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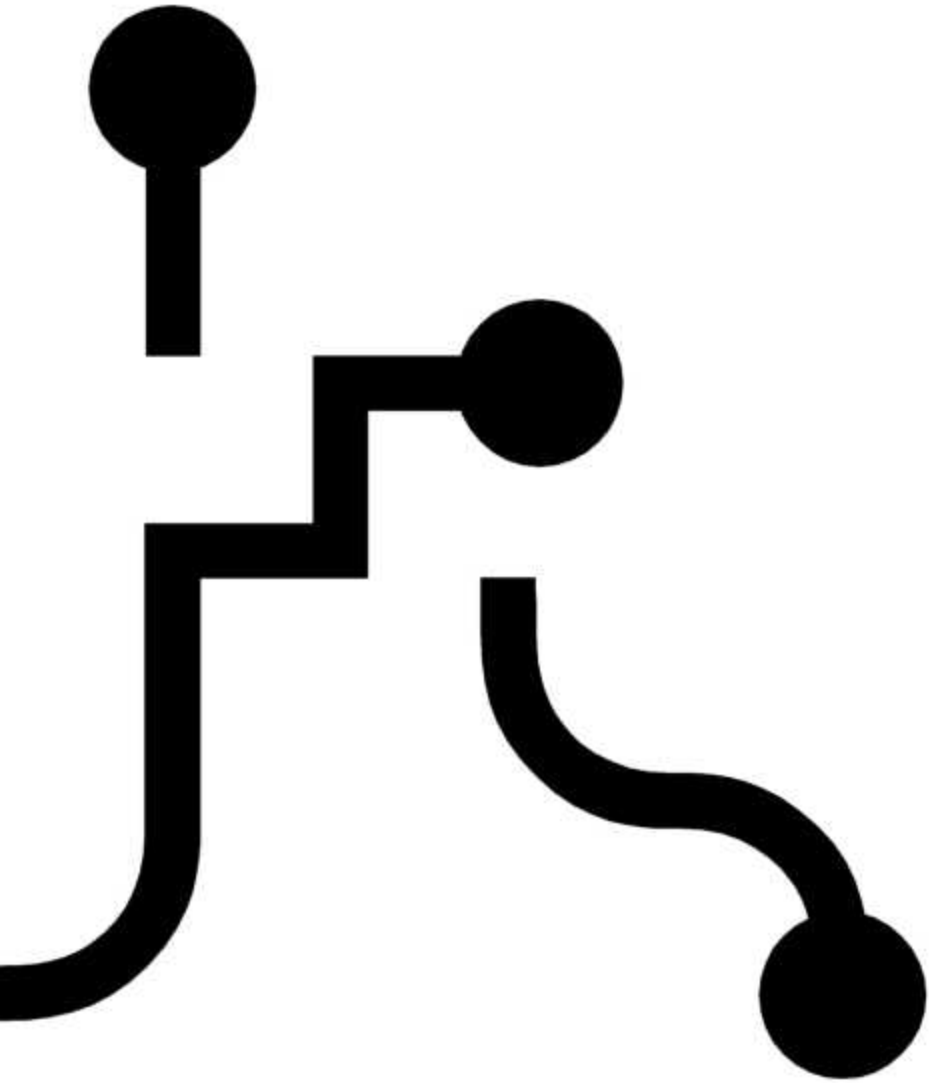

International Journal of Marketing Semiotics

Editorial

Almost three years have elapsed since the official release of the International Journal of Marketing Semiotics. During this period we have witnessed an increasing interest in multidisciplinary research between marketing and semiotics from scholars whose primary affiliation rests with either side of this far from irreconcilable divide. Admittedly the unique territory that the International Journal of Marketing Semiotics has been consistently trying to consolidate, at the intersection between marketing and semiotic research, has proven to be a demanding task. Occasionally novel brand propositions that are born in the centre of Venn diagrams are burdened with the vagaries of the 'stuck in the middle' phenomenon. Thankfully this has not been the case with marketing semiotics thus far. This is also confirmed by the significantly greater number of marketing semiotic submissions to the 12th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies compared to 2011. In line with our vision and mission statement of furthering the discipline, we are particularly glad to bring you the second volume of the International Journal of Marketing Semiotics.

The issue opens with an innovative contribution by Angela Bargenda in the field of what might be called (given that this is a nascent research field) architectural brand semiotics (not to be confused with the standard term brand architecture in branding research). The article addresses a significant opportunity gap in the traditional conceptualization of brand identity concerning the contribution of architectural aesthetics in the construal of an overall customer experience with a focus on the branding of financial services' retail outlets. Bargenda's semiotic analysis demonstrates how olfactory, spatial, optical, auditory, gustative and tactile signs function synesthetically with view to engendering a multi-sensory brand universe that gives rise to a distinctive corporate personality. At the same time, the analysis demonstrates lucidly how architectural branding elements attain to harmonize the spatial experience with a wider socioeconomic and cultural framework, thus transforming mundane financial exchanges into symbolic and cultural capital. Furthermore, by incorporating a multimodal rhetorical analysis in the wider semiotic framework the author points to how architectural branding elements attain to balance the background, functional expectancies from a banking retail outlet

with the aesthetic requirements that are part and parcel and at the same time enriching of a unique urban environment. The managerial implications are highlighted with respect to the increasing economic importance of aesthetics in the generation of symbolic capital for financial services and semiotics as a potent methodical roadmap for achieving superior benefits to this end.

The second article, by George Rossolatos, aims at laying the foundations of a cultural branding model that is edified largely against the background of Lotmanian semiotics. Despite the fact that cultural branding, from a marketing literature point of view, by now constitutes an entrenched research field in the wider CCT stream, no cultural branding models have been furnished in marketing semiotics. While recognizing the considerable theoretical and practical benefits that may be reaped by capitalizing on the conceptual richness of Lotman's prolific writings on textual/cultural semiotics, the author puts forward the model of the brandosphere, as the branding equivalent of the seminal concept of the semiosphere. By placing relevant concepts from the vast Lotmanian cultural semiotic inventory in a branding context, with an emphasis on the notions of cultural centre vs. periphery, levels and units of semiotic analysis, semiotic modeling, among others, an attempt is made to integrate insights that were borne out mainly through Lotman's engagement with literary texts (and to a lesser extent with cinematic ones) in a set of concrete guidelines and research directions. The model of the brandosphere is in line with the author's consistent attempts at laying bare the scholarly contributions that may be made in the extant literature by adopting a wider brand textuality perspective, amidst an intellectual climate that has been increasingly preoccupied with arguing for the textual constitution of cultural identity. As an attestation of the massive opportunities in terms of the empirical applications of the brandosphere the paper focuses on the nascent research field of user generated advertising. The pursued argumentation is intent on demonstrating the benefits that may stem for account planning and brand management while attending to how brand discourses are textually co-conditioned (rather than co-created), an analytical output that is expected to emerge on multiple levels by comparing and contrasting brand initiated with user generated advertising. Ultimately, the brandosphere is intended as a model for managing a brand's share of cultural representations, in complementarity

to a brand's market share, which is mandated even more forcefully in an economy that is progressively driven by intangible benefits and values.

The ensuing contribution by Richard Tressider explores how the language of hospitality is shaped in contemporary marketing communications. By adopting a social semiotic conceptual framework for mapping the social and cultural significance of hospitality, while drawing on the multimodal discourse of three restaurant websites, the author demonstrates how consumer experiences and anticipated benefits that are related to hospitality are shaped and conditioned by brand discourses. In essence the consumption of a hospitality experience is incumbent on a sign-economy or, as the author puts it, by vectors that connect consumers with texts. While deconstructing the language of hospitality Tressider demonstrates how the gustative code relates to wider cultural codes, but also, how the aesthetics of taste (gustative or otherwise) cohere with and are reflective of socioeconomic structures. Moreover, the analysis unearths the inextricable relationship between product and service aspects that are integral to the brand promise of the scrutinized restaurant websites which are edified, in turn, on mythical and iconic codes. The implications of this semiotic reading are extended to encompass how meaning is guided or signposted by a set of visual and textual marketing conventions that are invested with exchanges of cultural capital and expressions of identity, reaching up to sacral dimensions.

The volume concludes with a dual Peircean, structuralist reading of a single Nutribalance print ad by Sharon Schembri and Eliane Karsaklian. By singling out which ad expressive elements are central, from an enunciator's point of view, in conveying intended brand meaning, the authors report findings from primary qualitative research that are suggestive of two interpretive avenues whereby consumers either align their take-out of the concerned ad with the brand owners' intentions or 'miss the point' altogether. The benefits of combining semiotically informed research frameworks for answering the same research questions in terms of enhancing credibility are highlighted, while the significance of semiotics for applied advertising research is stressed in terms of furnishing robust interpretive frameworks for systematically segmenting and methodically portraying consumer narratives.

George Rossolatos

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The paradox of contemporary bank architecture: Building a new model of brand identity

Angela Bargenda

Angela Bargenda Ph.D. (abargenda@aol.com) is a Professor of Marketing and Communication at ESCE International Business School in Paris. She specializes in the areas of marketing semiotics, financial communication, brand identity, and aesthetic marketing. She holds a Ph.D. from the City University of New York and a doctorate from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. She has published numerous papers in academic journals and speaks regularly at international conferences. Her research interests combine disciplines such as art history, aesthetics, rhetoric and semiotics with marketing and communication studies, especially in the finance sector. Her most recent publications include *Communication Visuelle dans le Secteur Bancaire Européen. L'Esthétique de la Finance*. Paris: L'Harmattan (2014) and *Corporate architecture as a branding tool* (in *Managing Corporate Communication: A Cross-Cultural Approach*, Gambetti, Rossella & Quigley, Stephen [eds.], London: Palgrave Macmillan [2013]).

Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the semiotic relevance of architecture in building a bank's brand identity. It establishes architectural discourse as a sign-system that produces symbolic capital within the wider framework of the identity-building process. The shift from ethics to aesthetics, from functional, utilitarian retail venues, to glossy design interiors, has recently emerged in the financial community. New design concepts of retail banking are currently being tested to accompany innovative initiatives in the area of consumer marketing. In the finance sector, where symbolic capital ranks as a critical reputation asset, architecture increasingly conveys corporate values and takes part in institutional myth-making.

By presenting an analysis of architectural semiotics, the paper argues that the multi-sensory (visual-sonic-olfactory-tactile) congruity of architectural narratives generates denoted and connoted meaning. An empirical illustration of Société Générale's branch on the Champs-Elysées shows how architectural discourse establishes idiosyncratic brand identity. As the semiotic exploration of architecture remains significantly under-represented in the marketing semiotic literature, the paper seeks to open a new territory in this emerging field.

Keywords: architectural semiotics, financial communication, brand identity, marketing aesthetics.

0. Introduction

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, the banking sector has been affected by major image losses and client attrition. In addition, the rapid expansion of online banks and the provision of financial services by non-financial institutions have transformed profoundly this hyper-competitive marketplace. It has therefore become paramount for banking institutions to reconsider the priorities of their marketing strategy for the retail sector by creating new structures of client interfaces and innovative touch-points. Many institutions have completely overhauled their brick-and-mortar branches to project a more modern corporate image in conformity with contemporary urban lifestyles. In many cases, architecture is embedded in the larger scope of an integrated marketing discourse, including PR efforts, above-the-line advertising, and sponsorship.

In this new corporate discursive mode the strategic use of architecture engenders a "phenomenology of capital" (Martin, 2010, p. xvii), whereby the corporation transforms the use value of architecture into aesthetic and symbolic value. And yet, architecture is usually not part of the marketing practitioner's or scholar's toolbox (Schroeder, 2002, p. 91). Jons Messedat notes that "it is surprising that, despite significant investment and given the diverse possibilities of employing architecture as a central element of the communication of a company and brand contents, it is not used efficiently. The long-term cultural and emotional added value that can be achieved here is not appropriately reflected in economic calculations" (Messedat, 2005, p. 15). In marketing scholarship, architecture is mostly investigated as a sales tool based on Kotler's concept of "atmospherics" (Kotler, 1973, p. 50) or the concept of "servicescape" (Bitner, 1992), which both seek to maximize immediate impact on purchasing decisions. The "psychological, cultural and consumer values" (Schroeder, 2002, p. 91) of

space design rarely appear in the marketing literature, despite their persuasive branding power in the age of consumption as spectacle.

1. Literature review

Considered as a signifying entity, architectural discourse is semantically coded (Dreyer, 2009, 2008, 2003, Hammad, 2006, 2002, Larsen, 2002, Gottdiener, 1995, Bettetini, 1986, Jencks, 1977, Eco, 1968) and generates long-term cultural value in an integrated system (Dorfles, 1971, p. 94). Sonesson (1989, 2011, 2013) has shown that the iconic sign is essentially motivated. Eco (1988) interprets architectural language as a coded text that denotes a specific function and connotes symbolic meaning. He emphasizes the functional and social contents of architecture, while arguing that architecture cannot be decoded as a simple sign. The decoding process of architectural expression encompasses various facets of semiotic production and therefore implies a multi-layered sign-network. Eco identifies three main architectural codes: the technical codes (concerning the structural components of architectural forms), the syntactic codes (covering the typological codes and the spatial articulation of forms) and the semantic codes (linking the sign-vehicles in architecture to their denotative and connotative meanings) (Eco, 1988, p. 181).

The intertwined articulation of these codes calls for a poly-semiosis of architectural discourse, as "the specificity of a signifying system is not [...] defined solely by the specificity of the codes, but also by the form in which those codes are articulated; that is to say, the combination of codes may be specific, although the codes themselves may or may not be specific to the system in question" (Metz, 1969). With intrinsic variables such as symmetry or asymmetry, scale, rhythm, proportion, chromatic and formal properties, contrast, dimension, horizontality and verticality, open and closed space, materials, topography, style, functionality, etc. providing interpretive cues (Eco, 1972), the performance of architectural discourse dynamically results from the relationship between the variables and the actors who occupy these spaces (Semprini, 1996, p. 19).

Visual semiotics imply the subject's physical presence in space by exploring the interaction between the body and the environment, the spatial effects on movement, perception and overall *Raumempfindung* (Larsen, 2002, 1991, Certeau, 1990, Johnson, 1987, Gibson, 1968). Architectural semiosis therefore is twofold: perceived as the surface plane of a building's façade, it is decoded as a visual sign that Sonesson considers to have greater rhetorical power than verbal language: "[…] rhetoric is more immediately present in pictures and other iconic signs than in verbal language. It is the nature of the iconic sign to posit at the same time its own resemblance and dissimilitude with respect to its object […] the sign creates an expectation of identity […]" (Sonesson, 2013, p. 10). If buildings express meaning and give certain messages (Conway and Roenisch, 1994, p. 21), their functioning as semiotic sign systems is profoundly humane within the context of urban culture.

However, architecture also generates a spatiotemporal symbiosis, in which the sentient subject experiences space from within, as "we experience [...] architecture through our embodied existence and identification" (Pallasmaa, 2009). This sensory perception of four dimensions provides a unique

space/time experience that fully engages the subject with the brand. Zevi sums up this "moment of architecture" as "the moment in which we, with everything in us that is physical and spiritual, and, above all, human, enter and experience the spaces […]" (Zevi, 1974, p. 60). Architecture delivers a dynamic field of direct physical involvement that operates on all four dimensions: "There is a physical and dynamic element in grasping and evoking the fourth dimension through one's own movement through space. Not even motion pictures [...] possess that mainspring of complete and voluntary participation, that consciousness of free movement, which we feel in the direct experience of space. Whenever a complete experience of space is to be realized, we must be included, we must feel ourselves part and measure of the architectural organism [...]" (Zevi, 1974, pp. 59-60).

The taxonomy of architectural discourse within the realm of the visual arts therefore does not adequately reflect the entire communicative potential of topological properties. The sensory, phenomenological access to the medium transcends the purely optical apprehension. The generation of a specific atmosphere through shape, colour, materials, structure, but also sound, light, ergonomics, and smell, afford architecture a holistic status. Contrary to other forms of visual marketing, such as packaging, product design, and advertising layout, architecture captures consumers as sentient beings, as it is a kinetic art that is perceived by movement (Vasarely quoted in Heidingsfelder, 2009). The architectural object of semiotics constitutes a sign system that functions within a specific corporate and social culture (Nadin, 1990, p. 423).

The synthetic space perception of a bank branch rests on the projection of legible signs that identify the venue: security equipment, ATM walls, bank-tellers, safe deposit boxes, cheque deposit machines, etc. They constitute the denotative cues of the traditional narrative model of retail banking and form the cognitive map in this autopoetic ecosystem. The typified architectural discourse locates the institution within a culturally recognized referent system (Nisbet, 1990, p. 8).

Moreover, the iconic and spatial plasticity of architecture serve as a privileged means of image-building, catering to the contemporary propensity for individualism, immateriality and the imaginary (Semprini, 2005, p. 42), while setting the stage for social interaction. This 'aesthetic reflexivity' (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 5) of multimodal space perception situates architectural discourse at the core of the new consumer experience in an aesthetic economy. Norberg-Schulz points out: "How then is this stability compatible with the dynamics of change? First of all we may point out that any place ought to have the *capacity* of receiving different 'contents', naturally within certain limits. A place which is only fitted for one purpose would soon become useless [….] To protect and conserve the *genius loci* in fact means to concretize its essence in ever new historical contexts" (Norberg-Schulz, 1996, p. 422).

Thus, to avert the obsolescence of traditional brick-and-mortar venues, retail banking needs to be reconceptualised and filled with new content. The sole purpose of providing financial services no longer suffices to establish competitive value in a hypercompetitive marketing environment. Aesthetic space experience contributes to building symbolic and cultural value while accruing long-term reputation capital and goodwill for stakeholders (Bargenda, 2013, 2014). Banks seek to obtain cultural legitimacy in addition to commercial legitimacy (Ries and Ries, 2002) in order to meet the expectations of consumers. As metaphorical expressions of "brand culture" (Schroeder, 2007; Schroeder & Salzer-

Mörling, 2006), architectural narratives represent the "metaphoric image of the dominant powers" (Rykwert, 2008, p. 374), and therefore must be adapted to a changing historical context.

2. Main findings of the semiotic analysis

The performance of a semiotic analysis seeks to demonstrate how the new aesthetic elements generate identity-building values in the "kitchen of meaning" (Barthes, 1988). Plastic signs are based on lines, colours and texture (Klinkenberg, 1996, p. 379). The architecture of Société Générale's branch in Paris, substantially redesigned in 2014, exemplifies the attempt to build symbolic capital, while creating an integrated network of branches by means of a unified graphic design pattern.

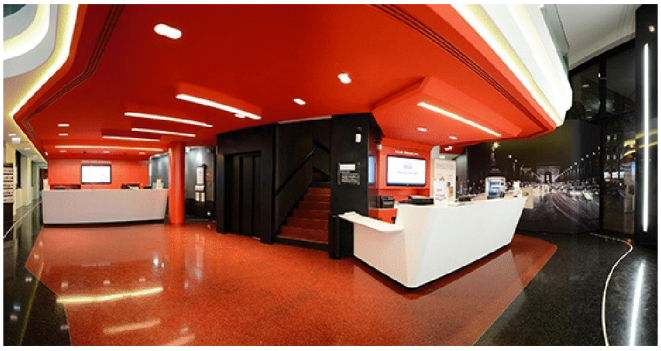
Conceived by architects Philippe Roux and Piotr Paciorek in 2012, and considered as an experimental pilot-project for future space strategies, the overhaul of the flagship branch on 91, Champs-Elysées, which opened in 1880, paradigmatically aligns the bank with previous architectural projects. In fact, throughout its institutional history, the bank has positioned itself at the forefront of innovation by readily adopting technological progress to ensure the optimal equipment of its facilities. The bank's historic headquarters, as well as its high-rise buildings at La Défense create differentiated architectural value with regard to its competitors. Similarly, the latest innovations in experiential marketing are tested for their communicative relevance at the Champs-Elysées branch.

2.1 Smell

Upon entering the building, a delicate smell of cut grass conveys a sense of freshness to the client. However, rather than functioning merely as a pleasant air freshener, this olfactory sign also connotes the candour and innocence of country life, thus seeking to re-establish a down-to-earth, trustworthy and solid identity.

2.2 Ergonomics

The trust-building factor also prevails in the ergonomics of space design. In fact, the almost organic, sinuous fluidity of the space conception creates a perfect harmony with natural body movements, thereby greatly facilitating orientation. In the main lobby, the entire space unfolds in a 180 degree perspective, affording the client control over the entire venue. The intense orange-coloured, futuristic, asymmetrical space design is made accessible by a new and clear signage system.



Entrance hall. ©Société Générale. Reprinted with permission.

2.3 Views

The new transparent glass façade, connecting the bank with the city, contrasts starkly with the original stone building. If architecture can be interpreted metaphorically, the opacity and secrecy of the past transform into transparency and openness of the present and future. The waiting room on the mezzanine offers a spectacular view on the Champs-Elysées, while an adjacent Japanese garden allows for meditative relaxation. The diffusion of natural light and LED lamps reinforces the impression of a genuine place.

View from the mezzanine on the Champs-Elysées. Photograph by author, 2014.

Japanese garden. Photograph by author, 2014.

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2.4 Sound

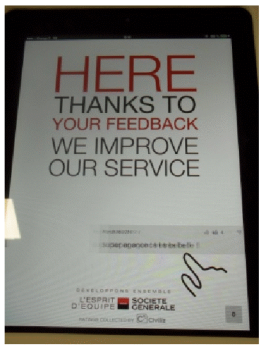
In the waiting area, smooth lounge music invites visitors to unwind and to socialize in a coffee-shop like atmosphere.

Waiting area for private clients on the mezzanine. Photograph by author, 2014.

2.5 Taste

A coffee machine is available to clients and their customer representatives to share a personal warm-up moment.

2.6 Tactile participation



Ipad terminal for client comments. Photograph by author, 2014.

Before leaving the branch, clients are invited to give satisfaction ratings, make comments on the waiting time and their representative's availability, etc., on an ipad application.

The overhauled bank branch features an idiosyncratically-coded environment of baroque theatrics. The utilitarian function of financial services is mediated through an institutional setting that transfers human values and experiences to a transactional environment. The venue epitomizes a new branding model that brokers highly prized values of aesthetic pleasure and community-building (Pedergnana, Schneider & Vogler, 2003, p. 27). The syntagmatic enrichment of sign-driven consumption with a more all-encompassing aesthetic spatial orientation enacts new forms of brand/client interface, where the environment becomes a sign in itself as "symbolic space that connotes something other than its principal function – the realization of capital through the stimulation of consumer desires [...]"

(Gottdiener, 2001, p. 73). Synesthetic atmospheric criteria have become paramount in the architectural expression of meaning, identity, and desire.

2.7 Synesthetic architectonic concept

The synesthetically connected olfactory, spatial, optical, auditory, gustative and tactile signs engender a multi-sensory brand universe that establishes a very distinct corporate personality. Architectural branding consists in linking the spatial experience to the larger socioeconomic and cultural goals that communicate shared values, so that "it becomes almost inevitable that the architecture will transcend its material value to engage in a dialogue with its audience" (Klingmann, 2007, p. 65). The threefold nature of architecture, as defined by Vitruvius, includes *firmitas* (solidity), *utilitas* (function), *venustas* (beauty). It is the area of *venustas* that was long neglected in retail banking architecture, foregrounding the principles of *utilitas*. However, architecture is a potent communicator of a myth or a narrative and therefore holds significant persuasive force. The new model of banking architecture therefore places particular emphasis on *venustas*, while articulating ideology, values, and symbolism in an aesthetically pleasing way. Thus, the denotative, functional aspect is being superseded by the connotative dimension of symbolic associations, enhancing the emotional appeal of the venue. Substance and depth of structure disappear behind the glossy surface that primarily exudes a sense of seduction. The holistic, multi-sensory spatial experience dissociates the financial core business of the institution from the experiential transformation of the subject through sensual stimuli. The dynamic interplay between depth and surface, rational/financial and emotional impact creates an oscillation in the subject, transforming the sensual and cognitive levels into two coexistent realities. "SENSE architecture", which "appeals to the senses, with the objective of creating sensory experiences through sight, sound, touch, and smell" (Schmitt, 1999, p. 64) is combined with the functional imperatives of a banking venue to institute a new architectural model. Böhme (2013a) notes that the communicative character of a synesthetic atmosphere does not result from a hierarchy of senses or a special exposure to one sensory modality. On the contrary, the phenomenological perception results from "mutually substitutable generators" creating characters of atmospheres. The emergence of a new regime of signification, where utilitarian venues are imbued with utopian, imaginary, culturally-coded sign effects, institutes a permeable, fluid connector between *utilitas* and *venustas*. The corporate brand identity construct takes place in the interstices of this hybridisation and functions simultaneously on all three types of signs, as defined by Peirce.

2.8 Semio-narrative architectural codes

The architectural sign system of Société Générale synthesises functional, utilitarian banking space and experiential, spectacular event architecture, against the three sign types of icon, index and symbol.

The *icon*

It represents an *icon* through its resemblance with organic, futuristic spaces reminiscent of 1970s aesthetics, both through space morphology and colour (predominantly orange). The fashionable vintage atmosphere that is thus implemented meets the cultural preferences of the core target[1], instituting a link with collective memory and generational cultural heritage.

The *index*

As an *index*, the renovated branch establishes a causal relationship with the formal and functional space requirements and the aesthetic demands of lifestyle branding. The revitalised branch creates meaningful brand relationships where function and form coincide in a homogeneous unity. The conjunction of commercial and communal interests opens up new architectural perspectives, as multi-sensory design elements not only serve a decorative purpose, but also assume strategic importance as an "art of the ensemble" (Scruton, 1979, p. 11).

The *symbol*

It is the symbolic dimension that clearly transforms the entire environment into a signifier. This "universal semantization of the environment" (Baudrillard, 1972, p. 230) leads to the semio-demonstration of power through space design and place-making, a preponderant trait of contemporary aesthetic economy.

By reframing architecture as a tool for evoking the socio-psychological dimension of the corporate message, it is established as a signifying "expressive system" (Bonta, 1979). As an identity-building device of brand culture, it metaphorically transcribes the passage from a brand with market-value to a brand with symbolic and cultural value, thus effecting a transition from the aesthetically designed *servicescape* to the symbolically connoted *brandscape*.

The very location of the branch on the Champs-Elysées carries symbolic capital, in that the prime retail location embodies power, but also consolidates the bank's urban presence on the historical axis of the urban development of Paris. The Champs-Elysées have both spatial and temporal, syntagmatic and diachronic relevance. By opening up the branch to the entire street frontage, the bank connects with the urban fabric of the past and present, while concurrently shaping the future public space of its environment: "With the rise of capitalism […], the symbolism of public and ceremonial architecture became more varied. The purpose of the symbolism, nevertheless, was the same: to legitimize a particular ideology or power system by providing a physical focus to which sentiments could be attached" (Knox, 1982, p. 110).

[1] According to branch director Idris Hederaly, 90% of clients express the highest satisfaction rate in the category "atmosphere and design" on the ipad evaluation form (interview with the author, 2 July 2014).

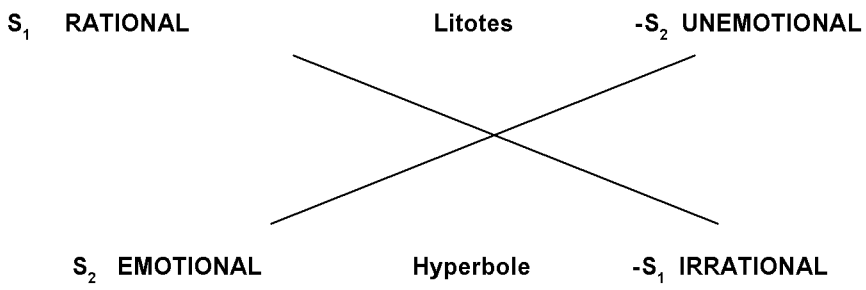
2.9 Rhetorical persuasion

If the purpose of rhetoric is to produce *adherence* to the proposed arguments (Perelman, 1977), it is legitimate to consider architectural expression as an argumentative device. The valorisation of a particular discursive style generates persuasive relevance to a specific target audience through meaning-generating mechanisms of a particular signifying structure. The rhetorical mechanisms of architectural discourse lend themselves to interpretation, as visual rhetoric is encoded through tropes (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). According to Hattenhauer, "architecture not only communicates, but also communicates rhetorically […] architectural items not only tell us their meaning and function, but also influence our behavior. Architecture is rhetorical because it induces us to do what others would have us to do. Architecture, then, is a persuasive phenomenon, and therefore deserves to be studied by rhetorical critics" (Hattenhauer, 1984, p. 71).

In this architectural discourse, the salient properties of Société Générale's branch may be articulated by recourse to the following four main tropes (cf. Rossolatos, 2013):

HYPERBOLE	"Quantitative augmentation of one of the properties of an object state-of-affairs; may be encountered purely verbally or visually or as the employment of a visual that augments the importance or the argumentative force […]."
LITOTES	"Quantitative diminution of a property of an object, the significance of an event of a state-of-affairs […]"
RESHAPTION	"Repetition of the same shape in the majority of visuals in a syntagm or across syntagms."
PARADOX	"The syntactical co-occurrence in the same syntagm of two words or phrases or visual that appear to be contradictory, but contains a truism or topos."

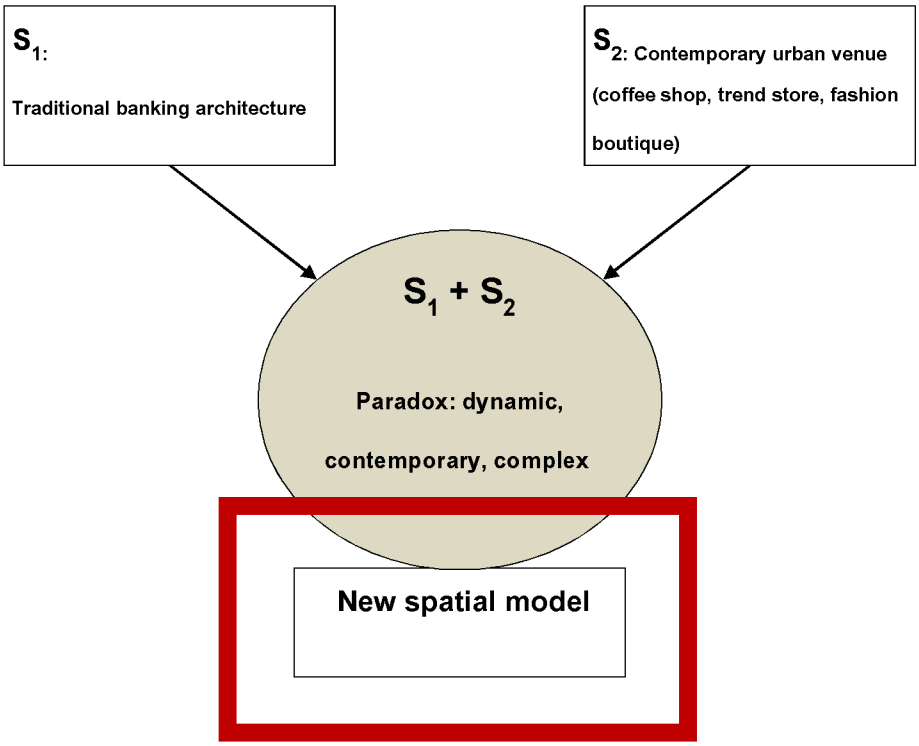
Hyperbolic properties, such as the predominant orange color and the vast expanse of the entrance hall are offset against the discreet confidentiality of private meeting rooms. Furthermore, the branch features no ostentatious ATM-wall, but just one cash machine. The understated, functional aspects are typical of traditional banking architecture. The concept of re-shaption lends itself particularly well to the interpretation of architectural syntagms in the wider sense. In fact, olfaction acts as such a connector, as the pervasive smell of fresh grass permeates the entire branch, thus acting like an olfactory identifier. In addition, the furniture design, the lighting fixtures and the color code are recurrent in the building and establish one unified sign network. Finally, the combination of the operative rationality of bank architecture and the dramatic computer-generated morphogenesis of interior design converge into a synchronically contiguous space concept. The dissimilar, antithetical realms of practical, functional architecture and neo-plastic, exuberant design production, fuse into a final synthesis. Thus, continuity and discontinuity, thesis and antithesis, rational and emotional variables are associated in a dynamic experiential field that can be represented as a semiotic square:



The following rational and emotional elements may be identified:

S_1 RATIONAL	$-S_2$ UNEMOTIONAL
Kinetic efficiency (180° view)	Natural and LED lighting
Functional space ergonomics	Spacious, airy reception area
Project-oriented customer service	Customer satisfaction survey on ipad
Clear signage	Welcome desk
	Modular walls and furniture
S_2 EMOTIONAL	**$-S_1$ IRRATIONAL**
Predominant orange colour	Absence of ATM walls (only one ATM)
Futuristic layout	Relaxing waiting area
Design furniture	Lounge music
View on Champs-Elysées	Japanese garden
Direct human contact	
Dramatic stage set	

The paradoxical complexity of Société Générale's space design results from the contrasting articulations of utilitarian architecture and spectacular design elements:



3. Discussion

The architectural features embody the bank's corporate values of team spirit and community building that are prominently articulated in the most recent advertising campaign. A transactional space is transformed into a place of culture and social exchange. The politics of the image revitalise a traditional banking venue as an artsy, dynamic place that can be modelled according to *ad hoc* contingencies. To the operative functions of financial services, the bank added a socio-cultural dimension to reinvent its identity along human-centred identifiers. Architect Bernard Tschumi argues that "there is no space without event, no architecture without program" (Tschumi, 1990, 89). Thus, the formal and ideological settings catalyse cultural and social exchange, while establishing a sensory atmosphere, where architecture itself becomes marketing. The triumphant smooth and glossy surface, the symbolic dramatisation and the swirling spectacle of colors, shapes, fragrances and panoramic views on the Champs-Elysées illustrate the bank's new identity. Thus, architecture serves to stage institutional power (Böhme, 2013b, p. 54). In the financial sector, this "phenomenology of capital" implements a new sign-system of complex topologies where form and function are synthesised into one congruent symbolic expression. This eclectic architecture draws on a variety of vernaculars, including overblown, euphoric design patterns, as much as traditional understated elements of bank architecture. The iconic interplay of signs creates a mythic spatial plasticity that could have a schizoid effect, were it not perfectly controlled as a balanced combination of permanence and difference (Floch,

1994, p. 7). The poetic choreography of space sets up a dialectic synesthesia emblematic of the new multifaceted brand signifiers.

The increasing economic importance of aesthetics in the context of a financial institution creates symbolic capital. Paradoxically, the financial business almost disappears behind the exuberant design initiatives. Even though the transparent glass walls open up the branch to the streetscape, efforts have been made to erase any explicit reference to the financial transactions behind a spectacular stage-set of light, color, sound and smell. Thus, the apparent transparency of design elements in fact conceals the core business, making the surface more important than the depth, the play more attractive than the reality, the emotional response more pleasing than the cognitive reflection. Entertainment, differentiation, and seduction are the components of this new approach to architecture and "the criteria that make up personality – by shifting attention away from the identity of the object to the experience of the subject" (Klingmann, 2007, p. 19). In a consumer-driven retail environment, brands seek to build strong customer relationships by providing dazzling stimuli and by touching consumers' hearts. In this new visual grammar, the design patterns create a motion that draws the visitors in from the street, orients them directly to the welcome desk, and dispatches them in a centrifugal movement to their respective offices. Through this dynamic field of perpetual motion, the subject experiences the movement, dynamism, and action of a fast-paced corporate environment. The signifying space design is concomitant with the signified corporate values of hardwork and effective guidance, thus instituting a direct link between architectural principles and managerial priorities.

4. Conclusion

Analysed through the lenses of semiotics, architectural space conception functions as a persuasive medium of representation. The semiotic codes of this signifying system formulate institutional poetics of authentic sensory experience. The salient properties of this venue combine the iconic signs of traditional bank architecture with new design components. Extrinsic to the conventional taxonomy of bank architecture, these signs build differentiated brand value, while experimenting with the architectural expression of various lifestyles. The ideological relationship thus established builds long-term reputation and cultural capital.

If Sonesson argues that the capital of the 21st century is located on the internet (Sonesson, 2004, p. 15), it is interesting to note that, to counteract precisely the competition from online banks and the increasing number of virtual financial transaction, traditional banks are seeking to re-emphasise the human communications systems of the boulevard and the café in an extended version. The new bank branch is open to sight, but also incorporates other senses that typically are not part of this system (such as smell, hearing and touch). The internet, on the contrary, is open to dialogue, but otherwise it is not as multi-sensory a medium as the described retail space. In the case of a globally-operating banking institution, the regained interest in original territories, both topological and ideological, testifies to the return to local cultural referents. In view of the bank's high proportion of international clientele (40% are non-locals), this focus holds particular importance. In fact, French cultural heritage constitutes

in itself a prime branding device and by valorising its more than 100-year-old institution, the bank draws heavily on the positive connotations of French architecture.

5. Further research areas

Research could be extended into the exploration of diachronic axes to include a historical perspective of corporate architectural branding. A relevant approach would be to examine the evolution of iconic identifiers in their evolving sociocultural and economic context. Another research approach could be centered on a more complete account of the rhetorical figures present in architectural discourse that were omitted in this paper (expletion, anaphora, etc.). An alternative route to the semiotic exploration of architectural discourse would address the interrelatedness between aesthetics and ethics, i.e., between the politics of the image and managerial techniques. Finally, a semiotic exploration of workplace design could discuss the impact of space and the relationship between design structures and employee motivation.

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For a semiotic model of cultural branding and the dynamic management of a brandosphere in the face of user-generated advertising*

George Rossolatos

George Rossolatos MSc, MBA, PhD (georgerossolatos123@gmail.com) is an academic researcher and marketing practitioner, with experience in advertising (JWT), marketing research (Research International/Millward Brown) and brand management (Colgate-Palmolive, Nestle, Weetabix, Cosmote). He holds a BA (Hons) in Philosophy from the University of Essex, an MSc in Marketing from Manchester Business School and an MBA from Strathclyde Business School and a PhD in Marketing Semiotics from the University of Kassel. Major publications include *Interactive Advertising: Dynamic Communication in the Information Era* (2002), *Brand Equity Planning with Structuralist Rhetorical Semiotics* (2012, 2014), *Applying Structuralist Semiotics to Brand Image Research* (2012), *//rhetor.dixit//: Understanding ad texts' rhetorical structure for differential figurative advantage* (2013), plus numerous articles in trade and academic journals. His research interests rest with effecting inter-disciplinary cross-fertilizations between marketing, rhetoric and semiotics, also informed by disciplines such as phenomenology, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, anthropology, communication theory, cultural studies.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is twice foundational. First, it aims at providing a sketchmap for a semiotically informed model of cultural branding that is currently lacking and second to identify how this model could be fruitfully applied for managing a brand's share of cultural representations, over and above its market share, as well as the textual sources of a brand language as (inter)textual formation. The propounded cultural branding model of the brandosphere is of inter-disciplinary orientation, spanning the relevant marketing and semiotic literatures, with an emphasis on Lotman's cultural/textual semiotics and social media, with an added focus on user-generated advertising (henceforth denoted as UGA). The brandosphere is envisioned as a marketing semiotic contester to the almost monopolizing cultural branding model of Douglas Holt (2004) in an attempt to demonstrate that marketing semiotics may constitute a standalone discipline that is capable of addressing, both conceptually and methodologically, various marketing-related research areas, rather than an ornamental add-on to consumer research.

Keywords: brandosphere, user-generated advertising, cultural semiotics, share of cultural representations.

0. Lotman's cultural semiotics as conceptual platform for edifying the brandosphere

"Cultural semiotics has broadened the meanings of the terms 'text', 'language' and 'reading' to include almost everything perceived as partaking of a sign-relationship understood in terms of inter-subjective communication" (Orr 1986: 812). "If one designates the totality of all sign systems in the world as the 'semiosphere' (Lotman 1990 and Posner 2001, 2003: 80 ff), one can say that cultural semiotics studies cultures as parts of the semiosphere" (Posner 2004: 2).

Yuri Lotman is perhaps the most prominent figure in the cultural semiotic discipline whose work is largely under-explored in cultural studies (outside of semiotics), not to mention Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and approaches to cultural branding that have been voiced therein. Outside of the semiotic discipline and beyond the geographical confines of Tartu that was his academic base, Lotman's cultural semiotic heritage has been taught extensively in the field of literary analysis. Interest in the central Lotmanian concept of 'semiosphere' has been picking up steadily ever since the appearance in English of his last work (Culture and Explosion). However, the indubitably insightful concepts of 'cultural explosion' and 'semiosphere' constitute the tip of the iceberg in Lotman's prolific writings.

Lotman's thinking deployed in various phases, as is characteristic of great thinkers. Certainly this is not the place for engaging at length with the various phases in Lotman's continuously elaborated

cultural theory or with the entire conceptual armory that was recruited for capturing salient facets of culture as a dynamically evolving system. In the 80's Lotman shifted attention from his initial conception of culture based on a perhaps crude distinction between primary and secondary modeling systems, that is on a clear-cut distinction between natural language as primary modeling system and all other discourses (artificial languages) that are modeled on natural language as secondary systems (e.g., religion, popular culture, theater, cinema, etc.), while introducing the notion of semiosphere. Certainly since Lotman's time the concepts of 'dynamic modeling' and 'modeling system' have been amply scrutinized and operationalized by disciplines such as cybernetics. Lotman's writings, in any case, surfaced amidst an academic climate that was geared towards inter-disciplinary research between semiotics and cybernetics, while nowadays there is a bespoke journal on semiotics and cybernetics.

The semiosphere, a considerably multifariously defined and operationalized concept (see Kull 2005, Nöth 2014, Rossolatos 2014b) constitutes an umbrella concept or metaconcept that designates a semiotic space that is made of various interlocking spheres with identifiable boundaries. "In defining the semiosphere Lotman is making a clear shift from the level of individual signs and their functioning in semiotic space toward a higher level of network semiosis and system level phenomena" (Andrews 2003: 34). As argued repeatedly in the relevant literature (e.g., Kull 2005, 2011) the semiosphere is a multi-level and multi-faceted construct that seeks to delineate how cultural spaces are produced as multi-level inscriptions in an all-encompassing semiospheric hyperspace, like *matryoshka* dolls within dolls. "As a metaconcept, semiosphere is a 'construct of semiotic method' (Kull 2005, 184) that takes a holistic approach to culture, and as an object it refers to a given semiotic space" (Semenenko 2012: 120). "The semiosphere is heterogeneous space (or communicative medium), enabling qualitative diversity to emerge, to fuse, and to sustain" (Kull 2005: 185). "Lotman especially stresses that the semiosphere is not just the sum total of semiotic systems, but also a necessary condition for any communication act to take place and any language to appear" (Semenenko 2012: 112). Each sphere in a semiospheric space is in a constant dialogue (a point of intersection between Lotman and Bakhtin's notion of dialogism; cf. Betea 1997) with every other sphere in varying degrees. "New information in the semiosphere can be produced only as a result of a dialogue between different codes, by which he [Lotman] understands not simply different human or artificial languages, but different ways of organizing reality into coherent cognitive structures, or different ways of making reality conform to our understanding" (Steiner 2003: 42).

Furthermore, each semiotic sphere has its own language, from simpler to more complex, and from strictly formalized to more fluid. "These languages are not equivalent to one another, but at the same time are mutually interprojected and have various degrees of translatability" (Semenenko 2012: 113). According to Semenenko, meaning is generated in communicative acts precisely through the tension that exists among the various languages that make up the distinctive spheres of a semiospheric space. "This makes the semiosphere the universal mechanism of meaning generation" (Semenenko 2012: 113). Zylko (2001: 398-400) summarizes the most significant aspects of the concept of semiosphere as follows:

First, "the notion of semiospehere is related to definite homogeneity and individuality […] Messages from the outside have to force their way through to become facts of a given semiosphere. To do this, they have to adapt to the conditions of a given semiospehere in such a way that the alien may become familiar. What is external becomes internal; what is nontext becomes text."

Second, "the internal organization of semiosphere is characterized by a lack of predetermined order. The hierarchy of languages and texts is constantly subverted; they collide as if they existed on one level."

Third, "the organization of semiosphere is marked by internal heterogeneity. The organization and structuring of particular centers can vary considerably. Lotman assigns special meanings to peripheries, which are less formally organized than centers and have more flexible constructions at their disposal […] In this account, peripheries are considered a reservoir of innovation and a source of dynamic processes, within semiosphere." In line with his previous theorization of modeling systems and the derivative distinction between primary and secondary modeling systems "natural language takes the central position in the semiosphere because it permeates almost all semiospheric levels and quite a number of semiotic systems are based on it (e.g., literature and partially cinema and theater)" (Semenenko 2012: 113).

Fourth, "the structural unevenness of a semiosphere's internal organization is determined by the fact that different domains evolve at different speeds."

Fifth, according to Lotman, "dialogue is the universal law which stipulates how semiosphere exists. This dialogue proceeds in different spheres, ranging from the individual's cerebral hemispheres to the cultural contact on the national and international scale. As a consequence, semiosphere consists of levels, which range from each person's autonomous semiosphere to the overall semiosphere of the contemporary world."

1. The principal aims of the cultural branding model of brandosphere

In an era that is marked by excessive connectivity among social actors on an international scale, enabled by increasingly rapid electronic communications, the rate whereby texts and cultural units migrate from periphery to center, but also the scale on which such migrations are effected, could be characterized as being of unparalleled proportions compared to previous historical periods. "Cultural dynamics consists in this fact above others: that nucleus and periphery can change places. What used to be central is now peripheral, and vice versa" (Zylko 2001: 402). Lotman's conception of the dynamic interplay between the centre and the periphery of a culture and the relative salience of various textual sources in a semiosphere is most pertinent for the brandospheric model, however it rests at a level of abstraction that awaits to be further qualified in empirical terms in order to be rendered managerially salient.

The accelerating interplay between cultural center and periphery mandates even more urgently the need for a model and a methodology of cultural branding whereby multidimensional dynamic changes may be mapped with view to enhancing the predictability of emergent cultural trends and the impact such trends may have on the semantic nucleus of a brand and its periphery. "If we follow the semiospheric approach, culture takes the shape of a heterogeneous whole bustling with multiple rhythms of development and transient domains" (Zylko 2001: 400).

Lotman's semiospheric approach, by combining the micro-cultural or micro-structural with the macro-cultural or macro-structural points of view in the determination of the flows of dynamic cultural change, also affords to pose considerable challenges both to cognitivistic approaches in consumer research (cf. Van Osselaer 2008) and cognitive semiotics which assume as their point of departure and ultimate point of reference an ego-centric cogito. "Semiosphere as a metaconcept allows for describing larger entities of semiosis that transcend national borders (e.g., film noir, rock'n'roll music or art nouveau architecture) as well as 'microcultures' of various groups or even 'individual cultures'" (Semenenko 2012: 124).

By situating the cogito in a wider inter-textual semiospheric trajectory, without suppressing its significance and without rendering the functions of cogito redundant, the semiosphere affords to shift focus from a conception of the individual as autonomous processing unit (the AI metaphor) towards the ineradicably textual embeddeness of the subject in a nexus of cultural texts whose relative salience constantly changes. "Texts serve to select that which is to be remembered or forgotten, thus changing the concept of 'facts to be remembered'" (Sonesson 1998: 105). Hence, cognitive approaches with regard to how messages are processed, stored and retrieved in memory should be addressed in the brandospheric model, however from a point of view where memory is considered to be part and parcel of a collective cultural ethos (cf. Ricoeur 2004) that spreads through contamination and through the conditioning of subjects in mutually recognized aspects of seeing.

The notion of collective memory has been multifariously conceptualized in various humanities and social sciences disciplines. Lotman conceives of this ubiquitous notion as collective intellect. "Lotman compares the semiosphere with the collective intellect, a network of individual minds in constant interaction" (Semenenko 2012: 115). Let us recall that one of the main weaknesses of solipsistic, cogito-centric approaches, such as Husserlian phenomenology which have influenced greatly the advent and the consolidation of cognitive semiotics, were complemented by processes of inter- subjective habitual immersion into common aspects of seeing by social phenomenologists such as Schutz. "If individual memory is preserved in the mind, collective memory rests on texts" (Semenenko 2012: 117). The modes of formation of inter-subjectively common lifeworlds have been theorized multifariously from different authors, from Husserl's concept of Lebenswelt (lifeworld), to Wittgenstein's conception of language as form of life, to Bourdieu's Habitus, to Von Uexkull's Umwelt. Lotman endorses Von Uexkull's conception of Umwelt in an attempt to account for how the individual is embedded in the cultural nexus of the semiosphere, but also how it differs from universalistic descriptions of the

interactions among the spheres that make up a semiosphere, as well as how individuals actively contribute in the recreation of the boundaries among the spheres and their relative salience in the constitution of the unificatory ground of the semiosphere. The notion of Umwelt has been extensively researched in the semiotic literature and extended to encompass inter- subjective Umwelten. The usefulness of this extension in adding further operational depth to Lotman's insights should be considered as a necessary adjunct to the import of cognitive psychological perspectives about the formation of individual cultural memory that corresponds to the micro-cultural point of view.

"The dynamic development of semiotic systems is the result of a continuous dialogue between inter-connected Umwelten, which together constitute the semiosphere as a whole" (Semenenko 2012: 117). In this manner, the endorsement of the dominant paradigm (for consumer research) of cognitive psychology in an attempt to account for the cultural values and the textual sources that are reflected and leveraged in UGA should be coupled with a social phenomenological perspective as to how culture propagates among subjects that partake of a common cultural predicament, without reducing the relative merits of each approach to a univocal explanatory ground, but also without losing sight of the unificatory principle that was posited by Lotman as a precondition for conferring judgments about the incidence of a hierarchically organized semiospheric whole with distinctive spheres, each of which vies for an increase in 'mindshare' or what I call each sphere's 'share-of-cultural-representations' among the recipients and *co-creators* of the units that make up individual cultural spheres.

"The scholar from Tartu was particularly interested in dynamic systems, whose very functioning relies on transformation" (Zylko 2001: 403). For the Lotmanian school of cultural semiotics, culture is far from an objectively identifiable plenum of acts of human expression. As Segre (1989) points out, what appears as a rigidly structured system in fact constitutes a reserve that maintains in its contours traces from different epochs and multiple permutations. In line with the Peircean conception of signs as having a life of their own, always awaiting consumers as 'hosts' or 'carriers of meaning' for their semiotization (see Nöth 2013), Lotman was particularly concerned with how distinctive cultural spheres and the texts that make them up are transformed in various modes of contextualization and in different historical epochs from the centre of a cultural semiosphere to the periphery and vice versa. As Kristeva (1994: 376) remarked "he maintained that no culture, no study of culture, is possible without taking into account the *transformative essence* of meaning". Mapping the dynamics of cultural transformations and the relative role that is performed by different textual sources in this process was a life-time project for Lotman. "Culture is made of a web of semiosis, a thick tapestry of interwoven sign systems. This web is not perfectly smooth and continuous, however, and cultural semiotics finds its way into the sign system of a culture through the discontinuous, the breaks and gaps, the unexpected, the ambivalent" (Orr 1986 813). Lotman's particularly rich conceptual armory was borne out of his prolonged engagement with mapping out trajectories of cultural transformation, conceived of dynamically in terms of *morphostasis* and *morphogenesis*:

"*Morphostasis* and *morphogenesis* provide models that are particularly relevant. Morphostasis answers to complex interactions between a text and its environment that *maintain* and *preserve* a given organization. Morphogenesis is the more radical concept; it sets in motion processes that *elaborate* new forms" (Orr 1986: 818; italics in the original).

Mapping out this dynamic interplay between cultural centre and periphery which is responsible for infusing 'life' into a culture as an interplay between brand-owner generated textual universe (henceforth BOGTU) and UGA is crucial for (i) understanding which currently peripheral cultural spheres in a brandosphere may assume central importance for consumers in a mid-to-long term horizon (ii) which textual sources and textual forms make up distinctive spheres (e.g., cinema, politics, popular press, leisure activities) and how their relative salience shifts over time (iii) what types of signs, in terms of concrete representations, as well as modalities make up each textual form and how their importance shifts over time. These three interlocking levels for addressing how a semiospheric environment, and, concomitantly, how a brandosphere mutates over time, even at a sketchy level in the context of this paper, are suggestive of the all-encompassing character of Lotman's semiotic conceptual model of culture that combined the macro-cultural with micro-cultural outlooks in a uniform perspective. "The degree to which a code is *central* to a culture can be inferred from the following properties: (i) *wide distribution*: this code is mastered by more members of the society than other codes; (ii) *great frequency*: this code is utilized in the society on more occasions than other codes; (iii) *high prestige*: the utilization of this code in a given situation is more highly valued in the society than the utilization of competing codes" (Posner 2004: 125). Yet, the adequate operationalization of these three analytical levels by recourse to the Lotmanian corpus is in need of both considerable scholarly elucidation, insofar as Lotman did not offer a strict blueprint of levels and units of signification akin to Greimas, for example, save for examples of what such levels and units would consist of (e.g., in Lotman 1976), but also in the face of post-Lotmanian advances in the delineation of multimodal discursive units and their quantification with the aid of content analytical tools (see Rossolatos 2013a, 2014c). The above are compounded by the aforementioned precariously multifaceted definitional scope of the very notion of semiosphere which must be meticulously qualified prior to venturing into further segmenting a brandosphere into units and levels (see Rossolatos 2014b for a preliminary discussion of quasi-paradoxes that emerge in the delineation of the levels of a semiospheric space).

Therefore, the primary task the brandosphere seeks to accomplish consists in a conceptual model of how a brand as sign-system mutates dynamically through time alongside the above-mentioned three levels of cultural analysis, while paying heed to how the macro-cultural point of view is reflected in the micro-cultural and how culture is in turn enriched by the texts that are produced on a micro-cultural level (e.g., UGA). Consumer-generated content is capable of enriching dominant expressive cues of a brand's discourse by making up a reserve of peripheral cultural units and textual resources which may be tapped by a brand owner for carving alternative communicative routes.

The generation of distinctive brandospheric clusters based on the above three levels of

analysis will allow for a systematic approach to the management of the textual sources that feed into the cultural imaginary of specific brands in specific categories, while also allowing for comparison across categories and for the generation of ever ramifying and more elaborate typologies, thus enhancing the predictability and hence the effectiveness of future communicative activities.

Lotman paid particular emphasis on how cultural explosions or moments of disruption and discontinuity are manifested in the tissue of a uniform culture which he categorized under the umbrella of the 'unpredictable'. "Each time we speak of unpredictability we have in mind a specific collection of equally probable possibilities from which only one may be realised. In this way, each structural position represents a cluster of variant possibilities" (Lotman 2004: 123). Indeed, one of the major gaps in advertising planning, and from a copy strategy and selection criteria for ad expressive units point of view, consists in the non-existence of a model that might allow for predicting which textual sources are more likely to constitute fertile ground for edifying new advertising executions, amidst a theoretically open set of infinite possibilities of stimuli selection. The examination of areas of fit and, even more importantly, of discrepancy between BOGTU and UGA, alongside the aforementioned three levels of analysis, is capable of enhancing predictability on behalf of a brand-owner, a capability that was not available prior to the advent of UGA.

The advent and increasing popularity of social media was coupled with a proliferation in the marketing literature of community-oriented research and the appearance of conceptual models of relational and community branding (e.g., Fournier). At the same time, the focus in academic marketing research shifted from one-to-many brand communications (e.g., traditional advertising) towards many-to-many or peer-to- peer communications. This shift in focus was matched by research that emphasized how consumer identity emerges in acts of co-creation between a brand-owner and the multiple ways whereby brand initiated communications are received and negotiated by individual consumers who are capable of establishing a dialogic relationship with brand initiated messages. "Consumer co-creation figures prominently in contemporary marketing theory, where co-production has been offered as the cornerstone of a new dominant logic for marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004)" (Fournier et al. 2008: 787). Co- creation of meaning has also been defined as "the process in which consumers actively appropriate, extend, and/or modify products in ways that differ from the predefined or prescribed form and/or use in order to create new symbolic structures and meanings that have both personal and communal signifiance" (Lanier and Schau 2007: 327).

From the point of view of the brandosphere we are not concerned primarily with exploring either consumer benefits or modes of consumer identity formation, both constituting heavily researched topics in the branding and consumer research literatures, but with how a brandosphere crystallizes and mutates from a purely (inter)textual point of view. In fact, textuality is an aspect that has largely eschewed the attention of consumer researchers who have concentrated on outcomes of co-creative activities, at the expense of sources of formation of a collective identity in terms of the textual universe that makes up a semiosphere and, concomitantly, a brandosphere.

From a cultural semiotic point of view, and this is a key point of differentiation with

regard to the consumer research vernacular, the focus is laid on mapping out the textual sources that make up a cultural reserve and how these sources are transformed, as above noted, in distinctive cultural spheres that make up a brandosphere. The ability of managing dynamically these sources, at the intersection between a BOGTU and UGA will essentially endow brand and advertising planners with a conceptual toolbox and a concrete methodology for predicting which aspects of a cultural/textual reserve are more likely to migrate from the periphery towards the center of a brandosphere and hence of maintaining relevance of their communications to their targets.

> The general text concept used by cultural semiotics is suitable to be used by all disciplines involved in the study of cultural phenomena. It is equally applicable to the subject matter studied by philology, history, architecture, art history, musicology, and the new media disciplines. Its utilization contributes to the bridging of disciplinary boundaries and to the formation of a non-metaphorical conceptual basis for research into the structure and function of sign complexes in all media. (Posner 2004: 115)

"Lotman (1970: 64-77; 1981: 34-48) bases his approach on the broad concept of text according to which every artifact with a function and a coded message can be regarded as a text; he notes, however, that every culture selects from the set of these texts a small subset which its members consider important for their cultural identity" (Posner 2004: 118). Lotman's emphasis on the criteria for textual selection (and, furthermore, of particular signs from distinctive texts) is most pertinent for a cultural branding model that is intent on managing dynamically sources of a brand's textual formation. "The function of a text is defined as its social role, its capacity to serve certain demands of the community which creates the text. Thus, function is the mutual relationship among the system, its realization, and the addresser-addressee of the text [...] In this sense it may be said that culture is the totality of texts or one complexly constructed text" (Lotman et al. 1978: 233). Hence, strictly speaking from a Lotmanian point of view, what we are primarily concerned with is not acts of 'co- creation', as has become common meta-linguistic currency in consumer research, but what may be called modes of (inter)textual co-conditioning between brands and consumers (insofar as a text is always another text's inter-text; Orr 1987: 814). Cultural semiotics is particularly apt for mapping out these distinctive modes of textual co-conditioning (cf. Ricoeur 2004), with a future orientation that allows for endorsing the unpredictable as rapturous moment in a cultural tissue. In the context of addressing these modes of textual co-conditioning particular emphasis should be laid not only on where the identified texts and their cultural units are situated in between the center and the periphery of a brandosphere from a synchronic point of view, that is based on a descriptive snapshot of their situatedness at a particular moment in the infinitely developing autonomous life of signs, but, even more, how the same cultural units are constantly desemiotized, in Lotman's terms, and resemiotized in discrete communicative contexts or how they are continuously re-appropriated by distinctive agents of cultural production

(brands and consumers). "The removal of text from the usual norms of semiotic meaning and its outward desemiotization are conditions for the semiotic meaning of the text" (Lotman et al.1978: 242).

2. User-generated advertising in focus

Hard as it may be to yield an exhaustive account of the state of the art in cultural approaches to branding research in the context of this paper, this Section will start by outlining the main research directions that have been pursued in marketing research with regard to user-generated content and then move on to argue for the merits of developing a cultural branding model from a marketing semiotic point of view prior to pursuing empirical research in the field of UGA, rather than simply adopt a cultural branding model in the extant marketing theory.

2.1 The role of UGC and UGA in a diverse social-media landscape

"Social media marketing can be simply defined as the use of social media channels to promote a company and its products… Social media, in a way, converts consumers into marketers and advertisers" (Akar and Topcu 2011: 36). "Social media helps consumers buy online, communicate with each other, socialize, and influence each other online (Singh 2010, 15)" (Akar and Topcu 2011: 51-52).

In terms of motivations for participating in social media branded communities, Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) provided two principal axes, viz., knowledge-sharing and advocacy, and emotional motives, such as social connection and self-expression. Park et al. (2009) found four motives for using social networking sites: socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information (Heinonen 2011: 357).

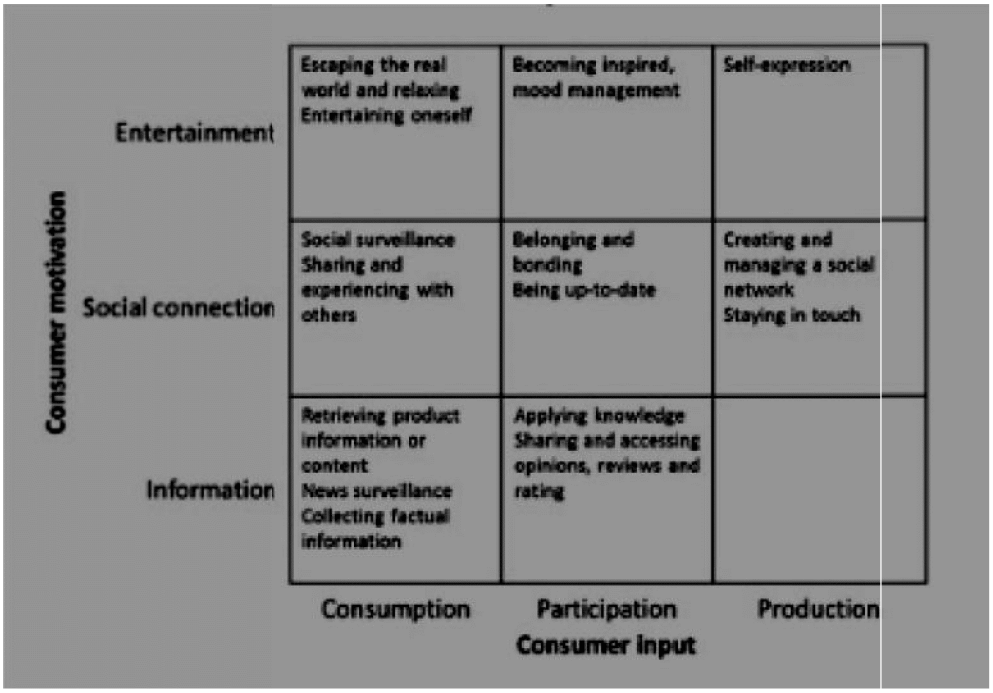

Figure 1. An overview of social media activities (Heinonen 2011: 359).

Complementary to the diverse set of motivations that are operative in decisions to engage variably in social media communities, researchers have pointed to an equally diverse set of 'needs' that are fulfilled by participating in virtual communities, such as relationship-building, social identity/self-expression, enjoyment, belongingness, status/influence, as summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Various needs that members fulfill via virtual communities (Porter et al. 2011: 81).

In addition to motivations and need-states pertaining to branded social media participation, the following benefits for marketers and consumers alike have been suggested:

Table 1. Benefits for consumers and marketers stemming from new media use (Moran and Hill 2011: 821).

New media characteristic	User benefits	Marketing benefits	Examples
Interactivity	• more control and choices for use • enabling user-generated content (UGC) allows for more consumer creativity	• requiring more from consumer makes consumers more involved, higher learning, more memorable	• search function: the ease of finding information through keyword search through a particular web platform • hypertext links: guide to important pieces of information related to a particular topic included or external to the site • crowdsourcing: outsourcing tasks to an undefined, large group of people or community, through an open call (e.g. Wikipedia)
Customisation	• ability to find relevant information faster • simplifies future buying attempts, gives appropriate reminders • increased control and ability to organise	• increased ability to get technology to use info to target people • reduced cost for campaigns targeting many segments	• tags: categorisation of content by users adding 'tags' – short, usually one-word descriptions – to facilitate searching based on interests • signals: the use of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) technology to notify users with any changes of the content through email • mobile applications: Internet applications that run on smart phones and other mobile devices, making it easier to use the Internet on portable devices
Social interaction	• constant communication with friends and family • easier access to entertaining and relevant information through credible sources	• ability to influence and promote product free of charge, creation of buzz, influence of virtual friends	• social networks: online service, platform or site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, e.g., who share interests and/or activities • social media: sites allow for the sharing of user-generated material (e.g. YouTube, Flickr) • online communities: virtual community that exists online; can be information system where anyone can post content, such as a bulletin board, or one that allows for reviews and recommendations of products, services, etc.

Amidst this highly diverse social media landscape, where variable forms of communication serve different need-states, are motivated by discrete engagement drivers and furnish variable benefits for consumers and marketers, user-generated content has attracted particular attention from academic researchers, but also from companies that seek to deepen the levels of engagement with their target audiences (e.g., Frito-Lay; cf. Rossolatos 2013b). "The OECD (2007) report defines UGC as content made publicly available over the internet, which reflects a certain amount of creative effort and is created outside professional routines and practices" (Bonhomme and

Christodoulides 2010). User-generated content (UGC) consists in various forms, from simple blog-posts featuring reviews of company announcements and the launch of new products (Yong et al. 2012) to actively managed brand-related communities where consumers are regularly invited to contribute with their own creative ideas regarding various product and communications related facets of a brand mix.

> Traditional forms include blogs (e.g. Blogger), wikis (like Wikipedia), multimedia sharing services for photographs (such as Flickr), videos (e.g. YouTube or Dailymotion), podcasts (such as Odeo) and tags. More recent are the social and professional networking sites (like Facebook and LinkedIn) and the virtual worlds (e.g. Secondlife). New types of services and variations on existing services keep appearing every day, such as the platforms for talent search (e.g. SellaBand), mobile specific services (like ShoZu) and social bookmarking sites (including Mister Wong). Some governments are even starting to use UGC platforms as a way of communicating with their citizens (such as FixMyStreet). UGC can be text-based, graphic-based, audio, video or mixed. It can also include video games and virtual objects. (Valcke and Lenaerts 2010: 119-120)

A classification and quantification of different types of UGC was offered by Ochoa and Duval (2008) as per Table 2.

Table 2. Type of content published and the total number of users and contributions (Ochoa and Duval 2008).

Code	Website	UGC Type	User (Sources)	Contrib. (Items)
FR	Furl	Bookmarks	3,500	808,520
AM	Amazon	Reviews	82,365	3'100,671
LT	LibraryThing	Book Metadata	4,300	355,630
MR	Merlot	LO Metadata	2,675	17,379
DG	Digg	News	55,388	196,896
SS	SlideShare	Presentations	2,383	5,000
SC	Scribd	Documents	15,000	175,850
RV	Revver	Videos	3,255	69,519
FF	Fan Fiction	Stories	7,451	17,624

"Just as advertisers in this media environment are doing, academics are just beginning to explore the key mechanisms and processes that guide the operations of UGC advertising" (Krishnamurthy and Dou 2008: 3). Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008: 2) further provide a tentative classification of UGC alongside two principal axes, viz., psychological motivation and platform, as per Table 3.

Table 3. Typology of UGC Classification and Exemplars (Krishnamurthy and Dou 2008: 2).

		Psychological Motivation for Engaging in UGC Creation			
		Rational		Emotional	
		Knowledge Sharing	Advocacy	Social Connections	Self-Expression
Platform base	Group	Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia)	Issue-centric communities (e.g., Rachel Ray Sucks Community)	Multiplayer online games (e.g., socio town)	Virtual presences (e.g., secondlife)
	Individual	Blogs by experts (e.g.,askanexpertblog.com)	Consumer reviews (e.g., Epinions)	Social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook)	Consumer creative inventions (e.g., Jumpcut)

There is partial research evidence of consumer perceptions of enhanced trustworthiness and authenticity towards particular forms of UGC as against their marketer-generated equivalent, such as in the case of UGA (Fournier et al. 2013), however this evidence is far from binding across product/service categories, as suggested by the research findings from Hautz et al. (2014) in the tourism industry. The latter research piece sought to determine whether there were perceptible differences in the intention to visit Austria upon exposure to agency generated ad videos vs. user-generated videos. Contrary to conventional wisdom that might suggest that negative perceptual barriers from consumers who adopt a skeptical attitude towards advertising in general are partially lifted in the face of UGA (particularly in cases of high identification levels among peers, as suggested by Fournier et al. 2013), Hautz et al. (2014) found that video quality, irrespective of source, was the ultimate determinant of the positive influence of the concerned videos on the intention to visit the tourist destination.

The bulk of the academic marketing related literature on UGC has been concerned with written, rather than with visual and/or multimodal content. But even in cases of latest research that has been concerned with audio-visual UGC in the form of UGA (e.g., Hautz et al. 2014) no attempts have been made at examining semiotically areas of similarity and dissonance between company generated advertising content and user generated ad content. At the same time, "new approaches to categorizing user-generated content" has been listed as a priority research area (Winer 2009: 116). This area of investigation not only presents massive opportunities going forward, in terms of understanding the cultural codes which consumers leverage when generating ads (either solicited, e.g., in the context of contests or unsolicited), but, at an even more advanced level, of strategically capitalizing on the semiotic analysis and systematic coding of UGA for gauging alternative communicative routes for company generated advertising. Additionally, from a consumer insights point of view, this systematic coding is bound to contribute gravely in understanding sources of cultural/textual embeddedness of consumers who actively engage with a brand's values and manifest discursive content.

Moreover, whereas the bulk of research in the concerned marketing literature has been concerned with understanding antecedents and outcomes of the employment of UGA, that is motives and benefits (for consumers and/or for marketers), no attention has been paid, from a marketing semiotic point of view, on how the generated messages in terms of content structure may be systematically coded in such a manner as to lay bare the textual and inter-textual sources that condition the selection and use of particular expressive elements, their combinatorial rationale, as well as the differences and similarities between user-generated and company-generated content alongside the above dimensions, as described in Section 2. This demanding task may be accomplished by the brandospheric model.

2.2 Why draw on the semiotic conceptual heritage for edifying the cultural branding model of the brandosphere, rather than use a cultural branding model already on offer in the marketing literature while examining UGA?

The cultural branding approach "emphasizes the cultural forces in society and how these can be used to build iconic brands as well as the impact of branding practices on the globalized culture and marketplace" (Heding et al. 2009: 208). "Brand meaning is not wholly derived from the market. Culture, aesthetics, and history interact to inject brands into the global flow of images" (Schroeder and Salzer-Morling 2006: 4). "The cultural approach focuses on culture in a macro perspective, applying findings from the culture surrounding us all to branding practices. In this approach, macro-level culture is defined as the *social* definition of culture. In this definition, culture is closely intertwined with meaning and communication (Du Gay et al. 1997)" (Heding et al. 2009: 209). "In the cultural approach, the brand is analysed as a 'cultural artifact moving through history' (Holt 2004, p. 215)" (Heding et al. 2009: 210). Holt's (2004) cultural branding model currently monopolizes marketing theory (cf. Chapter on cultural branding in Heding et al. 2009). Holt's model draws, in part, on McCracken's cultural anthropological model of symbolic consumption that originally surfaced in 1986 and was later revised. According to McCracken's symbolic consumption model meaning is transferred from culture to brands to consumers.

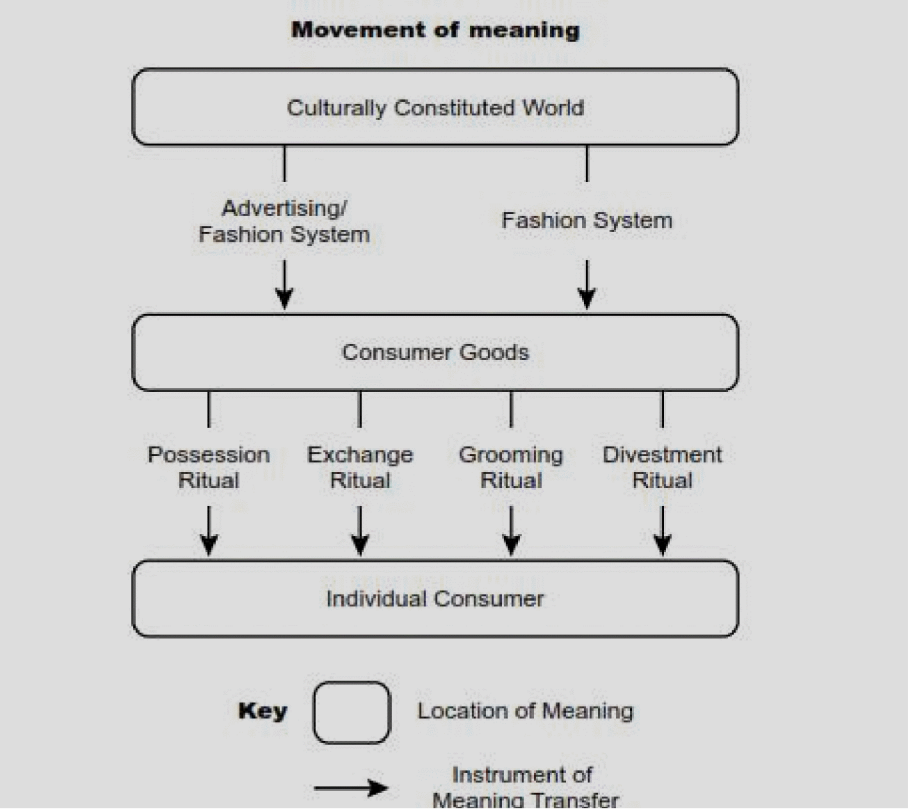

Figure 3. McCracken's model of movement of meaning (Heding et al. 2009: 215).

Both authors have imported semiotic concepts in their terminology (see Heding et al. 2009: 216: "This conceptualization of the transfer of cultural meaning draws heavily on semiotics"), albeit in a non-scholarly fashion, that is by employing heavily researched (in the semiotic tradition) terms, such as 'cultural code', without acknowledging the terms' semiotic sources.

McCracken's co-creation model was expanded to the territory of consumer co-creation which "concerned the adaptation of culturally shared meanings of the person's unique circumstance for purposes of individual communication and categorization" (Fournier et al. 2008: 785). Despite the wide endorsement of McCracken's model by consumer researchers, three identifiable limitations offer fertile ground for the construction of a semiotically informed brandospheric model of cultural co-creation (or intertextual co-conditioning).

First, McCracken's model is not semiotically informed, despite the fact that it is allegedly geared towards an understanding of meaning making processes. By definition, the discipline that examines meaning making processes is semiotics, hence this undue focus on semiotics constitutes a major limitation. Secondly, McCracken's model only furnishes static descriptions of a cultural co-creative predicament between brands and consumers. The proposed brandospheric model may account for the diachronic evolution of co-created cultural migrations in both consumer and brand initiated discourses. Third, no studies as yet have addressed not only the interplay between brand initiated discourse and user- generated content, but, moreover, how the latter may open up spheres for future brand communications.

The mission of Holt's alleged 'cultural branding' model which he also sells to clients via his agency aims at offering step-wise solutions whereby brands may be transformed into what he calls 'iconic brands'. The model of iconic branding is "is a set of principles that structures how firms seek to build their brands. These principles work within the axiomatic assumptions of the extant consumer culture" (Holt 2002: 80). "A cultural icon is a person or thing regarded as a symbol, especially of a culture or a movement – a person, institution, and so forth – considered worthy of admiration or respect" (Holt 2004: 11). Apparently a major criticism that may be launched against this definition concerns *prima facie* the conflation of icon with symbol. According to Holt, iconic brands perform myths that symbolically resolve the identity, desires and anxieties stemming from an important cultural tension, a resolution of opposites mechanism that lies at the very foundation of Levi-Strauss's original conceptualization of the function of mythic structures (and which has been quite extensively criticized ever since).

Holt further seeks to exemplify his model by recourse to a 'genealogical' reading of various brand discourses, including Corona beer's rebranding in the U.S. market. In the genealogical account of Corona beer's re-branding (Holt 2005: 281-284) Holt argues for the key success factors behind the brand's leadership as lying not with attaining to carve a unique associative territory in consumers' minds (as per the tenets of the traditional CBBE perspective), that is in terms of abstract concepts, but with a specific qualification of the semantic nuances of such associations. In this context, even though Holt rightly claims that associations are the outcome and not the cause of brand strength, he does not fully account for the modes of formation of brand associations (e.g., PDP processing and how schemata are formed based on gestalt psychology), save for engaging on a top-line level and *in abstracto* with Keller's CBBE perspective, in oblivion of the bulky literature on the modes of formation of brand associations (cf. Rossolatos 2014a). For example, when claiming (Holt 2005: 284) "in so doing, the brand didn't represent relaxation in a generic way, as an abstract concept stripped bare of connotations, reduced to its dictionary definition", Holt implies that abstract concepts by default are not accompanied by connotations and that the semantic scope of abstract concepts is exhausted in dictionary definitions. Obviously, both assumptions are edified on shaky ground. From a practitioner's point of view, the qualitative exploration of the semantic nuances of abstract concepts has been standard practice in branding research since time immemorial. In this instance, Holt conflates how brand image is explored quantitatively as battery of image attributes (abstract concepts), without further qualification as to the differential connotations these concepts may carry for single members of a respondents' pool, with qualitative research where consumers are customarily probed extensively regarding how they perceive such concepts, in terms of brand usage by occasion, day-part, etc. It is against such comprehensive consumer insights that research agencies usually venture into accounting quantiatively for the relative mindshare of abstract concepts and not (or not only) against the background of standard lexicon difintions . The second counter-argument that may be raised apropos the above case-study concerns the over-reliance as explanatory ground behind the success of certain branding endeavors on mythic structures (as narratives that cater for a resolution of paradoxically co-existing opposing social forces). Usually brand mythic structures point to deeply laden drivers behind a

manifest belief system. The prospective resonance of such structures for positioning purposes in a branding context is dubitable beyond the province of already established brands which cherish high levels of awareness, heritage, trust. Raising myth-making to a predominant paradigm for successful positioning, regardless of current stature in terms of, at least, presence and awareness, is at best a precarious claim in terms of consumer credibility. In other words, a mega brand or major player in a category are more likely to be credible when raising claims of mythic proportions, compared to an unknown brand or to a new entrant. The same holds in the case of capitalizing on a sub-cultural movement (which lies among Holt's 'axioms' of cultural branding). Provided that a brand always speaks *ex positio* or *ex officio,* a mega brand that leverages a sub-cultural trend is likely to be perceived as hip and (depending on the execution of such endorsement activities) positive associations are likely to accrue in terms of modernity, keeping up with changes in consumer trends etc. However, the pursuit of the same strategy by a new entrant is likely to force a brand into a niche territory. Finally, the examples usually offered by Holt as brand genealogies are dissonant with the essence of geneaology that grew with Nietszche and ripened with Foucault (cf. Foucault 1977). For the latter, who drew inspiration and guidelines from the former, a genealogical reading differs from a historiographical account primarily on the grounds of unsettling illusions about myths of origin and presumptuous objective temporal identifications of seminal turns in the evolution of social movements. Holt's 'genealogical' accounts are genealogical only nominally. In essence, they constitute standard historical accounts, that is selective narrative crystallizations of the evolution of a brand through time. The managerial import of the presumed genealogical approach is framed vaguely: "genealogical mind-set: the managerial worldview necessary for the management of identity brands" (Holt 2004: 11). Bringing into the interpretative canvass wider societal/cultural forces and attempting to shift the interpretive focus behind brand success towards the effective leverage of shifting consumer trends does not constitute a genealogical reading, but the narrative fabrication of a historical context in order to enhance the credence of brand-related narratives. Furthermore, such interpretive gestures are usually enacted in a descriptive manner that is not informed by a blueprint regarding, at least, elementary semiotic methods for correlating semantic content with surface expression (e.g., commutation tests, textual coherence etc.) in a competitive context and diachronically (as undertaken in Rossolatos 2014a). On the contrary, the genealogical accounts offered by Holt are interspersed with random remarks about abstract concepts, social forces, brand expressive elements, without a systematic account of how such discrete levels and layers of brand meaning generation are interlinked (an issue that was pointed out earlier with regard to the identification of levels and units of analysis in Lotmanian semiotics). This is a key task that is usually undertaken by semiotic readings and a significant opportunity for a cultural branding model that is edified against the background of a robust semiotic conceptual armory and methodological framework. This guideline simply resonates a basic task of scientific investigation, that is the need for employing a metalanguage, rather than regurgitating intuitively practitioner lingo, invested with an aura of scientificity.

Even more fundamentally, a tantalizing question emerges in the face of Holt's (2005: 284) remarks such as "Corona succeeded when managers paid close attention to historical changes and

made the appropriate adjustments to better align the particular stories the brand performed with important tensions in American society" regarding the magnitude of novel contributions the cultural branding perspective may make to traditional brand planning. Is the prior misrecognition by a brand management team of the importance of paying heed to cultural forces while carving a brand's positioning and managing its intangible capital over time a matter of managerial deficit to be alleviated by a newly emergent perspective or a matter of not addressing adequately one of the most fundamental principles of strategic marketing planning, viz., PEST? In this context, S, standing for the social/cultural factors that are likely to impact on the success of any business endeavor is part and parcel of any business planning process and, of course, of marketing planning. The relative impact of each aspect of PEST on the viability of a business project has always been integral to situation analyses and strategic brand planning. In my view, cultural branding not only does not constitute a novel perspective, but is a pleonasm insofar as PEST is anyway an integral part of brand planning. If PEST is an integral part of brand planning, then cultural branding is not about adding a cultural dimension to brand planning, but about stating the obvious, but in a more emphatic manner and perhaps more systematically (to be determined) than otherwise. And if, by now, the benefits of pursuing a scientific management route of brand meaning by drawing consistently on a semiotic perspective have been made sufficiently clear to a brand management community (which is questionable), then the pressing need for adopting a semiotically informed avenue for accounting for PESTS's 'S' (rather than making grandiose claims about reinventing the brand managerial wheel) looms like the most viable solution.

Then, there is a perhaps disorienting pre-occupation with the concept of 'brand symbolism'. It is precisely due to the lack of semiotic import that such heavily abused concepts still populate the marketing vernacular even when their pertinence is minimal in applied research. The term symbol is used in consumer research as a proxy to pretty much anything that may be assumed as explanatory ground for intangible associations (i.e., symbolic). Semiotics has made considerable strides into symbolism-related research, while, as I have been repeatedly emphasizing (cf. Rossolatos 2014a), emphasis on semi-symbolic structures (as a more nuanced approach to the *en masse* treatment of the symbolism issue) has been a key pre-occupation of structuralist semiotics. Unfortunately, none of these advances has made a considerable impact either on marketing theory or practice which has resulted in a regurgitation of the term 'symbol' where no instances of symbolism are present (e.g., in advertising imagery, where the term 'brand symbolism' is often used in lieu of brand or advertising imagery, in oblivion of the process and the steps involved in turning imagery into symbolism). This unfortunately undue emphasis on the difference between symbolism and other types of signs (in which case it would be more pertinent to lay claim to brand sign typologies, rather than brand symbolism) has been propagated by Holt's (2005: 273) cultural branding perspective.

> "The cultural approach displays a variety of methods and data '*borrowed*' from different interpretive research traditions. What binds the studies together is that all data are interpreted in a macro perspective. Furthermore, *the basics of semiotics are important to understand if one is considering gathering knowledge about cultural consumption*" (Heding et al. 2009: 224; my italics).

"Understanding the production and circulation of meaning fundamental to the cultural consumption perspective requires insight into semiotic methods. When conducting semiotic marketing studies one deconstructs the meaning displayed in commercial communication [...] Semiotic codes should then be decoded and the intertextual strings of signs deconstructed [...] The commercial message (the brand in this case) is regarded as a cultural 'text' like other cultural expressions. Intertextuality is the idea of texts referring to other texts." (Heding et al. 2009: 225). The above passages from Heding et al. were quoted at length for the sole purpose of pointing to the argument that whereas the impact of semiotics on the development of what came to be recognized by the marketing scholarly community as 'cultural branding' is explicitly mentioned, yet the insinuation about the 'need for understanding the basics of semiotics' merely affords to underplay the magnitude of this impact, while leaving unaddressed the fact that semiotics is not a uniform discipline, that there are various schools of thinking and that the conceptual richness of each school by far exceeds the sufficiency of mastering 'basic concepts' while addressing complex phenomena such as culture. And yet, 'high-ranking' cultural branding models, such as Holt's, from a semiotic (and marketing semiotic) point of view, constitute embryonic attempts at watering down a rich scholarly tradition and lengthy dialogues that have addressed minute aspects of the phenomenon of culture. It is precisely in order to avoid suppressing the conceptual richness of cultural/textual semiotics and in order to acknowledge the fact that marketing semiotics already constitutes a standalone discipline that the proposed semiotically informed brandospheric model should engage argumentatively at a considerable length with 'cultural branding' models that have been offered in the marketing literature.

Complementary to the above it merits noticing that the impact of culture on consumer behavior has become increasingly recognized in the marketing literature over the past 20 years, which recognition has spawned the research stream of CCT (consumer culture theory) and two academic journals that address consumer culture issues from the point of view of cultural studies, however chaotic and multiperspectival this field may be: ""CCT research draws from an interdisciplinary body of theory to develop novel analytic theoretical frameworks that can illuminate the sociocultural dynamics that drive the consumption cycle" (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 870).

Undoubtedly, there have been exceptionally brilliant scholars in the CCT movement who have offered monumental research pieces. However, at least to my (extensive) review of the concerned collective volumes and journals on CCT, I still haven't come across an explicit recognition of the sheer diversity of semiotic schools and, concomitantly, their differential impact on conceptual and empirical approaches to consumer culture phenomena.

The orientation of the proposed brandospheric model aims at reinstating controllability of textual sources of brand associations from an internal marketing point of view, rather than giving in to somewhat defeatist claims (and surely non-managerially salient), such as those made by Fournier regarding the loss of control of brand meaning by marketers with the advent of new media and the proliferation of brand communities.

3. Expected contributions of the brandosphere to the extant marketing (semiotic) literature and practice

The brandosphere may contribute to the extant literature in marketing and marketing semiotics with the following. On a conceptual level by furnishing a cultural branding model that draws on a specific semiotic school of thinking (i.e., Lotman's cultural/textual semiotics) with rich heritage in the concerned field of study. On a methodological level by applying the conceptual armory of the resulting brandospeheric model in the context of interpretative cultural analysis of UGA and BOGTU ad filmic corpora. In terms of marketing research in UGC and social media, by addressing the previously stated research gap concerning the need for focusing on how content may be coded, while delineating an explicit coding process with the aid of verbal and multimodal content analysis. By focusing on how the cultural analysis and the output of complementary quantitative content analyses may aid in strategic decisions about alternative routes for designing future marketing communications, while taking into account a brandosphere's constantly shifting cultural center and periphery and by drilling down into specific textual sources and cultural units/signs that make up each sphere in the brandosphere. The resulting output will allow brand planners, from an applied point of view, to focus on the systematic management not only of sources of market share, but, equally importantly, on share of cultural representations.

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On the marketing language of hospitality

Richard Tresidder

Richard Tresidder (R.Tresidder@shu.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer at Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University. Richard holds a doctorate in Social Semiotics and a Masters Degree in Social Anthropology. He has published widely in the area of the semiotics of tourism and hospitality and jointly authored *Marketing in Food, Hospitality, Tourism and Events* in 2012.

Abstract

This paper explores how the language of hospitality is shaped in contemporary marketing communications. It traces an established global semiotic language of hospitality, and how a set of images and textual conventions have come to define both the hospitality industry and the hospitality experience in contemporary marketing practices. The ability to recognize and to understand the theoretical foundations of this language when utilized alongside traditional marketing creates a more holistic form of marketing practice. This paper puts forward the proposition that marketing is fundamentally a cultural activity that requires an in-depth understanding of its social and cultural foundations. It is only once this has been achieved that we can create effective and customized marketing campaigns that generate relevant meaning for the consumer.

Keywords: semiotics, methodology, sign vehicle, hospitality, dining, food, marketing, interpretation, websites.

0. Introduction

One of the crucial elements of effective hospitality marketing is that the marketing message provides a transparent communication about the nature of the product, and the benefits that the consumption of the product bestows upon the consumer. However, in order to reach this stage, marketers and academics need to understand precisely what messages should be communicated, and how the consumer understands and locates meaning in hospitality communications. This necessitates both the adoption of traditional approaches to the analysis of markets through segmentation, and the augmentation of such approaches with a more culturally orientated methodology. This enables the identification and exploration of the significance of the product or activity for the consumer. It may be argued that the Hospitality experience plays a significant role in contemporary life and is often employed to commemorate the passage of time, life, death and celebration. As a result our own individual relationship to hospitality as consumers is imbued with social, cultural, historical and individual biographical significance. This brocade of influences informs a discourse or language of hospitality that permeates contemporary hospitality marketing. This paper explores this language and identifies how the industry generates meaning and how as consumers we interact with this discourse by adopting a social semiotic model (see Figure 1).

To illustrate how the language of hospitality has become fundamental to effective contemporary hospitality marketing practices three hospitality websites are explored: Raymond Blanc's Two Michelin Star Hotel and Restaurant 'Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons' (http://www.manoir.com), Thomas Keller's 'The French Laundry' (http://frenchlaundry.com) and Danny Mayer's 'Gramercy Tavern' (http://www.gramercytavern.com). Traditional marketing approaches have adopted a largely quantitatively orientated approach to market segmentation, where the consumer is identified as part of a homogeneous mass (Tresidder 2013). However, in accepting and recognizing a more culturally orientated approach, we need to acknowledge that each individual consumer will bring with him a

personal biography of knowledge and experiences. This biography directly influences the way consumers interact with marketing communications, and as such each individual will find different meanings when negotiating hospitality marketing communications. In order to comprehend the impact of a personal biography on the interpretation process, this paper utilizes a hermeneutically informed social semiotic methodology that has been influenced by the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001). In this approach consumers are identified as interactive participants in the communication process, and in the interpretation process they negotiate and interact with the text in the process of meaning generation. Thus, consumers play a dynamic role in the marketing process rather than being passive, unquestioning participants in the communication process.

The methodology presented below was originally developed to analyze how potential tourists interpreted and found meaning in tourism brochures (Tresidder 2010). By adapting the conceptual framework to reflect the social and cultural significance of hospitality it has become feasible to effectively modify it for the hospitality sector. The method consists of three layers of meaning and analysis (see Figure 1). The external layer of the model identifies how consumers are influenced by the historical and cultural embedding of the hospitality experience in society, and how this establishes a language of hospitality through elements of shared understanding, or as Emmanuel (1997) labels them, 'consensus constructs'. The second level explores how meaning is both produced and consumed, and recognizes that this process is informed by a historically and culturally significant discourse that surrounds hospitality, and ultimately informs the interaction each consumer has with the text and the subsequent experience of hospitality for the individual consumer. The third level embodies the interpretation and identification of meaning by the consumer. The analysis of these layers will be explored throughout the remainder of this paper.

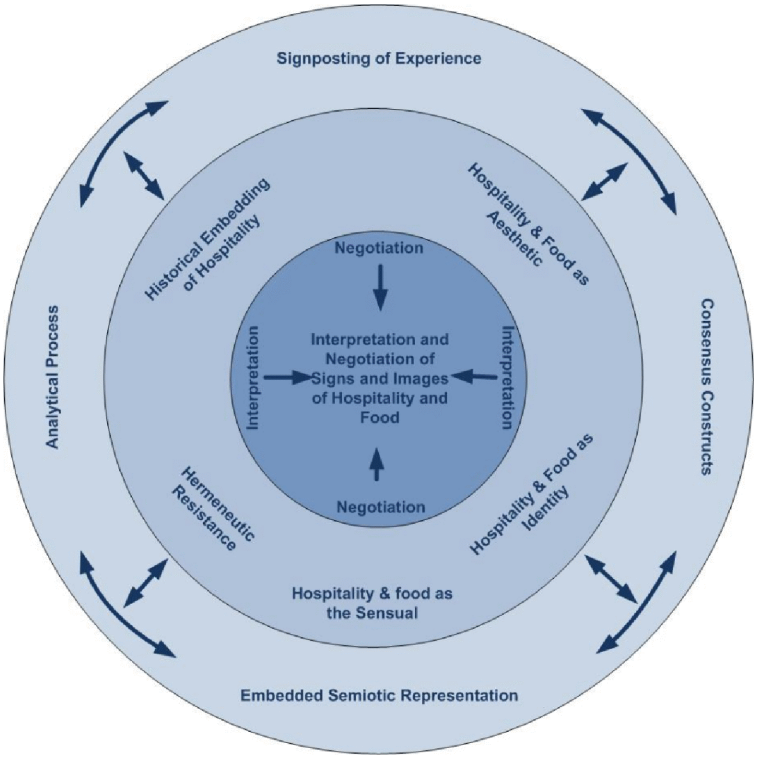


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for mapping the social and cultural significance of hospitality.

1. Reading the Hospitality Experience

As stated previously, this paper utilizes a social semiotic method that was formerly developed for understanding how consumers read tourism brochures. Although the conceptual framework needs to reflect the subject area, the foundation of how consumers read texts remains the same. It is to this element that we now turn.

The signs and images used in the sites can be separated into two components, the 'Narrative' and the 'Conceptual' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 56). Narrative structures always have a line of communication that directs the consumer to the message being presented in the communication, or in the case of this paper the website. Conversely, conceptual representations do not rely on vectors to transmit meaning as the 'conceptual' facet belongs to the culture in which they are generated, for example the significance of hospitality in the culture with which the reader is associated or in which he is immersed. Vectors are established by routes or lines of vision across the screen or text. These vectors connect and link the text to the author. As a consequence of this process, an image can be both a participant and a vector (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 59). A vector affords a connection or a 'method of realization' between the consumer and the text or narrative. Once this connection is made, the initial interpretation is achieved. The vector guides the consumer and emphasizes the importance of the representation: the"...means of realization produce quite similar semantic relations" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 44). Thus, the affiliation between the website and the consumer is supported and reinforced. This relationship allows the communication of meaning to be identified and espoused by the consumer in terms of collective hegemonic definitions of hospitality. Nevertheless, not all visual or textual elements on the website support universal forms of interpretation that cross cultural and social divides: "Rather, a given culture has a range of general, possible relations which is not tied to expression in any particular semiotic code...This distribution of realization possibilities across the semiotic codes is itself determined historically and socially" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 44).

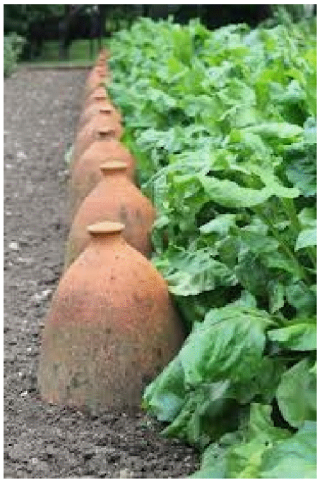
Therefore, the representations of the experience of hospitality in the three websites (and all hospitality orientated marketing) are mediated by historical and cultural discourses (see Artbury 2005, O'Connor 2005, O'Gorman 2007) that are continually contextualized by a rich in meaning semiotic language of hospitality. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 45), this mediation challenges notions of reality: Pictorial structures do not simply reproduce the structure of reality. On the contrary, they produce images of reality which are bound up with the interests of the social institutions in which the pictures are produced, circulated and read. They are ideological. Therefore, from a sociosemiotic point of view, restaurant websites can be seen to have an objective and a purpose that is ideological (Ferguson 1998) as it represents a number of commercial or corporate discourses, for example the many discussions that surround the relationship between McDonalds and globalization, westernization or health.

The process into which consumers (actors) enter when reading restaurants' websites renders them reactors, while the goals of the websites become phenomena (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 64). The reactor is the participant who enacts the looking or gazing, while the phenomenon is shaped by alternative participants at whom the reactor is looking, or by a whole visual proposition. Therefore, the images become the actor as they are non-transactional, while representing a phenomenon of hospitality by virtue of their location in The French Laundry or the Gramercy Tavern's websites. While the web banners linking to information about the Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons' and the Orient Express Group become a reactor, a transactional response is devised by the reader as the 'text directs perception' and interpretation through reinforcing 'signposts' of experience. In this process, the written textual element of the website guides perception and underlines the significance of the images used, which results in a conversion activity that is guided by techniques such as the use of text (Davis 2005), changes in written context and the represented meaning of the hospitality experience (Marshall 2005). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 67) call this process 'participant relay'. This is clearly witnessed in The French Laundry's website with elements of the philosophy directing the interpretation process. For example, the picture of a dressed scallop is accompanied by text that supports the experience by stating

> "Because a great meal is not one that fills you up. A great meal is a kind of journey that returns you to sources of pleasure you may have forgotten…"

This relay demonstrates a text-image association in which the text extends or re-conceptualizes the visual information about the nature of the experience that is offered by the restaurants. The interpretation of narrative images on the website is additionally directed by the presence of what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 67) define as 'secondary participants'.

Vegetable Garden French Laundry



Vegetable Garden Le Manoir

Figure 2: Serving the Organic

These participants are not related via vectors but become linked in other contexts (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 71) in the 'setting' of the narrative images. For example, if an image of a customer is

contained in an advertisement, it creates a vector that defines other images' role and status in the service context, while waiting staff in the background emphasize the nature of the relationship between the host and guest and status of the guest in the context of the service relationship as they are demonstrating their subservience (sic). Another example of this process are the glass cloches that protect the vegetables from the weather as seen in Le Manoir's garden (see Figure 2), or the statement on the Gramercy homepage: "...bricks for the wood burning oven come from the last American foundry to cut bricks by hand." Both of these examples represent a relationship to the authentic and offer a contrast to the fast food culture (Delind 2006) and the inauthenticity of postmodern culture. In a way such semiotic examples of authenticity offer a form of roots in a rootless society, or alternatively a semiotic refuge for the consumer to enter, and to psychologically escape the profane aspects of everyday life.

The first stage of consumers' interpretation places the experience of hospitality in the numerous cultural and historical discourses that define hospitality and food. These discourses are supported by narrative and conceptual structures utilized in the websites. The recognition of these structures both locates and signposts the experience of The French Laundry, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons' and The Gramercy Tavern in contemporary cultural definitions of food and hospitality. The embedding of significance and the use of distinct hospitality orientated signs and images are contextualized in this movement. The websites intersperse and distort conceptions of place, country, the archaic, the contemporary and the commercial, while obfuscating the websites' commercial marketing with an individualistic space.

The use of hegemonic representations of hospitality in marketing texts creates what Jenkins (2003) calls 'expected places'. These places reflect the ordering of images by providing representations of all the aspects of hospitality we would expect to see, for example the dining room, food, décor etc., or in other words the foundations of the language of hospitality. These are supported in the case of the three restaurants by a variety of experiential themes, such as the statements pertaining to the provenance of the bricks, or the garden at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons'. These experiential themes add an additional layer of experience to the practice of hospitality and mark their difference. The use of these experiential themes signposts what these restaurants stand for, thus cementing their position, status and reinforcing the myth of haute cuisine. These conventions in hospitality marketing perpetuate definitions of luxury and hospitality and create needs, wants or desires on the part of consumers. This theme is developed in all three sites. The Gramercy Tavern utilizes a tradition and heritage that is represented through the décor and statements about the provenance of the bricks and the antique American furniture. The French Laundry provides a more organic or 'earthy' approach, the initial picture of the door that is painted in a heritage blue, surrounded by mellow bricks and ivy, signifying an understated notion of home. This feeling is further reinforced by the continual link to seasons and products. Therefore, time as represented in the websites unifies the past, present and future into a temporal continuum of social and cultural disorder that is expressed by Jameson (1991: 67) as '...a series of pure and unrelated presents in time'. Although the language of hospitality in marketing communications offers countless escape routes in which the consumer can find significance and

escape, the experience of hospitality becomes '…dominated by a consciousness which emphasizes the discontinuity of experience' (Harvey 1993: 157). Nevertheless, the representations of the restaurants and communicated experiences of hospitality delineate a hospitality space in which experience may be semiotically consumed in the form of a tangible ontological act.

2. Constructing the Language of Hospitality

In order to understand the significance of the language of tourism developed and utilized in the restaurant websites, it is important to understand the meaning of the employed language, and how it is constructed. The following sections explore the significance of this semiotic language. The marketing of 'Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons', 'The French Laundry' and the 'Gramercy Tavern' provide access for the consumer to a sensual world of luxury and hedonism in which food and the experience of dining are elevated from the mundane to a multi-sensual experience in which food, landscape and philosophy merge as one. Hospitality marketing utilizes what Dawkins (2009: 34) labels '…the semiotics of the senses'. The marketing of experience differs from other sectors, such as fashion marketing, as the selling of experiences is not tangible. We cannot test drive or try the experience on as we can only feel or consume it once. The experience will differ every time we re-visit it, as is the case with experiences whereby marketers endeavor to immerse consumers in a sensual world of luxury and indulgence.

Figure 3: Le Manoir Bedroom

As a result, the language of hospitality adopts a very sensual and visceral focus and consequently the relationship between hospitality marketing and the senses is of particular significance.

Sutton (2010: 217), while exploring the complexity of the senses goes further by introducing the concept of synesthesia which represents the idea that senses do not operate in isolation, but rather form a union. This concept is particularly important for defining and comprehending the experience contained in the three restaurant websites, and how it differs from mundane dining experiences. Sutton stresses that "synesthesia …blurs the objectivity and passivity of western sensory models by showing the ways that sensory experience is not simply passively registered but actively created between people. Synesthesia is a reminder of why food and the senses should be considered together".

This view of the senses has been explored recently in tourism studies and it is interesting to note that Pan & Ryan (2009) identify the multisensory nature of tourism and its significance to the contemporary tourist. The senses have always been an important part of tourism and hospitality and we can even chart this back to Baudelaire's (1863) notion of the flâneur and the awareness of exploring the city through the heightening of sensual awareness of the environment. According to Biehl-Missal (2012: 5) we need to consider the impact that senses have on our understanding of the world and how it influences our behavior: we gather "…aesthetic experiences through our five senses"; we "create an embodied, tacit knowing that…can influence behavior". However, as Pan & Ryan (2009) found in their New Zealand research, although tourists utilized all of their senses, taste was privileged as the most significant sense experience in all of the explored sites.

Since the publication of John Urry's 'The Tourist Gaze' in 1990, tourism research has been overly reliant on the notion of the gaze, and in particular the ocular. It is only once one starts to explore organizations such as The French Laundry that it becomes evident that sight plays a very small part in the overall gustatory experience. This theme is also reflected in an increasing number of academic articles that are challenging the primacy of the gaze by identifying the significance of other senses in the realm of tourism and hospitality as encountered in marketing texts. This exploration of the senses is particularly reflected in gastronomic tourism. According to Lopez-Guzman & Sanchez-Canizares (2012: 63) the exploration of the senses through the consumption of food is one of the major motivations for engaging in gastronomic tourism. This association between food, wine and sensory experiences (see Getz 2000) is lucidly summed up by Sutton (2010: 215), who, while commenting on the significance of the relationship between food and the senses states that "…food is central to cosmologies, worldviews, and ways of life and is reflected in the term 'gustemology' as a means of understanding the spectrum of cultural issues that exist around taste and the sensory aspects of food".

Intrinsically, the experience offered at these restaurants is a journey that grounds the individual metaphysically in the marketing text (see Brownlie et al. 2005) through the stimulation of the senses and by linking food to a physical, social and cultural geography, while guiding the sensual expectations of the customer. In short, hospitality marketing materials often provide a semiotic aestheticized link to the beginning of time. By semiotically challenging and stimulating the senses, the semiotics of hospitality marketing provides a rupture with or break from the everyday; it creates a purity of experience and a re-establishment of an awareness of the senses that have been dulled by the act

of 'being' in a world dominated by catastrophe, homogenization and technology. As Levi-Strauss affirms in assessing the significance of the senses:

> The senses…are operators, which make it possible to convey the isomorphic character of all binary systems of contracts connected with the senses, and therefore to express, as a totality, a set of equivalences connecting life and death, vegetable foods and cannibalism, putrefaction and imputrescibility, softness and hardness, silence and noise'.
>
> Saussure 1983: 1 53, quoted in Sutton 2010: 210

Thus, for Levi-Strauss, senses are codes that transmit messages and the "Gustatory Code" (1983: 164) is privileged over other sensory codes. But most important for this article is the idea that links the codes that surround the food system to the "social system" in which we live (Sutton 2010: 210). This view is supported by Weismantel (2005: 97), who ascertains that sensory aspects of taste change '…the social and economic structures that make consumption possible…'. Therefore, although the production of 'sensescapes' in tourism provide us with place and space to explore the sensual side of life, we cannot remove or isolate them from social and economic structures.

2.1 The language of Hospitality

The marketing of restaurants draws on semiotic codes that concern both hospitality and food (see Brunori 2007). These codes also include the formal ritual of food production and service (see Figures 2-5) to create an identifiable experience and theatrical delivery and presentation of food that elevates the experience of dining at luxury restaurants to that of the extraordinary. Concomitantly, establishments such as Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons', Gramercy Tavern and The French Laundry represent the iconic (see Claseen 2007) or mythical (see Magee 2007) sectors of hospitality, against which other restaurants will be benchmarked. The mythical discourse that surrounds hospitality is informed by the theme of hospitality, providing physical and psychological peace, security, comfort and refreshment (Hely 2002). In other words the myth that surrounds these restaurants and their representations in hospitality marketing provide a refuge from the world of fast food and ambiguity of living in a post-industrial world (Delind 2006). The semiotic language of hospitality (see Figures 2-5) offers consumers a world of prodigality and luxury, a world of experience in which the average consumer is generally excluded. The images used by the websites are empty, with no sign of human interaction; the site invites us as consumers (or even voyeurs) to vicariously find escape or even social therapy through the semiotic consumption (rather than physical consumption) of the represented experience of hospitality.

Meaning is guided or signposted by a set of visual and textual marketing conventions that we invest with exchanges of cultural capital and expressions of identity. In this manner our relationship with hospitality acts as a marker of who we are (Howes 2004, Delind 2006, Ruben 2008, Dawkins 2009) or who we wish to be. It is interesting to note that Thomas Keller reflects this sentiment in The French Laundry homepage by stating that "Respect for food is a respect for life, for who we are and what we do". Additionally, we are invited to elevate the consumption of food to a sensual and luxurious exercise (Reed-Danahay 1996, van der Veen 2003, Howes 2004, Magee 2007, Dawkins 2009). The language of hospitality is an ideological construct (Ferguson 1998, Ruben 2008) that is disseminated through the portrayals of hospitality and food in culture (Ferguson 1998, Hollander 1999, Ferry 2003, Magee 2007) and advertising. It is from these ideological influences and embedded definitions of hospitality that it draws its content, structure and message.

Gramercy Tavern

The French Laundry

Le Manoir

Figure 4: Dining Experiences

2.2 Hospitality as a Sacred Journey

The language of hospitality marketing also offers a notion of time and space that may be conceptualised as 'servicescape' (Chronis et. al. 2012: 265). Hospitality marketing continually utilises the differentiation between time and space as a convention in marketing practice. This manipulation of time and space can be seen to operate on a number of levels, whether in terms of offering empty spaces in which consumers can find joy or pleasure, or of a refuge of authenticity in an inauthentic world. However, what links all of these conventions is that the representations and messages embedded in marketing texts provide a representation of hospitality as not being ordinary, as not being part of everyday life. The extraordinary nature of the three restaurants and their 'servicescapes' examined in this paper represent a time and place that is so removed from everyday lived experience that the configuration of the hospitality experience may be defined as sacred.

Although the relationship between hospitality, food, the sacred and religion is clearly developed (Hely 2002, Artbury 2005, O'Connor 2005, O'Gorman 2007, Claseen 2007), the communication of the hospitality experience in the three restaurant websites institutes a 'configuration of time, space' (Jokinen and McKie 1997: 23) that locates hospitality and food as the sacred and as the antithesis of the profane aspects of everyday lived experience (Sered 1988). The idea that hospitality can be part of a sacred journey or even a cultural pilgrimage is clearly reflected in the philosophy of The French Laundry's website : A great meal is a kind of journey that returns you to the sources of pleasure you may have forgotten and takes you to places you haven't been before.

The language of hospitality marketing draws on various images, phrases, conventions, debates and discourses, words and images to create the representation of a world in which food and hospitality legitimately become part of what Reed-Danahay (1996) refers to as the 'legitimate art of living', the extraordinary and even the sacred when considered as the opposite of everyday lived experience. The conception of the hospitality experience as linked with the notion of the sacred and the differentiation between time and space as represented in hospitality marketing has been developed through the modification of Durkheim's (1995) hypothesis of the 'sacred and profane'. Consumers' exploration of the websites of these three restaurants is just one of the means whereby consumers locate and fix their encounters with the social. Just as Silverstone (1988) envisaged television as a 'ritual frame', as a cerebral, creative and practical space, in which everyone can access the things that mark off the social from the private (Couldry 2001: 158), the website fashions a ritual frame that is semiotically constructed, representing the ritual character of hospitality. One of the major conventions used to express this ritual frame is graphically illustrated by the ritualistic setting of the tables (see Figure 4). This ritual formality demonstrates a type of experience and way of life, it informs behavior, perception and cements the significance of the activity.

Just as the language of hospitality is a product of the social, so are contemporary definitions of what constitutes the sacred. Durkheim (1995) in his exploration of religion as a social phenomenon recognised that the notions of the sacred and the profane are socially engendered and reflect the particular nature of the society and culture in which they have been generated. Thus, the sacred

emphasizes the distinction between social and ordinary experiences. In opposition to this, Caillois (1988: 20) recognised that the two mutually exclusive domains of the sacred and the profane do not mingle in unmediated ways, that is, in the absence of collectively recognised rites of passage and acknowledged risks of admixture. 'He took great care to outline how the profane needs the sacred, and the regulation, through rites, of the process of consecration in the passage into the sacred from the profane' (Genosko 2003: 75). In adapting these foundational works in the context of consumer behaviour and marketing, Belk et al. (1989) recognised that consumers enact a scared/profane distinction in common domains of experience, and consumption becomes '...a vehicle of transcendent experience' (1989: 2). This is significant for understanding the nature of the language of hospitality marketing in providing individual consumers with access to a world in which escape and fulfilment are possible. This notion of hospitality as viewed from the standpoint of the sacred is inextricably linked with the concept that marketing texts generate semiotic forms of stimulation. Berlyn (1977: 170) contends that humans attempt to sustain a certain intensity of arousal and seek 'artificial sources of stimulation...to make up for the shortcomings of their environment'.

Gramercy Tavern

French Laundry

Le Manoir

Figure 5: Food as Art

The experience of hospitality and dining is elevated into this atmosphere of transcendental arousal through ritual and significance (Fantasia 1995, Ferry 2003, Marshall 2005). The language of hospitality that underpins contemporary hospitality marketing signifies, connotes and directs interpretation while

reinforcing the significance of the ritualistic element involved in the production and consumption of the hospitality experience. The ritual of dining generates a form of social harmony (Givon and Trostler 2008) and even social therapy; it acts as a script that regulates the order of dishes, the formality of the setting and the intensity of experience (Marshall 2005). The websites offer the interactive participant a 'passage to the sacred' or the 'sacred sphere of excess' (Caillois 1988: 282). The embedded connotations of luxury in the restaurant websites express a social distinction that augments social bonds. In these sites the hospitality experience and dining turn out to be a celebration of society itself (van der Veen 2003), and in the Durkheimian tradition 'sacred'.

3. Conclusion

Hospitality marketing provides an interesting case of how meaning is constructed and consumed in marketing communications. From the research at hand it emerged clearly that subjects such as tourism and hospitality generate strong feelings as they play such an important role in our lives. In addition to this we need to recognize the cultural and social significance of such activities, and acknowledge that our understanding of the hospitality experience has been shaped by a complex mixture of historical, social and cultural influences that embed the experience of hospitality in the contemporary world. It may also be argued that the marketing of tourism and hospitality need to be treated as a specialist area of activity that locates and identifies the significance of the activity and its importance for the individual consumer. As stated previously, although traditional approaches to hospitality marketing adopt a largely quantitative approach to understanding the sector, the adoption of a more culturally orientated approach will enable marketers to comprehend the most effective means of communicating the hospitality experience. As a result, marketers will be capable of utilizing an effective semiotic language that truly reflects the meaning of contemporary hospitality.

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Who sees what? One print advertisement and a dual semiotic analysis

Sharon Schembri and Eliane Karsaklian

Sharon Schembri (schembrist@utpa.edu) is Assistant Professor at the Department of Marketing, College of Business Administration, University of Texas – Pan American. Her research focus includes health care as well as branding and brand cultures. She has developed a specialization in visual methods and has been responsible for a range of qualitative research projects that include semiotics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnography, and visual ethnography. Her work to date has been published in the *Journal of Business Research, Psychology & Marketing, Marketing Theory,* and others.

Eliane Karsaklian is Professor of International Business at Université Sorbonne, Paris, France. Her research focuses on international marketing, global branding, ethical consumption, and international negotiation. Her research has been published in several countries via international conferences, edited books, and international journals including the *Journal of International Business Research and Practice* and *Décisions Marketing*.

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Abstract

This research investigates consumer interpretations of one print advertisement with a dual semiotic approach. The research design features 20 in-depth interviews with participants from ten different cultures, where participants were asked to tell the story that the ad depicts. This investigative process generated consumer narratives that were analyzed with a dual semiotic approach comprising an application of both Peirce's Semiotic Triangle (cf. Grayson and Shulman 2000) as well as Greimas's (1983) Actantial model. The findings demonstrate that across a diversity of cultures consumers interpret this print ad either with or without recognition of a key expressive element (object) in the ad. Interpreting the ad in recognition of the intended object of the ad renders a story that screams a concealed meaning - as intended by the creative designers; interpreting the ad without recognition of the intended object renders a somewhat confusing story. The dual analytic approach reports similar findings from both semiotic viewpoints, thus enhancing the credibility of the output. The findings of this research therefore include advertisement design implications for practitioners.

Keywords: narrative analysis, semiotics, Peirce, Greimas, advertising.

0. Introduction

How consumers understand and interpret advertising is a complex phenomenon (Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver 2006a; Scott and Vargas 2007; Koslow and Costley 2010). The complexity of this phenomenon is compounded by the national cultural lens through which consumers view the world (Taylor 2005; Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver 2006b). This research investigates who sees what, with one print advertisement as the point of reference. Narratives were generated and analyzed with a dual semiotic approach by drawing on in-depth interviews from a diverse group of consumer participants in terms of ethnic background. More specifically, the dual semiotic analysis involves the application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle (cf. Grayson and Shulman, 2000), as well as Greimas's (1983) Actantial model. The application of these two analytical frames shows a variation in who sees what in this print ad, where interpretations hinge on the recognition of a key expressive element in the ad, or not. The key element that is recognized by some consumers is two bare feet protruding from below a curtain line. Recognition of this key element yields an interpretation of the ad as intended by the creative designers. However, interpreting the ad irrespective of this key element yields a different, somewhat confusing story. Therefore, the findings of this research include print advertisement design implications for practitioners.

This paper begins with an overview of the relevant marketing semiotic literature as the science of meaning. Then, the dual semiotic analytical approach is explained, while research findings are reported with view to lending support to the semiotic frameworks. Tables 1 and 2 present a summary of the findings which are subsequently discussed in terms of their contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this work shows how an advertising message can be analyzed with semiotics to

uncover connotations and nuances based on consumer narratives about marketing communications, and more specifically about one print ad. The identification of similar variable interpretations by drawing on the selected semiotic perspectives enhances the credibility of the findings. More practically, therefore, it is demonstrated that semiotics is a useful business analytical tool.

1. The role of semiotics in communications research

The English language is inherently ambiguous (de Mooij 2011), and consequently communication can be difficult (Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010), demanding (Majaro 2013), and even strategically treacherous (Czinkotaand Ronkainen 2003, 2012; Mueller 2011). The plethora of communication theories (Ballantyne, Frow, Varey, and Payne 2011; Schmid and Kotulla 2011) is indicative of the embedded complexity of communication. In seeking to understand the complex phenomenon of communication, semiotics as the science of meaning offers a means to investigate consumer interpretive perspectives on communications such as advertising. As Oswald (2012) explains, semiotics is about the analysis of verbal, visual, and spatial sign systems and is most appropriate in the study of advertising and ad meaning. More specifically, Oswald (2012, p. 1) premises her book on the notion that "consumers shop for meanings, not stuff." Similarly, the seminal work of Sydney Levy (1959) *"Symbols for sale"* suggests that a considerable portion of consumer choices are made against the background of symbolic meaning, rather than rational criteria, and this suggestion is reinforced in a more recent publication by Bastos and Levy (2012).

Marketing and advertising are meaningful discourses that reflect and shape cultural values, stereotypes, and norms. However, the use of stereotypical imagery in advertising is a long standing societal concern (Wiles, Wiles and Tjerlund 1995). As Wiles et al. (1995) and de Mooij (2010) discuss, this concern lies with sexist and racist stereotyping, such as the portrayal of men and especially women in inaccurate, outdated, and demeaning roles. The problem with this portrayal is that such images are used as a method of establishing a shared experience of identification with the consumer. The use of stereotypical images is especially problematic in the global marketplace, where kaleidoscopic contexts further complicate media communications (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002) and intended meaning. According to Borgerson and Schroeder (2002), marketing communication depends largely on visual representations to produce meaning. However, the counter debate to stereotypical portrayals in advertising is that communication media are simply a mirror of the existing values and traits of a culture (Plakoyiannaki and Zoto 2009). In this way, advertising is a form of cultural expression; a mirror of social conditions. From this perspective, advertising is a source of information about values, beliefs, and lifestyle activities of a culture.

Problematic to both sides of this debate is that visual representations create meaning within the circuit of culture that often extends beyond what may be intended by photographers, art directors,

advertising agencies, and firms doing the advertising (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002). Current research in promotion and advertising still draws largely on behavioral psychological frameworks. Contrastingly, interpretivist approaches such as semiotics are becoming increasingly accepted. Semiotic research considers key elements such as language, signs, and symbols that may not necessarily hold universal meaning. Therefore, meaning in international advertising and branding strategy is highly relevant and central to the question addressed in this research, namely *"Who sees what?"*. As Oswald (2012) contends, interpretation beyond an individual consumer and their private world of meaning is a venture into the ambiguity of social communication and the world of brands, branding, and advertising. Even non-linguistic sign systems are interpreted at some level and this realm of connotations and nuances of consumer narratives derive from marketing communications, brand advertising, and culture.

Semiotic analysis begins with the identification of the signs, symbols, and codes that are embedded in a text, whether that text is verbal or nonverbal, visual, symbolic, or experiential. Another important part of semiotic analysis involves looking at contrasts and implied contradictions. Visual elements of advertisements, such as pictures or symbols that are an important component of many advertisements imply a meaning, but what meaning? As per a groundwork Barthesian tenet, semiotics applied in the study of advertising reveals implicit and connotative as well as explicit and denotative concepts that are produced through the selection and combination of signs (Zhou and Belk 2008).

2. Applying the dual semiotic framework to consumer narratives

The work of Charles Sanders Peirce (Mick 1986; Grayson and Shulman 2000) is fundamental to semiotic thinking. Peirce presents a relational theory of meaning between three elements as shown in Figure 1. These three elements are the object, the sign, and the interpretant, where the interpretant is not equivalent either to interpreter or to interpretation, but rather to the interpreter's interpretation of the sign (Mick 1986). Known as the Semiotic Triangle (Figure 1), the three interrelationships between the three elements are symbolic, iconic, and indexical. A symbolic interrelationship involves the symbolic sign relating to the object in a conventional manner (Mick 1986; Grayson and Shulman 2000). Many organizations employ this symbolic interrelationship as a branding strategy when a symbol or sign is devised to represent a particular object such as a product, brand, and/or organization in a meaningful way. The Apple brand, for example, uses a simple white apple silhouette with a clean bite missing to symbolize more than just a highly technical computing device, but simplistic design, as well as original thinking. The iconic interrelationship involves the iconic sign relating to the object as an imitation or resemblance (Mick 1986; Grayson and Martinec 2004), such as counterfeit copies of a designer brand.

The indexical interrelationship involves the indexical sign relating to the object with a factual or historical connection (Grayson and Shulman 2000), such as heirlooms or irreplaceable possessions, such as jewelry from a great grandmother.

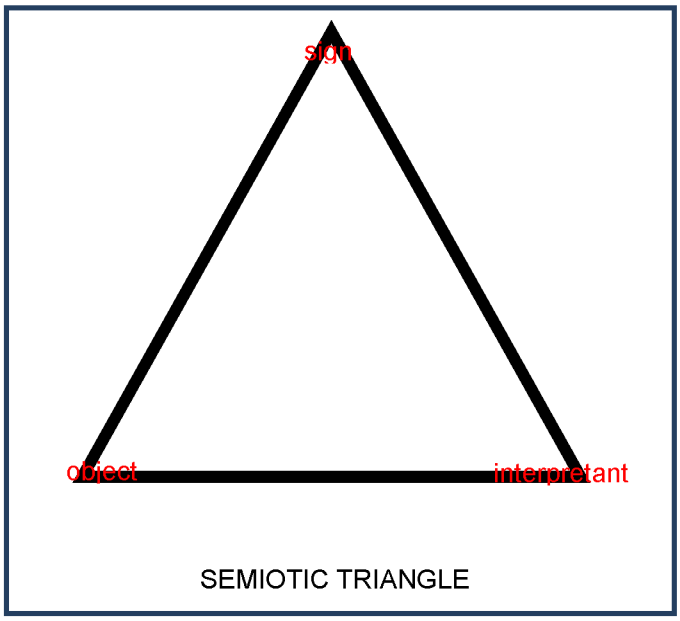

Figure 1. Peirce's semiotic triangle (adapted from Mick 1986).

Other semiotic applications in advertising include Zhao and Belk's (2008) study of ideological tensions between communism and consumerism in Chinese advertising and Humphrey's (2010) semiotic analysis of newspaper articles related to gambling. Exploring the rise of consumerism in China during the shift from communism, Zhao and Belk (2008) use semiotics to show the symbolic role of advertising in reframing the transitional politics of the day. Similarly, Humphreys (2010) analyzes semiotic structure in her investigation of shifts in public discourse that legitimize consumption practices. In both Zhao and Belk's (2008) and Humphreys' (2010) applications of semiotics, the investigation is a sense making inquiry.

In asking the question *"who sees what?"* in the context of a print advertisement, this work is based on the premise that narratives are a sense making tool for consumers. This premise is evident in other works such as Levy (1959), and Shankar, Elliott, and Goulding (2001) as well as Schembri, Merrilees, and Kristiansen (2010) and Stern, Thompson, and Arnould (1998). As Levy (1959) discusses, contemporary consumer culture structures the myths and meanings that consumers attach to goods and rituals. More to the point, Shankar et al. (2001) discuss how narratives are considered a fundamental way for consumers in structuring and making sense of their lives. Narrative analysis is shown by Schembri et al. (2010) to be a useful tool in the study of how consumers use brands to construct the self. Through interacting within and interpreting the social world, consumer experiences are considered to be a basic way whereby we structure and make sense of our lives (Stern et al. 1998).

The narratives, or stories, that consumers provide offer valuable insight relevant to marketing strategy and tactics (Thompson 1997). Storytelling has a long tradition in consumer culture, as

demonstrated by the many and varied folklore tales that abound in historical archives. In contemporary society, consumers use brands as props or anthropomorphic actors in the stories they tell (Woodside, Sood, and Miller 2008). Stories and narratives convey meaning of a personalized experience and the personal nature of stories and narratives reflects the essential power of storytelling.

Narrating is telling a story in the form of a linked set of events, happenings, and situations that affect human beings. In telling stories, consumers create a sense-making situation where the chronological order of happenings is respected and the narrative conveys experience through reconstituting that experience (Squire 2008). More specifically, narrative meaning is created by establishing that the story is part of a larger whole. Narratives also display the significance that events have within a certain context (Denning 2001). Consumers are the storytellers narrating their life experience to others in a meaningful way and marketers are beginning to recognize narration as a powerful brand strategy.

As with any good story, there is a beginning, middle, and end. Skillful storytellers also seek to establish a setting, specific characters, and a sequence of episodes that are more or less interrelated. In seeking to analyze such narratives, A.J. Greimas developed a tool that can be applied to any real or thematized action. This analytical tool put forward by Greimas (1983) is known as Actantial model, where an action is broken down into six identifiable roles called actants: subject and object, helper and opponent, sender and receiver (see Figure 2). Assigning each action to one of the actantial roles enables narrative analysis relative to the plot, complemented by the modalities of wanting to, being capable of, and knowing how to. These modalities are referred to here as axes of desire, power, and knowledge, respectively. Hence, the Greimasian Actantial model is adapted to our analysis of consumer narratives as composed of six actants across three axes:

- **The axis of desire**: includes a subject and an object where the subject is what is directed toward an object. For example, the narrative of a fire-fighter saving people in a burning house depicts the fire-fighter as the subject, the people being saved as the object, and the life-saving effort as the axis of desire.

- **The axis of power**: comprises the helper and the opponent. Continuing with the fire-fighter narrative, the helpers for the subject are the resources that are available to the fire-fighter for extinguishing the fire and saving people: water, ladder, other fire-fighters etc. The opponents are the elements of fire, wind, and location, for example, that effectively prevent the fire-fighter from accomplishing the life-saving mission.

- **The axis of knowledge**: includes the sender and the receiver. The sender is the element requesting the action from the subject and the receiver is the element for which the quest is being undertaken. Continuing with the fire-fighter narrative, the sender is the fire station and the receivers are the people being saved, along with their neighborhood and surrounding community.

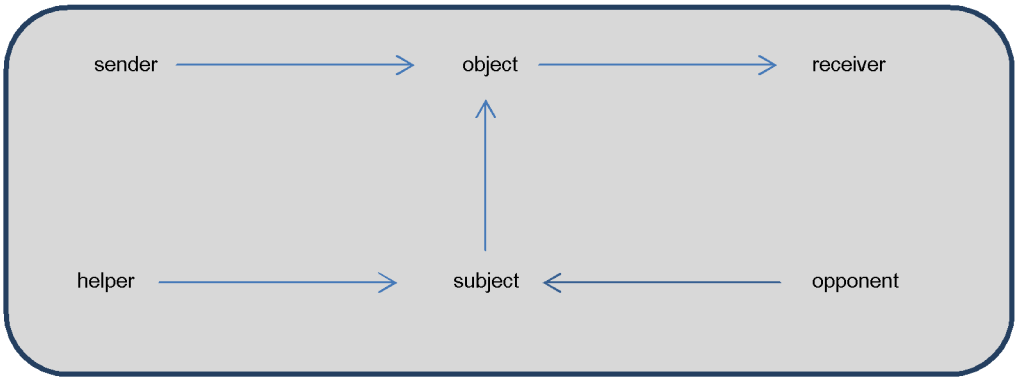

Figure 2. Greimas's Actantial approach to narrative analysis (Greimas 1983, Greimas 1986).

3. Investigating who sees what

The participants in our study consist of 8 females and 12 males, aged 25-35 years, from 10 different nationalities: Chinese, Croatian, Egyptian, French, Italian, Malian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, and Moroccan. The research was conducted in Paris, France. In line with the premise of this study that narratives are a sense-making tool for consumers and that consumer storytelling is a powerful branding strategy (Denning 2006; Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu 2010), the participants' interpretations of a print advertisement for Nutribalance (Figure 3) constitute our primary data.

Nutribalance is a dog food brand and the ad central to this investigation is part of a print advertising campaign created by the Chilean ad agency ProlamY&R. According to Macleod (2009), ProlamY&R is promoting Nutribalance pet food with a print campaign that is sensitizing pet-owners about the connection between bad food and bad dogs. While the Nutribalance campaign comprised several print ads, the focus of this research is the ad titled "Pilot", where the dog betrays the woman who does not feed him well by revealing the hidden feet of her lover. The ad is designed to show consumers what happens when dogs are not fed well and therefore the message is about feeding dogs good food and specifically Nutribalance dog food. In seeking to document consumer interpretations of this Nutribalance dog food ad, participants were shown the advertisement (Figure 3) for 30 seconds and then asked to tell the story depicted in the ad. This auto-driving image elicitation technique, as per Heisley and Levy (1991), gives research participants the opportunity to describe what they see from their perspective. To further enable the 20 participants to articulate the story depicted in the ad, participants' interviews were deliberately unstructured, while featuring only short and minimal probing questions. The purpose of this storytelling interviewing style is to identify symbolic markers in an ad in an inductive manner (Gummesson 2005). In this way, the narratives that were generated from this interviewing process reflect an accurate and authentic interpretation of the ad from the participants' perspective.

Figure 3. Nutribalance "Bad Food Bad Dog" advertisement created by Polam Y&R.

4. Findings

This research sought to identify and analyze consumer interpretations of a Nutribalance print advertisement based on a pool of diverse consumer participants (in terms of gender, age and ethnic background). The reported findings demonstrate that the various interpretations of this print advertisement may or may not be in line with the intended marketing message. More specifically, the dual semiotic analysis shows that some participants recognize the key expressive element in the ad of two bare feet protruding from below a curtain line and some do not. This expressive element is key to the intended story that screams a concealed meaning. Effectively, variable interpretations are reported, where the same outcome is demonstrated with a dual semiotic analysis.

In applying Peirce's Semiotic Triangle, the findings are organized in terms of what the participants have assumed as the semiotic elements: interpretant, sign, and object. Table 1 summarizes these findings. In applying Greimas's Actantial model to the analysis of the participants' narratives, the findings are organized in terms of what participants have assumed as actants. Table 2 summarizes these findings. The findings from each of the two analytical approaches concur in that the 20 narratives fall neatly into two distinct interpretations. As per Tables 1 and 2, the findings are reported as two different interpretations, where participants either recognized the bare feet protruding from behind the curtain as exposed by the dog, or not.

From the application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle, the consumer narrative that recognizes the bare feet as the key expressive element, or object, of the advertisement (Table 1, Intrepretation #1) was in line with the creative strategy that was intended by the ad designers, as reported by Macleod

(2009). In recognizing the bare feet as indicative of infidelity and a covert affair, the narrative also interprets the betrayed pilot as the interpretant along with the sign of the ashamed woman who is hiding her face with her hands. According to this interpretation, the symbolic interrelationship is about the woman being ashamed of her infidelity. The iconic interrelationship in this narrative is the woman's shamefulness in the face of the exposed bare feet of the hidden lover. The story here, therefore, is a story of the pilot who is often absent and his loyal dog revealing the woman's infidelity and her hidden lover's bare feet. The indexical interrelationship then is about the shamed woman having been unfaithful. In this narrative, the bare feet as the object and the shamed woman as the sign, indicate a hidden lover and a covert affair as confirmed by the woman's body language.

In the second interpretation (Interpretation #2, Table 1) the participants did not recognize the bare feet as part of the story. Assuming the interpretant as the pilot arriving or leaving, this narrative posits the uncontrollable dog as the object and the emotionally needy woman as the sign. From this interpretation, the symbolic interrelationship is about the pilot either just arriving or near leaving and the needy woman showing her desperation in her body language, as does the dog with bad behavior. The iconic interrelationship here is about the pilot either arriving or leaving, and as a result the woman's becoming needy and the dog's becoming uncontrollable. Indexically, the woman has not handled the dog well when the pilot master is away. Consequently, the behavior of the dog is uncontrollable and the woman responds to this situation with desperation.

Table 1. Application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle.

Elements	Interrelationships			Participant narrative	
	Symbolic	Iconical	Indexical		
Interpretant = betrayed pilot Sign = ashamed woman Object = bare feet exposed by the dog indicating infidelity and a covert affair	Symbolically, the woman is ashamed of her infidelity. The woman has been unfaithful and the dog's behavior exposes the hidden lover's bare feet.	Iconically, the woman is ashamed of the evident covert lover. The pilot has arrived home unexpectedly and the dog is loyal to his master so reveals the hidden lover's bare feet.	Indexically, the shamed woman is shown to have been unfaithful. The dog exposes the hidden lover's bare feet indicating infidelity and a covert affair.	**Interpretation 1:** The dog displays his loyalty to the master who feeds him well but the dog also shows revenge to the woman who does not feed him well when the master is away.	Participants: Chinese, Portuguese, Croatian, Polish, Malian, Egyptian, Italian
Interpretant = pilot is arriving	Symbolically, the woman is needy	Iconically, the emotional	Indexically, the	**Interpretation 2:** The dog shows	Participants: Moroccan,

Elements	Interrelationships			Participant narrative	
	Symbolic	Iconical	Indexical		
or leaving Sign = forlorn, emotionally needy woman Object = uncontrollable dog	and the dog is uncontrollable. The pilot is either on the way in or out and the woman is feeling desperate and needy, while the dog is behaving badly.	woman's behavior reflects the uncontrollable dog's behavior. The pilot is either just arriving or near leaving and so the woman is in despair and the dog becomes uncontrollable.	emotionally needy woman has historically not handled the dog well. The dog may not be controlled by the woman and this is a recurring and unresolved problem.	bad behavior because the woman cannot manage the dog and his pilot master is always leaving or arriving.	Chinese, French, Egyptian, Portuguese, Spanish

In applying Greimas's Actantial model to the narratives provided by the 20 participants, as summarized in Table 2, two interpretations are again reported. These interpretations also differ in terms of whether the bare feet are recognized or not. The application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle concurs in this way with the application of Greimas's Actantial model to narrative analysis.

As presented in Table 2, Interpretation #1 places the dog as the subject and the hidden lover as the object. The axis of desire tells the story of the dog desiring to reveal the hidden lover; the axis of power revolves around the dog who reveals the truth; and the axis of knowledge where the dog knows the truth and the lover chooses to hide. Considering the helper and opponent actants, along the axis of desire the dog helps his master by revealing the truth while the woman hides her face in shame and in opposition to the truth; the axis of power is about the woman holding the power because she chooses a lover and she feeds the dog when the pilot is absent; the axis of knowledge sees the dog knowing the woman is unfaithful and so chooses to oppose the woman's actions. In terms of sender and receiver actants, along the axis of desire, the dog sends a message to his master that the woman is unfaithful; on the axis of power the dog appears to be powerful by revealing the hidden lover; on the axis of knowledge the dog appears to be all-knowing, while choosing to reveal the covert affair.

Table 2. Application of Greimas's (1983) Actantial model.

Actants Axes	Subject - Object	Helper - Opponent	Sender - Receiver	Participants	
Axis of Desire	The dog as the subject desires to reveal the hidden lover as the object	The dog is helping his master by revealing the truth while the woman is hiding her face in opposition	The dog is sending a message to his master that the woman is being unfaithful	Chinese Portuguese Croatian Polish Malian Egyptian Italian	**Interpretation #1**
Axis of Power	The dog is holding the power by revealing the truth of the hidden lover	The power of the situation is held by the woman because she chooses a lover and feeds the dog when the pilot is absent	The dog holds the position of power and seeks to reinstate his master's power by revealing the hidden lover		
Axis of Knowledge	The dog knows the truth and the lover chooses to hide	The dog knows the woman is unfaithful and chooses to oppose her	The dog knows all and seeks to inform his master of covert actions by his wife in his absence that his master is not knowledgeable of		
Axis of Desire	The pilot as the subject desires the woman as the object	The pilot desires to help the woman with the dog's uncontrollable and opposing behavior	The dog desires good food rather than bad and sends this message both to the officer and the woman with bad behavior	Moroccan Chinese French Egyptian Portuguese Spanish	**Interpretation #2**
Axis of Power	The pilot is denied intimate relations by the woman who holds the power in this situation	The woman is powerless to control the dog	The dog captures the attention of both the officer and the woman with bad behavior		
Axis of Knowledge	The pilot and the woman	The pilot knows how to manage the dog but	The dog knows he wants good not bad		

Actants Axes	Subject - Object	Helper - Opponent	Sender - Receiver	Participants	
	have a difficult relationship as reflected in the dog's bad behavior	is often absent and the woman does not possess the requisite knowledge	food and seeks to send this message to both the pilot and the woman		

In contrast to Interpretation #1, Interpretation #2 does not recognize the hidden lover's bare feet as pertinent to the story and therefore the narrative does not comprise this actant. Instead, Interpretation #2 assumes the pilot as the subject and the woman as the object, where the pilot desires the woman on the axis of desire but is denied intimate relations on the axis of power and the dog's bad behavior reflects the difficulty of the man-woman relationship on the axis of knowledge. In terms of helper and opponent actants, on the axis of desire the pilot desires to help the woman with the dog's uncontrollable behavior, but on the axis of power the woman is powerless to do so, while on the axis of knowledge, even though the pilot knows how to control the dog, given that he is often away, the woman is charged with this responsibility, but does not possess the requisite knowledge. Considering the sender and receiver actants, on the axis of desire, the dog desires good food rather than bad and sends this message to both the pilot and the woman with bad behavior. On the axis of power, the dog captures the attention of both the pilot and the woman with bad behavior. On the axis of knowledge, the dog wants good, not bad food and sends this message to both the pilot and the woman with bad behavior.

The findings reported here and summarized in Table 1 and Table 2 involved an application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle and Greimas's Actantial model. Each of these interpretive routes identified similar outcomes. The application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle and Greimas's Actantial model show that a key element in interpreting this advertisement is the bare feet that signify a hidden lover and a covert affair. The one interpretation recognizes this key narrative element, whereas the other does not. In effect, the findings have implications for both theory and practice, however prior to addressing implications the following discussion relates the literature to the findings.

5. Discussion

The findings of this dual semiotic analysis of a print advertisement for Nutribalance dog food show that the ad is interpreted in variable ways. More specifically, in applying both Peirce's Semiotic Triangle (cf. Grayson & Shulman, 2000), as well as Greimas's (1983) Actantial model, various interpretations of this print advertisement are reported. The application of Peirce's Semiotic Triangle shows that variable interpretations involve different assumptions regarding the elements of the Semiotic Triangle, where the

assumed object or assumed central component directs the narrative. As Rossolatos (2012) explains, from a semiotic perspective, elements in brand imagery are significant in their relatedness to the brand's combinatory logic. Consequently the semiotic interrelationships differ according to what element of the story is assumed as the central object directing the narrative. In Interpretation #1, when the bare feet of the hidden lover are recognized as the key element of the story, the story is about the dog displaying loyalty to the master who feeds him well and revenge to the woman who does not feed the dog well when the master is away. In contrast to Interpretation #1, Interpretation #2 does not recognize the bare feet and hence the consumer narrative misses the point of choosing Nutribalance dog food. Similarly, in terms of Greimas's (1983) Actantial model, variable interpretations also involve assumptions regarding the actantial roles and the axes of desire, power, and knowledge, while, again, the assumed object directs the narrative.

As shown by the dual semiotic analysis in this study, one way of interpreting this advertisement recognizes the hidden lover's bare feet as a key element of the narrative. In this interpretation, the dog demonstrates loyalty to his master by revealing the truth that the woman is hiding a lover. However, an alternative interpretation is a story where there is no recognition of the bare feet, a hidden lover and a secret affair. Accordingly, the story becomes one of the pilot's arriving or leaving, while the woman becomes emotionally needy and the dog is behaving badly, with little relation to Nutribalance. The intended meaning of the print ad is therefore missed in this interpretation. This (mis)interpretation confirms the suggested problematic of media communications in the global marketplace given cultural complexities (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002). With visual representation understood to produce meaning, the meaning produced in the interpretation that does not recognize the bare feet as representative of a hidden lover and secret affair is an interpretation that fails to reinforce the intended advertisement message.

By looking at this print ad in terms of an integrated plan, this ad has been part of a successful campaign (AdLiving 2012). Beyond the traditional notion of advertising as stimulus and response, the dual semiotic analysis employed in this work has identified that imagery does not necessarily hold universal meaning. By venturing into the ambiguities embedded in social communication inasmuch as in advertising, this work reports on the semiotic structure of a print ad to uncover connotations and nuances of consumer narratives derived from interpretations of one print ad. However, as an interpretivist study, this work is neither exploratory nor confirmatory. The value of this research lies in the depth of insight on consumer interpretations of that one print ad (Figure 3) and the findings are particular to that context.

6. Managerial implications

When an advertisement is designed, there is an intended narrative as is the case with the print advertisement used in this research. The ad of interest in this study was designed by the Prolam Y&R ad agency to demonstrate the negative consequences of feeding your dog bad food. The ad is a promotion for Nutribalance dog food as a solution to the problem of a badly behaving dog. According

to DrPrem.com a simple image that screams out a concealed meaning is what keeps consumers spellbound and DrPrem rates the Nutribalance ad used as the point of reference in this research as No.2 in a list of Top Ten print ads (DrPrem.com 2013). DrPrem.com describes the ad as the situation of someone trying to hide something and your pet exposes you, which is the message as intended by Prolam Y&R. However, a key element of that story is the bare feet protruding from below the curtain line. If this key visual element is missed, the consequent interpretation is a story without any concealed meaning and therefore no consumer holding power. The findings reported here show that only some recognize the key visual element, while others are missing that key element and interpret a story of something other than intended. As shown in this research, the findings report that the story as intended by the ad designers is only one way of interpreting this ad and primary to this interpretation is recognition of the lover's bare feet as the object directing the narrative. Consumers who accurately associate the symbolism of an ad effectively buy into the ad's message (Stern 1988).

Beyond the standard industry comprehension that semiotic analysis is a useful tool for effective visual design, the research design employed here demonstrates the usefulness of a dual analytical approach. In using just one or the other framework, accurate findings may be produced. However, by using a combination of two different semiotic frameworks the credibility of the findings is enhanced. Our findings suggest that this ad, given that it is part of a global campaign, is only partially effective and can be improved by ensuring that the key element of the bare feet is more clearly portrayed and more easily recognized. Without that key element being recognized and interpreted, the message is off track, as is the media spending.

7. Limitations and areas for future research

The dual semiotic interpretive approach pursued in this paper has demonstrated concurrently that some consumers interpret this advertisement as intended by Nutribalance and Prolam Y&R, while others do not. With interviews from 20 participants from different nationalities, this diverse selection enabled a variation to be identified in what and how the participants interpreted the advertisement used here as the point of reference. Some participants understood the message as intended to be interpreted through the key element of the hidden lover's bare feet protruding from behind the curtain, but other participants did not see this element as part of the story. The analysis of the stories that were elicited from participants was subjected to a dual semiotic analysis that drew on the variable interpretations of this print advertisement, where each of the two semiotic frameworks identified similar findings. Further research could therefore apply this dual semiotic design to an advertisement prior to release. As highlighted in the managerial implications of this work, each of the two semiotic frameworks applied in this study have provided accurate findings. Hence, employing a dual semiotic analysis adds credibility to the reported findings.

8. Conclusion

This research investigated consumer narratives against the background of one print advertisement with a dual semiotic analysis. With this one ad as point of reference, 20 participants from ten different national cultures were interviewed with a view to generating narratives for the purpose of semiotic analysis. The analysis featured two semiotic interpretive frameworks: Peirce's Semiotic Triangle and Greimas's Actantial model. This dual semiotic analysis identified variable interpretations with similar findings for each of the two semiotic frameworks in that some participants recognized a key element in the ad and therefore understood the intended meaning, whereas other participants did not recognize a key element in the ad and therefore (mis)interpreted the story. The benefits of adopting a dual semiotic approach in the generation of variable interpretations consist in enhancing the credibility of the research output, while producing more nuanced interpretations. Moreover, semiotics was found to be a most useful business tool for optimizing the design of global advertising at a planning stage.

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Contact information

journalmarketingsemiotics@yahoo.com

georgerossolatos123@gmail.com

Contact address

University of Kassel

Department of English

c/o George Rossolatos

Mönchebergstraße 19

34109 Kassel

Germany