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# International Journal of Marketing Semiotics

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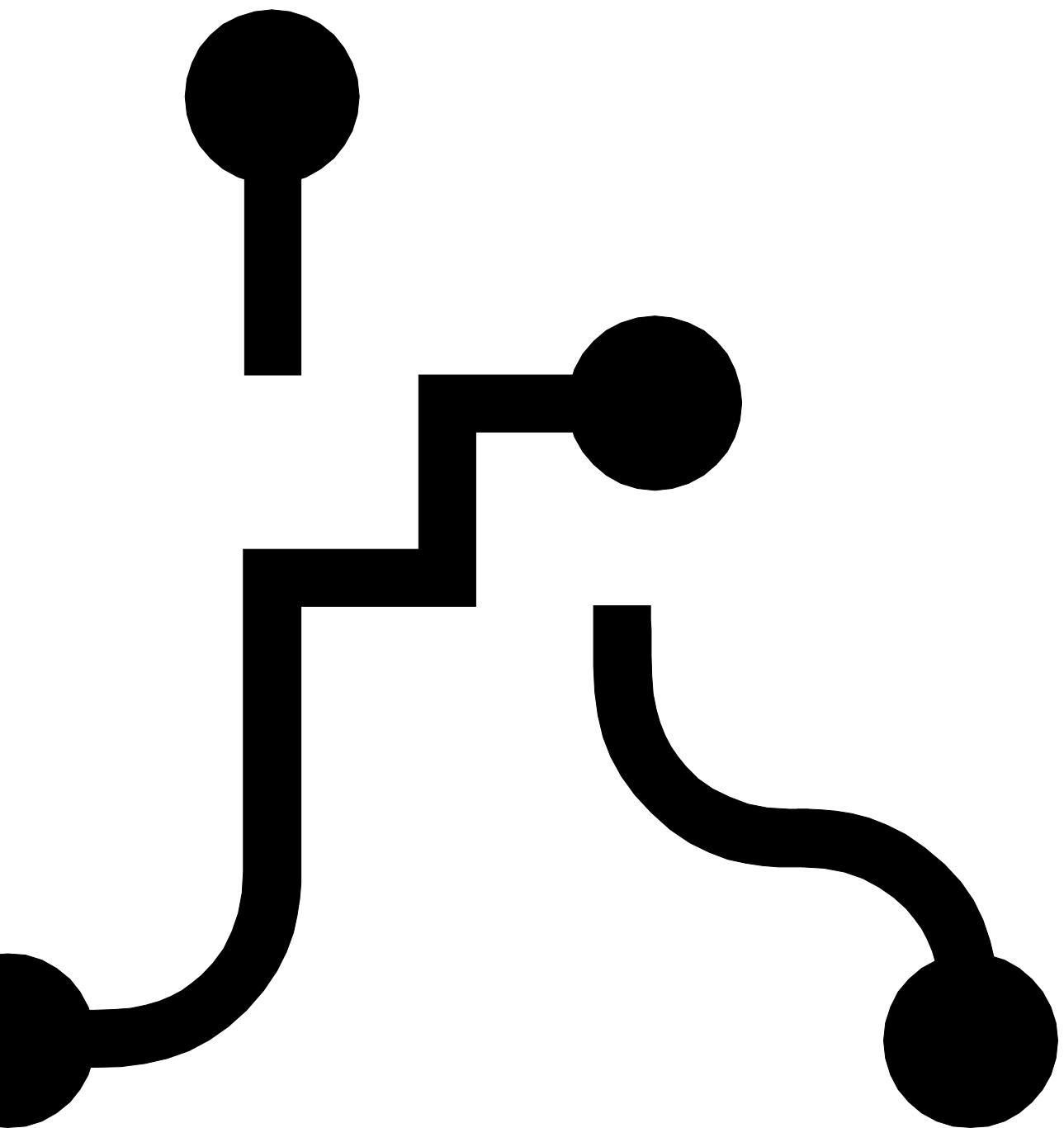
## 2018

Vol. 6

ISSN: 2195-2280

[www.ijmarketingsemiotics.com](http://www.ijmarketingsemiotics.com)

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# Papers

# Multisensory perception of cuteness in mascots and zoo animals

**Jason Dydynski\***, Tartu University, Department of Semiotics, Estonia

([jason.mario.dydynski@ut.ee](mailto:jason.mario.dydynski@ut.ee))

**Nelly Mäekivi\*\***, Tartu University, Department of Semiotics, Estonia

([nelly.maekivi@ut.ee](mailto:nelly.maekivi@ut.ee))

## Abstract

Cuteness, as dealt with in the existing semiotic and product design literatures, is often regarded as a purely visual perception. This paper provides an alternative to existing lines of thinking by offering a more holistic, multisensory approach to humans' perception of cuteness with regard to animal mascots and animals themselves. We adopt a biosemiotic approach to cuteness and product design studies with the employment of *Umwelt* theory and associated concepts of multisensory perception. Additionally, we analyze *Kindchenschema*, that is different visually perceptible characteristics that are considered to be properties of cute animals, in order to establish the multisensory aspect of the affective dimension of cuteness. In explicating the interaction between the senses, we analyze cases of sensory incongruence that can affect one's perceptual experience of animal characters and animals. We then argue for the need of a multisensory approach to the study of cuteness and the implications such an approach has for marketing research and applied products/services' design.

**Keywords:** biosemiotics, cuteness, *Umwelt*, product design, animal mascots.

**\*Jason Mario Dydynski** is a doctoral student in semiotics and cultural studies at the University of Tartu in Estonia. His research interests include concepts of cuteness, approach motivation, sensory perception, and anthropomorphism as well as their application in marketing, animal conservation, robotics, and product design. His current work focuses on modeling the perception of cuteness/*Kindschenschema* through the lens of cultural and zoosemiotic theories. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3216-255X

**\*\*Nelly Mäekivi** has a Master's degree in semiotics and cultural studies from Tartu University, Estonia. She is currently working on her PhD project. Her interests lie in intra- and interspecies communication, ethology, anthropology, and human representations of other species. Her main research focus lies in analyzing zoological gardens and cities as hybrid environments, and species conservation as a multifaceted research object by applying zoosemiotic, ecosemiotic, and cultural semiotic perspectives. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5912-9245

## 0. Introduction

Marketing semiotics constitutes a research field that is largely informed by cultural and semiotic theories in addressing communicative and consumer behavior phenomena (e.g. Barthes 1967; Solomon 1988). However, little attention has been paid to biosemiotics. We suggest that biosemiotics, when dealing with cuteness studies, has much to offer to both theoretical and applied marketing semiotic research. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to offer a biosemiotically grounded approach to perceived cuteness of animal mascots and animals themselves. We argue that this approach is more holistic than existing perspectives, as it stems from the idea that cuteness is perceived in a multisensory way.

Taking into account that humans are not purely cultural beings, but also biological beings with specific communication capabilities, is particularly important in perceiving other animals and animal characters. The role performed by biological factors in our perception of and communication with other species in general, as well as in the perception of cuteness and youth more specifically, has been underscored by the ethologist Konrad Lorenz (1943) and the biologist Charles Darwin (1872).

Building on existing biosemiotic theories, we consider *Umwelt* as the key concept in the discussion of cuteness perceptions. *Umwelt* is a concept that was established by the Estonian-German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1982) to describe the meaningful world of an animal. *Umwelt* refers to an animal's subjective world: it consists of *Merkwelt*, which is the specific perceptual field of a given organism, and the *Wirkwelt*, which is the field of interaction. More specifically, *Umwelt* is the totality of an animal's meaning relations, i.e. the only perceivable reality for the animal, based on its perceptual and operational organs (Uexküll 1982). Here, it is important to stress that an animal's point of view is what matters, i.e. something can be meaningful only from the point of view of the perceiver. The way that an animal perceives others and his/her surroundings is dependent on its body structure and is thus highly species-specific, which means that communication channels (also including the range and receptivity of the senses) employed by different species differ significantly. It follows that the communicative abilities of different species depend on the structure of their *Umwelt*. The more similar the body structure of different species (i.e. the more similarly they can perceive and act upon the world), the greater the overlap between their *Umwelten* and the more possibilities there will be for communication. Overlaps in *Umwelten* enable the communication of complicated matters between different species such as selecting a mating partner, as is the case with lions and tigers in some zoos that in the past have produced offspring (ligers and tigons). We apply the notion of *Umwelt* not to other species, but to humans and our specific communication system. Thus, our *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics Vol.VI (2018)*

approach stems from the realization that humans, in addition to other animals, have a species-specific *Umwelt*, encompassing the perceptual senses, concrete communication channels, as well as methods for social communication and interacting with the environment; our *Umwelt* overlaps to different extents with the *Umwelten* of other animal species, thus enabling us to communicate with and ascribe meaning to them.

More precisely, given the topic of this paper, we employ *Umwelt* as it pertains to the perception of cuteness in other animals and animal mascots. We argue that the perceptions of cute animals, animal mascots, and the way that people interact with them creates an affective relation. Affection, in relation to cuteness studies, can be defined as the outcome of positive sentiments through sensory perception (Gn 2016). This definition is not limited to emotion, but refers to the whole bodily experience (physiological, emotional, etc.) in which one's capacity to act in certain ways is diminished or enhanced (Spinoza 2001; Gn 2016). To elaborate, by affective relation we mean that people have a certain attitude towards what they encounter and, in the case of cuteness, they display a tendency for interacting in a multisensory fashion.

The current study, although dealing with marketing issues, falls within the field of biosemiotics, and more precisely under anthropological zoosemiotics and its subcategory of representational zoosemiotics, which deals with animals as sources of representation and meaning (see Martinelli 2010). In addition to employing Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory, we recruit Lorenz's<sup>1</sup> (1943) *Kindchenschema*, i.e. the different, visually perceivable characteristics that are considered to be properties of cute animals. By building on *Kindchenschema* and the affective dimension of cuteness we propose to rethink the methods of studying cuteness in marketing. We argue that visual perception has been overemphasized in cuteness studies, as well as in marketing and design studies in general. By offering a multisensory approach to the perception of cuteness, we are able to address both the potential problems and the benefits that stem from sensory incongruence. We further argue for the relevance of such an approach in the design and testing of products and services both within the field of cuteness related industries and species conservation marketing, as well as in the broader marketplace.

## 1. General approaches to cuteness

*Cute* is not a straightforward term, and its metamorphosis is a proof of that. In English, it derives from the word *acute*, denoting a cunning, clever, or shrewd perception (Brzozowska-Brywczyńska 2007; Cross 2004; Dale 2016). Thus, its connotations elicit a sense of a sharp and keen understanding of something or someone. However, because of this connotative

<sup>1</sup> Lorenz was Uexküll's student (Maran et al. 2011: 51).

transformation of the concept, cute may also evoke sensations of warm-heartedness and affection.

Around 1830, the term cute was used to describe *objects* that were attractive, charming, or pretty (Cross 2004). An early recorded example taken from *Virginia Illustrated* shows the term being used to refer to a pair of small socks for a doll: ““What cute little socks!” said the woman regarding the work of interest” (Strother 1857: 166). Nowadays, however, we also use this word to characterize both humans and other animals.

Cute or cuteness has several definitions that emphasize different nuances. Cuteness may be defined as “a characteristic of a product, person, thing, or context that makes it appealing, charming, funny, desirable, often endearing, memorable, and/or (usually) non-threatening” (Marcus et al. 2017: 8). More common definitions see cuteness as a set of attractive infantile features (see, for example, Morreall 1991; Sanders 1992). Some semantic uses of the term cute refer to small objects or to a sense of smallness (Marcus et al. 2017). Cuteness, as a generalized concept, is most directly tied to the physical characteristics of humans, animals, and objects. However, cuteness has also been identified with a style, language, gender, or cultural marker (Ngai 2005), and, as above mentioned, historically it has been used as an indication of perceived mental abilities. The Japanese adjective *kawaii*, which denotes the affective feelings often elicited by babies and young animals, is often translated into English as ‘cute’ (Nittono et al. 2012). However, some authors also employ the concepts of cute and *kawaii* for describing a certain social context in Japan (see, for example, Madge 1992). We can infer that the conceptualization of cuteness is similar in different cultures. Some sources contend that the connotations of cuteness render the term difficult to define and simply state that cuteness “[...] has multiple meanings ranging from “someone who is sweet and nice” to “something that you want to squeeze”” (Wang and Mukhopadhyay 2016: 150). Some studies have also proposed the term *whimsical cuteness* (Nenkov et al. 2008; Nenkov and Scott 2014), stating that “whimsical cuteness is not characterized by the vulnerable nature inherent in the cuteness of a helpless baby or child; it is instead associated with fun and playfulness” (Nenkov and Scott 2014: 327), e.g. a purse that is designed to look like a book or a hotdog outfit made for a dachshund are whimsically cute. In general, there seems to be two different types of cuteness — one that is largely based on the aforementioned whimsicality and the other, more prevalent one, on the theory that baby-like features, which elicit warm and caring feelings<sup>2</sup>, are cute.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that some animal documentaries have captured scenes that indicate that caring for babies of other species is more widespread than we might assume, e.g. in the movie *Eye of the leopard* (2006) a leopard cares for a baby baboon, whose mother she has killed (and the leopard was not lactating

Cuteness, as dealt with in the relevant literature, places considerable emphasis on the visual aspect, i.e. cuteness is mainly seen as something experienced through our visual sense (see Miesler et al. 2011; Morreall 1991). This might be the reason why the relevant literature compares the notion of cuteness to other aesthetic experiences that elicit positive emotions. For example, cute may often be juxtaposed with pretty, attractive, and beautiful, to discover whether or not they could be synonymous or what kind of semantic preferences are present in using these words (see Ly and Jung 2015; Geldart 2010). However, we argue that experiencing affective feelings<sup>3</sup> also plays a great role when depicting cute objects and subjects. For example, books like *Pure cute* (West and Bergund 2009) or *So cute you could die!* (Summers 2017) feature predominately pictures of baby animals that are meant to elicit affection and caretaking reactions. In addition, picture books like *Hot guys and baby animals* (Khuner and Newman 2011) feature solely baby animals in conjunction with human caretakers. In either case, whether aesthetically appealing or eliciting affection, the physical characteristics as perceived through the visual sense, usually not accounting for other senses, are used as a means for eliciting a desired response from an audience. Since we are dealing with cuteness in animal mascots (who are depicted as having biological attributes) and to a lesser extent with zoo animals (that are biological beings), we consider cute as a more widely known concept that stems from the biological approach and is based on the criterion of youthful features (not the type of cuteness which is based on whimsicality).

## 2. The biological approach to cuteness

Research into the notion that physical traits influence the perception of cuteness and that cuteness can generate a caregiver response from adults has a well-established history. Charles Darwin (1872), in *The expression of emotions in man and animals*, explains that there is likely an adaptive force in both humans and many mammals that encourages adults to take care of infants. In his discussion of the affection of cats and dogs towards their young, Darwin claims that “there is every reason to believe that the gestures both of hostility and affection are innate or inherited [...]” (1872: 57).

In offering a theory to explain the driving force behind this inclination for caregiving, Konrad Lorenz (1943), who studied the parenting behavior of several species, proposed a series of characteristics in infants that promote nurturing and caregiving responses and suppress

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herself at the time); and in the documentary *Spy in the wild* (2017) a male chimpanzee adopts a baby genet.

<sup>3</sup> Also called the aww factor (Dale 2016).

aggressive responses in human adults. Lorenz's contemporaries synthesized the list of features to include: "(a) large head relative to body size, rounded head; (b) large, protruding forehead; (c) large eyes relative to face, eyes below midline of head; (d) rounded, protruding cheeks; (e) rounded body shape; (f) soft, elastic body surfaces; (g) elastic body movements"<sup>4</sup> (Cupchik and László 1992: 124). Originally entitled the *Kindchenschema* (Lorenz 1943), this theory is also referred to as *baby schema* (see Borgi et al. 2014), *child schema* (see Dale 2016), or *neotenous features* (see Archer and Monton 2011). In contemporary teachings, the guidelines for cute character design also emphasize the given features, with the addition of using light colors and keeping the character simple (Marcus et al. 2017: 25–26). Psychological and behavioral research examining the *Kindchenschema* has found that adults form more positive aesthetic judgments of infants with a higher incidence of these features (Hildebrandt and Fitzgerald 1978; Sternglanz et al. 1977; Gardner and Wallach 1965). Thus, in cuteness studies the concept's biological principles are often referred to, emphasizing the babyish features that cause the innate releasing mechanism of caregiving and affection towards the very young: cuteness is *inviting* (Genosko 2005; Morreall 1991).

There is "considerable agreement (and evidence [...]) that humans respond in a parental way to certain sets of facial and bodily features found in human infants. These features make most of us go "ah" and "coo" regarding their owner as "cute" or "sweet"" (Archer 1997: 249). For example, in zoo marketing it is common to depict endearing animals, who are usually large charismatic mammals, to evoke positive emotions (Cushing and Markwell 2011). Baby animals, especially, are credited for zoos' mounting revenues due to the rise in visitor numbers (see, for example, Clark 2008; Kawata 2013). There is also a general loss of interest following the aging of the animals (Mullan and Marvin 1987). This phenomenon can be easily explained by the fact that animal babies, as human babies, possess youthful characteristics described by *Kindchenschema* which decrease once they reach sexual maturity.<sup>5</sup>

In animals, this is not only evident in the changes of their visible features, but also in their movements and interactions with their surroundings, such as when their clumsiness disappears. It is also important to note that although young animals possess these youthful features naturally, when it comes to animal designs some features are often exaggerated, e.g. the eyes are enlarged, the heads are designed as non-proportionate to the body size, etc. However, there

<sup>4</sup> In some cases, 8 features are named with the substitution of elastic movements for clumsiness or weakness (e.g. Morreall 1991) and the addition of "[s]hort, stubby limbs with pudgy feet and hands" (Genosko 2005: 5).

<sup>5</sup> There seem to be two exceptions to this phenomenon, namely giant panda bears, and koala bears who retain their youthful features and thus their cuteness.

is a limit to this exaggeration, meaning that at some point the *cutified* animal mascot or toy will no longer be perceived as cute, indicating that there are certain proportional aspects that need to be accounted for. Lorenz himself said, “The Kewpie doll represents the maximum possible exaggeration of the proportions between cranium and face which our perception can tolerate without switching our response from the sweet baby to that elicited by the eerie” (Lorenz 1981: 164–165). We accept that in addition to biological roots, there are also cultural factors that influence the perception of cuteness, e.g. cuteness has been viewed, in general, more positively in Japan as compared to the United States of America where it often has more negative connotations, such as helplessness and distraction from responsibilities (Ngai 2005). However, in this article, we concentrate for analytical clarity on the biosemiotic aspects that are under-represented in cuteness studies; thus, we shall not analyze cultural aspects. We explore the importance of a multisensory approach to cuteness perception, especially regarding animal mascots and zoo animals, and how this biosemiotically based approach can be a viable marketing tool.

### **3. Anthropomorphism in cuteness and *Kindchenschema***

Anthropomorphism is a well-studied area across disciplines, e.g. literature, religion studies, computing, psychology, biology, marketing, and very important in evaluating the cuteness of animal characters and animals. Anthropomorphism denotes attributing human characteristics to non-humans, with an emphasis on attributing animals with human mental and behavioral characteristics (see, for example, Serpell 2002) (and especially in cases where this characterization is erroneous (Horowitz and Bekoff 2007)). A great example of anthropomorphism is that of a zoo panda, who “[...] becomes an animal imbued with human personality, with human needs, and subject to similar emotions. So closely does it resemble the soft toys which are made in its image that the toy is played back into the perception of the real animal and thus even adult pandas become soft toys” (Mullan and Marvin 1987: xv).

Lorenz (1970[1951]) extended the cuteness response beyond human infants and young animals to inanimate objects such as dolls, toys, and stuffed animals by means of an anthropomorphic analogy, thus widening the scope of attributing human characteristics from living animals to non-living objects. In perceiving other animals besides humans, analysis of anthropomorphism often indicates that animals from certain species are more likely to be anthropomorphized. This applies to the species that are physically more similar to us (e.g. primates) (Horowitz and Bekoff 2007; Connell 2013). The focus here is on the species resembling ourselves as the target of anthropomorphization. Additional research reinforces this

claim by showing that people ascribe to different species various mental states (e.g. sentience, affect, cognition). Top positions, once again, are occupied mostly by species who are biologically similar to us (Herzog and Galvin 1997). It may be argued that this is due to the shared or overlapping *Umwelten* between humans and other mammals (see also Mäekivi, Maran 2016).

This mammalian *Umwelt*, or precultural basis for anthropomorphization, also infuses bias when we interpret other animals or even animal characters and mascots. In research looking at the perception of cuteness in animal characters and mascots (Dydynski 2017), it was shown that inherent biases towards given species could lead to more positive aesthetic judgements (e.g. towards mammals) or negative aesthetic judgments (e.g. towards fish) as regards animal characters and mascots.

This bias is also encountered in the diversity of species represented as animal mascots in sports. In the *National Hockey League*, out of the 29 currently used mascots 16 are depicted as mammalian species, with only 3 being invertebrates, also heavily anthropomorphized (NHL 2018)<sup>6</sup>. This bias against invertebrates has been labeled as *vertebrate chauvinism* (Kellert 1985). In zoos these vertebrates are referred to as *charismatic megafauna* and zoos are sometimes accused of bias against mammals, because they seem to “spotlight cute animals, fuzzy animals, “charismatic megafauna”” (Malamud 2012: 116). In species conservation, these species are referred to as *flagship species*, denoting a “popular, “cute”, charismatic animal that is used as a symbol to arouse public interest in the animal and its habitat [...]” (Smith and Sutton 2008: 127).

Although anthropomorphism targets mainly mental and behavioral characteristics, there is another kind of anthropomorphism, which is especially important for and evident in marketing. In marketing, emphasizing human physical (as opposed to mental) characteristics in different products is a customary method that is used to increase sales and the likeability of goods (Wang and Mukhopadhyay 2016). These physical characteristics, for example in animal mascots, are exactly the same as those that abide by the features of *Kindchenschema* and make the mascots and other animal characters more neotenous. For example, Mickey Mouse's head and eyes have grown larger and he has gotten sclerae resembling human eyes (Gould 1979). This physical aspect of anthropomorphism is also a link to cuteness, since, as discussed previously, physical characteristics are directly tied to the perception of cuteness.

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<sup>6</sup> A listing of the current mascots of the National Hockey League can be found here: <http://www.thehockeynews.com/news/article/nhl-mascot-rankings-the-good-the-bad-and-the-cuddly>.

Traces of anthropomorphizing can be found in animal characters' design, as people respond more positively to anthropomorphic portrayals of animal characters compared to non-anthropomorphic depictions (Connell 2013). We can see this trend in the depictions of non-mammalian species in a variety of animated movies and their licensed merchandise: in *Finding Nemo* (Pixar 2003) and *Finding Dory* (Pixar 2016), many fish and aquatic species are ascribed front facing eyes instead of their lateral facing ones among many other anthropomorphic characteristics, while in movies like *A bug's life* (Pixar 1998) insects are made bipedal and their limbs are reduced from six to four. In a similar fashion, *Lucas the spider*<sup>7</sup> is portrayed with large eyes, relatively clumsy movements, with a childish voice. By rendering something that should be feared or repulsive, cute and adorable, *Lucas the spider* manages to override a quite common inherent bias against spiders or even arachnophobia, a widespread biologically induced fear and a psychological response to spiders especially in Western cultures (Davey 1994).

#### 4. Cuteness as design factor

We briefly discussed that often the affective responses towards youthful features are manipulated for artistic or commercial reasons. In Western markets, the shift away from traditionally ornate toys towards porcelain dolls and figures can be traced in the emergence and rapid popularity of the teddy bear in 1902 (Hinde and Barden 1985). The development and market research of this aesthetic did not fully develop until well after WWII (Ngai 2005). During this period, many products and related media underwent a rapid aesthetic transformation. Similarly to Mickey Mouse, the teddy bear design assumed neotenic traits (Hinde and Barden 1985). While this trend can be seen globally, its emergence can be traced in 1970's Japan with the establishment of Gakken Publishers and Sanrio, which featured cute characters, such as Hello Kitty, on stationery and greeting cards (Madge 1997). By 1990, Sanrio was earning an estimated \$90 million annually in Japan (Shimamura 1991: 60). Companies both in Japan and in other parts of the world soon began utilizing cuteness in an attempt to mirror their success (Shimamura 1991: 58–61).

Nowadays, cuteness as a dominant aesthetic in Western media is exemplified in Disney and Pixar's commercial success with cute anthropomorphic animals and characters such as Nemo (*Finding Nemo*) and Stitch (*Lilo and Stitch*) (Allison 2003). As an anecdotal confirmation, Mr. Disney himself is said to have put notes on his animators' desks which reminded them to "keep it cute!" (Genosko 2005: 1). Additionally, human characters such as Elsa and Anna from *Frozen* are now being designed with more of these exaggerated *Kindchenschema*

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.tubefilter.com/2018/03/12/lucas-the-spider-viral-youtube-acclaim/>.

characteristics, e.g. larger eyes, bigger heads, softer features compared to the traditional traits of Snow White (Wiersma 2000).

Contemporary research into cuteness as a factor in the design and marketing of artefacts has also largely focused on visual aesthetics (Cho 2012). This focus on visual aesthetics is also encountered in research that seeks to examine and define the aspects of the *Kindchenschema* (Berry and Zebrowitz-McArthur 1988; Bogin 1988). Many cuteness studies feature pictures of faces that are presented for evaluation, where characteristics (e.g. the shape of the head, size of the eyes, etc.) are manipulated to find out which *Kindchenschema* features are indeed important in cuteness perceptions (see Wang and Mukhopadhyay 2016). Often, these studies utilize eye tracking and gaze allocation as their primary measurements (Glocker et al. 2009; Borgi et al. 2014) or ask respondents to evaluate pictures by utilizing the visual modality (Little 2012). In addition, physical characteristics such as color (Etcoff 1999; Frost 1989; Wright and Rainwater 1962) and object roundness (Bar and Neta 2006) that were not established features in the original *Kindchenschema* theory, have lately gained traction. Although there has been extensive research into the visual communication channel in the perception of cuteness, whether of biological or cultural orientation, few attempts have been made to study additional communication channels in evaluating cuteness. In the next section we approach cuteness from a more holistic vantage point to explicate the importance of other perceptual modalities and their interconnectedness in creating a multisensory perceptual experience. To this end, we draw on the perceptual framework of our own *Umwelt* for establishing the importance of other senses (besides visual), such as touch, smell, and sound perception in our apprehension of other species.

## 5. Cuteness as a multisensory perception

Humans, along with other animals, have many communicative abilities that enable us to perceive the world in a specific way: “[a]ll living beings are immersed in an impalpable “bubble” delineated and defined by the special possibilities allowed each organism by its unique means of sensual perception” (Sebeok 1986: 172). However, despite the typical and well-known Aristotelian categorization of humans’ five senses<sup>8</sup>, vision is still often cited as the main modality for gathering information. “[T]he world we inhabit is filled with visual images. They are central to how we represent, make meaning, and communicate in the world around us” (Struken and Cartwright 2001: 1). Since we live in the information and new media age it is understandable

<sup>8</sup> There are also authors who claim that people are in possession of more senses, e.g. proprioception and equilibrioception (see, for example, Macpherson 2011).

that a lot of emphasis is placed on the visual modality where text, pictures, graphics, videos, are constantly present on our screens. This phenomenon has also been referred to as “the hegemony of vision in Western culture” (Howes 2003: xii). Still, we do not agree that the visual modality<sup>9</sup> should be granted independence from the other senses, as this is not reflective of our experiences which are multisensory in nature.<sup>10</sup> Echoing a rather similar thought, it might be argued that generally if some other sense is taken into account in addition to vision, it is most probably audition, e.g. “[m]essages almost exclusively appeal to sight and sound, neglecting the full five-dimensional picture” (Lindstrom 2005: 86). However, humans as a species belonging to the mammalian class, use the entire sensorial spectrum at their disposal while interacting with others and their environment. Thus, we also utilize other communication channels which should not be underestimated.

Humans similarly exploit the conditions of the world and the capacities of our human bodies. We use light and the faculty of vision in multifarious ways. Sound waves and audition too — we listen to vocalized utterances and much else too. Touch and movement play their part, far more than often recognized (Finnegan 2002: 34).

The use of other modalities proves to be important in perceiving objects that are designed with the intent to accord with other senses, e.g. taste in food, smell in perfumes, touch in pillows, the sound of a squeaky toy. However, when it comes to cuteness it has been argued that “[t]here are [...] no cute textures, tastes, or smells” (Morreall 1991: 39). We do not fully agree with this statement. Recent studies have been shifting attention to other senses, e.g. the role performed by the olfactory and auditory senses in cuteness perceptions (e.g. Kringelbach et al. 2016). Some studies include topics such as motivation (Aragon et al. 2015), suggesting that to a certain extent other modalities of cuteness perception are beginning to be recognized, although exploration into this topic still lies at an embryonic level.

We argue that cuteness is a multisensory experience that builds off biosemiotic ground and affection. Affection, although seen as a response to cute features, can be elicited by *cute behavior*, e.g. the clumsiness of an animal or animal character. Clumsiness embodies the lack of

<sup>9</sup> In fact, the input of our other senses can even lead to visual illusions, or misinterpretations of visual stimuli, such as the addition of auditory cues to a visual stimulus can lead to a sound-induced illusion of visual motion (Fracasso et al. 2013).

<sup>10</sup> This claim is further supported by the fact that much of social communication of primates relies not on visual but on tactile communication (see de Waal 1989).

skill in interacting with one's environment. It can also be argued that affection eliciting cuteness perception creates a situation similar to the social interaction between people in proximity to each other or where they establish a relationship through mutual gazing in face-to-face encounters. Now, the term *face-to-face* is in itself interesting, inviting us, once again, to identify visual cues and to glean information from faces, e.g. to detect personal identity, possible kin relationships, personality, facial expressions, and action tendencies (Cosmides and Tooby 1992). We, however, are interested in other senses that are operative in direct social interaction. Touch is one of the modalities that allows people to show affection in social interaction. It might even be argued that touching can potentially evoke some sense of proximity to the touched and human beings often employ touch when they want to provide emotional support or when they express intimacy or tenderness (see, for example, Jones and Yarbrough 2009). We could draw a parallel between the affective responses that humans feel towards cute animal characters, especially toys, or animals themselves and what they express in interpersonal communication with other humans through the modality of touch, i.e. it is a similar expression of affection that is elicited in cute perception and in social situations where only humans are involved. When the first soft animal toys were produced<sup>11</sup>, they were covered with real animal skins in order to point out their authenticity by portraying a more realistic representation of the toy as animal (Berger 1980). Touch, in this example, is paramount for the entire experience of the animal toy.

We may discern from the above that if we take into account the affection that people feel towards animal characters and the wish to approach or establish contact with them (Dale 2016), we can conclude that cuteness motivates the desire to touch or hold cute animals (Elliot and Covington 2001). One reason for this is that tactile communication is important in our mammalian *Umwelt* especially in social settings; and since cute animal characters and animals elicit affective responses (partly due to their cute behavior or clumsy movements), they also stimulate the urge to cuddle or physically protect them (Lorenz 1981). This is especially evident in zoo settings, where children's zoo or *affection section* as Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park<sup>12</sup> cleverly calls it, is hugely popular and the element of touch is in the center of experience.

In many cultures, we also encounter the manipulation of vocal pitch for conveying social meaning. This is exemplified in the Korean concept of *aegyo*, in which a falsetto is often employed among young women to express a sense of innocence and affection towards partners (Cho 2006). Similar ways of garnering affection through audition are employed in toy design,

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<sup>11</sup> It is also interesting to note that the production of realistic animal toys coincides historically with the establishment of public zoos (see Berger 1980).

<sup>12</sup> See <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/attractions/animal-kingdom/affection-section/>.

such as in *Build a Bear Workshops*<sup>13</sup> which allow for pre-recorded or personalized sound boxes to be built in their bears with a view to fostering a personal connection. In animals, such as mammals and birds, high pitched sounds (as compared to low pitched sounds) are often employed to approach another animal in a friendly manner (Morton 1977). It is reasonable to assume that high pitched sounds are also part of *Kindchenschema*. For example, human babies, inasmuch as the young offspring of many mammals and birds, produce higher frequency sounds which are intended to elicit care-taking responses. “Nearly all infant vocalizations are high frequency and pure tone-like sounds that would tend to attract the adult rather than repel it, [...] apparently selection favors vocalizations to elicit parental care and to direct food toward the calling nestling” (Morton 1977: 865). Additionally, auditory information can be associated with texture such as the feeling of warmth or softness, as in the case of cat purring or of onomatopoeic expressions in Japanese such as *fusa-fusa* and *pof-pof* that convey sensations of softness and comfort (Ohkura 2016).

Cuteness as perceived through the olfactory sense provides a greater challenge than other senses, especially regarding real animals. We recognize the objection in considering an animal or an animal character as *smelling* cute, however the olfactory sense is part of the overall affective experience that sustains cuteness perception. There are instances where maternal affection in humans and other (mammalian) species is discussed with relation to olfactory signals and where nurturing behavior is seen as strongly elicited by the smell (Fleming 1989). So, this aspect can be considered as something quite prevalent in the mammalian *Umwelt*. Although it is difficult to locate scientific studies on people knowingly smelling other animals, the fact that there exist perfumes for dogs<sup>14</sup> and perfumes made from animal scents, e.g. musk, civet, castoreum (Jellinek 1997), supports the argument that olfactory signals are also important in perceiving cuteness in animals and animal characters.

Furthermore, we can trace a relationship between cuteness and the gustatory sense in colloquial expressions such as “so cute I could eat it up” and in the employment of terms of endearment referring to sweet substances such as ‘honey’, ‘sugar’, and ‘sweetie’. We can also see associations between animal characters and our gustatory preferences. The usage of cartoon animal mascots (and media characters) on foods may increase a child’s appetite and preference for the food (Kraak and Story 2014). Animal representations and characters are not limited to food packaging, but foods themselves are often shaped as animal characters (e.g. animal crackers, fruit snacks, cookies). The design of food into animal shapes and forms has

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.buildabear.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, <http://www.ohmydog.eu/en/content/c0750-oh-my-dog-perfume-en>.

also been shown to be an effective technique in encouraging food consumption for children who are picky eaters (Elliott 2011). Anecdotal evidence also supports the usage of animal shaped foods to encourage eating, with a variety of blogs, videos, and articles<sup>15</sup> dedicated to the subject. We can also see contexts and connotations associated with sweetness in the usage of animal characters. Often cute characters are utilized in products high in sugar and sweeteners such as soda, cereal, and candy. The usage of characters has been shown to exert a particularly strong influence on children's food preferences for cookies and candy as compared to vegetables and fruits (Kraak and Story 2014).

The above examples are crucial in understanding that the visual representation of animal characters may not account on its own for the intimacy and affection that are elicited when people perceive cuteness. We argue that cute character perception is a complex activity, i.e. it requires the senses to be interwoven, it has similarities with social interaction, and is further amplified by the anthropomorphic factor. To elaborate, the representation of cuteness solely through the visual modality is not sustainable because the effect of cuteness perception on human behavior or action already involves other modalities and their interaction. The affection people feel towards cute animals or animal characters that invite people to approach them is also a prerequisite for using both distance senses (e.g. olfaction) and proximity senses (e.g. touch) (Ludden et al. 2006). The interplay between senses is sometimes referred to as *sensory synergy* (Lindstrom 2005: 85). In addition, there is a sort of plasticity and interwovenness of our senses that can be expressed in language, e.g. *warm color* combines touch with vision; *sharp sound* combines touch with audition, *sweet smell* combines olfactory signals (see also Žemaistytė 2017). Thus, we do more than see when engaging with the world around us.

## 6. Congruence and incongruence of the senses in perceiving cuteness

Our argument for the interconnectedness of the senses is also supportive of the fact that people develop certain expectations that accompany the visual perception of an object, e.g. small things are not supposed to produce loud sounds, and if they do, it creates a conflict (Ludden et al. 2006). The same applies to other senses, e.g. when viewing an object, people develop a variety of assumptions and perceptions as to the tactile characteristics of the object that correspond with perceived physical ones. For example, even if we first experience an object with a visual modality, we often transition to the modality of touch, especially regarding cute animals or animal characters. During this transition we use our visual experience to predict the secondary modality, surface or texture. Such predictions occur in all modality transitions (Yanagisawa and Takatsuji

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.popsugar.com/moms/Animal-Shaped-Snacks-33928147>.

2015). Tactile communication is important in the human *Umwelt*, as it sometimes serves to confirm the information sourced through the visual communication channel, i.e. whether an animal's or character's texture feels the way we visually perceive it. It is suggested that these features combine to form tactile judgments such as "nice to touch" and that these judgments are heavily influenced by our expectation of the object (the expectation effect, Yanagisawa and Takatsuji 2015). The feel of a cute animal or animal character (e.g. round and soft) may also be accompanied by expectations of moves (e.g. clumsily), sounds and smells (e.g. a baby's scent).

In product design, this sensual bias has been called the *halo effect*, designating how our initial expectations of a product, either in relationship to its brand or its design, create expectations or even sensory biases (Garvin 1984). If the perception of cuteness is congruent with how it is perceived by different senses (i.e. the experience is truly multisensory), then it is reasonable to assume that overall cuteness perception is reinforced. In cases where conflict of the senses arises, i.e. the expectations nurtured by one sense are not confirmed by another, there are two possible outcomes: either there is a sort of compromise where information from different senses is integrated in the overall perception; or the information from one sense dominates the overall experience of the object (Ludden et al. 2006). This phenomenon has been tackled by the *expectation confirmation theory* (Oliver 1980), which proposes that a product's customer satisfaction is influenced by the confirmation of expectations and perceived quality, as well as by the quality itself leading to a perceptual outcome of either contrast or assimilation. Where touch and vision are involved, the incongruity is more distinct, probably because the characteristics can be perceived through both of these sensory modalities. However, when, for example, there is an incongruence between vision and sound or between vision and smell, the connection is rather of a cognitive kind (i.e. sound and smell are not visible, but texture is) (Ludden et al. 2006) and hence, the incongruence, if not too powerful, might not be perceived as a sharp contrast.

Incongruence in the information gained through different senses is an important aspect in cuteness studies, especially because other senses besides vision are underappreciated or their influence on the whole experience of an animal mascot or of a real animal go unnoticed and may thus create an unwanted outcome. For example, in zoological gardens, what deviates from the visual perception of cute animals is both sound and smell. A case study of the Bosphorus Zoo in Turkey found that among adult zoo visitors the sounds of other visitors and children aggravated the experience, while bird sounds and focusing on the sounds of an animal ameliorated the overall experience (Dirsehan et al. 2010). In a case from Bristol and Paignton Zoos children refused to enter the indoor exhibits with pungent smells and "[i]n most cases the

reactions involved exclamations such as “Phew! It’s *smelly* Mummy!” or, as one older child put it, “They should use some *air freshener* in here!”” (Lindahl Elliot 2006: 204).

The incongruence between scents can also be utilized for eliciting a positive affect. Disney Japan’s Ufufy plush dolls which recreate famous Disney characters in egg shape to enhance cuteness, are also designed with fruity and floral aromas including apple blossom, cherry, and plum. The addition of scents, especially of unexpected ones, has been positively surprising for consumers, leading to adding scents to more of their products, as well as to expanding the Ufufy line globally (Shop Disney 2018). The product descriptions of the online Ufufy also address the multisensory experience of the toy such as this Winnie the Pooh Ufufy description: “Oh brother! Pooh’s nary been more huggable than in this Small Ufufy plush, descended from the clouds and as soft as air, carrying the scent of apple blossom. Snuggly, squeezably soft.”<sup>16</sup>

Although we have brought examples of different senses participating in the perception of an animal character or a real animal in a zoo, we understand that considering each of the senses separately allows us to appreciate their interdependency, as well as their interconnectedness in different combinations.

## 7. Multisensory cuteness and implications for the design of products and services

Insofar as cuteness often refers to a design aesthetic that is intended to elicit lovability (Gn 2016), it is crucial to manipulate forms and sensations in such a way as to capitalize on feelings of lovability which should not be constrained by the visual modality. The increasing popularity of this design aesthetic entails an enhanced attentiveness to perceptual features. Although the existing studies display a bias in favor of the visual modality, there is a clear need for research into additional modalities in order to offer more well-rounded accounts of how animals’ *Umwelten* are processed by humans. Since research into the overall perception of cuteness has largely ignored the multisensory experience of engaging with cute stimuli, there is a gap which limits the benefits that may be reaped by existing models of cuteness in addressing marketing and design issues. This becomes increasingly important with the growth of cuteness into a popular global aesthetic.

Product design that has placed an emphasis on the interplay between the senses and their synergies, as well as on how our perception influences emotion, such as *Kansei*

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.shopdisney.com/winnie-the-pooh-scented-ufufy-plush-small-4-12-1438158>.

engineering (see Nagamachi 1995), has been quite successful in Japan and East Asia, although it remains to be widely adopted in the West.

Even so, there is still a large gap in our understanding of how variegated sensory features contribute to the relationship that consumers establish with a given product. The incorporation of the theory of *Umwelt* in the marketing and design process allows designers to better assess and manipulate instances of incongruence in product expectations. We can also see the advantage that such an approach has in the marketing of attractions at zoological gardens and aquariums, where petting zoos, animal feedings, and immersive experiences can lead to greater visitor satisfaction (Direshan 2010). While extra care needs to be paid to both guest and animal welfare, creating a full-fledged interactive experience while balancing desirable stimuli (e.g. animal sounds/textures) and undesirable stimuli (e.g. smell of animal feces) can lead to the construction of more compelling and marketable exhibits for zoos and achieve their educational role through emphasizing affective experiences.

## 8. Conclusion

Both visual bias and the lack of a biosemiotic approach in cuteness and marketing studies have limited our understanding of human perception and potential design applications. Approaches that separate cultural or social spheres of being from the biological ignore salient processes that condition our *Umwelt* and that are dependent on our body structure and its perceptual and operational organs. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to scrutinize the complex overlay of sensory experiences that create our perceptions, and for designers and marketers to utilize this knowledge in the creation of multi-sensory experiences. The biosemiotic theory of *Umwelt* offers greater insight into how we can interpret and understand the bodily experience of a human consumer.

By drawing on the aesthetic concept of cuteness, we have demonstrated the limitations of the *Kindchenschema*, primarily in terms of its over-emphasis on the visual, and highlighted the importance of incorporating additional sensory factors (e.g., touch, sound, taste, and smell) in the overall perception of cuteness in animals and animal characters. The interaction of these senses cannot be ignored and more attention should be devoted to their joint interaction in creating a perceptual whole. These factors should be considered in the testing and design of products and services. By establishing a robust understanding of the multisensory experience of the human *Umwelt* we can recognize that cuteness is more than just *looking cute*.

## Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the Estonian Research Council (PUT1363 “Semiotics of multispecies environments: agencies, meaning making, and communication conflicts”).

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# Discursive representations of Chilean universities and their future students in advertising

**Pablo Matus\***, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Facultad de Comunicaciones, Santiago, Chile (pmatus@uc.cl)

**Francesca Poggi\*\***, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Facultad de Comunicaciones, Santiago, Chile (fpoggi@uc.cl)

## Abstract

This article presents an exploration of the discursive representations of Chilean universities, based on the analysis of ad executions published in social media for their 2017 admission to undergraduate courses campaigns. Based on branding theory (Aaker), the analysis of value propositions shows that both state and private universities share a focus on infrastructure and quality, although the latter also promise a public character and grants. Then, an analysis of enunciation (Benveniste) was carried out to the ads of the institutions whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits. These universities are presented as agents of transformation for their students who are invited to be socially responsible, supportive and to change the world. Finally, recommendations are offered for the strategic management of university branding in Chile.

**Keywords:** higher education, branding, representation, discourse analysis, social media.

## 0. Introduction

In the last decade, the Chilean higher education system has faced various controversies and political tensions, particularly regarding its financing structure and the marketization of the sector (Somma 2012; Cabalín and Bellei 2013). Although this situation is not unique (see Molesworth et al. 2009 for the case of the UK), among other reasons there is a consensus that the country has a commercialized neoliberal tertiary educational system (Vejar 2013), as until 2016 there was no free university offer, not even in state institutions, unlike what happens in other countries in the region (Espinoza and González 2016).

\***Pablo Matus**, PhD in Communication Sciences, is professor and researcher at the Facultad de Comunicaciones of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. His research lines are advertising discourse, strategic communication, and communication theory.

\*\***Francesca Poggi**, MA in Strategic Communication, has a professional career in institutional communications at the public sector and also works as instructor at the Facultad de Comunicaciones of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

In the light of the above, the exploration of higher education institutions' advertising is a subject that has been scarcely studied by local scholars (e.g., Simbürger 2013; Espinal and Rodríguez-Pastene 2015; Matus 2015). In what ways is university education 'sold'? What attributes do institutions highlight in their ads? How do universities represent their future students—their interests and expectations regarding higher education—in advertising? These questions can be answered using a mixed approach, through branding and semiotics.

Since brands are fundamental assets for positioning in highly competitive markets (Gilligan and Wilson 2003), and their symbolic contribution to products or services (its equity) is built on the basis of a brand identity (Aaker 1996), the value proposition—the benefits for the customer—is a key element for recognizing the organization itself and its purpose regarding their clients, what advertisers call 'the promise' of an ad (Brierly 1995: 168).

In parallel, following the theory of enunciation (Benveniste 1974), it may be argued that the subjects of discourse—speaker (enunciator) and listener (enunciatee)—are represented in the text, both in their identity and in their expectations towards each other. This is what Benveniste (1966) calls 'subjectivity' in language: the capacity of the speaker to establish himself as a subject—an agent with a purpose and a worldview—and, in that same act, to recognize and to elaborate a depiction of his/her listener. Because discourse is a communicative event that involves the performance of subjects in a specific situation (Van Dijk 1999: 246), the analysis of enunciation allows for a description of the relationship between the speaker and the listener, as well as their mutually binding context (Filinich 2004).

This paper reports part of the results of a broader study on the discursive representation of universities in Chile in their advertising campaigns during periods of admission to undergraduate courses. In particular, the objective of this article is to describe the value propositions of Chilean universities and to identify the representation of their future students and their expectations regarding higher education. To this end, ad executions published during 2016 were collected from the universities' social media accounts, and were analyzed from the point of view of their value propositions and their enunciative structure.

In the following section we explain the relevance of branding for universities, the concepts of brand equity and value proposition, and the main aspects of enunciation theory. Then, we detail the methodological framework and report on the findings. Finally, we discuss the findings in the context of the Chilean university market.

## 1. Conceptual framework

### 1.1. Universities, marketing, and branding

The Chilean higher education system has been accused of excessive marketization, that is of having developed according to market principles (Somma 2012: 298). This is technically true, since the creation of new private universities was allowed since the 1980s. It was established that these institutions would be free to create and offer careers, that those that enrolled the best students<sup>17</sup> would obtain greater fiscal contributions, and that their main source of financing would be the payment of fees by students (Olavarría and Allende 2013: 92).

From an economic point of view this means that the university system operates as a market: a set of current and potential buyers of goods offered in a competitive environment (Kotler et al. 1999: 14). That is why some speak of the commercialization of Chilean higher education which among other things has stimulated investment in marketing (Espinoza 2005: 51).

Given the diversity of higher education offers in Chile (160 institutions comprising universities, professional centers, and technical-training centers<sup>18</sup>), and the large number of undergraduate students (6.69% of the total population: Consejo Nacional de Educación 2017), the sector can be considered as being highly competitive. In this context, in 2016 the government established a policy of free education for students of higher education who belong to the poorest 60% of the population, provided that their institutions have joined the initiative<sup>19</sup>.

In markets sharing these characteristics, the brand is a key tool for achieving a competitive advantage (Gilligan and Wilson 2003: 503). This concept does not refer only to the name of a product or service, but also to the set of attributes (images, values, emotions, etc.) that the consumer can recognize and appreciate about the offered good, which makes the brand an asset for organizations (Blackett 2003; Kotler and Keller 2006: 275-276).

Viewed in this way, the brand is a key element for positioning—the definition of a space and a hierarchy in the mind of the consumer (Ries and Trout 2001: 5-7)—and for integrated

<sup>17</sup> According to the results of the PSU (Prueba de Selección Universitaria; in english, University Selection Test) standardized selection test organized by the Universidad de Chile, the main state-owned higher education institution.

<sup>18</sup> Universities are the only entities that can grant academic degrees and provide some careers that, according to the legislation, require a certain complexity, such as Law, Architecture, and Medicine. The professional centers, meanwhile, can grant professional and technical degrees but not academic degrees. The technical-training centers are institutions that can only offer technical programs whose average duration is two years (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and World Bank 2009: 26-36).

<sup>19</sup> The benefit is based on a reference fee, although it relieves the student of any co-payment. By right, state universities are part of the policy; private institutions can join if they meet certain quality conditions. More information at <http://www.gratuidad.cl/>.

marketing communications (Percy 2008: 35-40). Consequently, the creation and development of brands (branding) aids in increasing consumer preference (Kapferer 2008: 9-13).

It is not surprising that, globally, branding has become a relevant topic for universities. Although the effectiveness of undertaking strategic branding initiatives in higher education institutions is questionable, especially when compared to other industries (Colin 2006; Bunzel 2007; Chapleo 2011), several studies suggest a positive effect on the recruitment and satisfaction of students (e.g., Bennett and Ali-Choudhury 2009; Iqbal et al. 2012; Joseph et al. 2012; Casidy 2013), which is key to the marketized Chilean reality.

## ***1.2. Brand equity and value proposition***

The purpose of branding is the development of brand equity, the value that the brand brings to products or services (Kapferer 2008: 15-17; Percy 2008: 42-44; Lane et al. 2011: 83). In concrete terms, it corresponds to a set of attributes linked to the name of the product (e.g., recognition, quality, loyalty, etc.) and that enrich its offer, whose effect is seen in the opinions and preferences of consumers as well as in its market share and profitability (Kotler and Keller 2006: 276).

According to Aaker (1996: 68) the key to brand equity is the management of brand identity, mainly because it provides the basis for the associations that the consumer will make about the product or service with other products and experiences. Thus, brand identity is something that is intentionally created from four dimensions (pp. 78-85): attributes of the product (e.g., quality), attributes of the producing or offering organization (e.g., innovation), attributes of personality, as if the brand was a person (e.g., creativity), and symbolic attributes (e.g., the logo).

Precisely because it is built from attributes, brand identity implies a value proposition for the client, that is, a manifestation of benefits that guide the relationship with the consumer and, ideally, their purchase decision (Aaker 1996: 95). According to this model, the value proposition is based on functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits (pp. 96-101). While the former corresponds to product characteristics (e.g., in a car: having many airbags) and the second, to the feeling that is generated in the consumer when using or consuming the product (e.g., feeling safe when driving), the latter are those that help to build and maintain the identity and image of the consumer (e.g., to be a safe and reliable person).

The self-expressive benefits usually imply a more intimate and permanent relationship with the consumer, so they are considered as being superior to the functional ones, which are

more easily imitated (Aaker 1996: 96), and the emotional ones, which in a certain way are ephemeral (p. 101).

In this study, the concept of benefit is very important, as at the same time it defines the key element of the structure of the advertising message (Lane et al. 2011: 484). In this framework, the benefit is manifested as a ‘promise’, an explicit or implicit appeal of the main offering of the product or service, which in turn is based on its attributes (pp. 485-486). The advertising promise is, consequently, a discursive manifestation of the value proposition.

### **1.3. Discourse and enunciation**

From the previous section it can be extrapolated that the concept of brand identity implies the construction and representation of a personality with certain values, in the axiological sense. One way to analyze the representation of identity in discourse, from a semiotic perspective, is through enunciation.

The study of enunciation arose from the recognition and evaluation of discourse as a key aspect of social experience (Filinich 1998: 12). Its development is attributed to Benveniste (1966, 1974), especially with regard to his study of the representation of subjectivity in discourse. According to Benveniste, subjectivity in language is the capacity of the speaker to establish himself as a subject—an agent with a purpose and a worldview—and, in that same act, to identify and to elaborate a portrayal of his/her listener.

Benveniste (1974: 80) argues that enunciation is an individual act of language use, which is distinguished from the Saussurian *parole* by its performative nature. The enunciation is an event of appropriation of a language by a speaker (Greimas and Courtés 1991: 79), as the very act of speaking involves establishing oneself as an entity in the world (e.g. “I think ...”, “We want ...”). That is why Benveniste (1974: 82) says that enunciation introduces the speaker into his speech. But this is not just a textual phenomenon. For Benveniste (1966: 259), the establishment of the subject within his speech implies the possibility of founding a reality which is tantamount to subjectivity.

A key premise of Benveniste’s enunciation theory (1966: 260) is that the awareness that a person can have of himself is only experienced by contrast with other individuals. That is, subjectivity in language is not a matter of individuality, but of recognition and relationship: it would not make sense to use the expression ‘I’ were it not for distinguishing myself from someone else or for addressing someone.

Consequently, as soon as the speaker establishes himself in his speech —as enunciator— he explicitly or implicitly also establishes an allocutary, a representation of the one whom the speaker addresses (Ducrot 1984: 136-137). By extension, the enunciation also supposes a reference to the world, which is also constructed discursively by the speaker (Benveniste 1974: 82).

Methodologically, the analysis of enunciation consists in the description of the elements of the 'enunciative framework' (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980: 30-31): who is the speaker and how does he represent himself before the listener? What are his interests and his needs? Who is the addressee and how is he represented in the statement? What characterizes the world (the setting, the context) in which both speaker and addressee coexist? And what are the general conditions of production and reception of the message (e.g. the discursive genre and the diffusion channel)?

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this article is to describe the value propositions of Chilean universities, based on their audiovisual advertisements for the 2017 admission campaign, and to identify the representation of their future students and their expectations regarding higher education. According to the theoretical framework, this implies analyzing the advertising promises of the universities—the benefits that support their value propositions, and the attributes on which, in turn, these benefits are based, as the enunciative structure of the advertisements. We have decided to emphasize the analysis of the enunciation of those universities whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits, given the conceptual prominence of this category.

The research questions are the following: (Q1) What promises do Chilean universities make to their potential students? (Q2) What promises make up the self-expressive benefits category? (Q3) What universities tend to postulate self-expressive benefits? (Q4) How are the speakers who most frequently postulate self-expressive benefits represented? (Q5) How are the addressees represented in those ads?

The analysis of the advertising promises of the universities was geared towards the identification of references, intertextualities and figurativizations. Reference is the relation that is established between expressions and entities, properties or situations of the external world (Lyons 1984: 145), such as when naming someone or showing their image. Intertextuality is the relation of co-presence between two or more texts, such as that manifested in the quotation or the allusion (Genette 1989: 10). Figurativization is the representation of abstract aspects of

reality through concrete objects (Greimas and Courtés 1991: 176-177), as when the image of a judge symbolizes the notion of power.

As can be inferred, reference and intertextuality may serve the figurativization of abstract ideas. For example, an aerial shot of a campus or a building—a reference—can be interpreted as a figurativization of the promise of ‘infrastructure’. If the phrase “For a free, high-quality public education” is later exhibited, an intertextual relationship with the main slogan of the 2011 student movement is established, as well as a promise of ‘public character’.

This method involves both denotative and connotative readings. While the former corresponds to literal interpretations, attached to a natural language, the latter entail an extended meaning based on cultural references (Barthes 1964: 130).

In order to collect advertisements from as many institutions as possible, we decided to analyze audiovisual spots published during 2016 in the social media accounts (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vimeo, Flickr and Google+) of the 61 Chilean universities. The underlying assumption was that since these platforms are free, there would be fewer entry barriers for institutions with fewer resources. However, we only found spots from 44 universities: some did not have videos in the observed period and others did not have spots as such—brief ads in which a promotional objective was noticed. This means that any video that did not belong to the advertising genre—e.g., news, or testimonies of newly enrolled students—was discarded from the sample.

The final sample consisted of 119 pieces: 57 from state universities, 12 from ‘traditional’ ones (private institutions created before 1980) and 50 from the so-called ‘private universities’ (those created after 1980).

### **3.1. Advertising promises**

The analysis of the ad executions was geared towards the identification of the advertising promises of each university. The number of promises per ad varied according to its argumentative complexity. Therefore, although three and even four promises were identified in the majority of cases, in some cases only one was noticed. Using a full 30-second spot to emphasize the same promise can be as successful and effective as raising four promises in 15 seconds; depending on the advertising strategy. Regarding Q1, Table 1 shows the advertising promises made in the spots of state universities. In this group, the frequencies of the promises of ‘infrastructure’, ‘quality’ and ‘regional identity’ stand out. The last two are explained by a discourse that appeals to tradition, since many of these institutions (except the Universidad de Santiago and the Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana) are heirs of the old provincial

headquarters of the Universidad de Chile, the oldest and most reputed higher education institution in the country. Faced with the rise of private institutions, professional centers and technical-training centers, these universities appeal to their brand heritage.

**Table 1**  
***Advertising promises in of state universities' ads***

Institution	Ads	Promises
Universidad Arturo Prat	1	Quality; Financial aids; Postgraduate courses offer; Regional headquarters
Universidad de Antofagasta	1	Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad de Aysén	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Sustainability
Universidad de La Frontera	1	Quality of teachers; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer; Vocation
Universidad de La Serena	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad de Playa Ancha de Ciencias de la Educación	1	Public character; Infrastructure; Pluralism
Universidad de Santiago de Chile	1	Diversity; Integral education (e.g., knowledge and values); Infrastructure
Universidad de Talca	1	Arts; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer; Postgraduate courses offer
Universidad de Tarapacá	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad del Bío-Bío	20	Support for students (19); Arts (4); Financial aids (2); Benefits for students (11); Quality (1); Sports (8); Regional identity (2); Infrastructure (5); Innovation (1); Academic exchange (1); Interculturality (1); Research (2); Political participation (7); Internships abroad (1); Professional practices (2); Labor insertion (1)
Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación	21	Diversity (21); Infrastructure (21); Undergraduate courses offer (21)
Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana	7	Quality (5); Public character (7); Development of the country (1); Research (1); Undergraduate courses offer (5); Political participation (2); Sustainability (7)

Note: The promises are in alphabetical order and do not represent the frequency of their mentions in the ads. However, in those cases with more than one ads, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of ads in which the promise was identified.

Institutions from which no ads were found: Universidad de Atacama, Universidad de Chile, Universidad de Los Lagos, Universidad de Magallanes, Universidad de O'Higgins, Universidad de Valparaíso.

Table (1) lends further credence to our earlier argument, namely that the variety of promises only allows for inferring the complexity of the advertising strategies, but not necessarily their effectiveness. For example, whereas in the 20 spots of the Universidad del Bío Bío we may

identify 16 promises, in the 21 pieces of the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación they are only three. Although in the first case there is a greater diversity of issues, which may involve a communication proposal aimed at young people with multiple interests (e.g., a quality education, but also a series of extracurricular activities), the second case involves a branding approach based on the consistency of one promise.

Table 2 displays the promises of private universities that were aired before 1980, the so-called 'traditional' ones, members of the G9 (Network of Public Non-State Universities). These ads are marked by a prevalence of the notions of 'infrastructure', 'quality' and 'public character'. The latter has since become the main argument of the sector which seeks to defend its relevance in the political debate on reforms to the higher education system (see Red de Universidades Públicas no Estatales 2016): they are privately owned institutions, but not the same as 'private universities'—those founded after 1980—since they are older and more complex<sup>20</sup>, like the state-owned ones. That is, they are also 'public' universities.

**Table 2**  
**Advertising promises in ads of non-state universities pre-1980 ('traditionals')**

Institution	Ads	Promises
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	1	Quality; Public character; Diversity; Prestige
Universidad Austral de Chile	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción	1	Financial aids; Applicant's fair; Regional identity; Internships abroad
Universidad Católica de Temuco	1	Arts; Public character; Regional identity; Humanist values
Universidad Católica del Maule	4	Quality (4); Public character (1); Regional identity (4); Infrastructure (4); Undergraduate courses offer (3)
Universidad Católica del Norte	2	Quality (2); Regional identity (1); Infrastructure (1); Research (1); Undergraduate courses offer (1); Tradition (2)
Universidad de Concepción	1	Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure; Tradition
Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María	1	Quality; Infrastructure; Regional headquarters

Note: The promises are in alphabetical order and do not represent the frequency of their mentions in the ads. However, in those cases with more than one ads, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of ads in which the promise was identified.

Institutions from which no spots were found: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

<sup>20</sup> The qualification of 'complete' or 'complex' universities has been used for a few years to characterize those institutions where not only teaching activities are carried out, but also high-level research (see e.g., Brunner 1995; Parada 2010).

This apparent equivalence between what is public and what is state-owned is justified in common parlance: the specialized literature, as well as academics and the media use both terms without distinction when referring to the educational system provided by the government (e.g., Reese 2005; Paredes and Pinto 2009; Vivaldi 2014; Ramírez 2017).

Table 3 presents the promises made in ads from private universities, among which 'infrastructure', 'quality' and 'financial aid' (grants) stand out.

**Table 3**  
**Advertising promises in ads of non-state universities post-1980 ('private')**

Institution	Ads	Promises
Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano	1	Arts; Public character; Political participation; Pluralism
Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez	3	Quality (2); Infrastructure (3); Innovation (1); Academic exchange (1); Regional headquarters (1); Undergraduate courses offer (2); Postgraduate courses offer (1)
Universidad Adventista de Chile	1	Infrastructure
Universidad Alberto Hurtado	1	Quality; Intellectuality; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad Andrés Bello	1	Financial aids; Quality; Infrastructure; Research
Universidad Autónoma de Chile	5	Support for students (2); Quality (4); Academic requirement (1); Infrastructure (2); Research (1); Vocation (1)
Universidad Bolivariana	1	University community; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad Católica Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez	1	Quality; Public character; Sports; Infrastructure
Universidad Central de Chile	1	Quality; Infrastructure; Vocation
Universidad Chileno Británica de Cultura	1	Quality; Internships abroad; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad de Arts, Ciencias y Comunicación (UNIACC)	1	Arts; Creativity; Diversity
Universidad de Las Américas	2	Financial aids (2); Quality of teachers (1); Diversity (1); Infrastructure (2); Regional headquarters (1)
Universidad de Los Andes	1	Students with high PSU score; Quality; Infrastructure
Universidad de Viña del Mar	1	Financial aids; Quality; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad del Pacífico	1	Financial aids; Creativity
Universidad Diego Portales	6	Students with high PSU score (1); Quality of teachers (1); Double degree (1); Employability (1); Research (1); Postgraduate courses offer (1); Internships abroad (1); Visiting professors (1); Student satisfaction (1); Extension (1)

Universidad Finis Terrae	1	Students with social commitment; Contribution to society; Humanist values
Universidad Gabriela Mistral	1	Financial aids; Undergraduate courses offer; Alumni network; Tradition
Universidad Mayor	1	Students with social commitment; Infrastructure; University life
Universidad Pedro de Valdivia	2	Be a college student (2); Flexible admission (2); Financial aids (2); Diversity (2)
Universidad San Sebastián	1	Quality; Financial aids; Infrastructure; Research
Universidad Santo Tomás	4	Students with social commitment (4); Contribution to society (1); Quality of teachers (4); Diversity (1); Research (1); Internships abroad (1); Regional headquarters (1)
Universidad SEK	1	Infrastructure; Sports; University life
Universidad Tecnológica de Chile, INACAP	11	Practical learning (9); Financial aids (2); Quality (9); Continuity of studies (to graduate courses) (2); Employability (7); Infrastructure (7); Undergraduate courses offer (1); Internships abroad (1); Labor insertion (3)

Note: The promises are in alphabetical order and do not represent the frequency of their mention in the ads. However, in those cases with more than one ad, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of ads in which the promise was identified.

Institutions from which no spots were found: Universidad Bernardo O'Higgins, Universidad de Aconcagua, Universidad de Arte y Ciencias Sociales (ARCIS), Universidad del Desarrollo, Universidad del Mar, Universidad Iberoamericana de Ciencias y Tecnología, Universidad La República, Universidad Los Leones, Universidad Miguel de Cervantes y Universidad UCINF.

Upon a preliminary inspection, it is surprising that these institutions, as well as state-owned and traditional ones build their offer in the same way: it seems that the entire sector shapes discursively its service, education, as something inseparable from the materiality of a broad campus, with large green areas and well-equipped laboratories.

The incidence of 'quality' as a common promise can be explained by the scenario facing the industry: this is an issue that has been discussed since 2011, when the student movements began to demand greater control over universities—especially private ones, although the state-owned ones have not been free from criticism too—by the government.

Finally, the frequent recurrence of 'financial aid' is interesting because, as remarked in the extant literature (e.g. Matus, 2015), one of the main claims raised in the advertising discourse of these institutions is information on scholarship opportunities and discounts on fees.

Considering that only those private universities that meet certain conditions (being accredited for at least four years and demonstrating that they are not for profit organizations) could be added to the policy of gratuity which has had a negative economic impact (since the institutions must subsidize the difference between their fees and the amount that the State finally

transfers to them), it is not surprising that most of them actually do not abide by this policy. Therefore, the offer of financial aids to new students is relevant.

Precisely because of these conditions, gratuity is not part of the promises made by any of the above universities. Not even state-owned institutions talk about it, although in their case there is not a serious financial problem, as the gap between their fees and the reference fees is lower, while the State also subsidizes them in other respects (the so-called 'basal contributions').

With respect to Q2, Table 4 allows us to identify the promises that partake of the category of self-expressive benefits. As per the relevant literature, these promises have the most long-lasting effect as they build a value proposition from elements of identity configuration and support.

**Table 4**  
**Analysis of value propositions, according to benefits and promises in the ads**

Type of benefit	Promise	Ads	Description
<i>(It offers me something clear and concrete)</i>	Flexible admission	2	<i>It's easy to enroll</i>
	Support for students	21	<i>It offers extracurricular activities</i>
	Financial aids	15	<i>I can pay less fees</i>
	Benefits for students	11	<i>I can have resources for my projects</i>
	Continuity of studies	2	<i>I can continue studying</i>
	Double degree	1	<i>I can be more competitive in the market</i>
	Applicant's fair	1	<i>It's easy to enroll</i>
	Infrastructure	64	<i>Better university experience</i>
	Academic exchange	2	<i>Better university experience</i>
	Undergraduate courses offer	39	<i>There are several options to study</i>
	Postgraduate courses offer	3	<i>I can continue studying</i>
	Internships abroad	6	<i>I can be more competitive in the market</i>
	Professional practices	2	<i>It's easier to find a job</i>
	Regional headquarters	5	<i>There are headquarters near my house</i>
	Labor insertion	4	<i>It's easier to find a job</i>
<i>(It makes me feel...)</i>	Practical learning	9	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Arts	7	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	University community	1	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	Sports	10	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	Employability	8	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Integral education	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Political participation	10	<i>...like a real college student</i>
	Visiting professors	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Alumni network	1	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	Student satisfaction	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	University life	2	<i>...like a real college student</i>
	Extension	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
<i>(It configures my</i>	Be a college student	2	<i>I am / will be a college student</i>
	Students with social commitment	6	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>

<i>identity)</i>	Students with high PSU score	2	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Quality	42	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Quality of teachers	7	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Public character	18	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Creativity	2	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Development of the country	3	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Diversity	28	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Academic requirement	1	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Regional identity	15	<i>I belong to a region</i>
	Innovation	2	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Intellectuality	1	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Interculturality	1	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Research	9	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Pluralism	2	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Prestige	1	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Sustainability	8	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Tradition	4	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Humanist values	2	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Vocation	3	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>

In this case, for example, the promises of 'students with high PSU scores', 'quality of teachers' and 'research' constitute a value proposition based on the quality of the educational offer. In other words: if there are good students, good professors and research is done in the university, the proposition that you may become a high-quality professional is validated. Likewise, the promises of 'public character', '(contribution to) the development of the country' and 'diversity' allow us to identify a value proposition based on social commitment. That is to say, if the university has a public vocation, is interested in the future, and is inclusive, then not only it dialogues with one's own values, but also promises that you will become a conscious and committed citizen. Table 5 categorizes the value propositions based on self-expressive benefits, to facilitate the analysis.

**Table 5**  
**Categorization of value propositions based on self-expressive benefits**

Categories	Spots	Promises
Social commitment	71	Students with social commitment Public character Development of the country Diversity Interculturality Pluralism Sustainability

		Humanist values
		Vocation
Quality education	71	Students with high PSU score
		Quality
		Quality of teachers
		Creativity
		Academic requirement
		Innovation
		Intellectuality
		Research
		Prestige
		Tradition
Maintenance of local identity	15	Regional identity
Being a college student	2	Be a college student

As can be seen, self-expressive benefits tend to be associated with rather soft or immaterial promises, while functional benefits are linked to those of a material and immediate nature, such as ‘financial aid’ (e.g., scholarships), ‘infrastructure’ (e.g. size of campus) and ‘academic offer’ (e.g. to which careers it is possible to apply).

Identifying universities with a tendency to postulate self-expressive benefits (Q3) was more difficult than expected since it is common for ads to thematize appeals simultaneously on different dimensions. For example, the Universidad de la Frontera has one ad (see Table 1) that combines the promises of ‘infrastructure’ and ‘academic offer’, which have been interpreted as belonging to functional benefits, with those of ‘teacher quality’ and ‘vocation’, which have been linked to self-expression (see Table 4). Consequently, it would not be fair to say that this institution has a clear promise structure<sup>21</sup>.

To disambiguate this overlap, a frequency of promises corresponding to self-expressive benefits equal to or greater than 70% was established as a cut-off point (minimum threshold value). For example, the Universidad de La Serena (state-owned) combines four promises in one ad. Three of them are identified with self-expressive benefits, which facilitates the ascription of a clear and distinct value proposition. In the same manner, Universidad Santo Tomás (private) has four ads. Five of the seven promises made therein correspond to self-expressive benefits.

This analysis was based on the categories of value propositions associated with self-expression (see Table 5). Considering that two of them (‘maintenance of local identity’ and ‘being a university student’) comprised only one promise (which makes it impossible to identify

<sup>21</sup> A different scenario might have emerged if a content analysis had been conducted, for example, on the duration allotted to each promise.

frequencies in ads where they did not exceed four), it was decided to draw a sharper distinction between 'social commitment' and 'quality education'.

From this exercise (see Table 6) it was possible to discern that the 12 universities that tend to postulate self-expressive benefits comprise state, traditional and private ones. This suggests that branding strategies and value propositions are not differentiated by ownership of the institutions.

**Table 6**  
***Universities whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits***

Type	Institution	Focus on a category
State	Universidad de Aysén	Social commitment
	Universidad de La Serena	Both
	Universidad de Tarapacá	Both
	Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana	Social commitment
Traditionals (pre-1980)	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	Both
	Universidad Austral de Chile	Both
	Universidad Católica de Temuco	Social commitment
	Universidad Católica del Norte	Quality education
	Universidad de Concepción	Both
Private (post-1980)	Universidad Autónoma de Chile	Quality education
	Universidad Finis Terrae	Social commitment
	Universidad Santo Tomás	Both

### **3.2. Enunciation**

From the conceptual framework it is possible to infer that the identification and characterization of the speaker/enunciator and the listener/enunciatee can be approached via a 'mirror method': if the speaker represents a conservative ideology, the addressee must represent a position relative to this stance (favorable, uncertain or unfavorable). Therefore, in this section the analysis of the enunciators (Q4) and enunciatees (Q5) will be presented jointly.

As can be gauged from Table 6, the branding strategies of Chilean universities whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits do not manifest differences based on the ownership of the institutions. This also holds in terms of utterances.

A commonly adopted strategy by these universities consists in the construction of their speakers based on values such as seriousness (or solemnity) and certainty (as self-confidence). We can surmise that these values are common to all institutions of higher education, but in the

case of those who build their offer from self-expressive benefits they are particularly important: if the value proposition consists of the transmission or transfer of an identity, in a way of a being or a must-be, laying explicit stress is vital. This explains why their modalities of enunciation (Benveniste 1974: 84) tend to be assertive: universities show themselves as expert agents, confident of themselves and having a worldview. Consequently, their addressees are represented from an expectant position, as they need such self-assurance.

For example, the ad of the Universidad de La Serena (see Figure 1) portrays a young woman accessing a virtual platform from her laptop that presents the institution and its amenities. The informative and assertive nature of the statements allow us to infer that these texts correspond to the 'voice' of the university, even though the images show students engaging in different activities. The contrast between linguistic and iconic messages operates as a parallel montage: when the text speaks of regional identity and contribution to local development, the image exhibits cultural activities; when the text alludes to the institution's membership in the Council of Rectors (which includes both state-owned and 'traditional' universities), the image shows the campus. Despite this, the speech conveys a clear and distinct identity.

**Figure 1**  
***Universidad de La Serena (state-owned)***



Text: "Local and oriented to development."



Text: "Part of the Council of Rectors."

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zI-jkNjgpYI>.

In the case of Universidad de Concepción (see Figure 2) the ad shows a sequence of aerial shots of the main campus and its most emblematic buildings (e.g., the Bell Tower and the entrance arch, in a characteristic freeze-frame), interspersed with scenes of students walking around the place, talking and laughing. Some, in fact, pose at the camera. Then, images of other campuses are shown, including one that has the aesthetics of a quiet suburb. The final

sequence shows the front of the university, while a voice-over (adult male) pronounces the name and slogan of the institution: "Public in essence and in spirit". This way of representing seriousness and solemnity is different because it is based on the recognition that is expected of the addressee who must know the Universidad de Concepción to the degree of identifying its emblematic places. But the assertive character remains, especially at the end of the ad where it seeks to reinforce one of the main strengths of the brand: being a unique institution with the stamp of the state.

**Figure 2**  
*Universidad de Concepción (traditional)*



Image: El Campanil (The Bell Tower).



Text: "Public in essence and in spirit."

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oz3qYwTwOWE>.

The Universidad Autónoma (see Figure 3), unlike the previous ones, draws on heteroglossic polyphony (Bakhtin 1993) to represent itself and its addressee: the voices of its potential and current students, and even those of its professors, are contrasted with linguistic messages that make up the voice of the institution, highlighting key concepts. This is the composition of the five ads that make up the campaign and that allow for identifying the life cycle of the student: the positions of the future students (that is, the applicants), current and graduates are exposed. But also, by referring to the reality of academics and their research, the rest of the academic community is represented, adding them to its identity representation.

**Figure 3**  
*Universidad Autónoma (private)*



Plot: A student is running in a park, thinking about her higher education experience and recognizing the support of the university. In text: "Vocation." Plot: Remembering his class, a teacher thinks about the relevance of scientific research and the support of the university. In text: "Solutions."

Sources: Left, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abs67f59sOg>. Right, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUbqrVoE5sw>.

Another common aspect in the enunciation of universities whose value propositions are based on self-expressive benefits is that they present themselves as transforming agents and facilitators regarding the infusion or defence of values that are necessary for social change. Following the classification of Bellenger (1992: 55-56), it may be argued that these institutions tend to promote commitment-oriented values, those that appeal to a possible and delimited experience, normally associated with rights and social welfare (e.g., justice, responsibility), rather than universal abstract values (e.g., beauty, purity) or concrete values (e.g., effectiveness, discipline).

For example, the Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana developed a campaign of speeches (seven ads) based on the recognition of and commitment to solving contemporary social problems (Figure 4). In five of them the speeches are delivered by professors, both on behalf of their faculties, as well as their institution. The main message in these cases is sustainability, both environmental and social, as approached by science and technology schools, as well as by communication and humanities departments. In the other two ads the main characters are students who utter the slogan of the campaign: "With your talent, you build new realities."

**Figure 4**  
**Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana (state-owned)**



Plot: Several teachers speak about sustainable development as a keystone in the university's educative model. In text: "New materials. Energy efficiency. Environmental sustainability. Risk analysis."

Sources: Left, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s87BE97gRnk>. Right, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-XDnZp0f\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-XDnZp0f_o).



Testimony: "To urbanize, to integrate rural areas and to connect cities. That's the change I want to generate in society. With your talent, build new realities." In text: "Student of Civil Engineering in Civil Works."

The Universidad Católica de Temuco (Figure 5) defines its mission in a contingent but idealistic way: in a world that poses new challenges, its commitment is to work for equal opportunities, to educate new generations with solid values, taking care of the environment and providing a global perspective from a local identity, bringing knowledge and culture closer to people. That is, the speaker accounts for his belief system and presents it as an object of value, as something logically desired by the addressee.

**Figure 5**  
**Universidad Católica de Temuco (traditional)**



Image: When the voice-over mentions equal



In text: "Public and local commitment."

opportunities, the camera shows a rural primary school where a teacher (graduate from the university) works with first grade mapuche boys . The student's book title alludes to *mapuzugun*, the mapuche language.

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Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1KnLk4s6UA>.

In the case of Universidad Santo Tomás (Figure 6), the four ads of the campaign talk about humanistic values, social mobility and solidarity, especially from the point of view of the role that professionals may perform with regard to their communities. A major difference from other institutions is that two of the pieces tell stories about students (not graduates) who, during curricular or extracurricular activities, have developed social service projects. This implies that even in the midst of vocational training it is already possible to live the valuable experience delivered by the university. But it also means that students choose the university because of its values, which resonate with their individual beliefs. In addition, the case of Santo Tomás presents a slight variation with regard to the other institutions' ads, as alongside the promotion and defence of abstract values, in the tagline of its ad stand out the academic requirements and the support to the students. This approach identifies the social commitment of students with an activity that is validated by academics.

**Figure 6**  
*Universidad Santo Tomás (private)*

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Plot: Two students of Kinesiology tell the story of how they built a pediatric baby-walker for a patient with special needs, with the support of their teachers.



Plot: A Veterinary Medicine graduate tells the story of how she did the research for her thesis on environmental impact in Antarctica. In text: "Recognize. Demand. Support."

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Sources: Left, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONjjAxNmL\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONjjAxNmL_s). Right, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaLxqGFGD2w>.

While it is true that these universities are committed to furthering societal goals, in reality they do not establish parameters or indicators of this commitment, as they speak from themselves, from their logic and interests. In this manner, it may be questioned why they do not mention other types of initiatives that would also account for this vocation, such as the existence of economic support for students. In the same way, a certain ingenuity on their part can be questioned when proposing specific and delimited activities, such as solidarity-building activities for students or the scientific research itself, as proof of their social commitment.

Finally, we may identify another pattern in the statements: while the regional universities tend to base their identity on local belonging, on the cultural link with a specific area (Figure 7), those of Santiago not only do not allude to the city, but in fact they seem to exist in an indeterminate space, in a non-place.

**Figure 7**  
**Regional universities**



Universidad de Tarapacá. Image: The sculptural set 'Presencias tutelares' ('The guardians'), in the desert near the city of Arica, which represents the ancient prehispanic cultures. In text: "Our North."

Universidad de Aysén. Plot: Teachers and students talk about the experience at the university; in every transition they share the *mate*, a traditional South American caffeine-rich infused drink, very popular in the austral zone.

Sources: Left, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd54\\_WCP0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd54_WCP0g). Right, <https://www.facebook.com/udeaysen/videos/vb.1736709696578254/1779190798996810/?type=2&theater>.

In the case of regional institutions, this membership is figurativized through verbal and visual reference to geography, as in the case of the Universidad de Tarapacá, or through cultural practices, such as *mate*, as does the Universidad de Aysén. This shows that enunciative localization is not necessarily a spatial issue.

#### 4. Conclusions

This article described the discursive representations of Chilean universities and their future undergraduate students based on their ads for the 2017 admission campaign. This involved the analysis of an ad corpus to identify the benefits—or advertising promises—on which the value propositions of the institutions are based, and to characterize the speakers and addressees.

The analysis of advertising promises showed that those concerning ‘infrastructure’ and ‘quality’ are the most recurrent across state-owned, traditional and private universities. The former is explained by the tendency of the sector to value its educational service (and represent it) largely because of the breadth of its campus and the availability of technological resources, while the latter is justified by the social judgment that all higher education faces in Chile regarding the quality of offer, especially since 2011.

In the case of non-state owned universities, two dominant directions were identified which could be considered as being counterfactual. For traditional universities (those created before 1980), this is seen in the recurrence of the promise of a ‘public character’, based on the premise that because they are older and more complex, they are equivalent to state institutions. For private universities (those created after 1980) the promise of ‘financial aids’ stands out, which seems to be a contradiction considering that their fees tend to be higher than those of other institutions, and many of them are reprimanded for being profit-driven.

As per the relevant branding theory that suggests that self-expressive benefits are most effective in achieving a value proposition, in this study it was decided to dwell principally on this type. In the advertising of Chilean universities, the benefits of self-expression tend to be associated with intangible promises such as ‘quality’, ‘public character’, ‘(contribution to) the development of the country’ and ‘diversity’. This implies that young applicants value these attributes, which then helps to characterize the Chilean university market.

The analysis of enunciation showed that universities whose value propositions are based on self-expressive benefits construct themselves as enunciators based on values such as seriousness, solemnity and certainty. This construal is performed mainly in an assertive modality, since it seeks to account for self-assertiveness. Their enunciatees are characterized by the valuation of these attributes and the expectation of a complex university experience, which implies opportunities for individual development as well as support from the institution.

Moreover, the enunciators were found to be providing figures of meaning, while acting as transforming agents in students’ lives. To this end, universities use values oriented to commitment, such as sustainability, social development and solidarity. Again, the theory of enunciation allows us to infer that these projected values cohere with the belief systems of the

enunciatees (the applicants), who are presumed to have a higher expectation of university life: they want to be converted into professionals who will bring about positive changes in society.

This is a particularly interesting finding as other studies (e.g. Matus 2015) suggest that certain segments of the market (e.g., elite careers—Business Administration, Law—in private universities) search for students who are more motivated by individual and financial success. However, such a discourse would probably have been classified in this research as a value proposition based on functional benefits which explains why this perspective is not represented in this analysis.

In the context of the marketized system of higher education in Chile, the preceding analysis points to the existence of a diverse ecosystem: the brand positioning of the universities is anchored neither in their property-status (state or private), nor in their heritage, but in a reading of the interests and expectations of their potential and current students. This resonates with a peculiar characteristic of the sector: universities with the most transcendent value proposition invite their future students to build a conscious, responsible and solidary identity which implies trading off in some respects their independence and satisfaction. The ideal student of these universities, therefore, has an autonomous but heterorreferential or utilitarian morale: doing good is acting in favor of the welfare of others. The system may have a neoliberal inspiration, but the image that institutions have of young people is not always aligned with that stereotype.

While it is true that this study allows us to appreciate the current state (2016-2017) of branding strategies of universities in Chile, it is necessary to recognize certain limitations. First, that by working only with web-TV ads, the range of messages susceptible to be analyzed was limited (e.g., advertising in newspapers and magazines were not analyzed). Second, that the two main institutions of the country (the Universidad de Chile and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) are not represented in the sample, precisely because we did not find any TV ads (there were other videos, but not of this advertising genre). Finally, this study spans a specific time-period, so its findings cannot be extrapolated to the past or present.

Future research may investigate the origin and evolution of these trends, as well as contrast the ads' main messages with other types of ads and even other kinds of communication pieces that are typical of Chilean university marketing communications (e.g. flyers and merchandising).

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# On the spectral ideology of cultural globalization as social hauntology

George Rossolatos\* (georgerossolatos123@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Globalization allegedly constitutes one of the most used and abused concepts in the contemporary academic and lay lexicons alike. This paper pursues a deconstructive avenue for canvassing the semiotic economy of cultural globalization. The variegated ways whereby ideology has been framed in different semiotic perspectives (Peircean, structuralist, post-structuralist, neo-Marxist) are laid out. By engaging with the post-structuralist semiotic terrain, cultural globalization is identified with a transition from Baudrillard's *Political Economy of Signs* towards a spectral ideology where signs give way to traces of *différance*. Subsequently, the process whereby globalization materializes is conceived as a social hauntology. In this context, global citizens engage in a constant retracing of the meaning of signs of globalization that crystallize as translocally flowing ideoescapes and mediascapes. The propounded thesis is exemplified by recourse to cultural consumption phenomena from the domains of cinematic discourse, computer-gaming, food and social gaming.

**Keywords:** cultural globalization, critical semiotics, scapes, *différance*, spectrality, social hauntology.

## 0. Introduction: From cultural hybridity to cultural flows

Globalization constitutes a multi-dimensional phenomenon, as varied and variously theorized as culture itself (Faulkner et al. 2006). "Globalization connotes the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of social, cultural and economic phenomena across national boundaries" (Crane 2010: 1).

**\*George Rossolatos** (MSc, MBA, PhD) is an academic researcher, marketing practitioner, and the editor of the International Journal of Marketing Semiotics. Major publications include *Interdiscursive Readings in Cultural Consumer Research* (2018), *Handbook of Brand Semiotics* (2015; ed. and co-author), *Semiotics of Popular Culture* (2015), *Brand Equity Planning with Structuralist Rhetorical Semiotics* (2012, 2014), *//rhetor.dixit//: Understanding ad texts' rhetorical structure for differential figurative advantage* (2013), *Applying Structuralist Semiotics to Brand Image Research* (2012), *Interactive Advertising: Dynamic Communication in the Information Age* (2002; ed. and co-author), plus numerous articles in trade and academic journals. His research interests focus on cultural consumer research/popular culture, branding/advertising, new media. Download full CV from <http://bit.ly/1cnUnVT>

This paper focuses narrowly on cultural globalization, while culture is approached predominantly through the dimensions of structure, process and products (i.e. cultural artefacts), based on Baldwin, Faulkner & Hecht's (2006) typology. The argumentation is in alignment with the research cohort (e.g. Tomlinson 1999; Inglis 2005) that views cultural globalization as a progressive attenuation of the ties between cultural production and physically demarcated place in the context of constant de- and reterritorializations (cf. Rossolatos 2018b).

Theorizing or imagining cultural globalization begins where discursive articulations of cultural hybridity end. Cultural hybridity gained momentum amidst academic discussions about 'glocalization' that spawned the infamous dictum 'think global, act local', a managerial maxim that became entrenched ever since Levitt's *Globalization of Markets* (1983). The problematization of 'glocalization' was triggered by questioning the notion of 'local' in the first place. The transpiring of research streams such as cultural geography and place branding afforded to destabilize, retractorize and reterritorialize the meaning of 'locale' by critically questioning the overdetermination of cultural/experienced space by physical place. The concept of hybridity may be said to be if not outmoded, at least in recession, given that one of its fundamental assumptions is predicated upon a conceptualization of culture within a geographically demarcated territory. By the same token, culture has been dislodged from the province of the nation/state, while the latter is being increasingly approached as a construct that seeks to contain cultural diversity by evoking a phantasmic dominant culture as the ideological correlate of an imaginary community (Anderson 1983; Wodak et al. 1999), either within a state's boundaries or across geographical regions. Such antiquated ideologemes have been confronted with clown sightings<sup>22</sup> that mark events of carnivalesque respacing of territorialized space.



**Figure 1. Clown sighting: opening fissures in striated space.**

Instead, cross-cultural fermentation in the context of globalization is viewed as constant flows (Castells 2004) of images within and between 'scapes' (Appadurai 2005), namely 'the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups

<sup>22</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016\\_clown\\_sightings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_clown_sightings)

spread around the globe' (Appadurai 2005: 33). These imaginary scapes that bear considerable resemblance to Castoriadis' concept of imaginary constellations (cf. Rossolatos 2015b) consist in ideoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes, ethnoscapes and technoscapes. Here, the first two are of focal concern. More precisely, mediascapes constitute image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, as series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives (Appadurai 2005: 35), while ideoscapes constitute the ideological counterpart of mediascapes as "state ideologies and social movements' counterideologies that challenge it" (Appadurai 2005: 36). According to Appadurai (2005), globalization may be more pertinently couched in terms of a cultural imaginary, without an identifiable locus of centralized control, and of multi-directional orientation that eschews the restrictive cultural imperialism of centre/periphery. Imagination constitutes the driving force behind reterritorialization whose semiogenetic role by far eschews the strict confines of a cognitive faculty or of 'escapist fantasy' as conceptualized in neo-Marxist discourse.

Globalization has been heralded for the potential benefits that may accrue for suppressed populations in terms of enabling the articulation of subaltern voices (Appadurai 2013), of enriching cultural geographies with diasporic imaginary mediascapes (Harindranath 2006), inasmuch as it has been criticized as a new form of ideology that seeks to impose a homogeneous culture on a global scale (Hall 2000). Although the homogenization hypothesis has been vehemently criticized by otherwise non rejecters of the ideologically fuelled prong, the latent power plays that determine the extent to which some voices are heard more 'loudly' than others have been a recurrent investigative avenue in the extant literature (Wise 2008).

This paper, although not trending on a biopolitical stream that assumes cultural politics as its vantage point, rather than cultural globalization *per se*, does cherish the ubiquitous concern of a latent ideology as globalization's invisible scaffolding. By adopting a critical semiotic outlook, against the background of a deconstructive reading strategy (Derrida 1994), the ensuing discussion sets out to identify the meaning of cultural globalization by attending to indicative signs, and to elucidate what sort of ideology may underlie it as process.

This form of cultural globalization, as will be argued in greater detail, is identified with a spectral semiotic economy that is predicated on an impossibly totalizable ideology. This spectral semiotic economy is tantamount to a hyperspace of proliferating cultural differences, without origin and without an identifiable teleology that corresponds to the movement of *différance* as the double movement of the production of differences and deferral from the 'source' or the origin of this differential play. Differences constitute traces, albeit traces that point to nowhere. They are not traces 'of', but traces that constantly *produce* their origin, an origin that may not be

delimited by 'its' signs. The absence of source allows us to assign to cultural globalization the role of a spectral ideology, a post-ideology that is manifested as a social hauntology. This hauntology is explored in the following cultural exploratory through a tapestry of cultural artefacts, spectacles and immersive experiences from the domains of cinema, food, social gaming.

## 1. Ideology from a critical semiotic point of view

The analysis and criticism of ideologies as sign systems constitutes a mainstay in the broader semiotic discipline, and has been approached through multiple semiotic perspectives. In this overview, some of the most important perspectives that have theorized ideology are outlined. As remarked by Nöth (2014: 2), "among the semioticians there are some who describe ideology in a value-neutral way as any cultural or social sign system, while others define ideology critically as a hidden system of meaning in public messages requiring critical analysis." Critical semiotics does not adopt an either/or stance in the face of contrived ideological oppositions, but sheds light on the very processes that are responsible for the formation of disjunctive relations between seemingly opposed ideologemes. The ideologeme, according to Kristeva, corresponds to the minimal unit in ideological analysis that functions textually and intertextually as an assimiliative and organizational principle for grouping entire textual sequences. In this sense, it is akin to what Barthes described as a 'global signified'.

The demonstration of how ideologies operate as popular myths was exemplified most lucidly in Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972). According to Barthes, the dividing line between ideological and non-ideological discourse is identified at the point where denotation gives way to connotation. The prominent function of ideology, according to Barthes, is the naturalization of axiology. This is most strikingly manifested in popular myths that are inscribed connotatively in pictorial and multimodal signs. The famous example of the black soldier on the front cover of *Paris Match* that was drawn upon by Barthes (1972: 115) in *Mythologies* exemplified the function of ideology in visual signification by opening up connotatively the interpretive vistas to incorporate the signified of non-discrimination in terms of color against the background of a subordinate signified concerning patriotism. In ideological discourse two signification levels may be distinguished at a primary level of analysis: the object-language or the denotative level where a sign system consists of signs that are composed of signifiers/signifieds, and a metalanguage on the connotative level where the signifier of the object language assumes the position of sign, itself comprised anew of a signifier and a signified (Barthes 1972: 113-114). "Ideologies become successful [...] because they connect with and reinforce a group's metadiscourses, its discursive

memory" (Schönle and Shine 2006: 27). This opening up of the signifier extends to and may accommodate multiple layers of connotative semiosis. In a similar fashion, "Eco describes ideology as an instance of overcoding, i.e., a process where (secondary) meanings are assigned to messages generated by a basic (primary) code" (Tarasti 2004: 17). Although in his later writings (*S/Z*) Barthes abandoned the prospect of identifying a degree zero of signification at an absolutely denotative, that is non-contextual level, claiming such a distinction within specific textual contours is a valid endeavor (as performed by Groupe  $\mu$ , for example, and their distinction between local and global degree zero; cf. Rossolatos 2014).

From a neo-Marxist semiotic point of view, Rossi-Landi suggested that the internal structure of ideological sign-systems may be mapped out by attending to the interdependencies between three classes of artefacts, namely material, communicative, and ideological which he calls artefacts (*simpliciter*), signifacts, and mentefacts respectively. To this end, he coined the model of General Homology, consisting of "1) pre-significant elements, 2) irreducibly significant elements, 3) "whole pieces", 4) tools and sentences, 5) aggregates of tools, 6) mechanisms, 7) complex and self-sufficient mechanisms, 8) overall mechanisms or automata, 9) unrepeatable (singular) production, and 10) global production" (Bernard 2004: 50).

From a textual semiotic point of view, it is pivotal to distinguish between the axiological and the figurative levels, as endeavored in Greimasian structuralist semiotics (for a similar approach in a discourse analytic vein see Chouliaraki 2010). Ideology operates as a depth grammar or hidden axiology, that is a system of ideas, beliefs and values that is usually glossed over or mystified by a figurative grammar (lexical or multimodal), whether this is evinced in literary, cinematic or other textual forms. Ideological analysis consists in identifying repetitive patterns of surface level textual configurations (e.g. recurrent lexemes, tropes, visual symbols) and interpreting them axiologically in line with the inner logic of each text. Based on the trajectory of signification, disentangling ideological discourse amounts to a stepwise transition between three levels, namely the figurative, the semio-narrative and the thematic (cf. Rossolatos 2014). "An ideological utterance is one that tries to mask its own axiological points of departure, so as to justify and universalize them by a myth that deceives the receiver, or by postulating one's own values as if they were natural" (Tarasti 2004: 24-25).

From a Peircean point of view, ideology may be identified in various ways as being operative in a text, most eminently by examining the ways whereby the terms of a semiotic triad (object, sign, interperetant) are inter-related. Peirce's time-hallowed triadic account of semiosis, according to which "a sign is a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to stand for or represent. This thing is called the object of the sign; the idea in the

mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an interpretant of the sign" (Bergman 2003: 9) is particularly pertinent for the analytical task at hand. This triadic account renders the 'object' dependent on the sign(s) and the interpretant(s) for its existence, thus laying bare its irreversibly semiotic existence. "Semiosis exhibits a three-termed relationship of sign, object, and interpretant standing to one another in an indissoluble union. This process is open-ended principally by virtue of the sign's capacity to generate innumerable interpretants" (Colapietro 2008: 240; also see Eco 1976). The object that 'underpins' a sign is always already a construction of the sign(s) whereby it is evinced to an interpreter through a string of interpretants. Peirce renders this ineradicable dependence of 'object' on its semiotic counterparts even more accentuated by drawing a further distinction between 'immediate' and 'dynamic' object. The immediate object is the object as it appears within the semeiosis process *as representatively present* therein, whereas the dynamical object is the object *as it really is* regardless of how or what it is represented as being in any given representation of it (Ransdell 2007). Hence, what is immediately given for interpretation in a sign is already enmeshed in a web of signifying relationships, beyond which lies the dynamic object that may affect this web, albeit in a manner that may not be known unless manifested in a mode that is not deprived of such relationships, that is as immediate object. In each signifying triad, the interpretant of a previous triad assumes the character of sign and so on ad infinitum. Moreover, Peirce distinguishes amongst three types of interpretants: "The "immediate" interpretant is the fitness of a sign to be understood in a certain way; the "dynamical" interpretant is the actual effect a sign has on an interpreter; and the "final" interpretant is the effect which eventually would be decided to be the correct interpretation" (Misak 2006: 10). Ideological discourse works in such a manner as to effect an imbrication between a final interpretant and a dynamic object. This is what I call the 'violence of the final interpretant', on which ideological discourse feeds as an abrupt semantic closure to a discourse. This form of discursive violence has discernible parallels with the Derridean notions of violence of metaphysics and/or violence of representation. In Derridean terms, the dynamic object is identified with the master signified of an ideological discourse (cf. Rossolatos 2015a).

From a post-structuralist point of view, Baudrillard's strand of critical semiotics in the context of his *Political Economy of the Sign* (1981) seeks to transcend traditional oppositional pairs embedded in orthodox Marxist cultural economics, such as the use vs. exchange value, in tandem with the unilateral ascription of ideological mystification to the realm of the signified (or cultural values), by contending that the real working of ideology rests with a code that is responsible for inscribing commodities as signifiers with valuable concepts as signifieds. "It is the

cunning of the code to veil itself and to produce itself in the obviousness of value" (Baudrillard, 1981: 145). The same code is responsible for the projection of subjectivity that is manifested as agency of choice.

A cultural economy, as shown by Baudrillard, is a semiotic economy consisting of free-floating signifiers that may be exchanged for a limited set of signifieds. This means that an artefact such as a car may be exchanged via a purchase act for the signified of success, inasmuch as the same signified as axiological component that is embedded in a cultural economy may be appropriated by purchasing a luxury watch brand. From a semiotic economic point of view, floating signifiers may be correlated with any signifieds whatsoever. 'A signifier may refer to many signifieds, or vice versa: the principle of equivalence, ergo of exclusion and reduction, which roots the arbitrariness of the sign, remains untouched' (Baudrillard 1981: 149). 'What is involved here is precisely a free play of concatenation and exchange of signifiers, a process of indefinite reproduction of the code' (Baudrillard 1981: 150).

In order to appreciate the modus operandi of cultural globalization, the exploratory focus will now turn to Derrida's critical deconstructive outlook as formulated in *Spectres of Marx* (1994). In the context of a political economy of signs, as outlined by Baudrillard, a system of values hovers over interchangeable signifiers as their signifieds. This system is omnipresent and ready to be exchanged for freely floating signifiers. However, in a spectral semiotic economy no such axiology is at stake. Instead, the spectral semiotic economy, as noted by Derrida (1994) is equivalent to an economy of *différance*.

*Différance* points to a double movement whereby the proliferation of differences is coupled with traces that defer/postpone the presencing of their origin (Derrida 1976, 1981). Whereas Baudrillard's political economy of signs is anchored in an omnipresent axiology as the locus originarius whence stems the meaning of floating signifiers (even though Baudrillard does recognize this presence as what he calls the metaphysics of the code, rather than subscribing to it uncritically), for Derrida a spectral economy is incumbent on traces without origin. In these terms, the global as 'cause' and 'origin' constitutes a ghostly apparition that hovers over its traces. The traces produce the meaning of the global through repetition and the re-inscription in global flows. According to Derrida (1981), traces do not derive from an originary arche-trace as absent presence. As noted by De Man (1979), the 'object' recedes in infinite regress as soon as the question 'what is this?' is posed. The spectral is not an apparition of an absent presence, as contended, for example, by exponents of the materiality dependent relational ontology of absence (Meyer 2012), but of a presence that has never been, and that is produced through its

traces. The trace produces the illusion of the origin, hence it is spectral with reference to an origin and not representational.

Subsequently, the anti-ontological reading of the meaning of a global culture lays bare a loose-ends structural organization, only nominally subsisting as such, that is via the recurrence of the arche-signifier (and at the same time master signified) 'global', whereas, in reality (that is the 'reality' that is mystified behind the cloak of the recurrent nomenclature) we are concerned with spectral signs and a spectral semiotic economy.

The global *is* (obliquely referred to by italicizing the existential copula) an abstract machine that spawns signs as a play of differences and flows, while being constantly deferred from appearing in a signifying chain (as arche-signifier), always sliding beneath the signs (as master signified). The proliferation of differences points semiotically to the processual aspect of globalization as a constant differing-in-itself. This in-itself is not incumbent on a dialectic between inside/outside or Geist/corporeality or Same/Other, but on a hyperspace that constantly redefines its boundaries based on an interplay between provisionally overcoded cultural artefacts and novel semiotic configurations. This hyperspace is haunted by the 'global' as its spectrally present conditional absence that transforms it into a hauntological space.

The critical semiotic lens through which the 'global' is approached in this respect also alerts us as to the catch-all descriptor 'neo-liberalism' that is regularly evoked as a nominalized occasion for performatively exorcizing a plethora of underlying processes, stakeholders and relationships that have been accommodated by Castells (1996) under the paradigm of the network economy. This economy is largely identified with the hazy conception of neo-liberalism (Fairclough 2006). The operative concurrence of unfathomably inter-locking socioeconomic forces that slips under the signifier 'neo-liberalism' legitimates us to conflate its machinations with a divine, omnipresent, omnipotent existence. Although omnipresent, it may only be manifested, but never seen as such. In this respect, neo-liberalism constitutes what has been called by Zizek (1999) the sublime object of ideology. It is a spectral entity, "elevated to the status of the impossible Thing" (Zizek 1999: 77), yet whose power is felt very palpably in ordinary cultural predicaments. According to the preceding exposition of the Peircean model, then, positing neo-liberalism in all its abstractness antonomastically as a vengeful transcendental entity that tortures humanity is tantamount to the violence of the final interpretant whereby it is necessarily imbricated with the dynamic object, the sublime object of ideology in all its magnanimous awe and terror (according to the Kantian aesthetic model of the Sublime). Subsequently, if an ideological substrate buttressing globalization may be discerned, this is a phantasmatic entity, a ghostly apparition that may become reified in the same fashion as urban

Pacman<sup>23</sup>, that is a spectral entity that is bound in a double movement of becoming and being (re)traced.



**Figure 2. Urban pacman.**

## 2. (Re)tracing the signs of cultural globalization

The spectral economy of cultural globalization thrives with examples of imaginary flows whereby 'identities' are performed ec-statically, that is outside of territorialized symbolic roles. In this subsection three examples are drawn upon, namely the *Avatar* movie, its online 'correlate', i.e. the world of *Second Life*, and the *Hangover* movie (and the list is extended in the following section).

In the *Avatar* movie, Sigourney Weaver plays the role of a leading scientist who is sent to another planet to explore the prospect of colonization in the face of the earth's precipitate inhabitability. Due to the inhumane environmental conditions, Weaver conducts her regular expeditions in the form of an Avatar that mimics perfectly the indigenous population. The movie was soon catapulted to an ideological battlefield in terms of projecting narratively the depicted cultural clashes in the context of globalization (in a pre-spectral, territorialized regime, that is; see Mirrlees 2013 for an extended discussion). What is most important, from a spectral semiotic economic viewpoint, is that Weaver, as the motivator of the cultural clash between the indigenous population and the colonizing forces, is an apparition, neither living, nor dead, yet capable of bringing a new order in an existing planet.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/534306/turning-pac-man-into-a-street-based-chase-game-using-smartphones/>



**Figure 3. Sigourney Weaver as Avatar.**

It is a ghost that sublates the old and the new under a spectral presence of ambivalent origin and purpose. In other words, it is an effigy of undecidability, both in form and function: in form she resembles the indigenous population, whereas, in reality, she *is* a member of the invading forces; in function, she counteracts the purpose of the colonizing forces, even though she *is* one of them 'in flesh and bone'.

On a similar note, we encounter in the online world of *Second Life* avatars that constitute the survival of the 'real' individual through avatars signs, not replicas, but ghostly apparitions in a hyperreal world. The 'real' individual in avatars form is 'metamorphosed into a supernatural thing, a *sensuous non-sensuous* thing, sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible. The ghostly schema now appears indispensable [...] a 'thing' without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses' (Derrida 1994, cited in Joseph 2001). The avatars apparition can chat with other ghostly individuals, it can dance, albeit it cannot sense the surroundings. It is precisely present as neither living nor dead, and it is in such a fashion that it interacts with others in this hauntological mediascape. Ghosts experience immersively their avatars interaction as immediately present. The event is naturalized due to the technological apparatus's ability to condition the senses into believing that it is the individual in flesh and blood that undergoes the experience. Ideology is operative, in this instance, "because it turns social relations into ghostly

forms" (Joseph 2001: 102). This is why the affective part and the sensori-motor apparatus constitute the primary ground for ideological work.

The same mechanism underlies immersive translocal experiences, e.g. online multiplayer gaming, whereby the effacement of (physical) spatiality produces the effect of immediacy as naturalization of the lived experience and propagates the ideological myth of self-presence. "The technologies of immediacy [...] hide the act of mediation by presenting their content as if it were the only natural reality available" (O'Neill 2008: 22).



**Figure 4. Avatars from Second Life.**

Finally, and quite archetypically with regard to the (re)tracing process, in the movie *Hangover* we encounter a group of four friends in escapist adventures whose collective imaginary has been gripped (repetitively so, at least in the first two parts of the trilogy) by an arche-trace that has been obliterated beneath the signs and that must be recuperated by retracing them. The retracing process consists of extreme social situations, not necessarily connected to each other, that is spectral, self-contained fragments of a totalizing discourse that is imaginarily strewn at the fringes of the socially sanctioned roles that are otherwise performed by the heroes.

Drugs, in the movie's *fabula* (that is its manifest plot-line), are instrumental for bringing the wolf-pack (Galyfianakis' nomenclature for the male coalition) into the requisite mindset that will allow them to engage in cultural practices that would normally run counter to the pack members' ethotic pattern, such as getting tattoos and marrying a prostitute at an Elvis chapel.



**Figure 5. The Hangover wolfpack (minus the missing arche-trace) outside of the Chapel.**

Drugs, in this instance, function as a reification of the bifurcated Platonic notion of *pharmakon* (as analyzed in Derrida's *Dissemination*), while being responsible for causing temporary memory loss. "The *pharmakon* is that double-edged word in Plato's text that causes the metaphysical oppositions to waver and oscillate" (Brogan 1989: 11; cf. Derrida 1981: 99), just like snake poison that may be used for curing a bite, inasmuch as for effecting death. Here, *pharmakon* is accidentally disseminated as bad medicine, yet necessarily so in order to effect a collective *lapsus* (coupled with the audience's requisite *regressus*). The 'event' of *lapsus* is a necessary condition for the wolfpack's engaging in the economy of *différance* by becoming immersed in cultural differences beyond a good/evil dialectic whose meaning is constantly deferred while retracing differences as signs. The feats accomplished by the wolfpack in a state of *lapsus* constitute moments of a spectral semiotic economy where each social situation is enacted by automata who are neither living nor dead. They are not living as their actions, embedded in an 'imaginary world', run counter to the very symbolic structures that have allowed them to perform socially sanctioned roles thus far, and they are not dead since they are still biologically functional.

Most importantly, this spectral economy is underpinned by the 'real' economy, consisting of corporate structures and entrepreneurship. It is in direct complicity with the real market and in fact is funded by it: Galyfianakis' funding, based on the movie-script, stems from his father, a successful businessman with a sizeable fortune, as reflected in his lavish abode, who is always willing to serve his son's eccentric needs, including his abundant drug-use. The father, here, stands for the 'real' economy, whereas Galyfianakis is a sign of the imaginary economy, as deterritorialized flow of images and experiences. The real economy functions as the enabler of the imaginary, spectral economy.

### **3. Spectral ideology for a spectral semiotic economy: The 'global' as absent conditional for a social hauntology**

If ideology may still be ascribed to cultural globalization as above canvassed, this is a post-ideological ideology, that is an ideology that is not tantamount to a system of ideas and values, but an aestheticized and constantly mutating set of abstract schemata. "Ideology is not the reflection of real relations but that of a world already transformed, enchanted. It is the reflection of a reflection, the phantasm of a phantasm" (Kofman 1999: 11).

Post-ideology haunts cultural globalization by liquidating time-hallowed oppositions such as good vs. evil, functional vs. dysfunctional, local vs. international, by reducing them to symptoms of *différance*. It is the spectre of ideology, as the ghostly apparition of an illusory depth or as having become self-conscious about the illusory status of cultural ideals. This regime values syntagmatic constellations at the expense of idealist paradigmatic selection, and lends further credence to Appadurai's emphasis on the imaginary as shaping and sustaining globalization, while equating the production of differences with the proliferation of images. These images as signs of globalization cross borders without necessarily being motivated by a centralized agency of cultural production that regulates the translocal flows or by manifesting a correlation between the locus of production and the cultural output.

A remarkable example of such signs as imaginary syntagmatic constellations is the *Toilet Restaurant* that operated in Hong Kong until 2010 (with a similar concept now 'flown' to Japan). The interior design featured objects that are customarily used in toilets, the actual plates were toilet-shaped, while the menu was packed with forms and shapes that are reminiscent of the output of a toilet session. Thus, the customary function of the toilet was disruptively transposed from the final resort of waste and reintegrated into the nutrition chain. This sort of recontextualized cultural symbolism is inscribed at a foundational biological level, by questioning embedded distinctions between nutrition and waste, life and death. It operates as what Zizek *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics Vol.VI (2018)*

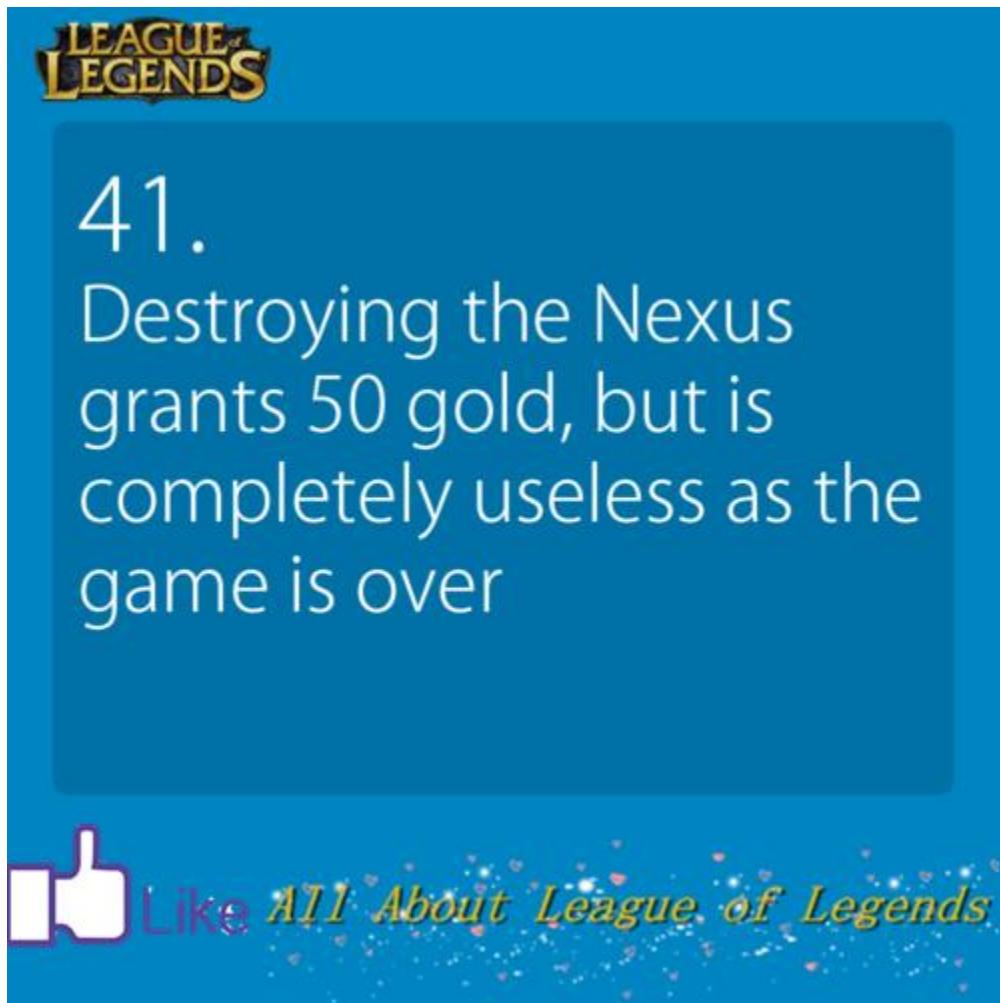
(1999) called the *counter-movement* of Hegelian shitting, of absolute knowledge as *emptied* subject.



**Figure 6. Toilet restaurant goodies.**

The signs of the spectral semiotic economy are concatenated via relations of sheer contiguity, and hence give away the impression of pure assemblages in a post-ontological cartography. They are not signs underpinned by an absent Being that sustains social actors as social ontological scaffolding, but signs of a social hauntology that maintains *in absentia* the global as master signified. The global, thus, may only be presenced as an apparition through acts of conjuration (Derrida 1994), rather than working as the ideational substrate of signification. The summoner who performs this conjuration is none other than the player in the popular online

multiplayer game *League of Legends* whose target is the non-localizable networked economy as *nexus*. The *nexus* as impossibly totalized and totalizing entity may only appear spectrally as an apparition to its summoner. In the *League of Legends*, destroying the *nexus* yields imaginary capital, albeit impossibly so, since at the same time it marks the end of the game: an impossible exchange for an impossible presencing. The *nexus* may be destroyed only through the obliteration of the signs of destruction that may not be exchanged for 'real' currency.



**Figure 7. League of Legends destruction of nexus: Game Over (?)**

The escape rooms social game that has been gaining popularity over the past couple of years is a remarkable inscription of social hauntology. The structure of the game consists of a group of friends who are locked in a room for a certain amount of time and must discover hidden messages (traces) leading to other hidden messages in order to ultimately locate the key for unlocking the door before the gaming time erupts.



**Figure 8. Escape rooms (London).**

This is a reinscription of the Da Vinci code, albeit relieved from any ontotheological significance. Thus, “the spectrality of ghost/machine becomes a part of common experience” (Joseph 2001: 104). What binds groups of players in this social game in a social hauntological predicament is their mutual immersion in the process of retracing.

The transition from social ontology to social hauntology is effected as the crossing out of Being as master signified that always appears as an invisible bond (the ‘cum’ that binds beings in ordinary affairs) towards the Spectral as irrecuperable absent conditional for being-with. In this manner, the ‘global’ as the constantly deferred object of *différance* in a post-ideological spectral regime, *is* always in a double movement of becoming and being (re)traced, evinced in cultural practices and artefacts as a social hauntology that is sustained as an apparition amidst proliferating, borderless differences.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Contrary to arguments about globalization as a homogenizing force that seeks to efface cultural differences, dislodging the global from place-centric constraints allowed us to reorient our focus from structure to process. In this manner, cultural globalization was in fact re-imagined, by opening up Appadurai’s concept of imaginary flows to a deconstructively inflected semiotic

terrain, as non-locally dependent and non-centrally controlled flows of mediascapes and ideoescapes. The release of cultural globalization from spatial constraints gave way to its identification with a non-originary locus as non-presentable absence that is evinced as constant retracing.

The scrutinized signs of globalization allowed for a transition from a political economy of signs to an economy of *différance* and, concomitantly, from anchoring signs to omnipresent signifieds as signs 'of', to traces that produce the global as absent conditional. This turn also implies a freeing of the signifier from the idealist yoke of the signified. In the spectral post-ideological regime of cultural globalization, and as a further semiotic qualification of the relationship between Appadurai's ideoescapes and mediascapes, we are concerned with undercoded imaginary signifiers, rather than signifiers that are symbolically attached to ideoescapes as overcoded ideologemes (in the traditional sense of semiotic analyses of ideology). These imaginary signifiers constitute traces 'of' the global as always sliding arche-trace. The non-localizable global legitimates us in stressing that cultural globalization thrives in a post-ideological regime where the object of ideology is identified with a spectre. Subsequently, this spectre that hovers over cultural production also produces the social in hauntological terms.

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# **Book reviews**

**John Flowerdew & John E. Richardson (Eds.) (2017). *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. Routledge, 637 pgs.**

One thing's for sure: collective volumes are getting bulkier each year. This is especially the case with discourse and multimodality oriented works that attempt to keep up with the mounting advances across disciplines in terms of empirical applications, inasmuch as conceptual innovations. *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* is no stranger to this sweeping trend. I dare say that this is perhaps the most comprehensive volume to date on the critical strand of discourse analysis, and an essential point of reference for students and academic researchers alike who may wish to keep the fundamentals top-of-mind at all times. The *Handbook* lives up to its core promise as the thematic palette unfolds, namely "to provide an accessible, authoritative and comprehensive introduction to Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), covering the main theories, concepts, contexts and applications of this important and rapidly developing field of study." The volume is divided into five parts, featuring all in all 41 individual chapters, spanning 600+ pages. The first part sets the conceptual stage for the ensuing methodological part which are followed by customized overviews of empirical applications in discrete domains in the broader media and cultural studies terrain. Although the underlying rationale behind this division is solid, in practice the boundaries between the conceptual underpinnings and the methodological operationalization of CDA concepts become blurred. For example, I would expect rhetoric and SFL to appear in the conceptual part, given that they have informed in variously identifiable ways major approaches in the CDA vernacular, such as Fairclough's CDA, Van Leeuwen's multimodal DA and Wodak's DHA. By the same token, the Interdisciplinarity part features chapters on politics and media studies, although journalism and legal discourse appear under the separate heading 'Domains and media'. Of course, this minor detail concerning the division of research labor by no means overshadows the richness of the contained information.

Interestingly, the volume features a chapter called Positive DA which seeks to balance the largely argumentative and confrontational nature of critical readings with constructive suggestions about social change, thus coupling a critical mindset with transformational discourses that promote social change in the context of power struggles. The chapter features examples from the extant literature where popular cultural artefacts were carved to this end, while exemplifying the power of critically minded reports in articulating dissent and motivating towards its collective voicing. Positive discourse analysis involves suggestions for the design of counter-discourses and it is geared towards social action through the transformation of semiotic resources. From a marketing point of view, positive discourse analysis presents considerable

potential in addressing how latent politics affect business decision making, as well as in comparing and contrasting foregone opportunities by dint of power plays premised on ego-battles. Indeed, as consistently found in boardroom simulation decision-making sessions, agreement on strategic alternatives is often established based on affiliation networks, rather than on an exhaustively thorough analysis of multi-source metrics. In these terms, positive DA may turn out to be an indispensable ally in deconstructing the so-called 'red tape' phenomenon. It would be very interesting to examine what alternative courses of action as counter-discourses might have been pursued were it not for embedded politics and structures of inter-dependencies. The critical scrutiny of marketing related decision making processes is partly addressed in the chapter on CDA and branding which adopts a highly reflexive approach with regard to underlying reader positioning mechanisms and manifest lexico-grammatical choices. In this context, SFL and social semiotics prevail in critically addressing the linguistic and metafunctional molding of branding discourse, both mono- and multimodally. The latter is exemplified by recourse to visual identity components (fonts, shape, size etc.), their selection criteria and their semiotic affordances.

Quite importantly, this handbook does not merely convey information about concepts, methods and fields of application, but offers lavishly background information as to the historical evolution of intra-disciplinary dialogues in an honestly self-reflexive attempt at laying bare its own 'power-play' whereby a relative share of voice has been allocated to some perspectives at the expense of others, thus practicing to the letter what CDA researchers 'preach'.

**John A. Bateman, Janina Wildfeuer & Tuomo Hiippala (2017). *Multimodality: Foundations, Research and Analysis: A Problem-Oriented Introduction*. Walter de Gruyter, 415 pgs.**

Multimodality related publications have been proliferating exponentially over the past ten years, with an impressive amount of multidisciplinary research currently forming its colorful canvass. Multimodality concerns the various modes wherein sociocultural, communicative and aesthetic artefacts and processes may be embedded, their meaning affordances and their multi-layered interactions. This volume seeks to differentiate itself from the already bulky literature of introductory monographs and collective editions by appealing mostly to first timers who wish to either quench their conceptual curiosity as to the fields of application of this ubiquitous concept or to put key concepts and methods in research practice. Despite its avowed introductory orientation, it does perform pretty well in covering and communicating research advances across

various fields of application, spanning social interaction, artistic performances, diagrams and infographics, films, web pages, social media, video games.

The book starts by defining 'mode' in a broader than usual manner, as a form of expression that impacts directly on how meanings are encoded and decoded. Indubitably, multimodality essentially modalizes expression while alerting participants in communicative predicaments to the subtleties involved in non-linguistically engraved stimuli, such as gaze, kinesics, proxemics, haptics. Although most of the evoked modes have been researched largely in a standalone manner in different disciplines prior to the advent of the multimodality stream, it was not until its consolidation as a coherent field that issues of multimodal interaction began to be addressed in a systematic fashion. Although equating modes with expression forms seems to be a fairly apt analogy for introductory purposes, in essence modes impact directly not only on the form, but also on the content of multimodal messages. For example, the tone-of-voice of an uttered sentence that is intended as an ironic reversal of its semantic content affords to resemanticize it.

The book presents conceptual issues and challenges alongside methodological ones in a balanced manner, thus providing a useful compass to multimodality neophytes as to which concepts/methods are most appropriate for distinctive fields of empirical study. Methodological guidelines are provided for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods oriented research, in a manner that is informed by both social sciences, and textual linguistics. Perhaps the methodological section becomes over-pedantic in some respects, especially where basic background information is presented about the mathematical formulas underpinning various statistical tests. This comes at a marked shortage of more crucial territories that might be expected to be covered at a considerable length alongside issues of transcription, coding and analysis of multimodal data, namely the use of CAQDAS software (cf. George Rossolatos, 2018. *Interdiscursive Readings in Cultural Consumer Research*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing) Furthermore, interpretive research is presented as being more untrustworthy compared to quantitative research, despite the availability of trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research in general which differ markedly in essence and scope compared to quantitative research, but also given that no quantitative research piece is bereft of assumptions and the interpretation of findings. On another note, the authors appear to be quite critical of multimodal studies that do not feature *inter-rater reliability* scores, despite the fact that dual coding is mostly employed in media and marketing content analytic studies, but neither in applied linguistic and rhetorical studies, nor in discourse analysis oriented ones (and the same holds for the vast majority of the *Handbook* authors' papers).

Nevertheless, the reader benefits considerably from the adoption of the vivid metaphor of 'canvasses' that is used for portraying the methodological transition between the requisite steps involved in multimodal analytic projects, which are summarized in an eight-step procedure involving (1) the selection of a class of communicative situations to be studied and the particular focus that is to be adopted (2) the decomposition of the media of the communicative situation to derive a hierarchically organised range of canvases and subcanvases (3) mapping out the multimodal genre space (4) selecting from the data the activities that are being performed and identifying the semiotic modes that may be using the canvases for those activities (5) triangulate the research problem with respect to other works on the targeted modes, genres and situations (6) perform the analysis using relevant media and genre frameworks (7) looking for patterns and explanations in analysed data (8) discussing the findings. The ensuing overview of applications in discrete research fields illustrates with reference to indicative studies in each area of specialization that attending to multimodality issues is no longer conceivable as an 'add-on', but as an essential component of almost every research piece that displays the requisite sensitivity to co-textual aspects of any sociocultural phenomenon's discursive articulation (alongside variously operationalized dimensions of context). Let us recall that the emphasis on co-textual considerations was a key innovation in Halliday's opening up of grammar to sociocultural practices. Perhaps a more extensive treatment of the issue of multimodal literacy might have afforded to contextualize more concisely the issues that were identified earlier in moving multimodal research beyond the regime of textual analysis. Additionally, the authors appear to be quite judgmental as regards the pertinence of some semiotic perspectives in filmic analysis, such as structuralism which they deem to be *passé*, despite the fact that advances in structuralist semiotics have been made consistently until today, that Bordwell's film theory on which they draw quite extensively recognizes structuralist semiotics as the main metalanguage for filmic analysis, that Bateman has drawn on Metz's film semiotics for offering a version of the *Grande Syntagmatique*, and that the majority of quantitative statistics amply employed in the social sciences are of structuralist epistemological orientation. Furthermore, Hjelmslevian structuralist semiotics were instrumental in the development of SFL. As regards the components of filmanalysis methods, the authors focus on an introductory level on production techniques, however no mention is made of profilmic elements, as a film's expressive resources, rather than syntactical inventory. Although production techniques are responsible for both semantic and syntactical cohesion, their salience by no means overrides that of the featured actors, settings etc. Production values in film criticism is a separate topic than actors' performance, the relevance and elegance of the settings and the plot as such. Issues of film narratology must be

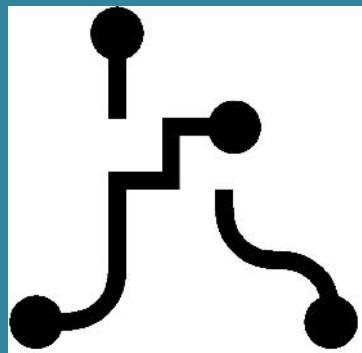
addressed in tandem with production techniques in order to yield a comprehensive picture of how meaning is produced in film. Multimodality is hardly addressed in the most crucial chapter on filmic analysis, save for production techniques. Production techniques do not constitute modes, but aspects of filmic syntax. For example, the contiguous placement of two co-evolving scenes suggests some sort of meaningful interdependence. This is afforded by editing, but editing as such does not afford the meaning of the scene which rests with the featured actors, their actions, the settings and other props. What is quite alarming, however, is the evoked method for gauging filmic effectiveness. This is presented here as being solely dependent on eye tracking and neuroscientific imaging (i.e. brain scans). I would tend to think that all this trouble in analyzing textually an art form should at least be coupled with a corresponding method (i.e. textually oriented) of researching consumer effects. This brings us back to the multimodal literacy issue which has been spuriously under-represented in this otherwise quite comprehensive volume. Reducing effectiveness to brain flashes, on the one hand, presupposes a precarious overlap between mind and matter (i.e. brain) and a largely falsified naturalized epistemology. On the other hand, it offers little in terms of identifying what semantic and syntactic filmic aspects were conducive to such brain 'flashes'. Was it the speed of alternating shots/reverse shots that intensified the spectators' adrenaline? Was it the sheer appeal of a famous actor? Both in varying degrees? All neuroscience can offer is a reductionist outcome without any interpretive link to the textual underpinnings of the spectacle.

The prominence of textual approaches in designing and monitoring the effectiveness of multimodal structures becomes even more compelling in the case of consumer experiences. Especially in the face of a burgeoning experiential economy and the constant quest for revamping cultural practices, 'mode' constitutes an indispensable parameter for cultural innovation that mandates a systematic approach to the design and management of cultural spectacles and experiences as multimodal phenomena.

**Contact the *International Journal  
of Marketing Semiotics***

**email**

**georgerossolatos123@gmail.com**



**address**

**University of Kassel  
Department of English  
c/o Dr. George Rossolatos  
Mönchebergstraße 19  
34109 Kassel  
Germany**