's Tony the Tiger and the liquid cleaner Mr. Muscle.

Semprini complements his semiotic account of brand signification by operationalizing Floch's brand value system in discrete product categories and brands. Floch (2001) constructed a brand value system by extrapolating key value territories that emerged through a semiotic analysis of four years of Citroen's advertising communication materials. The fundamental building blocks he identified consist of the practical and utopian values, the former corresponding to functional aspects of a brand's ownership and usage (comparable to Keller's primary brand associations), whereas the latter corresponding to more abstract values (comparable to Keller's secondary brand associations). By projecting these fundamental values on a Greimasian semiotic square, Floch came up with their opposites in the form of critical and ludic values respectively, which were adopted by Semprini. This exercise furnished a universal brand mapping model, as portrayed in Figure 17:

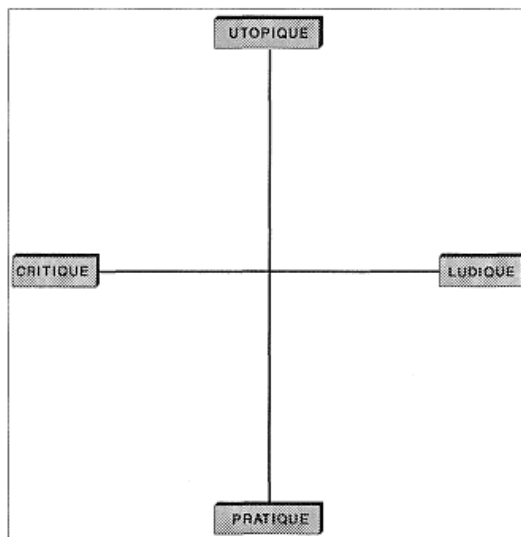


Figure 17: Brand values semiotic map (Semprini 1992: 79).

By virtue of their highly abstract nature, these four value dimensions may be interpreted in various ways, based on the product category and the sociocultural predicament at hand.

In greater detail, utopian values do not concern some sort of «higher humanity ideals», as stressed by Semprini, but a specific teleological framework underpinning the product category of concern. «If the practical valorisation has a tendency to be product-oriented, the utopian valorization is above all future-oriented» (ibid: 82). The utopian dimension is what foregrounds the evolution of a brand throughout its temporal manifestations. Critical valorization concerns the evaluation of the details of brands partaking of a product category by comparison to an external frame of reference and a hierarchy of values. Ludic valorization concerns the affective and emotional values attached to a brand. These generic value dimensions and concomitantly each value quadrant may be supplemented by more concrete ones, depending on the concerned category under scrutiny. The usefulness of such an abstract level of value mapping consists in its ability to accommodate brands from different categories, thus portraying a value framework from a more encompassing brandscape

perspective. Additionally, the merit of such a value framework lies in pointing to alternative directions for brand repositioning, either due to maturity or to shifting consumer values and category drivers. However, «the limitation to a particular set of universal values constitutes a form of reductionism, of which the advantages in terms of comprehension and clarity do not attain to counterbalance the inconveniences linked with psychodemographic variations» (Pasquier 2005: 25).

3.3 Danesi's brand semiotics

Even though Danesi is not approaching branding explicitly from within a structuralist framework, a considerable portion of his metatheoretical apparatus bears considerable resemblance to structuralist approaches, as will be argued in due course.

A particularly appealing facet of Danesi's approach to branding consists in his emphasis on the peculiar logic underpinning branding discourse, which he describes as poetic logic. «The term 'brand logic' is being used more often in place of 'brand image' in the relevant literature to provide a conceptual framework to explain the 'logic of branding'. But, in my view, the more appropriate term is 'poetic logic' [...] the logical reasoning involved is hardly deductive or rational, it is rather based on a poetic sense of the meaning nuances built into words» (Danesi 2006: 114)

The exemplary manifestation of this poetic logic that inheres in brands' signifying kernels is the metaphorical dimension of branding language. «Brands are essentially metaphors [...] As such, they become themselves constructs for further rhetorical processes» (ibid: 115). By virtue of their inherently metaphorical dimension brands are expressed through advertising as «workings of the unconscious» (ibid: 74), thus confirming a tentative parallel between what I call the «brandwork» and Freud's «dreamwork»⁵. The cogency of this parallel is further augmented by Danesi's elaborating the ad text in terms of connotative chains (Danesi and Beasley 2002: 103-107) or the associative syntagmatic relationship among signifiers in a given text. In order to understand Danesi's approach to brand signification and further illustrate its derivation from structuralist semiotics, let us proceed with an overview of its key conceptual components.

Danesi's striking resemblance to Greimas's generative trajectory of signification is evinced while drawing a distinction between surface and underlying textual levels, which may be conceived as a novel rendition of Greimas's distinction between surface and depth structures, accompanied by respective grammars. The underlying level is defined as «the hidden level of meaning of an ad text, also called the sub-text» (Danesi and Beasley 2002: 42). The surface level is «the physically perceivable part of an ad text» (idem). The authors also identify surface textuality with the conscious, denotative dimension and the subtextual layer with an unconscious, connotative dimension (ibid:129). This distinction harbors a potential

⁵ For further qualification of the parallel between «brandwork» and «dreamwork» see my paper «Representing the animal: A semiotic/psychoanalytic approach to the strategic importance of anthropomorphism in branding» (available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1999716)

misunderstanding insofar as «overt» textuality as advertising language or manifest brand discourse, as against the sub-text, is highly figurative. By virtue of its figurative status, it is open to the connotative dimension, hence the distinction may become blurred. In fact, it may be claimed that if such a relationship held, it would be the other way round, viz. the subtext as a brand's intended positioning constituting the denotative dimension, which is manifested on the surface through a connotative chain, which reflects the previously drawn distinction between the logical organization of a brand's positioning statement as against its figurative ad textual manifestations.

In his later work *Brands* Danesi seems to depart from his earlier conception of textuality. As against the position adopted in *Persuasive Signs*, where the manifest text and subtext are aspects of an overarching textuality, in *Brands* he defines textuality as «the form they [my note: ie. brands as significations systems, based on the terminology employed by the author] are given in advertising campaigns can be called their 'textuality'» (Danesi 2006: 70), thus equating textuality with the manifest level. The manifest level of a brand's discourse was also identified in *Persuasive Signs* with the concept of narrative. Yet, subtext is retained as a brand's signifying kernel, albeit in some sort dislocated from textuality as an all-encompassing process, involving both the manifest text and the sub-text. «And although the details of the ads will change, in line with changing social trends, the subtext tends to remain the same, since it is the level at which the signification of a brand is embedded» (ibid: 74). Again, it may be claimed that these concepts constitute a simplified version of Greimas's levels of the trajectory of signification. The risk involved in reducing the levels of the trajectory consists in missing out on important aspects of a brand's surface and depth grammar, the transitions among strata and the operations of semantic transformation involved during transitions.

The aforementioned connotative dimension is complemented by the concept of connotative chains. Connotative chains «constitute the underlying level of the ad's textuality [...] There are various kinds of connotative chains that characterize subtexts. The most common is the one that is forged from narrative sources; i.e. it constitutes a chain of meanings linked together by themes, plot-lines, characters and settings suggested from the implicit storylines built into the surface presentations» (Danesi and Beasley 2002: 104). Danesi's connotative chains also resonate the chains of homologation in Greimas's terms, which are responsible for linking analogically elements across the strata of the generative trajectory, as will be displayed in due course. In fact, connotative chains constitute a simplified version of Greimas's homologation chains.

From a brand planning point of view, what appears to be lacking in the process of coining connotative chains is an explicit linking of these chains with the motivation of the advertiser, which consists in a logically structured positioning statement and at the same time the plane of denotation, compared to which, one may make sense of the tropical configurations uncovered through connotative chains. Without taking into account a brand's positioning statement as semiotic constraint in the formation of connotative chains, the latter are likely to surface in all sorts of dissonant ways. This threat of dissonance vis a vis a brand's intended positioning (also called aberrant positioning or aberrant decoding) poses a considerable

challenge to the postulate that «the higher the number of connotations a brand generates, the greater its psychological force» (Danesi 2006: 37), a standpoint that is also shared by Keller, who postulates that richness of brand associations is a key determinant of equity strength.

The ability of an advertising text's signification to avoid yielding to unlimited semiosis is attributed by Danesi to a set of constraints, such as «conventional agreement as to what a sign means in specific contexts, the type of code to which it belongs, the nature of its referents» (ibid: 43), a pragmatic approach to signification that is also prevalent in Eco (1976) and, with social phenomenological overtones, in, Sonesson's account of Husserl's Lifeworld . At this stage it suffices to note that the assumption of conventional agreement between sender and receiver and the codedness of the sign is not enough in accounting for the poetic deviance of the advertising text, which occasionally challenges tropically this conventional agreement, rather than ratifying it, as Mick & McQuarrie have repeatedly shown. The need for semiotic constraints is inextricably linked to the ambiguity of a text, or the ability «to generate various kinds of subtexts from the same layout» (Danesi 2006: 101). The interpretive risk inherent in decoding, as. «the process of uncovering a subtextual meaning in an ad text», is also present in the process of structuration (as will be argued in section 5) during encoding, insofar as the more tenuous the constraints the higher the ambiguity,. The difference between decoding and structuration concerns a shift in focus from extra-semiotic codes to the strata in a brand's trajectory of signification that must be crossed in order to bring about this «uncovering» , as well as the modes of relatedness among the elements of different strata, which is not accounted for by the process of decoding. Decoding and structuration are complementary processes, which implies that in order to enable decoding we must first give an account of brand text's structuration, as will be endeavored in section 5.

The typology of levels of signification on offer, as already stressed, constitutes a reframing of semiotic structuralism, as previously pursued by Floch and Semprini.

3.4 Other structuralist approaches to brand image creation

Cossette (1973) offered a simple approach to the planning process of what he formulated as advertising or functional image, which essentially consists in a basic structuralist perspective, inspired by Saussure's structural linguistics, of how brand image is created through advertising communication.

By drawing on the fundamental Saussurean premise of the sign as a relationship between signifier and signified, the planes of denotation and connotation and the syntagmatic/paradigmatic axes of combination and selection of signs respectively, he carves a semiotic model that is characterized by accessibility and comprehensibility to practitioners.

As an extension of the traditional commutation test, he seeks to establish rules whereby signifying units are chained [the process of enchaînement].

In contrast to the approach pursued in this endeavor (see section 9) he locates denotation in a natural language, in which «the signified is strictly tied up with the referent» (Cossette 1973:

97). He localizes connotation in mythical and symbolic signifieds, which he deems concern the realm of rhetoric. The proposed model is enriched by recourse to Durand's earlier classification of rhetorical schemes and tropes, such as metaphor, metonymy, allegory, hyperbole into five rhetorical operations that correspond to the syntagmatic axis (repetition, adjunction, substitution, suppression, exchange) and five types of relationship that correspond to the paradigmatic axis (identical, similar, opposed, different, falsely homologous), which yields the grammatical backdrop of what Cossette calls «functional image», that is image, which is geared towards persuasion.

By blending semiotics with rhetoric he suggests a nine-step process of advertising image planning, as illustrated in Figure 18.

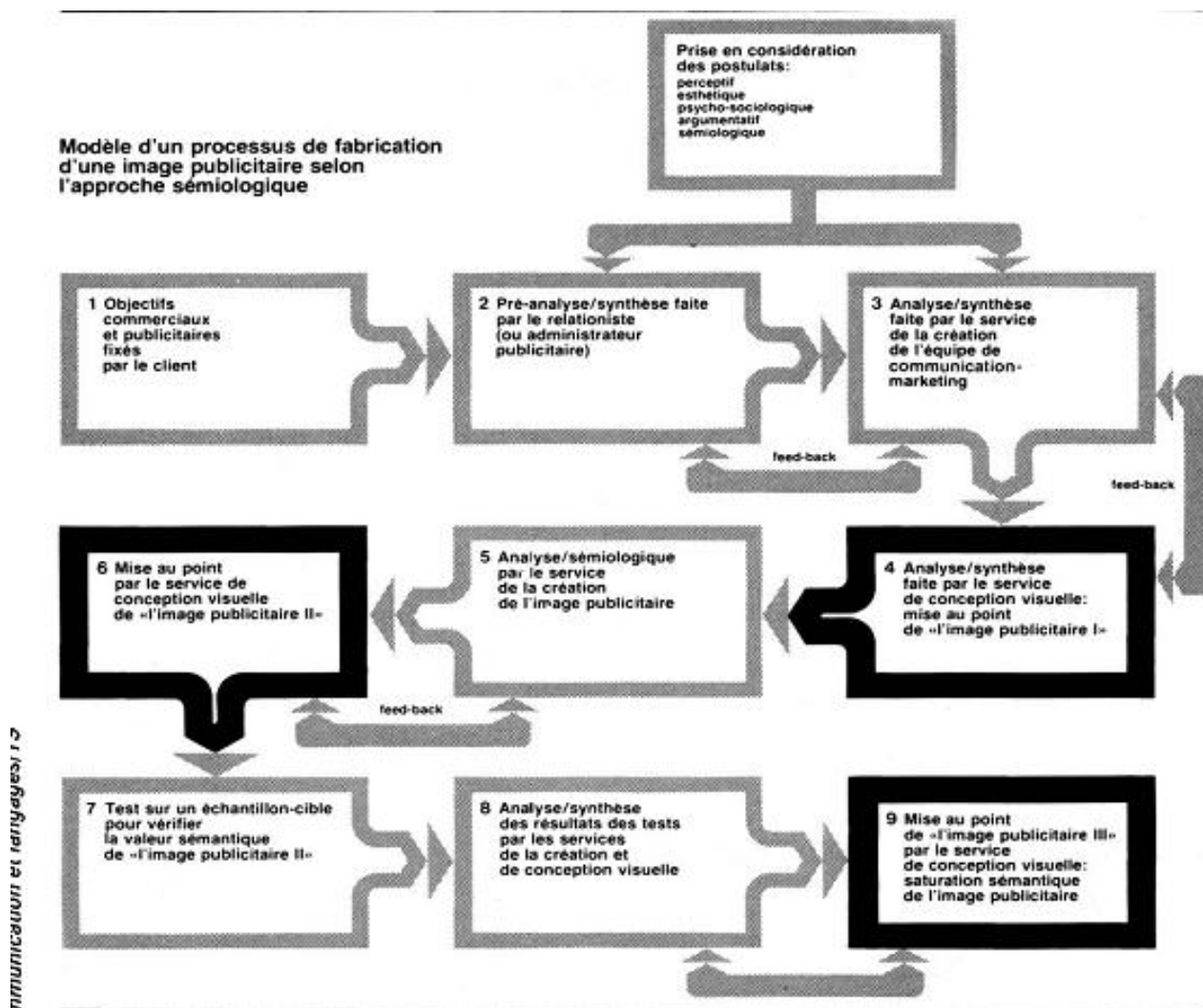


Figure 18: Cossette's model of the creation of advertising image

The process aims at streamlining perceptions of the employed signs in advertising communication among all stakeholders involved in a brand image creation process (at least during the encoding stage), viz. the client service/account planning team of the advertising agency, the brand management team and the market research team. Streamlining of perceptions among the involved stakeholders is effected by assuming as a common ground for

the appropriateness of the employed stimuli (mainly visual signs or iconemes, as defined by Cossette) a grid containing salient criteria, such as harmony, equilibrium, grain, orientation, angle. The proposed iconemes are evaluated in terms of their degree of pertinence against the intended signifieds or functional images.

Hetzel adopted Floch's adaptation of Greimas's trajectory of signification in branding by assuming the three strata of the trajectory as the key pillars of his brand semiotic approach. In his book *Planet Conso* (2002) he divides the three strata of signification of a brand identity system into the axiological or depth level, which comprises the key source of identity or the values that bestow continuity on a brand, the narrative level, which allows for the staging of a brand's values and the discursive or surface level, which enriches the narrative with figures.

Pasquier (2005) attempted to account for the focal areas of research in various semiotic approaches alongside the strata of the generative trajectory, as follows:

Level of analysis	Content	Concepts and models
Study of significations	Research of signs- carriers of signification	Signifiers, signifieds, denotation, connotation, proof of commutation
Study of narrative structures	Analysis of different functions of discourse and the roles of actors (different phases of communication)	Narrative schema
Study of depth structures of signification	Research of elementary structures of signification of an entire discourse (research of differences that give rise to signification)	Semiotic square

Table 1: Research streams alongside the various levels of the trajectory of signification (Pasquier 2005; my translation)

As Pasquier notes, the first level (study of significations) concerns the identification of the signifying function of signs in communication. The signifying units may be limited to a single sign (a word or an object in a message) , but may also correspond to a group of signs (a phrase or an ensemble of objects).

The second level (study of narrative structures) corresponds to the form of discourse. Any textual form may be organized according to the narrative schema. By virtue of being inserted into a narrative structure, the narrative schema must accomplish the task of segmenting every narrative into discrete phases, independently of their chronological ordering. What is of primary importance is the logic of discourse.

The third level of analysis concerns the depth signification of messages.

Pasquier correctly points out that the majority of branding related semiotic studies concern advertising communications, not strictly connected with a holistic approach to brand signification, as put forward by the aforementioned key authors in brand semiotics. By focusing partially on single aspects of the trajectory of signification, semiotic studies may become oblivious to the fundamental principle that brand communication is the manifestation of a brand's depth grammar, its brand identity structure and its image edifice, which precede and ground brand communications. As Mick et al (2004: 16) stress in their seminal global overview of semiotic approaches to various marketing related research areas "semiotic researchers have conceptualized branding as a multifaceted contract between the manufacturer and the consumer, focusing especially on communication and meaning in packaging, names/logos/trademarks, and advertising" , but not necessarily with how these various sources of signification are chained across the different strata of the trajectory of brand signification.

Approaches to brand image creation have also been coined by practitioners in the field of marketing semiotics. Let us briefly describe some of these approaches, based on their direct relevance to brand image research (and not research focusing simply on decoding advertisements or encoding packaging stimuli) in order to demonstrate how key concepts from key structuralist thinkers, such as Eco, Jakobson, Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Saussure have been put to practice, even in a piece-meal and selective, yet indubitably insightful fashion..

Valentine (2001) of *Semiotic Solutions* draws on Jakobson's focus on metaphor and metonymy in order to yield a heuristic mechanism for encapsulating emergent codes on which a brand myth may be predicated, which she calls «Imaginative Metonymy» .

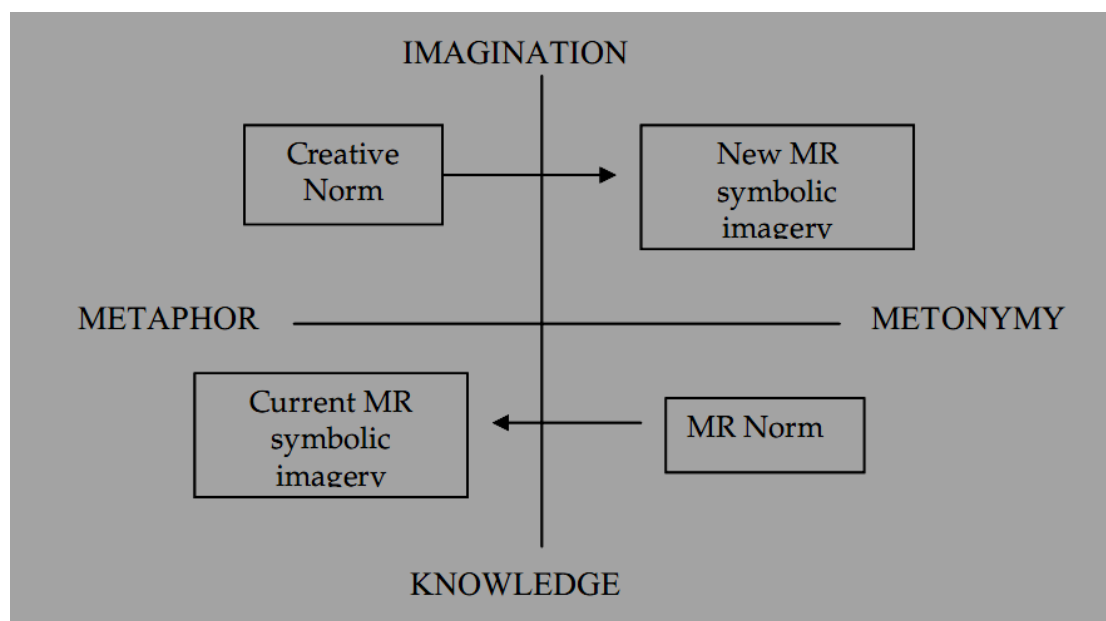


Figure 19: The imaginative metonymy map (Valentine 2001: 24)

«Currently MR is stuck in the bottom half of the quadrant, working to the codes of knowledge; either expressed metonymically, or through tired and cliché'd symbols and metaphors. If however, we shift to the codes of imagination, which also encompass change, ambiguity, liminality, feelings and hanging loose, we have a new symbolic register, Imaginative Metonymy» (idem).

Evans (1999) illustrates how the structuralist notion of «Code», popularized by Eco in his *Theory of Semiotics* (1976) may be operationalized in applied marketing research with view to segmenting cultural codes into residual, dominant and emergent.

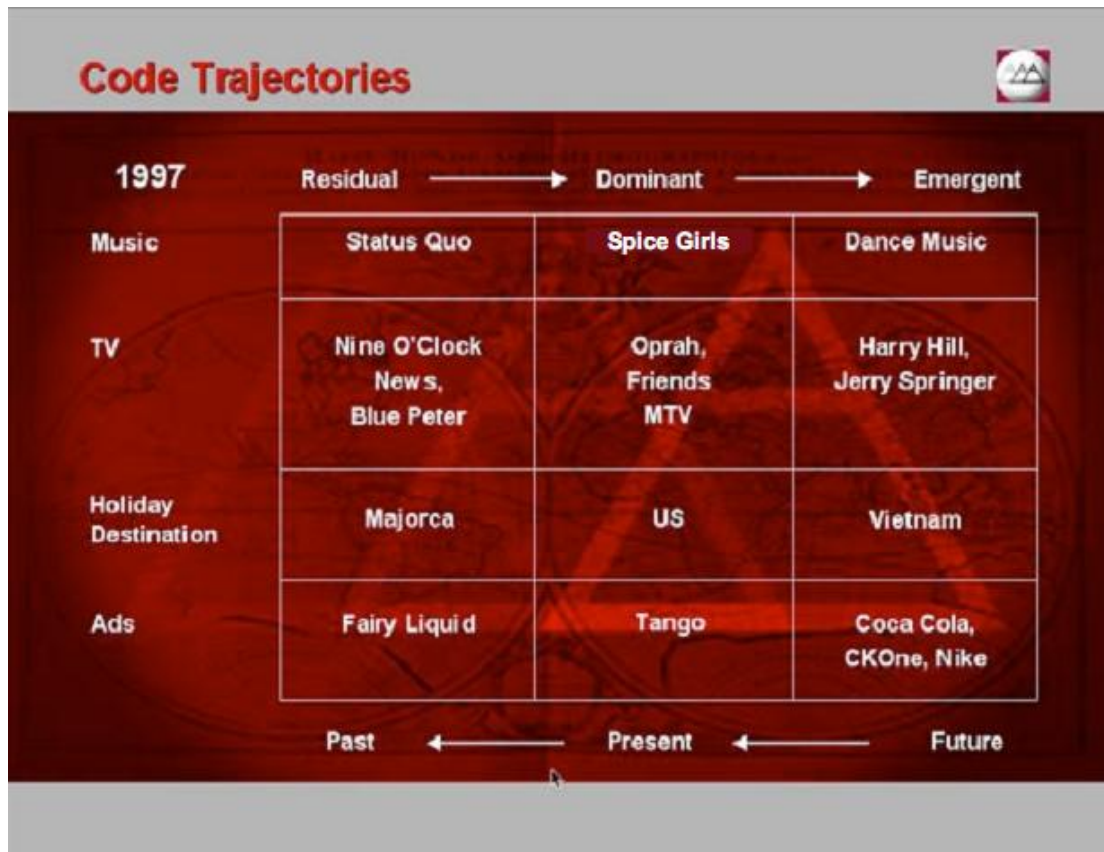


Figure 20: Code trajectories (Evans 1999)

Another interesting model that sprung up in an attempt to create a global semiotics based brand planning process that links cultural codes (defined as «cultural software»; Evans and Harvey 2001: 176-177) with brand image attributes and advertising stimuli in a competitive setting was furnished by the Added Value agency for Guinness beer. The agency analysed verbal, visual and audio stimuli of TV and print ads and dominant, emergent, residual codes in six representative markets, thus yielding a verbal and visual snapshot of global beer meanings.

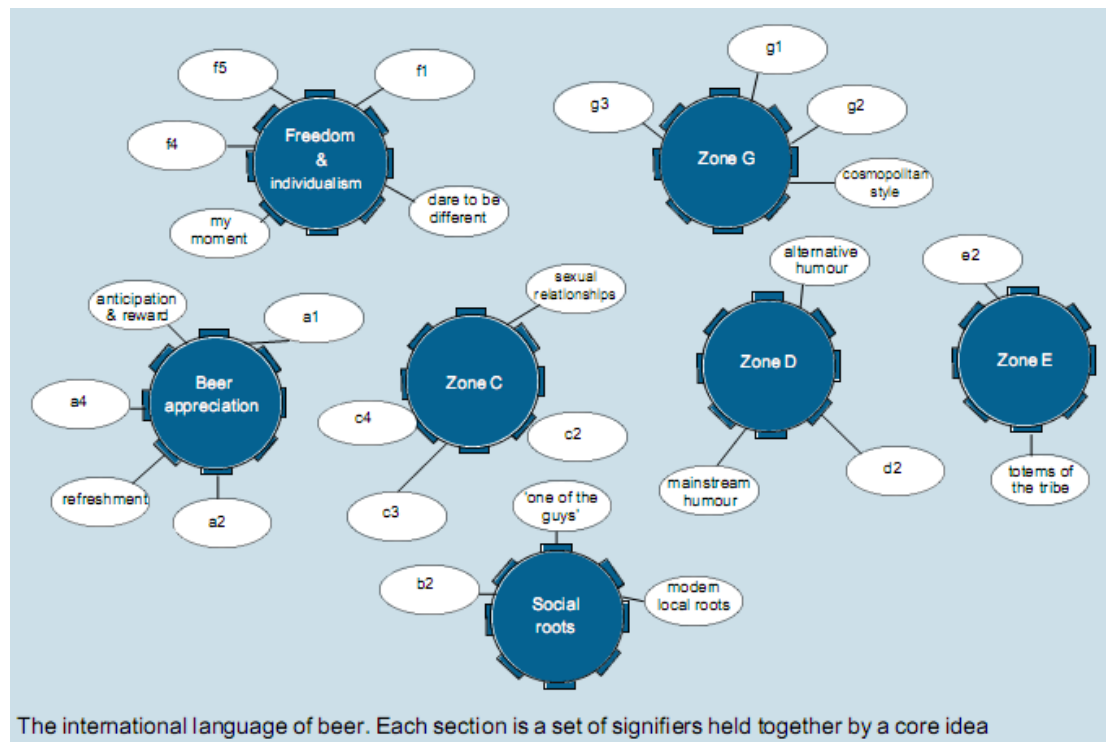


Figure 21: International beer codes (Harvey and Evans 1998)

The ensuing mapping exercises resulted in twenty-six codes, which were narrowed down to seven clusters. The project culminated with the creation of a competitor advertising decoding toolkit, which was adopted as an advertising planning platform by Guinness's brand management teams across the globe.

Alexander (1996) drew on Levi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology in order to deconstruct the mythic nature of brands. According to Strauss the basic function of a myth is to resolve oppositions. By analogy, brand personae, such as the Persil mum, afford to relieve cultural tensions, by reuniting them in a brand structure, such as «the 'distance' and detachment of a factory-produced, high-tech washing agent on the one hand, and the 'closeness' of a caring, loving member of the family on the other. From this contradiction, we could define the Persil myth by an expression such as caring detachment» (Alexander 1996). Alexander contends that the stronger the oppositions, the stronger the myth and hence the more impactful the resulting brand positioning.

Analysis of codes is a standard enterprise in applied brand semiotics. Complementary to the above furnished examples of the analysis of advertising, brand personality and cultural codes from brand semiotics practitioners, design codes analysis of a packaging structure is normally undertaken with view to positioning differentially a brand on shelf. Cavassilas (2009) of Semiopolis offers the example of Smoothies' adopting an infantile design code in order both to differentiate itself from Bio products, and emit its key positioning statement involving a wholly fresh, without any preservatives brand proposition.

4. What is the relevance of the generative trajectory of signification for the organization of a brand's image structure?

In terms of a marketing approach to branding, a brand personality consists in core and peripheral image attributes. Occasionally, brand personality is portrayed in the form of concentric circles, where core image attributes populate the center of the concentric circular system and peripheral image attributes the outward layers of the system. However, such approaches are not informed by a metalanguage, such as the one offered by structuralist semiotics, but constitute metaphorical portrayals rooted in common parlance.

The value of informing the brand creation process by drawing on a semiotic paradigm rests with furnishing such a metalanguage.

Thus, in structuralist semiotic terms, a brand's semantic kernel as core brand identity consists in a semic micro-universe. The key brand image attributes or semes that make up its semantic edifice constitute nuclear semes, which, while enriched with contextual semes or classemes in discrete communicative contexts, make up sememes as a brand's core and peripheral semantic territory respectively. Nuclear semes constitute the minimal units of signification of a brand langue or its core image attributes. What was originally conceived by Greimas in *Structural Semantics* as a semic micro-universe and particularly a semic category was redefined by Rastier in *Interpretive Semantics* as semic molecules, which combine at least two semes. The semic micro-universe makes up a brand's depth grammar, which becomes manifested through the elements and the particular syntax of a surface grammar in the form of two additional strata in the generative trajectory of signification [*parcours génératif*⁶], viz. semio-narrative and discursive structures (cf. Greimas and Courtés 1979, 160).

Semio-narrative structures contain the depth meaning of a discursive structure and «furnish the form of its organization». In terms of brand structure, semio-narrative structures constitute what has already been termed as brand master narrative. However, a brand master narrative should not be viewed solely as a canonical narrative schema. This is a crucial difference between literary discourse and brand discourse. A brand master narrative includes a brand's key positioning statement, featuring its nuclear semic brand image structure. They are distinguished from discursive structures as the latter are situated at a more superficial level in the generative trajectory. Discursive structures allow for manifestation at the discursive level of semio-narrative structures in the face of an enunciative predicament (Greimas and Courtés 1979, 364-365). Discursive structures correspond to the manifest texts of a brand master narrative, such as advertising (TV, print, radio, outdoor, ambient), but also experiential events (i.e. roadshows, in-store sampling/competitions), sponsorship and any form of brand communications. Further to the above let us portray the model of a brand's generative trajectory of signification, by interpolating the discrete brand semiotic strata on Greimas's *parcours génératif*:

⁶ Let it be noted that Rastier (1989) redefined the three levels of the *parcours* into micro, meso and macrosemantic levels.

Generative trajectory				
		Syntactic composition		Semantic composition
Semio Narrative structures	Depth level	Fundamental syntax	Fundamental semantic structure	
	Surface level	Surface narrative syntax	Narrative semantic structure	
Discursive structures	Discursive syntax		Discursive semantic structure (themes, figures)	
Brand Generative trajectory				
		Syntactic composition		Semantic composition
Brand semic molecules Brand master narrative	Depth level	Fundamental syntax	Fundamental semantic structure	
	Surface level	Surface semio narrative	Narrative semantic structure	
Ad filmic text	Discursive syntax		Discursive semantic structure (themes, figures)	

Figure 22: A brand's generative trajectory of signification

5. The key structuralist operations involved in the maintenance of a brand's depth grammar

The above model represents a topline view of how a brand's various semiotic strata of signification hold together. In order to yield a methodological brand image creation research framework from a structuralist semiotic point of view, which links all three strata of the generative trajectory of signification, we must display the key structuralist operations involved in bringing about brand signification. These operations consist in structuration, homologation, isotopy, reduction, redundancy and recurrence. Prior to analysing the role of each operation in greater detail let us describe how they interact and at which level(s) of a

brand's generative trajectory with view to maintaining a brand's image kernel, starting from the surface and moving progressively to depth grammar:

Structuration transpierces all levels and confers continuity in signification by subsuming all strata under a coherent structural backbone. Structuration is effected by establishing homologies among elements of the various strata, while homological relations allow for the discernment of isotopies. Isotopies are established through the operation of recurrence of common themes. Recurrence is incumbent on the operations of reduction and redundancy.

The process of structuration may be portrayed schematically as follows

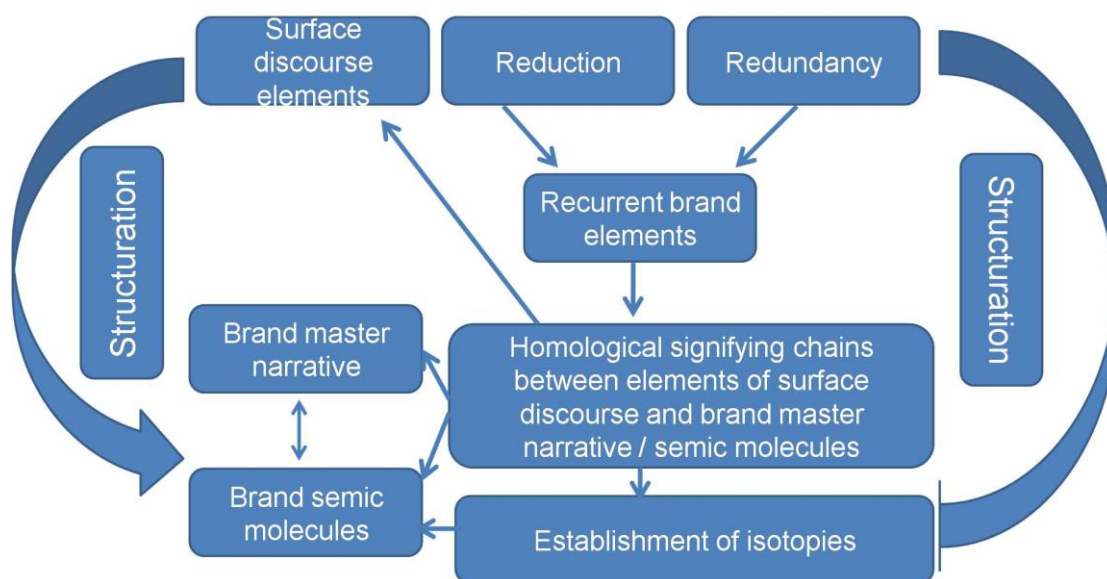


Figure 23: The process of structuration

In greater detail:

Structuration «is one of the procedures of semantic analysis [my note: semantic analysis corresponds to Greimas's system of structural semantics], responsible for carrying out, on the one hand, the reduction of parasyonymic sememic occurrences into classes and, on the other hand, the recognition of the homologation of semic categories (or sememic oppositions)» (Greimas and Courtés 1979, 360). Structuration's dual role, thus, transpierces the entire generative trajectory insofar as it is concerned both with the establishment of homologies between semic categories at a deep level and the classification of recurrent sememes at a surface level (as underpinnings of recurrent parasyonymic lexemes- even though, as Rastier notes, sememic recurrence is not exhausted in parasyonymic relations). In fact, if there is a way of organizing the semic micro-universe of a brand's discourse as master narrative in the context of an ad filmic text, then structuration entails starting from the classification of recurrent elements of the surface discursive structure (both on an intra-filmic, as well as inter-filmic level, ie recurrences throughout variable same brand executions), reducing them to sememes through a (provisional) rationale of contrariety (where the contrary poles of the ensuing pairs will also encompass sememes that emerge from competitive brand discourses),

further decomposing sememes into classemes and nuclear semes and ultimately showing which semes constitute a brand's signifying kernel. This is the classificatory part of the process of structuration and is concerned with effecting redundancy to peripheral cues on the surface of an ad filmic text, which results in the required reduction whereby sememes and semes may be recognized as such.

Homologation is an operation of semantic analysis that is applicable to all levels of the trajectory. It may be considered as a rigorous formulation of analogical reasoning. In its simplest form it concerns a relationship of the type $A:B::A':B'$, where term A stands in an analogical relationship with term A' by virtue of their mode of relationship with terms B and B' (Greimas and Courtés 1979).

The operation of homologation entails the construction of homological relationships not only on each specific stratum of the generative trajectory, but also on an inter-strata level, for example by pairing sememes with lexemes or units pertaining to other modes of figurative⁷ discourse (i.e. shots, sequences, but also individual audiovisual elements). It is through the ultimate formation of a complex chain of homologation that brand signification may be mapped out and issues of brand coherence and communicative consistency may be tackled not only at the level of an individual ad filmic text, but, even more importantly from an iterative brand planning perspective, throughout variable ad executions (and certainly this process of structuration may extend and encompass other vehicles in an Integrated Marketing Communications plan).

Isotopy is a multifariously used concept in structural semiotics. At the heart of the concept lies the notion of recurrence, which may concern either the plane of expression or content or both. Eco (1976) expands the notion in order to encompass even purely stylistic isotopies, while in *Semiotics and the philosophy of language* (1986) he furnishes an expanded list of isotopies. Its main use consists in discerning correspondences among the various strata of the generative trajectory. In terms of correspondences between the figurative and the thematic or the discursive and the narrative levels, various combinations of correspondences are possible, such as between two or more figurative elements and a single narrative element or between different complexes of figurative elements and different themes within the same text, as will be illustrated in this paper by reference to the ad filmic texts of Johnnie Walker (cf. sections 7 and 8). Isotopies furnish a reading grid that allows for a homogeneous reading of a text (Greimas and Courtés 1979:197-198).

Recurrence is the «iteration of occurrences in the interior of a syntagmatic process, which manifests, from the point of view of signification, regularities that serve the purpose of the organisation of an enunciated discourse. The recurrence of a certain number of semic categories, for example, institutes an isotopy» (Greimas and Courtés 1979: 308).

⁷ Notice that the term «figurative» has been employed in two senses throughout Greimas's writings. In the initial sense employed in *Structural Semantics* (1966) it refers to the nature of the elements that make up the discursive level, whereas in *Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts* (1989d) it refers to modalities other than verbal discourse, mainly of the visual register, but not addressing the moving image.

Reduction is «one of the operations of semantic analysis that is integral to structuration. It consists in the transformation of an inventory of sememic occurrences of parasynonymic⁸ nature, into a constructed class, which is invested with an arbitrary denomination (or semi-motivated) at the level of a descriptive language» (Greimas and Courtés 1979, 309).

Redundancy is a term that first appeared in the context of information theory. «It designates for a given quantity of information the distance between the minimal number of signals (or operations of encoding and decoding) required for its transmission and the number of signals actually utilized» (Greimas and Courtés 1979, 308-309). Redundancy is geared towards the maintenance of sememic regularities.

These key operations that have been singled out from Greimas's massive structuralist semiotic system are primarily responsible for maintaining a brand identity structure and a semic nucleus, consisting of core brand image attributes. In the ensuing sections I will demonstrate how the application of these operations allows for the construction of a signifying chain that cuts across the strata of the semiotic trajectory with view to uniting elements of a brand's manifest discourse with its master narrative and its semic brand image nucleus.

6. The master brand narrative in focus and the role of the énoncé in brand communications

Semio-narrative structures are situated in between a brand's depth grammar and the surface discursive level of the ad text. Insofar as brand signification emerges in the process of communication, the function and the mode of the organization of the ad signifiers at the semio-narrative level is crucial for the maintenance of a master brand narrative. However, Greimas's generative trajectory should not be conflated with narratological models⁹. The semio-narrative level is an integral stratum in a brand's signification process, and not capable of accounting per se of how brand signification morphs along the trajectory. Approaches that seek to reduce a brand's signification to "story-telling" constitute over-simplified forms of the potential embedded in Greimas's multi-level *parcours generatif*.

In this section Greimas's narrative grammar will be displayed in order to illustrate how ad signifiers function in the maintenance of a brand's master narrative.

Narrative is defined by Greimas (1971) as a sequence of narrative énoncés, where énoncés are equivalent to units of discourse or signifiers at the plane of the form of expression. «Two conditions, however, must first be fulfilled: a) the narrative énoncés must possess a

⁸ Greimas employs parasynonymy, ie quasi-synonymy, in two respects, first with regard to surface structure lexemes (and the same would apply to any elementary unit irrespective of modality, ie colorem, cineme, videme, vesteme etc) and second with regard to depth grammar sememes. Insofar as the plane of immanence that regulates the function of sememes requires the manifest discursive level of lexemes for the constitution of a synonymic relationship between sememes, the comparison of lexemes with view to establishing a relationship of parasynonymy rests with their parallel reading from a sememic point of view.

⁹ For a strictly speaking brand narratological model see Dahlen et al 2010:

determined and foreseeable canonic form, and b) the relations between énoncés which constitutes them in sequences of énoncés must be made explicit» (Greimas 1971, 798). The canonical form of the énoncé implies the presence of invariants, which Greimas traces in the syntactic function of the verb (while drawing on Tesnière's syntax) as the nucleus of the énoncé. The subject and object related by the verb are called actants. Let us recall by drawing on the figure of the generative trajectory that actants are elements of the semio-narrative syntax and not of the manifest discursive syntax, and by implication they should not be confused with the actors involved, for example, in an ad filmic text. Actants may be anything from humans, non-human objects, concepts and in our case brands.

For example, the main actor in Johnnie Walker's ad film is the android (see section 7), whereas the actantial subject at the semio-narrative level is the brand itself. Greimas further postulates that «the narrative énoncé and narrative as a whole allows for the interpretation of the narrative model at the epistemological level, as one of the fundamental forms of the organization of the imaginary» (ibid. 799). Thus, a master brand narrative concerns the recurrence of a particular network of relationships among actants as a semio-narrative syntactical and semantic reconstruction of units of discourse or elements and sequences of énoncés. At this juncture Greimas distinguishes between narrative and non-narrative énoncés. Let us sharpen this distinction based on the semio-narrative and discursive levels of the brand's trajectory as the manifest énoncé or unit of discourse, as already described and the latent énoncé or the énoncé at the semio-narrative level or the énoncé behind the énoncé pertaining to the brand's master narrative. In terms of communication, the latter, according to Greimas may be an object or a message (or both).

Without going into further details about the notation involved in the semio-narrative syntax, let us conclude this section with reference to the way whereby the actantial structure shapes the messages or énoncés of manifest communication by imposing a logical order on the surface imaginary text (or ad filmic text). In fact, this intermediate level of semio-narrative structures (of which a more expansive outlook is furnished in *Du Sens I*) matches in marketing practice the intermediate level of the production of branding discourse as the advertising concept, occasionally coupled with the film's storyboard which explains how the elements of the advertising concept are inscribed in distinctive shots and sequences of the ad filmic text (also coupled with notes about production techniques involved in bringing about the intended signification, such as close-up, fade in/out, reverse shot etc.). The advertising concept is the intermediary stage between a brand's positioning statement that portrays its semic microuniverse and its manifest ad filmic discourse, in the same fashion as a brand's master narrative mediates between its depth image grammar and its textual manifestations. Brand coherence and the maintenance of a brand's core identity concern primarily the successful encoding, recurrence and recognition of such nuclear and contextual image attributes in a brand's master narrative.

7. Commentary on the binarist organization of a brand's depth grammar and the perils of approaching it in a non brand categorical framework

Semes are relational attributes. Hebert (2011) identified a variety of possible structural relations, alongside different criteria. For example, a relation may be reflexive if it links a term to itself or transitive if it links a term to one or more terms. Simultaneity (or concomitance) is the relation between terms associated with the same initial and final temporal positions and succession is the relation between terms in which the final temporal position of one term precedes the initial position of the other term. A presential relation is a relation in which the presence or absence of one term indicates the presence or absence of another term. Identity is the relation between terms that have all identical characteristics. Alterity is the relation between terms that possess no identical characteristics. Relations of inclusion comprise mereological, set and typological modes. Mereological or holistic inclusion involves wholes (such as a word) and parts (such as the letters in the word). Set inclusion involves classes (such as the class of words) and elements (such as a particular word). Typological inclusion involves types (models, such as the sonnet genre) and tokens (more or less complete manifestations of a model or type, such as a particular sonnet that is more or less regular). However, in terms of relations of homologation Hebert confines them in analogical oppositional pairs, even though the analogical status of the corresponding terms of the homological pairings may also be of other types of relatedness, such as complementarity (as Greimas and Courtes stressed), but also a metaphorical one. In fact, given our previous focus on marketing metaphoria, homological pairings are particularly useful for chaining surface discourse terms with corresponding brand image attributes or nuclear semes. Such a metaphorical connectivity is also recognized by Rastier (1989).

Insofar as a brand's semic microuniverse consists in a set of image attributes (that reflect attributes and benefits linked both to direct product experience and intangible associations stemming from the metaphorical inscription of the brand's values), then brand image constitutes a brand's depth grammar. This is an important aspect that is lacking from recent structuralist semiotic accounts (i.e. Bianchi 2011) of the function of marcomms, which attempt to reconstruct the semic universe of surface discursive structures by reading the text backwards, albeit disregarding the motivational status of the text as intended brand master narrative, implying the preexistence of a semic microuniverse of which the ad filmic text is a manifestation. Such a unidirectional reading (i.e. top-down) risks not only missing out on the vexed issue of brand coherence, but of imposing a seemingly coherent structure that is completely incompatible with the brand owner's intentions (not to mention the probability of fit with the destinataire's decoding). In fact, this is another topos where communicative dissonance is likely to spring up as an outcome of the operation of reduction, viz. focusing on a set of surface stimuli and reducing them to binarist pairs. As Eco pointed out with regard to Greimas's analysis of the universe of Bernanos (cf. Greimas 1966, 222-224), «he undoubtedly brings to light the oppositions which can be found in the text on the level of a certain working hypothesis; but nothing prevents another reader, using that text in a different way, from singling out another key to reading and therefore of reducing it to different oppositional values» (Eco 1976, 83). This point is reiterated in the *Philosophy of language* as potentially

conflicting readings of a text in terms of thematic isotopies: «Greimas has further stressed the possibility of conceiving of texts able to provide manifold and mutually contradictory isotopic interpretations» (Eco 1986, 192). Complementary to this considerable gap in the reading strategy, the aforementioned analysis is prodigiously obfuscated by the attribution of semic status to surface structure elements (man, woman) of the Camay print ad employed by Eco in his original analysis (Eco 1972). The aforementioned approach, which does offer a more expansive outlook in terms of the variety of modalities involved in brandcomms, even though in passing, is plagued by the same self-contained extrapolations that undergirded previous top-down reconstructive attempts (i.e. Floch 1985), that is without establishing a product categorical frame of reference. This is further augmented by reducing a brand's semic microuniverse to binarist structures, which did constitute Greimas's method of the logical arrangement of signification (i.e. semantic axis 1966, semiotic square 1970), but which have since been seriously challenged by connectionist approaches to the organization of signification in consumers' memory (which approach is favored by Eco in terms of opting for Quillian's model in *Theory of Semiotics* and the *Role of the Reader* and by Rastier 1989). «Semiosis, far from following tidy linear axes, may take place through networks» (Jensen 1995, 166). In fact, as attested by latest advances in consumer research pertaining to the mode of formation of brand knowledge structures and brand image, the organization of attributes and stimuli as sources of attributes is better accounted for through associative networks (i.e. Teichert and Schontag 2010), rather than binarist pairs. Indicatively I am citing the output of such an associative network from primary consumer research data stemming from a project that I handled personally in the past:

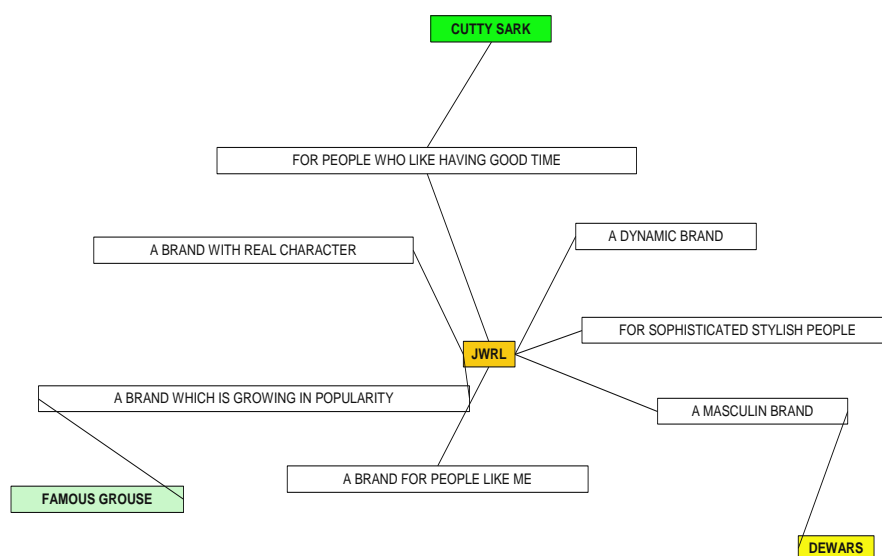


Figure 24: Example of quantitative research associative network from proprietary research in the alcoholic drinks market (identity of the client not disclosed for confidentiality reasons)

A similar rationale to the amply used associative networks in applied brand image research underpins Rastier's application of Sowa's conceptual graphs. «The nodes of these graphs are

labelled after semantic units of all sorts (including semes, semic molecules and sememes). Their links are labelled after semantic primitives» (Rastier 1989: 61).

The above do not imply that binarist readings do not constitute useful heuristics in the exploration of tentative hypotheses¹⁰, «but in itself would not be enough» (Eco 1976, 94). However, claims regarding the value of binarist approaches to the organization of brand signification, such as «the binary analysis of cultural data provides a window onto the myths and archetypes that structure the collective unconscious» (Oswald 2012, 13), coupled with an unfortunate obfuscation of the constructionist underpinnings of structuralism with metaphysics and a complete absence of any coherent model of brand equity¹¹, contrary to programmatic declarations, certainly do not constitute an advancement compared to traditional structuralist semiotic approaches, such as Floch's (2001) and Semprini's (1992),

The above-mentioned advances that resonate from a branding research point of view Eco's proclivity for using Model Q (cf. Eco 1976, 122-125) at the expense of a multiplicity of semiotic squares (which entails a cumbersome activity with doubtful results, given that interlocking squares may encapsulate a multiplicity of interpolated terms, but may not yield an outlook of the relative importance of semes as nodes in a network) and corroborate earlier assumptions by Keller (2003;2008) about the role of associative networks in portraying the organization of a brand knowledge structure in consumers' memory, point to definite directions for the formulation of structures of the énoncé during the encoding phase. This associative rationale also constitutes a fundamental building block in cutting edge research into the mode of formation of a brand langue and its storage in consumers' memory apparatus, as illustrated in Zaltman and Zaltman's *Marketing Metaphoria* (2008).

8. Homological signifying chains as the starting point in brand image creation

In order to illustrate the crucial operation of homologation let us assume as our interpretive substratum two highly impactful and awarded in terms of effectiveness commercials of the leading whiskey brand Johnnie Walker in Diageo's portfolio, viz. «Fish» (2003)¹² and «Android»¹³ (2006).

¹⁰ Both binarist and connectionist approaches are common currency in applied branding research.

¹¹ For a semiotic account of brand equity see Rossolatos 2012c

¹² Accessible through <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NH35waex4s&feature=related> (downloaded 3/2/2012, 18:00 pm). See Appendix 1 for script.

¹³ Accessible through <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcdSgS6EkDA&feature=fvsr> (downloaded 3/2/2012, 18:00 pm). See Appendix 1 for script.



Picture 1: Frame from JW «Fish» TVC



Picture 2: Frame from JW «Android » TVC

The first oppositional pair that springs to mind while attempting to reconstruct both films through the logical square (tentatively employed in the context of exploring hypotheses about homological relationships and not as the ultimate analytical tool as per section 6) is the one between /human/ and /non-human/, even though the semic universe making up the brand's core identity and periphery is certainly not exhausted in such an elementary pair.

In fact, this is a key threat embedded in the operation of reduction, viz. the non sufficiently discriminating and over-generic nature of the resulting pairs. Albeit, this elementary level of analysis suffices for the argumentative purposes of demonstrating the usefulness of homologation as a key operation in the process of constructing a brand's structuration through the employment of reduction and redundancy of its discursive structures. In the case of «Fish» the opposition is evinced in the form of /human/ vs /fish/, while in the case of «Android» the opposition is evinced in the form of /human/ vs /robot/. Now, these oppositions are posited as such in the context of the brand's elementary structure of signification, prior to being

embedded as actants in the brand's master narrative that links elements of the depth structure (i.e. semes, classemes, sememes) with elements of the surface structure (lexemes, videmes or shots, sequences).

The top-down reconstruction takes place against the core positioning elements or nuclear semes of /savviness/ and /progress/ embedded in the brand's master narrative, which fuel motivationally the interpretive directionality of the brand's discursive manifestations. These elements of the brand's depth grammar should be kept in mind as the semiotic reconstruction proceeds along the strata of the generative trajectory of signification.

Homologies may be established between semes, sememes and key shots, wherein they are anchored, against the background of the acceptable scope of homologation as previously described. The resulting homological pairs and ultimately the homological chain that will consist of the stringing of these pairs is equivalent to an account of a brand's coherence, but also of how this coherence emerges through the maintenance of communicative consistency throughout various énoncés or expressive units.

In order to construct a homologation chain it is prudent to start by reducing elements of the surface structure through a semiotic square.

The semiotic square is a way of logically organizing the events of the plot of the surface structure or the brand's narrative program. Its key dimensions, as described in Section 3, consist of opposition, contrariety and implication¹⁴. Given that the square is a dynamic structure, it allows for mapping the transition of brand related meaning through its axes.

The bottom axis of the square constitutes the 'neither/nor' or 'neutral zone', where brand meaning partakes of neither of the opposites of the key terms of the initial pair of contrariety.

In our example, the neutral axis consists of the semantic relationships between /non-human;/non-fish/ and /non-human;/non-android/ for the two commercials respectively. Let us point out that we are still situated interpretively in the first stage of the reconstruction of the brand's signification, while simply translating images into lexemes (the image of fish into the word fish), while not making any statements about the relationship between surface structure lexemes with more abstract image associations as part of the brand's semantic nucleus.

At this primary level of analysis it is feasible to describe the brand's enunciative structure as the progressive transformation among states of being, which constitute movements around the square. The énoncé is split into three stages, each one of which constitutes a separate transition phase in the communication of the semic structure as master brand narrative from destinateur to destinataire. Let us recall that the reconstruction of the brand's semantic transformation as passage through identifiable states of being does not consist in a reflection of the linear sequencing of the manifest plot's structure, but to its opening up to virtual

¹⁴ For a more analytical outlook of the dimensions of the square see Rossolatos 2012a

possibilities of becoming. But in the case of the filmic texts at hand, the noted transitional phases are inscribed in the discursive surface.

At the primary level of analysis the phases in the transition amongst the three stages of becoming as movements in the respective axes of the square for each of the two films consist in (A1) (i) the initial co-existence of /fish/ and /human/ as non-identifiable species, (ii) manifested through shots such as humans swimming underwater like fish and a close-up to a human/fish's genitalia manifesting absence through shading, which gives its place (A2) (i) to a relationship of contrariety between /fish/ and /man/, (ii) evinced at the surface structure in the sequence bridging the shots of being underwater and being on the coast, which results in (A3) (i) a clear opposition between fish and man, as relationships between /man/ and /non-man/ and /fish/ and /non-fish/, also united by relationships of implication between /man/ and /non-fish/ and the inverse pair, (ii) as evinced by the opposition between walking on the coast on both feet, as against swimming in a fish-like fashion underwater. In the case of the «Android» the respective dimensions, phases and corresponding textual elements may be rendered as a passage from (B1) (i) an initially clear opposition between /android/ and /human/, (ii) as evinced in the android's monologue «I'm faster than you, stronger than you, etc» to (B2) (i) a state of co-existence, or the robot's contemplating what is like to be human, (ii) «to love, to despair», culminating in (B3) (i) a relationship of contrariety, (ii) as evinced by the invitation of the android to the human to become immortal by keep walking.

Based on the above reconstruction of the basic relationships between transitional phases in the brand's énoncé and the shots/sequences whereby they are discursively manifested we may draw an initial chain of homologation in the following form: (A1)i:(A1)ii::(B2)i:(B2)ii, which may also be read in the brand's langue as to be neither human nor fish nor android is like emerging from underwater living to the coast and loving/despairing/hoping, (A2)i:(A2)ii::(B3)i:(B3)ii, which may be read as a human's being contrary to either a fish or android is like «keeping walking» as a transition from underwater being or an android to a struggling human and (A3)i:(A3)ii::(B1)i:(B1)ii, which may be read as a human's being in a relationship of opposition to either fish or android is like walking on both feet on a coast or not being as fast and strong as an android.

These homologations are crucial for the production of brand signification through its manifest discourse and the discernment of a brand related canonical narrative schema. The underpinning of a brand specific canonical narrative schema consists of recurrent themes¹⁵ through variable ad executions. Through recurrence as a manifestation of communicative consistency brand coherence is maintained.

¹⁵ Rastier (1989: 55) defines generic themes as «semantic classes that are manifested in the text through the recurrence of their members». He draws a sharper distinction between three semantic classes to which correspond three general themes (ibid: 55-56). The taxeme is the minimal class wherein sememes are interdefined, for example cigarette, cigar and pipe are opposed to each other at the level of the taxeme //tobacco//. Domain is a more general class that includes various taxemes. Dimension is a class of even greater generality; It comprises oppositions such as //animate// vs //inanimate//. The recurrence of a generic theme is tantamount to the establishment of an isotopy.

9. Brand image creation as a function of isotopies against the background of intra-brand diachronic communication

Further to the construction of homological chains let us now proceed with identifying (i) an isotopically recurrent theme, where «theme», following Metz (1971, 503;513), is conceived as the depth structure of a film, between the two films as an inter-filmic homology between surface structure shots/sequences and a nuclear seme as core image attribute of Johnnie Walker's signifying kernel or semantic microuniverse (ii) a pluri-isotopy¹⁶ as two recurrent themes on an intra-filmic level through the establishment of a chain of homologation (and the analysis may be expanded both intensively and extensively). Thus, assuming the same classification of surface structure shots/sequences as previously demarcated, and denoting as the isotopically recurring nuclear seme of /progress/ (which is assumed to be intended as such during the encoding of the filmic text by the brand owner as a projected user personality trait that reflects back on the brand as a brand personality image attribute) in both films as (A4) for 'Fish' and (B4) for 'Android', we may discern the following inter-filmic homology: (A2)ii:(A4)::(B3)ii:(B4). This homology accomplishes task (i). Task (ii) may be accomplished by assuming, this time in the context of the 'Android' a pluri-isotopy, in the form of the nuclear seme of /progress/ functioning in complementarity with the seme /savviness/. /Savviness/ is translated parasynonymically as brand savviness connoting expertise, for example, in the distillation process, involving the right balance in the blend of ingredients, the distillation period and natural conditions etc., which reflects back on the consumer, who is instituted by implication in the brand's discourse as /savvy/ who opts for a safe, credible, tried and tested brand choice. /Progress/ recurs isotopically in at least two instances, first in the aforementioned (B3)ii, which constitutes a verbal syntagm or a performative utterance in the imperative mode in the filmic unity and second in the key visual of the android that stands *aliquid pro aliquo* for progress per se, which may be denoted as (B5)ii. Insofar as both (B3)ii and (B5)ii concern the level of form of expression, they may be classified as one expressive unit (B3ii, B5ii).

/Savviness/ recurs isotopically in at least two instances in the ad filmic text, in the sign of the library embedded in the opening shot featuring the contemplating android (B6)ii and in the context of his self-proclaimed attribute of immortality (B7ii), in which the divine attribute of omniscience is engrafted by definition (perhaps enabled by the co-presence of B6ii as immortality might simply be an instance of pure materiality without evoking any cognitive aspects). This expressive unit may be classified as (B6ii, B7ii).

Pursuant to the above the pluri-isotopy in the Android film may be recognised through the homologation (B3ii,B5ii):/progress/::(B6ii,B7ii):/savviness/.

¹⁶ Rastier redefined the term as poly-isotopy, while retaining the same operative meaning (Rastier 1989: 280).

10. How do brand image attributes morph in the light of narrative and discursive structures?

Based on the preceding analysis, brand image attributes are equivalent to figures. They have a relatively stable meaning, which varies according to different ad textual contents. Based on the selected example of JW ads, the isotopically emergent brand image attributes or nuclear semes from the two commercials are /saviness/ and /progress/. The way these image attributes function as recurrent elements of JW's brand identity structure, and yet differ in terms of their contextual semantic investment may be portrayed as follows:

	Stable meaning	Contextual variation
Nuclear seme /saviness/	<p>Brand personality: Know-how in production process</p> <p>User personality: A consumer who knows how to make a correct choice</p>	<p>Fish: Knows the secret of evolution.</p> <p>Android: Omniscience</p>
Nuclear seme /progress/	<p>Brand personality: A constantly evolving brand</p> <p>User personality: Someone who constantly seeks to overcome his self, reach for maximum potential</p>	<p>Fish: Evolution of the species as myth of origin</p> <p>Android: The end of evolution of the species</p>

Table 2: Brand image attributes as recurrent nuclear semes through differential contextual semantic investment

Thus, the master brand narrative of JW involves the brand as the key actant (while refraining from using Proppian narrative typologies, such as 'hero' and 'helper') who, at the semio-narrative level, is responsible for maintaining a canonical narrative schema. The canonical narrative schema concerns the textual institution of a set of background expectations about the brand. These expectations concern an anticipatory structure on behalf of the target audience as a recurrent depth structure in terms of nuclear image attributes or the nuclear semes of /saviness/ and /progress/. Even though I had no direct access to Diageo's internal brand planning documents prior to the top-down reconstruction of the brand's generative trajectory of signification, published information about the brand's positioning confirms that these two nuclear semes actually constitute the brand's core positioning, especially among the core target group of males 25-34 yrs. old¹⁷. These core image attributes of JW are operative in the

brand's depth structure (at least during the period when the concerned ad executions were aired).

On a surface discursive level these recurrent nuclear semes are evinced differentially as contextually enriched semes or sememes, either through the visual of an omniscient robot or through a filmic sequence suggesting that the brand knows the secret of evolution. By the same token, the recurrent image attribute of /progress/ is contextually evinced either through the discourse of an android who stands for the end of progress or through a filmic sequence that portrays the evolution of the species. The maintenance of brand coherence as recurrent nuclear brand image attributes is effected by rendering redundant contextual elements that are not pertinent in terms of the brand's canonical narrative schema, such as the visual of the butterfly in the Android TVC or the visual of the sphere in the Fish TVC, thus reducing meaning to its bare essentials, that is to the invariant elements of brand signification. This process represents structuration and the way whereby a brand's semantic micro-universe and positioning is maintained diachronically throughout variable ad executions.

It is important to note that what functions figuratively in the surface brand discourse is not the visual signifier, but the nuclear seme. Contrary to what is standardly theorised in visual semiotics as figurative discourse, that is incumbent on the visual sign, what is primarily figurative in branding language is the nuclear seme as abstract concept or element of the form of the plane of content. As Giroud and Panier (1975) argue, the figure is envisaged from the point of view of virtuality. A core brand image attribute or nuclear seme, by virtue of its being part of a motivated sign system constitutes a virtual space that may be semantically invested in contextually variable ways. This is not the same as the distinction between denotation and connotation. A brand sign system is metaphorological in essence, hence the figurative nature of a nuclear seme. The stability of the meaning of an image attribute as recurrent brand identity backdrop is not equivalent to the denotative plane of a brand's langue, but to a relative degree zero of signification, as conceptualized by Groupe μ (1992). The general degree zero is furnished by the prior knowledge of a code that links elements of a manifest text (irrespective of modality). The local degree zero is furnished by the isotopy of an énoncé. Groupe μ uses the term isotopy in a Greimasian sense, as the grounding of an idea in a totality of meaning or an entire text. The local degree zero is the element pertaining to such a territory of an énoncé, by virtue of a structure that is particular to that énoncé. This is the case where visual plastic énoncés engender internal regularities. They also stress explicitly that isotopy is a very useful concept, especially for advertising, among other discourses, which are characterised by polysemy and interpretive openness.

Contextual variations as distantiations from this relative degree zero constitute deflections of a brand's internal structure or mirroring effects of a logico-semantic simulacrum. By virtue of brand image attributes' ability to be fleshed out in different narrative programs or TVCs

¹⁷ See Elen Lewis, *Walking the wiser walk*, Brand Strategy, September 2005; Steve Mustarde, *Johnnie Walker: The story behind keep walking*, Campaign Nov. 2008; JW case study (<http://marketing-case-studies.blogspot.com/2008/07/keep-walking-campaign.html>); JW PR case study (<http://www2.prnewswire.co.uk/cgi/news/release?id=189933>)

against a master brand narrative, they constitute what Girou and Panier call «discursive configurations» (1975: 95). The inventory of possible discursive configurations amounts to a brand's discursive dictionary. «The discursive dictionary may be presented as a stock of themes and patterns» (ibid: 96). According to Eco (1976) isotopies do not occur simply at the thematic level or, in our instance, at the level of a semic nuclear structure, but also at the level of surface discourse elements, which he calls stylistic isotopies. Thus, a brand's dictionary includes not only its core image attributes, but also contextually enriching elements. Contextual brand elements (i.e. the visual of the butterfly in the aforementioned JW android film) attain to enrich a brand's narrative structure, but, as already noted, only to the extent that they do not compromise the integrity of either uniformly recurring surface discourse elements or the underlying image structure.

11. Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was to add to the existing structuralist semiotic branding research by showing how key operations in the trajectory of signification function in a way that integrates brand signification throughout the semiotic strata. The underlying objective was to demonstrate how a brand maintains its structural coherence and communicative consistency as recurring brand image nucleus throughout variable ad executions. This approach may be enriched and extended by bringing into play a competitive outlook. The process of structuration and the involved operations of recurrence, redundancy, reduction, homology and isotopy, as defined by Greimas and Courtes and enriched conceptually by structuralist semiotic thinkers, such as Eco and Rastier, were recruited to this end.

The issues of brand coherence and communicative consistency constitute time-hallowed concepts in the marketing literature. Through a constructive dialogue with branding models that have been formulated within the marketing discipline, structuralist semiotics may yield conceptual and methodological frameworks for building and maintaining brand image over time.

Appendix 1- Johnnie Walker TVC scripts

Johnnie Walker «Fish» commercial script

(<http://www.framestore.com/#/Commercials%20London/JohnnieWalker,Fish>)

Fish starts with the camera moving over the surface of a blue-green ocean. It submerges and we catch our first glimpses of what appear to be multitudes of shoaling fish. The images are familiar from nature documentaries - the 'fish' darting in different directions, the many acting as one, the shoal seeming almost an entity in itself. As the camera closes in on the shoal, we realise that the creatures we are seeing are not fish but people - arms by their sides, legs together - driving themselves through the water with great speed and grace.

The pace picks up as we see the people near the surface, and then they start to leap out of the water. From above we see not one or two, but many, many men and women shooting out of the water like dolphins playfully racing each other. It is exhilarating and impossible. We finally return under the water, now in the shallows. One of the men touches his foot down onto the white sand. He stands up. He walks forward onto the beach of a tree-lined bay, others emerging to follow him. As he moves purposefully inland, we fade to black and the slogan 'Keep Walking'. This brief description of the action of the spot barely does justice to the beauty and power of the images - you really do have to see it to get it.

Johnnie Walker «Android» commercial script

(<http://lemonsblack.com/johnny-walker-human/>)

An android sits in a library in a futuristic setting utters "I am faster than you, stronger than you. Certainly I will last much longer than you. You may think that I am the future. But you're wrong. You are. If I had a wish, I'd wish to be human". Outside now, the android turns in the sunlight. "To know how it feels to feel". The android grabs a butterfly in his hand, then releases it. Back in the library the butterfly provides a point of continuity for the soliloquy. "To hope, to despair, to wonder, to love. I can achieve immortality by not wearing out».

"You can achieve immortality simply by doing one great thing"— Keep walking

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The Efficacy Of The Virtual: From Che As Sign To Che As Agent

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Abstract

*This paper begins by tracing a path through salient developments in semiotic theory regarding the visual. It examines the political functions of cultural and discursive semiotic systems through which graphic images and gestures are appraised, interpreted and given significance: it is not about what they mean, but rather how they construct meanings and how such meanings accrue importance. I consider the simultaneous material and social nature of both vision and representation. My primary focus is with the visual and social performance of the image of Che Guevara as derived from Alberto Korda's famous 1960 photograph, *El Guerrillero Heroico*. Using this image as a heuristic in the case of Che Guevara's image in East Timor during the time of Indonesia's dictatorship and independence struggle, I will outline how the performative aspect creates a space of "ethical possibility" through visualizations. I will tease out anthropologist Alfred Gell's (1997) radical notions of the agency of art and explore the possibilities of Donald Preziosi's (2003) elaboration of Roman Jakobson's addition of a fourth sign type, namely artifice. The inclusion of artifice is underwritten by an understanding of A. J. Greimas' (1987) semiotic square as a way to introduce complexity into binary or dual forms. I posit the square is as a dynamic, fractal-like construction. Building on this foundation, I articulate possible connections between artifice and the notion of the virtual as described by a philosophers and academicians from C.S. Peirce to Rob Shields, as a contribution to this theorizing and explore its relevance to the Che image phenomenon. Overall, it is the desire to find ways to speak about the *Guerrillero Heroico*'s social and political activity and resonance that drives the theoretical contributions in this piece.*

*"Aixo era y no era"
(It was and it was not).*

Majorca storytellers

"In the contradiction lies the hope"

Bertold Brecht

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Introduction

My search for a way to talk about an image –an image that began as a photograph but one that soon assumed different social, cultural and political functions: the banner in a parade, the graffiti in a camp, and a bikini on the catwalk among other things –led me to semiotics. The media vary as do the times, places, and contexts where everyday people occupy and find themselves interpellated by some rendering of Che Guevara’s face that recalls the Korda photo. The key question became how to speak about an image tattooed on Mike Tyson’s midriff in the USA for example, at the same time as it is a Bolivian miner’s hardhat icon, a Swiss cigarette logo, Chinese actress Fan Bingbing’s ‘look,’ fodder for artists such as Vik Muniz, and a mural for indigenous Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, Mexico. Can these disparate figurations of Che’s image be brought into conversation with each other without arbitrarily reducing them?



Often semiotics is applied within sociological and anthropological paradigm with an ontological tendency toward reductionism. Knowledge is more than mere information: it encompasses understanding the articulation of information within a constellation of human interests and societal influences beyond a utilitarian paradigm that characterizes so many academic disciplines implicated in technocratic, individualistic and consumerist worldviews. As an instrument to further understanding of our multi-dimensional being in the world, semiotics needs to be correspondingly multi-dimensional. It’s useful to recognize how the “academic apartheid” (Sandoval, 2000 p.4) of artificially dividing disciplines (nutrition from medicine being a classic example) actually generates exclusionist epistemologies. Reductionism as a partial vision of a phenomenon stimulates dogmatism. Semiotics has the potential to provide transdisciplinary inclusivity and dialogue, but it must be applied so that the multidimensionality of a phenomenon is kept in view, as well as its limits.

What is the potential offered by semiotic theory as a way to “see” this image and push its limits conceptually and functionally to show how it is not only socially reinvented as part of a “counterpublics” (Asen and Brouwer 2001; Coleman and Ross 2010) discourse but also to see how it

authorizes and motivates actors in turn? The purpose of this piece is to engage the thematic/discursive multiplicity essential to Korda's image of Che Guevara while still having some structure to orient myself around it, I approach representation as something that does more than *stand for* other things. I understand representation in this case, as inseparable from *acting* and *being*, it is kinetic, and mimetic. Understanding the term this way gives me permission to incorporate different ways of speaking to/with the object (theoretically and practically in terms of modality i.e. alternatives to text) and that would provide coherence yet allow the results to be emergent.

In the first half of this article, I provide a focused overview of key ideas I collate with an eye to having them inform the case of Che's image. Beginning this way allows me to show where I am situated in semiotics, and subsequently reveals what I am doing differently with regards to relationality, performativity and openness. Subsequently, I can locate the trajectory influenced by Alfred Gell's (1998) anthropological concepts of art and agency and the role of the concept of the virtual.

Semiotics: The history of a broken frame

Semiotics today operates from post-structural frameworks and can be seen as an open and transitive *structuring* rather than *structural* approach. Quite literally, the movement 'post-structuralism' was a transition within one variant of semiotics itself though it happened differently in different schools of thought. For example, it was an earlier and much more belligerent rupture in France than the later, more gradual transition in Italy. Notably, many of the key structuralist figures also became important post-structuralists, the most obvious example being Roland Barthes. Jacques Derrida deconstructed the assumptions underlying structuralism in *Structure, sign, and play* critiquing Claude Lévi-Straus's *Mythologiques* among others, and thus changed forever the European philosophical panorama. Speculating that, "perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an *event*," Derrida observes that the very word event had "a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural—or structuralist—thought to reduce or to suspect" (1978, p. 278). He realized as long as semiotics was oriented towards structure, there would be no room for movement, performativity or play and one stable Truth would calcify at the centre. Many years later, he is echoed by Bal and Bryson (1991) who understand that "to think of semiosis as process and as movement is to conceive the sign not as a thing but as an event, the issue being ... to trace the possible emergence of the sign in a concrete situation, as an event in the world" (p. 196).

The struggle to sustain a structural analysis forced thinkers like Barthes and Lévi-Straus to admit the limits of this paradigm and recognize that, before the rupture initiated by Derrida, they were enacting "a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre (Gasché, R. 1986 p. 353). Even the rupture, observes Derrida, is structural: it has "the structurality of an opening" but he pushes us to recognize it cannot be so simply understood. "It is thus as little a structure as it is an opening; it is as little static as it is genetic, as little structural as it is historical. It can be understood neither from a genetic nor from a structuralist and taxonomic point of view, nor from a combination of both points of view" (Gasché p. 146). An opening still needs a frame to be seen as an opening. The intimate and inseparable relationship between structuralism and its 'post' cannot be forgotten, clearly, that empty centre, or lack, can also be seen as a structural element.

With regards to the case of Che Guevara's image, one can now ask: what then, *is* the essential

quality of a work of art or an art form? It is not about communication in the Lockean sense of understanding something by bringing it to the Same, or the consensus model, rather it is an interruption. It is an event, and thus calls for comment but does not necessarily condescend to become whatever someone wants to make of it.

Further, semiotics is “centrally concerned with reception”; in fact, its object is to describe the “conventions and conceptual operations” shaping what viewers do; “...it will not provide or even discover a meaning but will describe the logic according to which meanings are engendered” (Bal & Bryson, 1991 p. 186). Crucially, semiotics recognizes there are many other viewers besides those whose observations can be discovered:

... As a canon has its exclusions, so has an archive: we need to look away from the obvious traces and the official records of reception, in order make the archive admit those whom it has set aside (Bal & Bryson, 1991 p. 187, original emphasis).

The numberless trajectories of seeing made possible in the visual text does not mean that reception is abandoned as a goal, rather the claim is shifted to one of asking: “From where, from what position, is the reconstruction being made?” (Bal & Bryson, 1991 pp. 187-189) If we understand reception in the manner being described by Bal and Bryson we must acknowledge viewers are being constructed by the object viewed at the very moment their viewing is also constructing the object. Thus, reception is always simultaneously production [and a kind of immersion]. Here, C.S. Peirce’s definition of meaning is critical. Peirce asserts that meaning is “in its primary acceptation, the translation of a sign into another system of signs” (Eco, 1976, p. 1464). But the process is continuous; it can be followed, so it is like a metamorphosis rather than a metaphor. This dynamic view of the sign, “can help to denaturalize the exclusions that have resulted from those particular framings, as well as, conversely, to use framings to counter these exclusions without falling back into positivistic claims to truth” (Bal & Bryson, 1991 p. 204) and helps make the analysis historically responsible.

Since all grammars (structures) leak as Edward Sapir famously noted, Chandler (2002) recommends searching for structural leaks, seams and scaffolding as signs of a representation’s construction, as well as obfuscation (p. 58). Another voice in the dialogue, John Tagg, comments that he is “not concerned with exposing the manipulation of a pristine ‘truth’, or with unmasking some conspiracy, but rather with the analysis of the specific ‘political economy’ within which the ‘mode of production’ of ‘truth’ is operative” (1988, 174-5 in Chandler, 2002, p. 165). The question for me becomes, how can Che Guevara’s image be recognized, which features of the Che image are indispensable in terms of a viewer’s ability to relate the translation to the original photograph or at least its interpretants in their minds and understand something by the altered renderings?

Pressing forward, it is helpful to keep interrelated debates in mind as well as the “elementary ideas that underlie Peirce’s” (p. 1539) inquiry that Jakobson (1976) sums up as the problem of the role of symbols in our creative life. Jakobson would later elaborate a fourth essential kind of sign to assist the study of the role of symbols. Though he did not publish his work in this area, we are aware of this development through Donald Preziosi (2003) who mentions his conversations with Jakobson and how they debated this fourth term. This fourth, the artifice, will be central to my development of a theoretical frame. In what follows, I will outline some of Jakobson’s and Preziosi’s ideas, and attend to them in more depth.

For background, Preziosi's concern with the impossibilities of representation prompt him to explore the implications of the invention of art, so that he returns to Jakobson's lecture critiquing modern linguistics, semiotics and poetics, where Jakobson demonstrated differences between factual and imputed relations between signifiers and what they signify (p. 143) identifying, in the process, the missing term, the sign type that indicates relationships of "imputed similarity" or artifice. A term used by Jakobson corresponding to what Preziosi (2003) refers to as "ostensification" (p. 144) or the ostensible, what is presented as being true, or appearing to be true, but usually hiding a different motive or meaning. Characterizing this mode of practice as something at odds with modern practice, and more in line with medieval and ancient times, Preziosi (2003) returns to "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which there exists a representational relationship between words and things, or, as the scholastic dictum put it, *veritas est adaequatio verbi et rei* (where *res* can mean not only thing or object but thought, feeling, or opinion)." (p. 145) Adequation as a relational term hints at movement back and forth from what is being fit to, and expression of truth in words or things is always this kind of *adaequatio* or approximation, a tending toward, an as-if. Thus this is not a "representation" as such, but a movement towards something. Preziosi (2003) writes:

An iconic sign relationship (all these terms refer to relationships between things, not kinds of things) is primarily one of factual or literal similarity; an artifice(i)al sign is one of imputed similarity, of adequation rather than equality... I have been drawn to this notion of artifice in no small measure because it allows us to deal with the extraordinary complexities - the fluid and open-ended relativities- of visual meaning in a clear yet nonreductive manner (p. 146).

The notion of artifice may serve as "the locus of working on memory and meaning as processes of adequation" (p. 147) asking us to see artworks not as "representations" but rather as questions soliciting our engagement pedagogically (p.147).

Has Anyone Seen the Field?

In his treatise concerning images, Göran Sonesson (2003) similarly comments, "it still seems impossible to establish a consensus among all semioticians on what semiotics is all about; and many semioticians (including the group μ) will not even care to define their discipline" (p. 3). Perhaps we can begin from a premise of understanding semiotics as simply the study of signs, but what signs might be defined as is also widely debated. For example, Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio (2005), begin their book, *Semiotics Unbounded* by considering what the boundaries of semiotics might be, and decide these bounds depend on the object of study, signs. However, "What signs are, and *where* they are, depends on the model of sign at hand" (p. xvii). Their approach opens the possibility of allowing the objects to inform the models, and the models to then define the terminology as it is used; in other words, they sidestep the definitional stage by stating simply "it depends". Despite developments, few scholars today would disagree with St. Augustine's claim: "all instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs" (*Omnis doctrinal vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur*) (Augustine De doct. chr. I 1, 1963, p. 9 in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2.1)¹. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson (along with Michael O'Toole and the Australian school) defend a useful side to the lack of disciplinary status of semiotics because it,

... offers a theory and a set of analytic tools that are not bound to a particular object domain...[and] lends itself to interdisciplinary analyses, for example, of word and image relations, which seek to avoid both the erection of hierarchies and the eclectic...Considering images as signs, semiotics sheds a particular light on them, focusing on the production of meaning in society... (p. 176).

Since I am concerned with the workings and offspring of a specific photograph and how different people have taken and used it, this particular perspective at first seems promising. Sonesson (2003) observes that the point of view of semiotics “is to study the point of view itself” or “it is mediation, i.e. the fact of other things being presented to us in an indirect way” (cf. Parmentier 1985).

What semiotics, regardless of its “name” or category, gives me is a specific language parcelled out between the works of various theorists (in Europe and beyond) who struggle with the various conundrums inherent in the art (or science?) of it. In a nutshell, “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (Eco 1976, p. 7). Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as ‘signs’ in everyday speech, but also of anything that “stands for” something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. Contemporary semioticians study signs not in isolation but as part of semiotic “sign systems” (such as a medium or genre). They study how meanings are made. By making more explicit the codes by which signs are interpreted we may perform the valuable semiotic function of *denaturalizing* signs. Deconstructing and contesting the realities of signs can reveal which meanings are privileged and which are suppressed. To decline such a study is to leave to others the control of the world of meanings that we inhabit. Sonesson (2003) concludes: “Semiotics, I will contend, is not about what something means; it is about *how* it means” (p. 30). His emphasis is on a processual model rather than an irretrievably reductive explicatory one. The same object can mean something in one context, and nothing in another, so that is it not a “what” question but more of a “when” and “how.”

Umberto Eco, beginning with *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975), “contributed significantly to the encounter between Saussurean ‘semiology’ and Peircean ‘semiotics’” (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005, p. 310). It is worth taking a closer look.

I hear an Eco

Eco prefaces *Semiotics and the philosophy of language* by declaring his main purpose is to show that:

The sign is the origin of the semiotic processes, and there is no opposition between the ‘nomadism’ of semiosis (and of interpretive activity) and the alleged stiffness and immobility of the sign. The concept of sign must be disentangled from its trivial identification with the idea of coded equivalence and identity; the semiotic process of interpretation is present at the very core of the concept of sign (p. 1).

He thus directs our focus toward interpretive processes and away from reductive notions of messages to be decoded. Throughout this work, Eco reviews semiotic theoretical problems by examining the concepts: sign, meaning, metaphor, and symbol with reference to the historical development of the sign model. He writes, “semiotics initially emerged as reflection on the sign; but subsequently this concept was gradually put in crisis and dissolved, and interest shifted to the engendering of texts, their interpretation, the drift of interpretations...” (1984, pp. xiv-xv). Eco (1984) stresses the need to recover earlier notions of the sign as dynamic semiosis (action involving tri-relative cooperation of representamen, object, and interpretant) and not a code to be deciphered with its built-in assumption of fixed correlations. However, some concepts, according to Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio’s (2005) critique in *Semiotics Unbounded*, are not directly dealt with in Eco’s approach. The most significant one of these, and one they believe must be developed, is “the dialogical character of the sign and its essential otherness or alterity. As clearly emerges in Peirce’s formulation, interpretation semiotics calls for this type of development” (p. 325).

Overall, a useful conceptualization Eco provides us with is the careful differentiation he makes between general (or theoretical) semiotics and specific (or applied) semiotics. What he terms general semiotics deals primarily with the philosophical questions, while the specific variants of semiotics are divided by technique or method of application, and how they deploy terminology in order to study their respective objects whether they be narratives, textual discourse, objects, artefacts, behaviours and so on. He describes specific semiotics as one that “aims at being the “grammar” of a particular sign system, and proves to be successful insofar as it describes a given field of communicative phenomena as ruled by a system of signification” (p. 5). Additionally for Eco (1984), “these systems can be studied from a syntactic, a semantic, or a pragmatic point of view” (p. 5).

Eco (1984) asserts: “every specific semiotics is concerned with general epistemological problems. It has to posit its own theoretical object ... and the researcher must be aware of the underlying philosophical assumptions that influence its choice and its criteria for relevance” (p. 5). He does not elaborate extensively on specific semiotics except to note that each needs to take into account the ambiguities of the sign system in question and that the objects are usually “stable” that is, they enable researchers to understand which expressions are “produced according to the rules of a given system of signification, are acceptable or ‘grammatical’ and which ones a user of the system would presumably produce in a given situation” (p. 5). Eco describes the contributions of specific semiotics as direct impacts on society giving the example of how a study on the internal logic of road signals can help municipalities in improving the practices of marking roads. However, his central thrust is to differentiate the task and nature of general semiotics from the specific. The basic problem of general semiotics is philosophical, and is addressed through three different questions:

- (a) Can one approach many, and apparently different phenomena as if they were all phenomena of signification and/or of communication?
- (b) Is there a unified approach able to account for all these semiotic phenomena as if they were based on the same system of rules (the notion of system not being a mere analogical one)?
- (c) Is this approach a “scientific” one? (p. 7)

These broad questions parallel the ones I have often asked myself regarding the famous Korda image of Che. The object of study is the concept of sign itself insofar as it can explain a series of behaviours

“be they vocal, visual, termic, gestural, or other” (p. 7). What this philosophy provides is explanatory power for what might otherwise be disconnected data. In other words, it provides coherence, one that may not be sustainable outside the framework of the philosophical assumptions but nevertheless provides a way for considering things as a whole.

Eco sets up the debate in a way that allows him to move us toward recognizing that the essential matrix is between presence and absence, referring to Derrida but also Leibniz. Essentially, a sign must stand for something outside itself: it paradoxically presents an absence, but the presentation itself contains an absence as well. As expressed by Petrilli and Ponzio (2005), meaning “is inseparable from the work of translation carried out through the processes of interpretation, to the point that we can state that signs do not exist without another sign acting as a translant sign” (p. 302). The structure that general semiotics is concerned with tracing is that of the “inference which generates interpretation” (p. 38) so that understanding a sign is not only a process of recognition but also always interpretation.

The understanding of a sign is always already contextually bound as was recognized by semiotic theorists breaking from structuralism. Kent Grayson (1998) writes, “When we speak of an icon, an index or a symbol, we are not referring to objective qualities of the sign itself, but to a viewer's experience of the sign” (in Chandler 2002, p. 29). This explains why the image of Che can in some cases be a symbol, and in others an icon or simply an index as the first original photograph was to its photographer. Signs may also shift over time. But we are not looking at a closed system since a sign, finally, does not denote its own meaning. So that, “To know that ‘water’ means the same as H₂O and that H₂O means the same as ‘acqua,’ and so on, without knowing what these terms refer to, is not enough for them to function as signs” (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005, p. 318).

The metaphor of the encyclopaedia illuminates and allows us to approach what Eco (1984) is theorizing. The encyclopaedia represents something that has no centre, we are always somewhere in the middle of a labyrinth made up of a network of interpretants that is virtually infinite because “a given expression can be interpreted as many times, and in as many ways, as it has been actually interpreted in a given cultural framework; it is infinite because every discourse about the encyclopedia casts in doubts the previous structure of the encyclopedia itself” and “it does not register only ‘truths’ but, rather, what has been said about the truth or what has been believed to be true as well as what has been believed to be false or imaginary or legendary, [*imputed*] provided that a given culture had elaborated some discourse about some subject matter” (p. 86). In this context, interpretation becomes a matter of hypothesis where one can posit a local description of the net or labyrinth, but it will necessarily result in a myopic vision as no one can see “the global vision of all [the labyrinth’s] possibilities” (p. 83) from their particular node. Understanding the work of semiotics as interpretation rather than decoding can account for the “irreducibly other as theorized by Bakhtin and by such philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas” (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005, p.327). Peirce signals this essential interconnectedness through a relation of otherness “as being present in all signs when he says that their interpretants are somehow always other than themselves” (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005 p. 339). Eco, with others such as Peirce and Bakhtin, agree it is not the sign itself that functions as a container of meaning, rather meaning exists in the relations among signs. What is the significance of these ideas with respect to the visual?

Jakobson's fourth sign-type: Artifice

Jakobson proposed a fourth type of sign, the artifice, to address the relationship of “a message which signifies itself, [and] is indissolubly linked with the esthetic function of sign systems” (Jakobson 1968:704–705, in Allingham, p. 2008 p. 171-2). Despite Jakobson's uneasy relationship with C.S. Peirce's work, it seems to be a productive option that would not neglect intention, expressivity, and affect.

This fourth type resonates with some of Umberto Eco's ideas. For Eco, comprehending what they stand in for as icons is not as important as “recognizing a content ‘other’ for which the represented object stands” (p. 17). They are also called symbols “but in a sense opposite to that adopted for formulas and diagrams. Whereas the latter are quite empty, open to any meaning, the former are quite full, filled with multiple but definite meanings” (p. 17). Luckily, he does not avoid the ambiguities and inextricable overlaps between these categories. Consequently, Eco writes: “The nature of the sign is to be found in the ‘wound’ or ‘opening’ or ‘divarication’ which constitutes it and annuls it at the same time”(p. 23). I conceive of the nature of the sign type Jakobson put forward just such a ‘wound’ or ‘open’ type sign in that, as artifice, it ceases to be once it is recognized as such, while yet being, simultaneously providing a multiple beyond. Artifice is in a sense designed to be pierced, it is the only self-conscious sign type and the only sign type whose intention is to represent something other or something more than what it seems to. Like disguise, once it is seen-through it ceases to disguise it ceases to act in that way. Yet, we can still derive pleasure and an aesthetic knowing from seeing and seeing through the disguise. It is artful and beautiful. And we can move in an oscillatory motion in the seeing/knowing. I contend that the aesthetic is part of the meaning content of a sign but that not any sign-type will do.

The renderings of Che's image are always the same image, or topic, but being reproduced in limitlessly varied media, contexts, and figurations. There is structure and yet it is open, I propose that the format of the four sign types is similar in many ways. The fourth position, which Greimas regarded as explosive, is occupied by artifice, which is a modality that splinters like a fractal into multitudinous possibilities. It is real, but virtual, in the sense that it is actual and possible at the same time depending on when/if it is recognized. Thus though related to a structure, it is fluid. Such a relation allows us to see the structure as something artificial that allows us to look at form through abstraction but does not generalize, or reduce it.

Donald Preziosi (2003) says artifice “allows us to deal with the extraordinary complexities - the fluid and open-ended relativities- of visual meaning in a clear yet nonreductive manner (p. 146). In short, artifice might be a conceptual tool to face kind of challenge posed by the image of Che Guevara in being fluid, open-ended, and irreducibly complex. Like Eco, Preziosi (2003) is clear the sign is “a *relationship* between things (of any kind).” (p. 31, my emphasis) Preziosi's (2003) pivotal observation is that Jakobson demonstrated the differences and importance of “‘factual’ and ‘imputed’ (or conventional/virtual) relations between signifiers and what they signify.” (p. 143)

Thus, Preziosi (2003) pairs up the notions of artifice and ostensification to show the relation is “presented as being true or appearing to be true, but usually hiding a different motive or meaning.” (p. 144) He also links it to the Aristotelian *adaequatio*, or adequation, or “fitting,” “adjustment” (p. 145). In this sense the artifice is an invitation to imagine *otherwise*. What is the final fit that cannot quite be represented?

The notion of artifice requires a necessarily participatory relation. This allows us to understand how “artworks are questions posed and adequations mooted, soliciting engagement so we may learn to see.” (Preziosi, D. 2003 p. 147) It is a *pedagogical* relation at the core not only of ostentation or adequation but of presentation and a pointing to something that one can only co-construct. It is a double motion because in a way the artifice is telling us that it is pointing to something and not pointing to it at the same time, but *being*, inhabiting or embodying, it in some way that can only emerge when we catch on. Additionally, artifice tends to point at its own constructedness. Because only this sign type emphasizes and exemplifies human skill in doing something, as such it stretches into the realms of finesse or cleverness, as well as *intention* something that none of the other sign types incorporate. But this is also what makes it delightful and effective, we are always negotiating artifice/ial signs in our daily lives, and we are more skilled at it than we imagine ourselves to be.

Preziosi delineates the difference between the icon and the artifice: “An iconic sign relationship is primarily one of factual or literal similarity; an artifice(al) sign is one of imputed similarity, of adequation rather than equality” (2003 p. 146). I would further explain by differentiating from the relationship that a symbol has as a sign. A symbol’s relationship to the signified is more or less arbitrary and not necessarily similar to imputed similarity.

As Preziosi (2003) noted: “The truth - the *veritas* - in words or things is always one of *adaequatio* or approximation or a tending toward, an as if.” (p. 145) A metaphorical relation means one object is understood in *terms of* another, but is more complex than the merely substitutional. One of the key words in understanding this semiotic mode should be “parallelism” but also the notion of the virtual.

At the close of 2008 both Peter Allingham and M. J. Sidnell published works addressing artifice. Both are worth looking at. Allingham (2008) adds: “Metonymic presentation works through design, layout and, e.g. the signatures of brands and logos. These space types catalyse experiential selection and creative interactive behaviour through, e.g. branded space (cf. Höger 2004).” (174) There seems to be an overlay of metonymy and metaphor to produce the artifice. But I would reverse the statement: “Metonymic presentation works through design,” to read, “Design works through, among other things, metonymic presentation” because we need to acknowledge the creative role of design as something that can invent new connections. The metonymic is perhaps one technique in an entire constellation of possibilities within the creation process of artifice. I am hesitant to give it a leading role. Having said this, it is easy to recognize the images of Che that do not even remotely endeavor to gesture towards the man because they are being used to represent attributes such as rebellion. This is a *symbolic* move, and I wish to differentiate it from artifice.

Finally, Allingham (2008) turns to Preziosi to observe the four kinds of semiosis afforded by the four types and remark on the ability of artifice to: “represent by presenting, by showing, producing, which is why artifice or presentation must be on, or simply be the limit of representation, i.e. the aesthetic form or expression that captures and engages the human senses before any cognitive processing or understanding takes place.” (Cf. Preziosi 2003:137ff in Allingham, P. 2008 p. 173) Artifice seems to be about to slip off the map of semiotics.

Allingham’s (2008) critical observations lead to two very useful insights: first, “it seems that Peirce’s typology of signs is insufficient when it comes to dealing with the *expressivity* of these objects.” (p. 171-2: my emphasis) In observing the expressivity of objects, I contend that Allingham is looking at their *virtual* qualities. I see a clear link between what artifice is able to do, the notion of expressivity, and the virtual. Expressivity must be addressed, and would say that only artifice can do

so.

Secondly, Allingham (2008) introduces the idea of liminality with respect to artifice. Again he is actually dealing with the real of the virtual. He writes: “In the quadrant of metaphoric presentation, physical space tends to be **virtual**, i.e. being established through aesthetic means for the sake of pleasure or growth” (p. 175). So the space for the event is real but virtual, and aesthetic means are the vehicle for creating it. This space is extremely productive because it provides an alternate place where one can be free to think differently from how one is colonized to think in everyday life. Allingham (2008) recognizes not only that the physical space tends to be virtual in the 4th quadrant, but also that this is a volatile and about-to-be-destabilized, or in his words: “a semiotic mode that is liminal, interfacial, as it represents through presentation” (p. 177). In being liminal it is at the edge of the relationship of representation common to other sign-types in that it is always-about-to-become something else. It teeters on the edge of unpredictability.

Sidnell, (2008) rightly observes that, “Jakobson may have designated *artifice* a distinct mode rather than a kind of *symbol*, within the Peircean triad, in order to make the 'artistic character' distinctive at the modal level. (p. 18) But he critiques Eco for not offering a semiotic understanding of beauty in his broad survey in *History of Beauty* (2004). Something that, for Sidnell, is critical to a concept of semiotic praxis. Indeed Sidnell seems to stop dead with the remark: "With this Beauty, semiotics, intriguingly, has nothing at all to do... In a very wide-ranging survey, he [Eco] has seen no need to broach the issues of whether a sign may be beautiful, insofar as it is a sign; and whether beauty as such be a sign." (Sidnell, M. J. 2008, p. 23) For me this is the critical opening where artifice and by extension the virtual enter the dialogue.

Exploring artifice: The *semiotic black market*ⁱⁱ

“The discussion over the primacy of art or nature – does art imitate nature or does natural beauty imitate art? – fails to recognize the simultaneity of truth and image...it is the very structure of the sensible as such. The sensible is being insofar as it resembles itself”

(Levinas 1987, 7-8)

C.S. Peirce’s basic sign theory provides for three basic relationships between signified and signifier, icon (based in resemblance), index (based in causality), and symbol (based in convention). As we have seen, Jakobson proposed artifice as the fourth main to show a 4th relationship not accounted for by the index, icon, symbol triad. Peirce’s initial distinction among three relations between signans and signatum, (Peirce 1931:1.558) is:

1. –An indexical relation based on factual contiguity;
2. –An iconic relation based on factual similarity;
3. –A symbolic relation based on imputed contiguity.

Jakobson wrote:

[The] interplay of the two dichotomies—contiguity/similarity and factual/imputed—admits a fourth possibility, namely, imputed similarity.

And so the table looks like this:

	<i>contiguity</i>	<i>Similarity</i>
<i>factual</i>	index	Icon
<i>imputed</i>	symbol	Artifice

In other words, something can be said to be artifice when it is done in an ostensible manner. Something created by artifice is said to be “effectively” real.

Something can be said to be artifice when it is done in an ostensible manner – avowedly, declaredly, professedly. Something created by artifice is said to be “effectively” real. Artifice is usually distinguished from, and often implicitly or explicitly opposed to, actually or really: in other words something that *is* apparently, but not necessarily or really.ⁱⁱⁱ We can say that artifice is a self-conscious sign. At the core of my understanding of artifice as the fourth sign-type is the idea that it is performative, in the sense that it “brings about” the allegorical connections as well as presents mimetically the structure of the sensible. The idea of the structure of the sensible^{iv} is something that Rancière takes up and applies to both politics and aesthetics which links it back to what he says about changing the world when you interpret it. If we have more nuanced ways of interpreting the world, we can have new shades and tones to our understandings, which in turn enable us to act in new and perhaps more powerful ways. In other words, if we can see how some representations are not simply what they appear to be but at the same time are other things, without losing whatever it is they apparently had, it means we don’t have to categorize them as one thing only, it allows for more fluidity and possibility. We can connect this idea to what Peirce writes about experience being our only teacher as cited by Portis-Winner; “its action takes place by a series of surprises, bringing about a double consciousness at once of an ego and a non-ego directly acting upon each other” (CP 5.53) (Portis-Winner, I. 1999, 29). The pedagogical moment of a sign exists only at the moment of its making or becoming in the recognition by the viewer or interpretant. Learning always already works through virtual levels and through our ability to comprehend artifice. The masking of the object in order to speak to it more directly is how we can see this functioning. Therefore the role of intention is central, as are the parts played by guise and disguise, gaps and misrecognition. The sign that effectually disappears as soon as you recognize it is disguise. Yet it is no less really representing what it purportedly represented in the first place.

The artifice as a sign type and the specific relation it bears to the signified can be better understood if we keep in mind the idea of having a duplicity of awareness to better grasp the quasi-presence and imminent visibility of the oscillating imaginary. *We can understand artifice as an*

ignescent sign, one that is capable of bursting into flame at the moment of recognition, the moment one recognizes it as an as-if, and as also not-that-but-other.

From artifice to the virtual via parallelism: Enter Gell

Artifice, can aesthetically impute similarity through aesthetic means and so it becomes an “as if” in a relationship that can be characterized as a *parallelism*. Thus, artifice is an actualization of the virtual (relationship). For Jakobson, following Hopkins, the principle of parallelism does not connote identity but rather correspondence through either points of similarity or contrast. The artifice *is* virtual (because what we ‘see’ is other than what we are being shown, though we also see that) and intrinsically ambiguous, while it represents through a parallelism, represents by showing something that it is not to talk about the thing that it is. In other words, aesthetically an artifice is what it is not, and thus seeks its meaning in unlikeness by triggering the viewer’s recognition through visual cues and thus embodies a different relationship with the signified that an icon, index or symbol. At this point Gell (1998) reminds us that: “some ‘representations’ are very schematic but only very few visual features of the entity being depicted need to be present in order to motivate abductions from the index... Recognition on the basis of very underspecified clues is a well-explored part of the process of visual perception. Under-specified is not the same as ‘not specified at all’ or ‘purely conventional’.”⁽²⁵⁾ We can see this in many of the instances when Che Guevara’s image is little more than a silhouette. Jakobson saw parallelism as equivalence rather than identity; the equivalent pairs are, in turn, juxtaposed according to the principle of similarity or contrast.^v (p. 6) In order to move on, we need to keep in mind such things as Merleau-Ponty’s “duplicity of awareness” and Foucault’s (1968) discussion of Magritte’s painting *C’eci n’est pas une pipe* as a calligram that inaugurates a play of transferences that run, proliferate, propagate and correspond.” (p. 49)

At times I have referred to the term *virtual*. My use and understanding of this concept is built on four separate but interrelated developments of “virtual” by Peirce, Shields, Rancière, and Didi-Huberman. I will briefly explain each of these approaches to the concept, while noting that they do not necessarily contradict each other. The virtual is key to understanding the workings of imputed signs. “The dictionary definition of “virtual” was penned by none other than Charles Sanders Peirce.” (Skagestad, P. p. 2) For Levinson, “Peirce defines a “virtual” X as what you get when the information structure of X is detached from its physical structure” (Skagestad, P. *Peirce, Virtuality, and Semiotic*, p. 2)^{vi}.

In a four part ontological frame, Shields positions the virtual as “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” (25) pairs it with the concrete as the other part of the axis of the real. He follows Deleuze in seeing the opposite of the really existing as the *possible*: “The possible is never real, even though it may be actual; however, while the virtual may not be actual, it is nonetheless real” (Shields, 25)^{vii}.

The sign-type of artifice is functioning as an “as-if”? Bergson writes “the virtual image evolves toward the virtual sensation and the virtual sensation toward real movement: this movement, in realizing itself, realizes both the sensation of which it might have been the natural continuation and the image” (Bergson, 1988: 131 in Shields, 26-7). There is a duplicity here a double movement that fits nicely with artifice. Our experience of the aesthetic object necessarily *authenticates* a perception of the world beyond the senses through the authenticity of the virtual. Thus we can say that an object

happens, that is, it enters into experience. Artifice is purportedly one thing, while it also is virtually another, it is the trickster's favorite. The Trojan horse for example was a gift and at the very same time a weapon.

For Rancière, the artifice is first and foremost a political sign mode. In *On the shores of Politics* he looks at what both Plato and Aristotle think democracy is and compares them. He writes: "...in Book IV of the *Politics* where Aristotle proposes that there should appear to be elements of both types of regime (oligarchy and democracy) and yet at the same time of neither, *a good polity being one in which the oligarch sees oligarchy and the democrat democracy* (p. 42 my emphasis). How is it that one group can see one thing and another sees something completely different? We know the oligarchs are controlling the "appearance" of the regime to suit themselves and to manipulate the democrats. There is an art to making something look like something it is not quite, it is an "as-if" redistribution of the sensible, in a word-- artifice.

Rancière continues and directly links to the notion of artifice: "It is worth pausing to consider the function of artifice here, for it embodies all the complexity of Aristotle's conception of politics" (42-3). He sees Aristotle considering politics "not as illusion or machination but as the art of life in common" (43). Artifice is the principle whereby people play each other's games and it is not simply reducible to being cunning. The space of shared meaning that makes legal words effective is for Rancière, a virtual space. He emphasizes: "Those who take the virtual for the illusory disarm themselves just like those who take the community of sharing for a community of consensus" (p. 50).

Finally, in a fourth variation Georges Didi-Huberman (2005) elaborates his theory of visual figuration by distinguishing between what he calls the visual, the visible, and the virtual. In his triad, the visible equals what we can see, the visual indicates something that cannot be seen (for example in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* her hair seems to be blowing in the wind as she arrives on her shell, the wind itself [indicated by the hair but unseen], is the visual), and the virtual is a presentation of something unrepresentable. Using Fra Angelico's painting of *the Annunciation*, as his primary exemplar, Didi-Huberman takes the whiteness of the walls and the blank paged book in the Virgin's hand to illustrate the virtual. He writes: "The whiteness is so simple, yes. But it is so altogether like the blank inside of the little book held by the Virgin: which is to say that it has no need of legibility to carry an entire mystery of the Scriptures" (22) Thus, "Fra Angelico simply used the *presentation* of the white – the pictorial modality of its presence *here* in the fresco – to 'incarnate' on his level something of the unrepresentable" (24). In this way the white paint, while being white paint, is also an act and an acting of whiteness, the uninscribed, the blank, the yet-to-be-but-promised, an event in the making, and all that it would have been for Fra Angelico. His conceptualization of the virtual resonates strongly with the performative aspect of artifice I underlined earlier. These four conceptualizations of the virtual, are compatible yet different elaborations of how the virtual can be described. Without ignoring the multiple trajectories and nuances in the concept, I will understand the virtual as real but not concrete, noticeable but not visible, recognizable through its effects, impact, or actions/incarnations designating its information structure. In the second part, I move to an engagement of salient concepts and application in a concrete example.

PART 2: THE CASE OF KORDA'S CHE IN EAST TIMOR

"In the beginning was the eye, not the word." (Otto Pächt, 1995)

Introduction

I started with traditional semiotics as a ground from which to approach the dialogic nature of the sign and its alterity; its essential woundedness simultaneously constituting and annulling it; its ability to register divergent relationships between signified and signifier; its coherence contingent on the framework; its insufficiency when it comes to the expressivity of objects; and its failure to address the art of dissemblance directly. I also found that these limitations with respect to affect and the world of movement and fluidity could be responded to through some of the work done by Roman Jakobson, and later Donald Preziosi on the notion of *artifice*. Some useful aspects of this notion relate to the possibilities provided by the "as-if" or the enveloping of the *virtual*, in the nature of artifice achieved through multiple coding and other tactics that appear as a general strategy of *parallelism* and the way one was able to interpret these events seemed to happen through abduction.

When a viewer recognizes the virtual (and invisible) qualities of visible image (of Che Guevara), the possibility of the agency of the art or artifact is created, and thereby the efficacy of the virtual. I am going to develop this theory through an example. By looking at how the image of Che Guevara has mobilized in East Timor, I will link artifice with parallelism and the virtual to show how the virtual is efficacious in allowing an image to become a social agent. I chose to look at this particular part of the world because I was somewhat startled at the magnitude of the image's presence and impact in a place so geographically distant from where Guevara himself was active.

As a way to tie semiotics and the notions of the virtual and artifice with visual images, my approach draws on some of Alfred Gell's (1998) principles from *Art and Agency*. With Gell, I agree most "literature about 'art' is actually about representation," (25) and thus sidelines the performative and agentic aspects of objects, something the social semiotic approach fails to fully appreciate. Second, I would accept Gell's definition of art as "a system of action, intended to change the world" (p. 6) and thus the emphasis is clearly on "*agency, intention, causation, result & transformation*" (p. 6) rather than mere symbolic communication. To ground his theory, Gell (1998) uniquely expands the notion of index far beyond traditional semiotics by re-framing the notion of cause. He posits that an artist is the 'cause' of a work of art in the same way as fire is (usually) the cause of smoke. But smoke does not always mean there is a fire, and a smile does not always mean there is a happy friendly person behind it, thus Gell (1998) problematically insists that art does not ALWAYS function semiotically. However, I think it possible to see more nuanced semiotic function by expanding the notion of semiotics to include a kind of semiotics of the virtual, although it is more accurately understood as a kind of an anti semiotics because it is not direct *representation* being evoked, rather

active *presentation*. Although broader, this tactic would still exclude the issue of expressivity. Gell's technique is limited by his failure to address *intention* in his expanded approach to index as the key difference in how "cause" comes to be vis-à-vis the traditional formulation. This intention is key to the notion of artifice because the similarity or link between signified and signifier is an imputed one, the sign is operating primarily on the level of the virtual.

Che Guevara appears



Another day, I head out of Dili towards the rugged hills that fracture the countryside. The trip takes a little longer than expected, as the road is a graveyard for careless drivers, twisting and turning upon itself like an itchy snake. My own vehicle is merely run off the road by a bus and later suffers a blowout... Other requisite stops include photo opportunities, stops to ask directions, and the obligatory gape-break, when the totally amazing presents itself - such as a warrior-clad cowboy with Che Guevara medals on his chest, riding a pony along the roadside. In this region, altitude means attitude.

(Graham Simmons, 2009)



On the blog, *East Timor – I was there before it became big* I came across this photo (below) taken in Dili. It was entitled *Che* as a simple indication of the subject. There Guevara's face appears in two-tone on the billboard within an unknown building's enclosure. What is the image doing so far from home? I would venture it is acting and thus performative in the sense that it: demarcates, announces, and protects to some extent that territory while interpolating those who resonate with that particular image. It is accompanied by one of the usual slogans "Hasta la victoria siempre" as well as other words too blurred to decipher.

Abutting the mural/billboard is another one depicting a room with three windows and a figure speaking at a podium with some kind of lamp or microphone being held on a rod extending towards him. Yet this more involved depiction is completely disregarded and made ambiguous by the puzzled photographer/blogger Daniel Gerber who writes beneath the photo: “Che Guevara seems to be really popular here, I don’t know why.” Clearly, the image does not speak to everyone.



Indeed my brief Internet searches seemed to confirm the popularity of Guevara’s image in East Timor as it quickly revealed a number of references to, and images of the revolutionary guerrilla fighter; for example this mural where the two girls are posing for the shot, in St. Crus, Dili (Flickr, franjer79).

The far right photo can be seen as a riff on the famous Korda image where the artist has Che with the cigar to his mouth, but retains the frame with the hair and beret, taken in Baucau, East Timor (J. Patrick Fischer, 2002) called *Wall painting of Che* though a definite wall is not apparent. I did read that when travel writer Norman Lewis visited Baucau in 1991, he described the city as "one of the most disturbing places in the world... a disheveled town full of barracks and interrogation centres with high, windowless walls and electrified fences. Baucau had been the end of the road for so many real and assumed supporters of Fretilin:" (Simmons, G. 2009) A suitable place for Che’s image?



Why is the image of Che in East Timor? Why at this time? Why this particular figuration?

Background/Context

The tiny half-island a thousand miles from nowhere of approximately 850,000 people speaking languages Tetun, Portuguese, and Bahasa Indonesian seems irrelevant to global business or power politics. (Rogers, B. 2002) After 455 years, the Portuguese abruptly abandoned this colony in 1975. Merely nine days after East Timor declared independence; Indonesia invaded and installed a genocidal regime. “The thought of East Timor falling into the hands of Che Guevara look-alikes horrified Henry Kissinger, and so he gave Suharto the nod to invade. Australia, too, wanted to get its hands on the oil ...” (Rogers, B. 2002) Rogers’ description of “Che Guevara look-alikes” made in hindsight is telling. It indicates something was happening in the East Timor of 1975, and indeed a resistance movement *Fretilin* (the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) had been born, and an enigmatic leader, Xanana Gusmão had emerged. It also indicates a virtual link between a mental image of Che Guevara that somehow contaminates those who have similar ideals and are willing to act on those notions in terms of sovereignty or independence.



During the 24 years of Indonesian brutality, Xanana Gusmão and a handful of guerrilla fighters, who numbered no more than 160 at their peak, waged war against 22,000 Indonesian occupation troops in the island's dense jungles. In 1992, Gusmão was captured and imprisoned. “He

quickly became one of the world's most prominent political prisoners, writing poetry and letters to keep the dream of independence alive. In 1997 Mandela visited and called for his release." (McCarthy, T. *TIME Magazine Online* 2000) In an article called *Xanana Gusmão, el Che de la jungla*, Luisa Futoransky (1999) recounts "They have frequently compared him to Che Guevara, Robin Hood, and Ho Chi Minh." Elsewhere he "was described by the press and analysts as a "poet-revolutionary" with the charisma of Argentine-Cuban guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who had become an almost mythical icon of revolutionary struggles around the world." (de Queiroz, M. 2007)

From prison, Gusmão issued a challenge of a referendum on full independence for East Timor: "Whoever is afraid of a referendum is afraid of the truth." In 1999, Suharto's successor, B.J. Habibie, surprised everyone – particularly his own military – by taking up Gusmão's challenge." (McCarthy, T. 2000 *TIME Magazine*) Again, the image of Che is noted in the press:

As the massive Indonesian ship left Jakarta, thousands of people filled its seven tiers. ... Among them were hundreds of East Timorese returning home to vote in the referendum. The majority were students, ... but there were also many refugees from the violence of anti-independence militias in East Timor. ... The clothes and luggage of those filling the decks were decorated with East Timorese and Falantil^{viii} flags, independence slogans and pictures of Xanana Gusmão and sometimes Che Guevara. (King, S. 1999)

When Indonesia lost the vote, Indonesian-controlled militias butchered the Timorese and unleashed mass destruction causing the majority of the population to flee their homes in sheer terror. However less than a year later, *TIME Magazine* reported in 2000:

But something remarkable is happening on this half an island. Gusmão, 53, a former guerrilla leader and political prisoner, has tapped into reserves that are out of reach of the World Bank and the IMF, reserves of willpower and pride the people themselves barely knew existed. Exuding the authority of Nelson Mandela and the charisma of Che Guevara, Gusmão has been traveling the country spreading his vision of the future...



Clearly there is a striking political and ideological parallel between Gusmão and Guevara that is reiterated by mass media outlets but also pulses steadily at the grass roots level. And, in fact they fought the same enemy, for the same reasons, just in different times and places, and with different outcomes in terms of their own personal stories. The rebels demonstrate a self-conscious adoption of some aspects of the Korda image, as well as of the linked slogans, haunted by this famous matrix image. For example, in this old black and white

photograph we see Xanana standing in the centre with some of his rebel troop and the banner with the phrase "Patria ou Morte" the Portuguese version of the famous cry by Fidel Castro on the fateful day in 1960 when the famous photograph of Che was taken. And there it stayed, stuck. Here there is a clear

alliance with the revolution in Cuba which became, in Che's words: "the image of what is possible through revolutionary struggle, the hope of a better world...an image of what it is worth risking your life for, sacrificing yourself until death on the battlefields of all the continents of the earth..." (Guevara, E. "Lecture in Santa Clara" 1961 [my translation] online)

How can this old photo from East Timor somewhere in the jungle *represent* the Cuban revolution, its victory, and the Guevarist stance? Gell (1998) differentiates between modes of representing in a useful way: "The ideas of 'representing' (like a picture) and 'representing' (like an ambassador) are distinct, but none the less linked" (p. 98). The slogan on the banner is an index of Castro's words in a sense. The banner is there like a representative of the Cuban revolution, not iconic but an "artefactual *body*." (Perhaps one can say this mode of representing is indexical in that smoke can be seen as the ambassador of fire?)

The basis of the agency of an artifact is rooted in the notion of the distributed object or distributed person in the Maussian understanding of gifts as actual extensions of persons so that in a parallel way the reproduction of an image whether it is of an object or of another image is as-if a gift from that prototype. For instance, "Constable's picture of Salisbury cathedral is a part of Salisbury cathedral. It is, what we would call, a 'spin-off' of Salisbury cathedral." (p. 104) Similarly, every iteration of Che Guevara's face taken from the Korda photo can be seen as a spin-off. Consequently, if "appearances" of things are considered material parts of things, "then the kind of leverage which one obtains over a person or thing by having access to their image is comparable, or really identical to the leverage which can be obtained by having access to some physical part of them." (p. 105) This would explain many of the attacks on art works representing historical figures such as the 'slashing' of the *Rokeby Venus* by an angry Suffragette.



Even more dramatically evocative, is the color image, where there seems to be in direct conversation with Che's image; the hair-beret-facial hair combo is unmistakable for those familiar with the Korda photograph (though they have adopted red for the berets). Judging by how young Xanana looks, I would place it in the earlier years of their resistance. We can look at this photograph in more than one way. If we see it as the image entering into Xanana and his troop, then it is as-if a case of possession. The image (prototype) is an

agent motivating the fighters (index) to take on its qualities both visible and virtual in a cause-effect relationship and we the viewers of the photograph are the recipients in a passive position but again motivated by our knowledge of the image to infer that it is the source of these fighters looking as they do, with the particular stance in preparation for the photograph.

We can also look at this photograph and see it as Xanana and his troop entering the image. In this case it would be as-if a dramatic performance where Korda the photographer would have the agency of a playwright in taking Che's photo which becomes the prototype represented by the actor (fighters) who actively index and are thus in an agentic position along with both the photographer and the image, in contrast to the audience (us) who witness the dots connecting through abduction.

However, at the exact same time, we know this is neither a possession nor a play. We know this is East Timor and these fighters are revolutionaries in their own right. The image-inhabiting, or image-becoming is an artifice and the transformation, while visually signaled is virtual. However, it may serve to provoke fear in those who see these fighters or this photograph and remember the success of Guevara in the Cuban revolution. In this way it can be seen to be efficacious. The artifice is an *actualization* of the virtual (relationship) manifesting belief in victory for one: it is not actually Che Guevara, but through a parallelism, it is just as if it is!

In the student rally shown here, there is an emanation or leaking of the image onto one of the young supporters, who dons the beret as if to match the image: a black and white portrait of Xanana in profile. In a way I see it as Che's image *in* Xanana's image *in* and acting *with* this youth.



Finally, and at the root why I was compelled to write about East Timor, is this intriguing photograph taken supposedly in "Malibere village, East Timor" according to *The Globalism Institute RMIT Report* in 2004.

This institute based in Melbourne, Australia manages a number of research projects and one in particular under the umbrella of *Sources of Insecurity* focuses on East Timor: "social conflict in East Timor, violence, nationalism, social movements, globalization and global protest movements" and is supervised by Damian Grenfell. Oddly, nowhere else in the over 70-page document did another reference

to this image, or an explanation of why it had occupied an entire page in the document appear. Neither was there another mention of Guevara outside the fascinating caption reading:



Che Guevara graffiti on Artorde de Araujo's house in Malibere village, East Timor, 2003. In part, because it was illegal to depict images of Xanana Gusmao, graffiti of other bearded revolutionaries was used as a sign of resistance"

If this caption is accurate in describing the situation, this is something of a reversal of the situation found in the color photograph of the rebels discussed above. This is an image clearly labeled "Che Guevara" but for those in the "know" it is really a virtual Xanana Gusmao. The image becomes the site where subordination is transformed into resistance through tactical conversions that allow what Sandoval (2000) calls a "dialectical movement of subjectivity that disallows, yes –but at the same time allows—individual expression, style, and personality." (p. 35) Che's image "is a congealed residue of performance and agency in object-form, through which access to other persons can be attained, and via which their agency can be communicated." (Gell, 1998, 68) The notion then, resonates with but goes beyond what Roland Barthes' had explored in his denotation (literal), connotation (socio-cultural, personal) approach to visual meaning. It does this because its tactic is one of disguise, and of imputed similarity, rather than a gesturing at different levels or orders of signification. Gusmao is invisible in the image, and yet it is an image of Gusmao, at the same time as being no less an image of Guevara.

We can conceive of Gell's (1998) agency for an artwork/image as a "modality through which something affects something else" (p. 42) and is absolutely relational and context dependent (p. 22). So, given the necessary context, "whatever type of action a person may perform *vis-à-vis* another person may be performed also by a work of art, in the realms of imagination if not in reality." (p. 66) But we know that a more nuanced understanding of reality takes into account the real of the virtual yet not concrete realm. Because we recognize agency by its effects, only when someone acts as an agent can they become an agent and not before. They must "disturb the causal milieu in such a way as can only be attributed to their agency." (p. 20) An artifact is rarely a primary agent, but can act as a secondary agent. For example, when a child feeds a doll because it is hungry, the doll is a secondary agent to the degree that it is able to channel, or become a conduit for the primary agent's action. Similarly, "social relations only exist in so far as they are made manifest in actions." (p. 26)

We can say that the prototype Che Guevara appears as agent since we know the activities of the artist in that case were subordinate to prototype (Korda did not plan the original photo and in various interviews he speaks of it *snapping itself* when Che suddenly appeared in his viewfinder). The index here (a material entity motivating abductive inferences) is the painting on the wall done by an unknown Timorese artist. The prior index is the photograph of Che taken by Korda. While the prototype is Che Guevara, the virtual prototype is (for the Timorese artist) is Xanana Gusmao. This Timorese artist is inspired by the Korda image: it acts on him/her and makes him/her its recipient. At the same time, the public and possibly those censoring institutions of the establishment are also recipients that may either be incited to violence if they understand the artifice at play, or simply allow the mural to pass. Those who understand the process of "masking as survival under colonization" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 84) and the place of the "trickster who practices subjectivity as masquerade..." (Sandoval 2000, p. 62) are those who have developed skills of semiotics as resistance and a consciousness that can identify oppositional expressions of resistance.

There is a constant oscillation between the material and virtual of the image. This shimmering is especially salient when the intent is one of imputed similarity signalled through the use of artifice to create a parallelism that can be recognized by those interested in the subversive restructuring of knowledge and who hold an elective affinity with the oppressed.

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ⁱ Having said this, the domain of contemporary semiotics has developed so vastly even since the modern moments with Saussure and Peirce that taking up the conversation any further back becomes unwieldy unless there is a specific purpose. Yet, I cannot resist mentioning the intriguing medieval proposal put forth by the French theologian Peter Abelard (1079-c. 1142) who suggested that, "the 'truth' that a sign purportedly captured existed in a particular object as an observable property of the object itself, and outside it as an ideal concept within the mind. The 'truth' of the matter, therefore, was somewhere in between" (Danesi & Perron, 1999 p. 43). Almost one thousand years ago, Abelard had grasped and expressed the complexity of perception in a way that did not create a dualism like the materialist or idealist poles seem to do, and that gestured toward a third position anticipating later developments of the Saussurean and Peircian models.

ⁱⁱ The term semiotic black market expresses the essence of artifice, and was coined by conceptual artist Vik Muniz: "I grew up in Brazil in the seventies, under a climate of political repression during military regime. You're forced to live in a sort of a semiotic black market, where you can never say what you really mean and everything that you hear is not what really is." - Vik Muniz
http://www.ted.com/talks/vik_muniz_makes_art_with_wire_sugar.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Etymologically, artifice has three different routes/roots, one is as the Greek techné, (TEKHNE) who was the goddess or the spirit (daimona) of art, technical skill and craft. Another derives from the word for artifice, stratagem, or plan: metis (may'-tis). Odysseus (or "Ulysses") is associated with metis in the Homeric Epics as polymetis, or "man of many wiles" and the famous stratagem (metis) of the Trojan horse. Finally, there is the Latin root, artificium "making by art, craft," from artifex (gen. artificis) "craftsman, artist," from ars "art" (see art (n.)) + facere "do" (see factitious): meaning "device, trick" (the usual modern sense). Other definitions include: artifice, to name or make by art: An ingenious expedient, a man{oe}uvre, stratagem, device, contrivance: human skill as opposed to what is natural.

^{iv} By structure of the sensible, Rancière is making a Platonic link to the later dialogues particularly the *Timaeus*.

^v Hopkins: "... perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. Now the force of this recurrence is to beget a recurrence or parallelism answering to it in the words or thought and, speaking roughly and rather for the tendency than the invariable result, the more marked parallelism in structure whether of elaboration or of emphasis begets more marked parallelism in the words and sense. (81-2) To the marked or abrupt kind of parallelism belong metaphor, simile, parable, and so on, where the effect is sought in likeness of things, and antithesis, contrast, and so on, where it is sought in unlikeness (41)

85- relevance and importance of ambiguity- intrinsic

87- "In referential language the connection between *signans* and *signatum* is overwhelmingly based on their codified contiguity, which is often confusingly labeled 'arbitrariness of the verbal sign.'¹⁴⁶ "Of the three different sorts of Parallels' viewed by Lowth, 'every one hath its peculiar character and proper effect' (xxvii). Synonymous lines 'correspond one to another by expressing the same sense in different, but equivalent terms; when a Proposition is delivered, and it is immediately repeated, in the whole or in part, the expression being varied, but the sense entirely, or nearly the same' (xi).

Two antithetic lines 'correspond with one another by an Opposition sometimes in expressions, sometimes in sense only. Accordingly the degrees of Antithesis are various; from an exact contraposition ... down to a general disparity, with something of a contrariety, in the two propositions' (xix).

... congruences, which he calls 'Synthetic or Constructive' and 'where the Parallelism consists only in the similar form of Construction.' The verses are bound by a mere "correspondence between different propositions, in respect of the shape and turn of the ... and of the constructive parts" (xxi) Sound symbolism is an undeniably objective relation founded on phenomenal connection between different sensory modes, in particular between the visual and the auditory experience.

89- " Charles Sanders Peirce: "This clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous"

110-"In manipulating these two kinds of connection (similarity and contiguity) ...an individual exhibits his personal style, his verbal predilections and preferences. Parallelism is "- a correspondence"-impressive range of possible configurations.

^{vi} In 1902, Charles S. Peirce defined *virtual* as: 'A virtual X (where X is a common noun) is something, not an X, which has the deficiency (virtus) of an X.' (see also Edmund Burke's doctrine of virtual representation, which is not representation but is supposedly as good as.)

^{vii} For Rob Shields, there are some core assumptions he builds on: first, the virtual "is neither absence nor an unrepresentable excess or lack" (20); second, reality is not a monolithic thing it needs to be treated as "more fine-grained concepts" (20) so that the real can be seen as multiple and more than simply the tangible "allowing us to being to conceptualize processes such as becoming in terms of emergence and dialogism (cf. Bakhtin, 1981 in Shields, 21); and third we are already accustomed to "day-to-day manipulation of virtual and actual objects" (Shields, 20) so that we can see ourselves as literate in terms of understanding the virtual though we may not have come to an explicit structuring of those knowledges.

^{viii} FALINTIL "forças armadas da libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste" translates as "The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor" originally began as the military wing of the leftist political party FRETILIN.

**If We Are Too Small to See or You Have Forgotten:
A postcolonial response to modern representations of the San
in Alexander McCall Smith's No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency
series**

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Abstract

*Alexander McCall Smith's enormously popular fiction series set in Botswana (2000-11) appears on superficial analysis to represent the San people benignly, even affectionately. Neil Graves (2010) submits that *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* achieves an image of "untainted and uncorrupted" Botswana through a "three-stage process of engagement, disarmament and dismissal, leaving behind a saccharine utopian Western fantasy of primitive primordial Africa" (15). However, deconstruction via a postcolonial lens shows the depictions in this text to be insidiously harmful in the light of the San's social and political disenfranchisement in Botswana since independence. Six tropes from David Spurr's seminal work *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993) are deployed to position the various representations of the San children in this series firmly within a postcolonial critique, since such classifications clearly define the particular nuances and levels of the characters' literary depictions.*

A recent compilation by Lonely Planet Publications (2010) which devotes a glossy double-page spread to every country on earth, lists at the head of its Botswana section the mandatory consumption for tourists prior to visiting Botswana, namely the 1980 film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* and the BBC mini-series *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (59). Both film and fiction series have generated substantial fascination with - and tourism to Botswana. John McAllister (2010) asserts that *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series is "being used by marketers to promote safari tourism" (6) and recounts his personal experience of "living on Zebra Way in Gaborone and sometimes seeing groups of tourists combing the street in search of Precious Ramotswa's house in Zebra Drive" (7).

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Postcolonial readings show that, still today, many of the same colonialist premises exist to the advantage of those in power, and by extension, to the disadvantage of any others, effecting a neo-colonialist power-dynamic. This calls up Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge's recognition (2005) that it is important for postcolonialism to be astutely aware that bourgeois anticolonial nationalism is merely another form of colonialism, effecting, as they cite Fanon (1990), "neocolonial class consolidation [which does not bring about] fundamental transformation [but rather] a mere restructuring of the social order" (384), which, I posit, is precisely the case in Botswana as regards ethnic minorities such as the San. According to David Spurr, whose work provides the theoretical framework for this analysis, even into the 1980s, the modern media still holds an "element of colonial discourse which continually returns to an idealization of the colonialist enterprise". Again, *writing* is implicated; various groups of peoples have become viewed as "others," in part because they have been portrayed in particular ways. (2)

Although the San won a celebrated high court battle to win back traditional hunting rights in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) in 2006, the cattle owners and large-scale farmers often ignore this and brutally threaten the San who exercise this right. There are well-documented cases within Botswana itself that wells have been filled with sand or concreted over so that the San cannot access water when out hunting (Survival International 2001:2). Indeed, in December, 2006, a press statement for the CKGR NGO coalition cited the High Court ruling in favour of the government that effectively evicted the San from the CKGR by ruling it "neither unlawful nor unconstitutional" for termination of basic and essential services (health, food and water) to occur, even though the Court also ruled that "the residents had lawfully occupied the land and were unlawfully deprived of it [from 2002 onwards] it was [also] unlawful and unconstitutional to deny residents entry into the CKGR" (1).

Kuela Kiema (2010) recalls that in the past "All the government officials ... bought bundles of *digwapa* (biltong) from us ... We were encouraged to hunt for cash and not for the pot. Then they told us that we weren't 'pure' because we were using modern hunting techniques and that we were now posing a threat to wildlife" (83). Then, following relocation of the San out of the CKGR the San were and are incentivized to stay relocated, including encouraging people to cultivate land, a practice that, as Lekoa (2007) discovers in her research, does not sit naturally with them. Kiema continues, "The government paid people to teach our children. Locals were employed to work at the school as cooks and grounds keepers ... The local government hired people to construct the Ghantzi/Xade road. Ghantzi Craft and Botswana craft bought out handicrafts ... Tourists brought more income to the area" (Kiema 2010: 83).

The Republic of Botswana has a justified international reputation as the most peaceful nation in Africa. But a consciously designed nationalist image, with its inclusive rhetoric has, to an extent contributed to the disadvantage of minority groups through its assimilationist model,

typical of colonial regimes and its legacy in postcolonial systems. The Tswana (the dominant ethnic group of Botswana) have the pre-eminent place in society, and minority languages like those of the San are subject to language genocide in favour of the principal tongue, Setswana (Kiema 2010: 40).

To an extent, naturally, such marginalization is the result of education, or lack thereof. Although official policy dictates that all children have the right to go to school in Botswana, the infrastructure and the nature of the San's lives mean that the poor and disenfranchised minorities rarely see this become reality. There is also no follow-up for school inattendance. So, in the case of the San, education is still elusive, with few children attending school and a desperately low literacy rate since mother-tongue education is only afforded lip-service in most schools (Mokibelo 2010). Consequently, the people are disenfranchised and generally at the mercy of aid organizations and the meagre offerings of the tourist industry where they are adopted as 'the little brown men' ... a kind of mascot embodying the timeless values of a lost world" (Lee 1986: 91) or socially entrapped as managers for Tswana cattle owners.

At present, those San who are not employed by the tourist industry are to be found manning the cattle posts of affluent Batswana as the following statement from Kiema (2010) endorses, "They looked after cattle for little or no pay. They worked under appalling conditions. No one cared how much they were paid. There were no labour laws to protect the interests of people who were now working on what was once their tribal territories" (79). Moagisi Mogalakwe, until recently administrative director the Research Centre for San Studies (pers. comm. September 2010) also notes the practice of South African hunters who, subject to game quotas, unscrupulously use San to poach for them in the CKGR, so that the San effectively take on all the attendant risks that this involves.

Theoretical framework

My main reason for using Spurr's categories as the analytical enframing is that it is robust and comprehensive, most specifically in its identification and detailed analysis of the *modes* of colonialist assumptions and practices. Also, those very structures along the spectrum of colonialist rhetoric identified by Spurr naturally overlap and serve as an organizational metaphor for the inherent *heterogeneity of cultures*, often dismissed in a colonialist mindset in favour of convenient, essentializing, monolithic generalizations. Six of the twelve tropes identified by Spurr are, as I demonstrate, epitomised within the McCall Smith series: Appropriation, Aestheticization, Debasement, Negation, Affirmation and Idealization. Each will be defined most effectively by way of their manifestations in the narratives. *

My postcolonialist deconstruction of McCall Smith's literary text, omnipresent in Botswana tourist outlets as well as being popular in Britain and her old colonies, is carried out in the spirit of P.W. Mwikisa's (2006) discourse analysis of a text also ubiquitous in tourist outlets in Botswana, namely Bessie Head's 1971 novel, *Maru*. Mwikisa's analysis asserts that "*Maru* powerfully contests [the corralling of San] into exclusive reserves where they would, supposedly be happy to practise their stone-age hunting and gathering lifestyle but at the same time remain available to the scientific scrutiny of the modern world" (93). McCall Smith's narrative features two San orphans fostered by the main character, Precious Ramotswe and her husband Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, who are *Tswana*, members of the dominant ethnic group in Botswana. Before the narrative opens, the two San children were discovered alone in the Kalahari, much like Head's central character, a Masarwa (Botswana San) orphan girl adopted and named by a white missionary, which, as Mwikisa asserts is an attempt to "register and insert the voice of Basarwa in Botswana's monophonous national discourse" (92).

* All references to Spurr's tropes will be capitalized throughout this article so as to distinguish their conceptually postcolonial usage from more general interpretations of the terms.

McCall Smith apparently feels no such obligation to deviate from the monophony. Indeed, as McAllister (2010) claims, "[he] seems to buy into these simplifications ... [publicly bemoaning negative representations of Africa as forgetting] '[t]he laughter. The kindness. The beauty' " (3). The San children in McCall Smith's series, much as they are loved, are always defined by their assimilation into Tswana culture. Having been buried up to their necks in the sand by their dying mother the children are discovered and rescued. The mother's act, incidentally, is an ancient San survival practice, also alluded to in *The Gods Must Be Crazy* where Mpudi recounts "I fled, deep into the Kalahari. I died you know. Dehydration. Some of those little buggers found me, and they buried me. Only my head stuck out". Before McCall Smith's narrative introduces them, the children had been taken to an orphan farm, and from there fostered by the protagonists.

In this series, McCall Smith is, I suggest, guilty of the less overtly objectionable tropes of Spurr's spectrum in his depiction of the San. When the children first come to live with the protagonists, the maid expresses an attitude of Debasing towards the race, purportedly typical among the dominant Batswana, and certainly there is no narrative sympathy for this position: "The maid's eyes widened ... Masarwa children being brought into an ordinary person's house ... was something no self-respecting person would do. These people were thieves ... Mr J.L.B. Matekoni may be trying to be kind, but there were limits to charity" (McCall Smith 2000: 99).

This attitude of Debasement alongside Tswana Affirmation of their own superiority is centuries old, and Mwikisa cites Bessie Head's recognition of San subalternity: "It is argued that [the San] had been conquered by the more powerful Botswana tribes and from then onwards assumed the traditional role of slaves [and] are also abhorrent to Batswana because they hardly looked African but Chinese (in Mwikisa 2006: 92).

The adoption of two San children by Mma Ramotswe and her husband could be read as substitutes for Mma Ramotswe's lost baby of years before, filling her childless void, (even the two-for one can possibly be interpreted as a statement). The adoption is seen by several of the protagonists' peers to be misguidedly altruistic, the premise being that the San children will only cause problems. The Appropriation of the children by members the dominant culture for their own ends, couched in well-meaning rhetoric, rather than any attempt to return them to their own culture, is written up as only natural. The omission of such a return as a possibility suggests the San are not fit custodians of their own kind and calls up the justifications for the 'stolen generations' in Australia. The dynamic operating between the protagonists of this fiction series and the San children is a metaphor for Botswana's positioning of the San (among other minorities) whereby "Dominant elites extract material taxes in the form of labor, [etc] in addition to extracting symbolic taxes in the form of deference, demeanour, ... and acts of humility ... every public act of appropriation is, figuratively, a ritual of subordination" (Scott 1990: 188).

Mma Ramotswe demonstrates Spurr's identified attitude of Affirmation in every novel of this series as she 'sings the praises' of former President Sir Seretse Khama (deceased), the architect of modern Botswana and a member of the clan that dominated in the land long before British colonization. Precious has a photo of him on her mantelpiece in Zebra Drive, alongside one of her beloved late father and the Queen of England. This assembled triptych is an Affirmation, apparently unquestioned, of the (paternal and imperialist) place of the Tswana culture (a marriage literally personified by the current President Ian Khama, offspring of Sir Seretse Khama and an English mother); a symbolic assumption of its 'right to rule', as well as the affection with which the departed colonial establishment is still viewed by the dominant culture.

McAllister (2010) lists the "governing virtues of Precious Ramotswe's world - neighbourliness, courtesy, trust, family, loyalty, and individual courage" as being the virtues of ... mid-twentieth century small-town Britain or America" (6). Such is the fondness the readership of this fiction series (and viewers of the spin-off television production) has for the central character with her homespun wisdom and traditional build, it is to be assumed that the narrative sympathy also extends to her attitude towards the Khama assimilationist policy and hegemonic place of the Tswana, much as Precious would never articulate her views in such terms

There was her ornamental plate with its picture of Sir Seretse Khama – a prize possession ... and there was her Queen Elizabeth II teacup, with its picture of the Queen looking out in such a dignified way ... it reminded her of her duty and of the traditional values ... Not once had Seretse Khama faltered in his duty, nor had the Queen, who admired the Khama family and had always had a feeling for Africa ... and that made Mma Ramotswe feel proud of being a Motswana, and of all that Seretse and his wife had done (McCall Smith 2004: 14).

In contrast, a San take on the Queen's role in their standing as citizens of Botswana is poignantly expressed in this letter from Komtsha Komtsha,

Dear Queen

I am an old man. I am a Bushman. If we are too small to see or you have forgotten, you must ask other people what a Bushman is and where they live ... Not very long ago you gave the Tswana people their land. At that time, when you came here, what did you see? Were there only trees and black people here? Is that why you did not talk to us? The Tswana people think that you have given us to them. They do not understand that you did not see us and that it is a mistake (in Le Roux and White 2004: 182).

The San narrative on British custodianship and its postcolonial replacement is revealing and notably not even alluded to within the McCall Smith series. Kuela Kiema (2010) elucidates the feelings of his people in independent Botswana,

Our oppression and land dispossession are colonial legacies which have been institutionalised by the Botswana government ... Botswana's political independence was hell for us. The residents of CKGR began to sense trouble soon after the Botswana government came to power in 1966 ... the government started harassing us in our own land. Our parents were jailed for being on their tribal hunting grounds (81-82).

Motholeli, the older child adopted by Precious Ramotswe, is an excellent student who, despite being wheelchair-bound, is determined to be a mechanic and watches closely while her foster father works on cars, asking questions, helping out. Her disability can be read as a metaphor for her race's disenfranchisement, yet this girl makes the most of the slightest opportunity and

the narrative suggests she will thrive as a citizen of Botswana. Mma Ramotswe stresses the importance of education in this quest and Motholeli empowers herself, within the context of the dominant culture. Indeed, as the Matron from the orphan farm says to Precious Ramotswe:

It is very kind of you to adopt them like that [... it is] such good news [that Motholeli wants to be a mechanic]. Why can't a girl become a mechanic? Even if she is in a wheelchair ... She will be able to help Mr J.L.B.Matekoni fix our pump ... [to which Precious replies] He is going to make a ramp for her wheelchair ... Then she will be able to get at the engines (McCall Smith 2002: 143).

Analysis of the discourse can read Motholeli's wheelchair ramp as the external assistance provided for assimilation to occur. This is in keeping with metaphor commonly found within disability and feminist theories and extrapolating from this is the broader position of 'disability' of the San in Botswana today, with its own set of special resources: "Disabled are perceived as unproductive members of society. Yet most disabled people are placed in a double-bind: they have access to inadequate resources because they are unemployed or underemployed, [or vice versa]" (Wendell 1996: 110). Later in the series, Mr J.L.B.Matekoni hears of a miracle cure for afflictions such as Motholeli's and takes out a loan for the treatment, for which they must drive to Johannesburg. It is difficult to be critical of such self-sacrifice and in a glorious revelation Mma Ramotswe informs her husband that there is no need for a loan, she had sold some of her cattle. But this renders Motholeli indebted to her foster parents for their altruism, and she says "I don't want anybody to cry for me [...] I am happy. I will carry on being happy" (McCall Smith 2009: 247).

In *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* Appropriation is evident in the lack of sensitivity within the dominant culture towards their absolute commandeering of San land when Puso, the younger of the two fostered San children, becomes surly and willful, informing his foster parents that he hates them. The Matron at the orphanage advises that what Mr J.L.B. Matekoni should do is "take the boy out with him in his truck. Take him out to the lands, to see the cattle. Things like that" (McCall Smith 2002: 145). The Matron (and Precious Ramotswe who considers this good advice) is apparently oblivious of the fact that these same lands are those that the boy's ancestors once roamed freely and these same cattle, now owned by members of the dominant Tswana, are the reason (along with tourism, its associated big game hunting, and mining) the San have been summarily evicted. McCall Smith's moral code appears insensible to the fact of the San's eviction (to facilitate Tswana Appropriation) as is evident through Precious's thoughts as she laments the encroaching urbanization and the pace of modernization only insofar as it affects relatively privileged people like herself,

It was a large house by modern standards, built in a day when builders had no reason to worry about space. There was the whole of Africa in those days, most of it unused, and nobody bothered to save space. Now it was different, and people had begun to worry about cities and how they gobbled up the bush (McCall Smith 2007: 7)

Puso bitterly denies his ethnicity for a time, being bullied for it at school in Gaborone. He sobs to Mma Ramotswe: “I don’t want to be ... that” (McCall Smith 2009: 38), a self-Negation based on years of systemic Negation that Bihela Sekere, a young San man relates to: “I could not touch anything that has to do with Anthropology – if I saw the word ‘Bushman’ or ‘San’ or ‘Basarwa’ I would just put the book aside” (5). Such a story was also related to anthropologist Sandy Gall (2001) during his interviews with displaced San: “Some of the other children beat us up and the teachers, too [because] I was depending on wild foods. They picked on me because I am Bushman ... [my sister and I] dropped out because we were discriminated against and threatened so I could not go to classes” (122), and as San author Kuela Kiema (2010) remembers with horror,

[T]he teachers said the government wanted to make us human beings and that we should stop being Basarwa. They started teaching us ‘proper’ human behaviour. In [our] tradition, when being called you respond by saying *Yee!* We had never before been told it was an insult, or inhuman ... But now we would receive corporal punishment if we responded to a teacher’s call with *Yee!* ... We didn’t know what it was called then but it was ethnocentrism of the worst kind – yet we were expected to teach our parents this ‘better’ culture ... Our school reports said ... Parents, this child can do better than this, but his main problem is that he does not know Setswana, please teach him Setswana at home. How could our parents teach us Setswana? (39).

Puso is constantly reminded by his foster-parents of the necessity to be proud of his heritage; they remind him of the San’s ancient and unique culture, “ ‘You could be a great tracker’, Mr J.L.B.Matekoni said to him once. ‘You have that gift from your people’ ” (McCall Smith 2009: 36). In this case, Spurr’s trope of Idealization comes into play, where a group is considered no threat, so the dominant culture can afford to use glowing rhetoric about the strengths of the Other, since it is now only of historical interest – apart from situations where it is carefully contained and contrived for tourists, as the ingenuously Idealized comments of the tourists in Lekoa’s 2007 documentary attest:

Tourists: They hardly suffer from funny diseases like heart attack ... because of the type of food they eat ... There is actually so much that we can learn from these people, you know. You realise that these people can stay for some time without food because they have their own traditions. And

there is apparently great wealth of knowledge of all the different substances and their properties, poisonous, non-poisonous ... but there should be a balance between development and preserving culture.

Significantly, it was Motholeli who *dug herself* and her baby brother out of the hole in the sand (again, a concept heavy with imagery) and walked for miles until they were picked up and taken to the orphanage, calling up the Idealization trope again by highlighting the fact that the race has the definitive genetic blueprint for survival. But the postcolonialist again could justifiably assert that the narrative endorses a *retreat out of the desert* as the only way the San can survive, that their child-like status can only be realized as fully human by ‘growing up’ (read: urbanization, assimilation into the dominant culture, or, as Lekoa (2007: 51) dubs it “Tswanatization”). This, of course, suits the corporate interests of cattle owners and diamond companies just fine.

Aestheticization is evident Precious gazes (the concept of the ‘gaze’ as an indicator of power being the subject of much psycho-philosophical scrutiny) at the sleeping Puso, “She would gaze at him, at the perfection of his features – for he was an attractive child, with the honey-coloured skin of the Bushmen side of his family ... His Kalahari ancestors had bequeathed him eyes that shone with light” (McCall Smith 2009: 36).

Negation of an apparently benign manifestation is evident in McCall Smith’s series and can also be read as Aestheticization by way of infantilization, since in this series the entire race could be romantically symbolized by these two children, much loved but ultimately required to conform. Although the author has Precious Ramotswa console her foster daughter when she is bullied at school with the words “Sir Seretse Khama said that every person in Botswana ... is of equal value. The same. That means you too” (McCall Smith 2002: 35), the very assumption of *sameness* in this context means downplaying her uniqueness as San for the purpose of survival at school. The irony of this is that the Human Genome Project has found “there is a San woman in the ancestry of each one of us, as far back as 200,000 years” (*Global News Monitor* 2005: 2). Kenneth Good (2008) articulates the government policy endorsed by Precious’s homily: “In purportedly homogenous Botswana, Seretse Khama imposed a new identity on San as ‘Remote Area Dwellers’ (RADs). This emphasized geography and avoided the issues of ethnicity, though it was clear that the majority of new remote people were San” (107). Such an assimilation-or-perish agenda is being forced upon the San by the government of Seretse Khama’s son, President Ian Khama: as the activist group The First People of the Kalahari (FPK) asserts: “Bushman villages have been cut off from their main sources of food and water and outsiders have been prohibited from entering [the CKGR] to provide relief ... heavy contingents of police, military and park rangers trucked out about 40 people – most of the remaining inhabitants – at gunpoint” (*Global News Monitor* 2005: 2).

There is no suggestion by the adults in McCall Smith's narrative, that perhaps some facets of San culture could work their way into the curriculum, even incidentally, unless, as Bennun (2004) asserts, it is as an historical narrative of an "extinct" race. To this extent Spurr's trope of Negation is again evident, in the systemic omission or dismissal of a rich cultural knowledge system despite the fact that recognition of – and systemic accommodation for – Indigenous Knowledge Systems is an acknowledged necessity in the *Preamble to the World Declaration on Education for All* which declares: "traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development" (cited in Hays 2001: 239). As San men James Morris and Aron Johannes articulate in a booklet of San voices, "We do not want to cast away the importance of education today, but traditional education must become intermingled so that the essence of both can come together" (Stewart and Hays 2010: 2).

An elderly man expressed the following opinion to San author Kuela Kiema in Botswana while Kiema was a teacher-in-training, comparing the insidious process of "Tswanatization" to the Afrikaaner hubris that underscored apartheid in South Africa:

Your tax, young man, will be used to enhance the traditional customs and norms of Setswana-speaking people- but not yours ... our loyalty to the country will be measured only in your obedience to the Setswana-speaking peoples – and not to your own. These things will only lead to low self-esteem for you and your people (18-19).

Again, within the Negation trope, there is no mention of the foster children in McCall Smith's series retaining their mother-tongue and their names are *Tswana* names, not San, suggesting they were re-named at the orphanage. This encouragement to discard all traces of San identity is a reality for San people, as Kiema (2010) recalls clearly, "One day in 1987 Miss Susan Supang, our class teacher, wrote a list of English names for us to choose from. I chose 'Charles' (41). And, as San woman Nxisae Nxau from Tsodilo, northern Botswana, relates, such prejudice is entrenched in the Tswana culture, even when San individuals are objects of affection:

I met this man, he came up to me and said that he liked me and would want to marry me, then he asked me my name and I said "Nxisae". He said, "But what is your Tswana name, don't you have a Tswana name?" and I said, "No, I don't have." He walked away, saying, "No, I cannot fall in love with a San woman." So I said, "So?", for I am proud of my culture (in LeRoux and White 2004: 71).

David Naude, of Shakawe, Botswana, also recounts a case of Negation, “I found out that when these other people married our women, the man would not allow the woman to speak her language, and when the children came, they were taught only to speak the language of their father ... So that is how our language is dying out (in LeRoux and White 2004: 69). Kiema substantiates such Negation, “We are still shown between the Stone Age and the Iron Age chapters” (76),

We do not feature in pre-colonial history of Botswana except as the first inhabitants of southern Africa;

We do not feature in Botswana’s colonial history except as expert hunters;

We do not feature in the struggle for Botswana’s independence; and

We do not feature in the history of contemporary Botswana as we are still portrayed as a ‘stone-age’ people (75-76).

The San children’s positioning within McCall Smith’s fiction series is important (as is the San’s *positioning as children*) and I argue, via a postcolonial lens, that the suggestion inherent in the text is that without Mma Ramotswa’s well-meaning intercession in the children’s lives (symbolic perhaps of NGO and other external intervention in the San’s lives generally) they would remain disempowered, that they could never make it as self-determining citizens of Botswana. Indeed, they probably have some sense that former President Festus Mogae’s insensitive and inherently racist remark, “If the Bushmen want to survive they must change, or otherwise, like the dodo, they will perish” (in Gall 2001: 84) expresses, sadly, some measure of truth.

To paraphrase Paulo Friere (1970), oppressed people are so enmeshed and have such a sense of powerlessness within the dominant society that they cannot perceive of the oppressor as being “outside themselves”, consequently rendering them “fearful of freedom” and unlikely to “seek their own liberation” (128). As the aforementioned elderly man pointed out to Kuela Kiema: “Your repression has been so systematic that you are now participating in your own repression” (Kiema 2010:19). Thus, as anthropologist Jennifer Hays asserts: “Very few San individuals have been able to enter into the discourse of national and international politics as equals” (2002: 29). Indeed, Kenneth Good (2003) asserts that under the definition of ‘tribe’ in the *Chieftancy Act* the San are not recognized in the list of Botswana tribes (22). Kiema relates “At school we learned about Setswana chiefs and their taboos and totems ... No one from our tribe was in the House of Chiefs to advise parliament on matters affecting *our* traditions” (19).

Suggesting that the general Tswana population (which Mma Ramotswa represents in this series) is ignorant of the San's disenfranchisement and actively believes the nationalist rhetoric of inclusiveness, Precious – with no irony – calls the San and the Tswana “the two peoples of this country” (McCall Smith 2009: 35) as though the two groups are on the same socio-economic and political levels. McCall Smith's depiction of the San children in his series as being utterly dependent upon or assimilated into the dominant culture sits comfortably and conveniently with his favoured VIP status in Botswana (Good, pers. comm. October, 2011). In *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958) Laurens van der Post mourned the “world” of the San which he had long mythologized as becoming increasingly “lost” to the Western imaginary. It is worth wondering what van der Post would make of the new manifestations of lostness the San experience today.

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