CHAPTER 11

The brand imaginarium, or on the iconic constitution of brand image

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11.1 Introduction

Brand image constitutes one of the most salient, over-defined, heavily explored and multifariously operationalized constructs in marketing theory and practice. In this Chapter, definitions of brand image that have been offered by marketing scholars will be critically addressed in the context of a culturally oriented discussion, informed by the semiotic notion of iconicity. This cultural bend, in conjunction with the concept's semiotic contextualization, are expected to dispel terminological confusions in the either inter-changeable or nebulously differentiated employment of such terms as brand image, symbol, icon, as well as to address the function of brand image at a deeper level than a mere construct that is operationalized in quantitative studies of purchase drivers. This shift in focus is dovetailed with a critical turn from the cogito-centric view of the consuming subject through the cognitivist lens of the AI metaphor as decision-making centre at the origin of largely conscious meaning-making, in favor of a psychoanalytically informed approach that considers figurativity as an essential process whereby brand image is formed. In these terms, brand image will be intimately linked to brand images as figurative multimodal expressive units and rhetorical tropes, as figurative syntax, that are responsible for shaping an idiolectal brand language, as well as to distinctive levels of iconicity as textual condition of possibility of a brand language. In order to understand the role of iconicity as fundamental condition of brand textuality, rather than just a procedure for spawning brand

images, the discussion is contextualized in a wider framework involving the culturally situated source of brand images, how they become correlated with brand image concepts and how correlations between brand images and brand image result in brand knowledge structures (Keller 1998). This opening up of the discussion on iconicity is enacted against the background of what I call the Brand Imaginarium which involves: (i) a critical engagement with the dominant cognitivist perspective in branding research that prioritizes individual memory in brand knowledge formation, through a cultural branding lens that involves two additional types of memory, viz. communicative and cultural (ii) a critical engagement with the cognitivist perspective on brand knowledge formation that prioritizes conscious processing of stimuli (as 'brute facts', rather than as already semiotized expressive units) in a cognitive mechanism from which the faculty of imagination has been expelled, by restoring the importance of imagination in brand knowledge formation, and, concomitantly, by showing that the highly figurative language of brands may not be researched thoroughly unless imagination is posited anew as processing correlate (iii) the adoption of an expansionist approach to the role of the imaginary in brand knowledge formation, from cognitive (or psychic) faculty, to a more sociologically inclined process of inter-subjective mirroring, and concomitantly as imaginary social significations (Castoriades 1985) that are shared by culturally conditioned and habituated subjects that engage in meaningful cultural practices, rather than individual processing monads.

In greater detail, the following outlines the argumentative steps that are followed in this Chapter: Section 11.2 criticizes the employment of the terms 'symbolic' and 'iconic' in the relevant branding literature from a semiotic point of view, while proceeding with a nuanced tripartite distinction between brand images (or multimodal expressive units), brand image and iconicity. Section 11.3 focuses on iconicity and how it has been theorized mainly in the Peircean semiotic literature, while

proposing the tripartite distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary brand iconicity. Section 11.4 engages critically with fundamental cognitive psychological concepts from a textual branding point of view, in order to recontextualize and link the preceding discussion in a wider framework that concerns how brand related memory is formed. The adoption of an expansionist outlook to memory formation that is more relevant for a cultural branding perspective results in the tripartite distinction between individual, communicative and cultural memory. Finally, Section 11.5 presents the conceptual model of the Brand Imaginarium in a comprehensive manner that puts in perspective how the preceding 'triads' of (i) brand image/brand images/iconicity (ii) primary/secondary/tertiary iconicity (iii) individual/communicative/cultural memory interact in the development, dissemination and establishment of a brand language.

Brakus (2008) contends that despite interpretivist consumer researchers' recognition of cognitivism's limitations in the application of a mechanistic step-by-step view of the information-processing paradigm, they have not provided viable alternatives that might explain marketing phenomena. The generalist orientation of this counter-critique notwithstanding, the Brand Imaginarium is intended as an outline in lieu of a more comprehensively formulated 'viable alternative', while taking on board Levitt's dictum that imagination is the starting point of success in marketing (cf. Brown and Patterson 2000: 7).

11.2 Brand image re-revisited

Stern et al. (2001) furnished an overview of definitions of brand image that have surfaced in the marketing literature over the past 50 years, as a follow-up to a similar and more extensive study undertaken by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990). In that study, Stern et al. (2001) endeavored a reclassification of brand, corporate and store image definitions alongside salient dimensions, such as whether the examined definitions are

generic, symbol-oriented. message/meaning oriented, based on personification or psychological processes. Our aim in this Section is to expose critical gaps in Stern et al.'s analysis through a semiotic lens, with view to demonstrating that semiotic perspectives constitute (perhaps the) most potent frameworks for addressing such gaps.

Before proceeding with the critical outlook toward some of the offered definitions, the following points are suggested as critical remarks on the classification process *per se* and the discussion that deployed on the grounds of the emergent typology. First and foremost, Stern et al. do not consider a fundamental issue with the offered definitions of brand image, viz. based on which theories from the humanities and the social sciences they have been formulated, and whether there are significant gaps either in the original theories whence stem the definitions, or in the adaptation of terms in marketing research. Second, many of the classified concepts might as well have been classified otherwise, which is attributable to a lack of clear classification criteria (in other words, the classification criteria are not mutually exclusive). Third, the role of semiotic definitions in this barrage is at best elementary and not representative of the rich conceptual inventory of semiotic theories. Fourth, the examined definitions are by no means as exhaustive as the ones considered in the earlier study by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), while, partly attributed to the study's publication date (2001), brand definitions that have been offered within the contours of more contemporary perspectives (cf. Heding et al. 2009), such as community branding (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), experiential branding (e.g., Schmitt and Rogers 2008; Brakus et al. 2009) and iconic branding (i.e., Holt 2005) have not been considered. Nevertheless, dominant definitions that inform constructs and concomitantly scales in quantitative brand image studies (and, by extension, consumer-based brand equity), still fall by and large within the dimensions outlined by Stern et al., and particularly within the psychological dimension, with which we shall be

concerned in due course. Fifth, the criteria posited by Stern et al. for disentangling the 'definitional mess' of brand image definitions, viz. locus, nature, and number, include under the criterion of nature the notion of process, albeit as communicative transactions between sender and receiver, rather than as process of transformation of sensory stimuli (or signs) into brand image attributes (or semantic content or elements/concepts of a plane of content).

In this context, as will be shown, we are concerned with processes of configuration[1] and transfiguration, whereby multimodal expressive units[2] are, at the same time, configured in syntagms (or constellations of expressive units) and transfigured into intelligible aspects of a brand language (through multiple

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[1] I define a brand textual configuration as assemblage of multimodal units at the plane of expression, as opposed to (and inter-dependent with) transfiguration that designates the correlation of expressive units (regardless of level of articulation) with units at the plane of content or brand image concepts (traits) or intangible brand associations. I do not employ the Hjelmslevian term 'commutation' instead of transfiguration, as the latter, on the one hand, is more representative of the pan-rhetorical approach that is adopted in the *Brand Imaginarium*, while, on the other hand, it retains the transformative process whereby the sensible (expressive units) is transmogrified into the intelligible (intangible brand associations or brand image concepts). Moreover, by dint of upholding an inherent plasticity in modes of relatedness between the two planes, as against the Hjelmslevian term 'solidarity', transfiguration allows for brand textual cohesion even at the level of primary iconicity. Thus, a brand text at the level of primary iconicity may not be solidary, even through semi-symbolic relationships, yet it is transfigured, even at the level of a private language, *rhétorique folle* and singular assemblages.

[2] I employ multimodal expressive units as an extended umbrella term, instead of the visio-centric one of brand images (Schroeder 2008), as it is more indicative of the advanced stage of the multimodal turn, pursuant to the visual turn (cf. Section 12.3)

intra-textual and inter-textual rhetorical operations[3]) or brand image attributes. Sixth, Stern et al. (2001) seek to frame the multiple definitions as to whether they concern (ontologically) the 'outside' or the 'inside', i.e., an extra-subjective, objective world versus intra-subjective psychological states. In my view, this is an antiquated dialectic that has been superseded in philosophy ever since Husserlean phenomenology, in which context an object is always *for* a subject and vice versa. This basic premise was also prevalent in Kantian epistemology that sought to overcome the binarism between inside and outside and, hence, this dialectic has been addressed ever since Kant's 1st Critique. More recently (compared to Husserl) Bernstein (2003) in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* excited a flurry of critical activity against this binarism. Moreover, ever since the 60's, sweeping criticisms have re-surfaced against the 'inside'/'outside' dialectic with the upsurge of constructivism. The constructivist paradigm has informed structuralist and social semiotics, a whole host of marketing related phenomena (cf. O'Shaughnessy 2009; Hackley 1998, 2001), but also Eco's conventionalist theory of iconicity that recognizes constructivist conditions for possible objects (cf. Eco 1978: 162). In turn, structuralist semiotics and its actantial theoretic counterpart have informed Latour's ANT theory. In this context, communication theory has also moved away from inside/outside, encoding/decoding frameworks towards participatory forms of communication. The participatory facet of communication (enunciation) was formulated in a very astute

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[3] Rhetoric has mistakenly, in my view, been confined in marketing research in the field of advertising rhetoric, where it appears, at its most superficially manifest, to be impacting the mode of formation of brand texts. Rhetoric furnishes the figurative syntax that is responsible for configuring brand discourse across semiotic modes and, hence, its implications are more far-reaching and strategic than assumed in ad hoc studies (cf. Rossolatos 2013a,e,f; 2014a,c). Rhetoric constitutes the heart of brand discourse from a brand textuality point of view.

fashion by Greimas (1983; see Rossolatos 2014a: 138-142), who posited an addressee's (i.e., consumer's) strictly intra-textual existence by virtue of participating in a structure of enunciation that binds addresser and addressee, a most innovative (up until our days) conceptualization that, most likely, urged Bertrand (1988) to assert that consumers are 'complicit' with advertisers (also see Ruiz Collantes and Oliva, this Volume).

In general, two co-existing, but divergent trends in branding related research may be heeded, which largely reflect wider trends in the humanities and the social sciences. On the one hand, research based on offshoots of cognitivist 'science', such as cognitive psychology, has been intensifying. On the other hand, we have been experiencing a proliferation of post mind/body dualisms that do not share the cogito-centric premises of cognitivism, and the emergence of perspectives such as Latour's ANT that seeks to overcome the traditional micro/macro divide in sociological research (Alexander et al.1987); the rekindling of interest in mimetism in social theory (e.g., Sampson's virality perspective and contagion in the networking age; cf. Rossolatos 2015f); the rise of interest in post-subjectivist, post-psychoanalytical perspectives, such as Guattari's (1996) chaosmosis, Castoriades' (1985) magma, Bourdieu's (1993) habitus (cf. Rossolatos 2015a). To this list we should add post-Husserlean social phenomenological strands (e.g., Schutz, Luckmann, Gurwitsch, Garfinkel; cf. Vaitkus 1990) that have sought to bridge the abyssal gap that was left gaping in Husserl's transcendental psychologism (as a response to empirical psychologism), concerning how inter-subjectively common lifeworlds are possible. This question may not be answered by assuming as point of departure or as processing unit the individual consciousness (which is the province of cogito-centric cognitivist accounts), but mandate alternative modes of theorizing about the formation of culture and society. "With Husserl, the school of inwardness reaches its apex. At the same time, the entire tradition of inwardness is constructed as an

impasse in the direction of collective memory" (Ricoeur 2004: 97).

This effervescent theoretical landscape that has been largely concerned with carving conceptual frameworks for interpreting how the individual is formed pre-reflectively in its non-conscious interaction with its environment has been reflected in branding related research in the proliferation of perspectives that seek, likewise, to elucidate how individual memory depends on cultural memory and how the latter is dynamically fuelled by the former. In this context, emphasis has been laid on the role of brands in subjectivity formation in modes other than those suggested by the cogito-centric AI metaphor and its solipsistic ideotype of the individual as cause of cultural representations and processing unit: "while it is surely true that consumers have cognitive representations of brand symbolism, these representations are the outcome of their stature in public culture and social life" (Holt 2005: 277). This shift requires "moving from the essentialist, static, individual-level constructs of existing theories to social and cultural constructs that are grounded in historical contexts" (Holt 2005: 273). The Brand Imaginarium is situated in this wider stream.

Further to these preliminary remarks, and in order to demonstrate semiotically where and how brand image definitions have gone astray in the employment of terms such as 'symbol' and 'icon', I shall concentrate on symbol-related and cognitive/psychological definitions pertaining strictly to brand (and not to corporate or retail) image. In greater detail, the following definitions will be considered, primarily due to their impact on empirical studies, as well as representativeness in terms of the classification criteria that were posited by Stern et al. (2001) for each definitional dimension:

Symbol related definitions
(i) Levy (1958): 1.People buy things not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean. The things people buy are

seen to have personal and social meanings in addition to their functions. 2. To ignore or decry the symbolism of consumer goods does not affect the importance of the fact. It will suffice to say that in casual usage, symbol is a general term for all instances where experience is mediated rather than direct; where an object, action, word, picture or complex behavior is understood to mean not only itself but also some other ideas or feelings. 3. A symbol is appropriate (and the product will be used and enjoyed) when it joins with, meshes with, adds to or reinforces the way the consumer thinks about himself.

(ii) Frazer (1983): [...] the advertiser formulates a claim of superiority or distinction based on factors extrinsic to the product. Often products are associated with symbols either socially extant or created by or for the advertiser ... the effort to differentiate the product is psychologically rather than physically based.

Cognitive/psychology related definitions
(iii) Gardner and Levy (1955): 1. The set of ideas, feelings and attitudes that consumers have about brands. 2. The social and psychological nature of products. 3. ... a character or personality that may be more important for the overall status (and sales) of the brand than many technical facts about the product.

(iv) Levy (1978): A brand image is a constellation of pictures and ideas in people's minds that sum up their knowledge of the brand and their main attitudes towards it.

Definition (iv) still resounds in Keller's (1998) brand knowledge structure, the definition of which, along with brand image, consumer associations and brand equity, constitutes one of the two most influential models in current brand image and equity research (the other being Aaker's Brand Equity Ten). Despite the fact that it was coined in 1998, and that it has been enriched throughout later revisions by Keller, in the light of advances in

experiential consumption and interactive advertising, but also partially challenged and revised in its application by consumer researchers in empirical studies, its cognitive psychological underpinnings have not been affected by time (or the criticisms formulated by Holt [2005] in the context of his cultural branding approach). Hence, although not mentioned by Stern et al. (2001), brand knowledge merits being cited as the fifth definition, also given that later on we shall be concerned with comparing and contrasting the connectionist cognitivist model with the brand textuality paradigm.

(v) Keller (1998, 2001, 2009): Knowledge of a brand refers to the establishment of a brand knowledge structure. The differential effect of a brand knowledge structure is reflected in the establishment of strong, favourable, unique brand associations. Consumer response is the outcome of a superior brand knowledge structure in terms of competitively superior associations.

Three sets of questions may be posed in the face of the above definitions, which will guide our analysis in the ensuing sections. First, as regards the symbol-related definitions, from a semiotic point of view, definition (i) wrongly asserts that a symbol is constituted simply because an object, action, word, picture or complex behavior is understood to mean not only itself but also some other ideas or feelings, as this is not the definition of symbol, but of sign in general. The qualifying difference between sign (in general) and symbol, according to Saussure (1959), concerns the motivated character of the latter, as against the arbitrary nature of the signs of a natural language (a division that has been severely contested, e.g. by Kress [2010], but which suffices for the argument at hand). Second, in the context of the same definition, it is suggested that objects, actions, words, pictures or complex behaviors, do not hold symbolic status because they are related "to themselves", but to other ideas or

feelings. This is a misnomer, as the former may be symbolic, insofar as they are signs, but with practical/functional signifieds, rather than "other" signifieds. For example, "the utilitarian commodity sign is associated with features related to its practical use-value" (Nöth 1988: 4). The same fallacy is replicated in definition (ii) where a symbol is related, in latent contradistinction to a 'simple' sign, to the correlation of a sign with 'superior' aspects that are extrinsic to the product (as sign). "Symbolic consumption focuses not so much on the good as sign per se, but rather on the meanings attached to the act of consuming the good" (Solomon et al. 2006: 53). Again, this definition is oblivious to the fact that that the distinction rests not with layers of abstraction and superiority of concepts (signifieds), but with levels of arbitrariness/motivation (according to Saussurean semiotics).

But what merits highlighting even more emphatically is that both definitions appear to be distinguishing between symbols and signs on a dimension that is even more alarming semiotically. This dimension concerns the valorization of signs or their exchange value. As noted by Saussure and extensively scrutinized in Rossolatos (2012b, 2014a), conflating the meaning of signs (of any type, including symbols) with value constitutes a semiotic cardinal sin. Meaning and value are inter-dependent, but not reducible to each other. Hence, claiming that a brand is symbolic in order to convey that a brand has superior value is blatantly misleading. The same holds in the perpetuation of this latent valorization to an even higher degree by christening brands 'iconic', as 'more than' symbolic (e.g., "iconic brands perform identity myths that address desires and anxieties" [Holt 2004: 7]; "iconic brands are brands that have become cultural symbols" [Holt 2005: 273]), first, because symbols do not imply by definition superior value, and, second, because symbols may mean without having superior value compared to ordinary signs. The superior exchangeability of symbols concerns not their image (or their meaning as abstract concept or signified correlated with

formal properties as signifier), but their equity (which is a wholly different discussion that will not be considered in this Chapter; see for relevant analyses and discussions Rossolatos 2012b, 2013b,c,d,e, 2014a).

The same 'cardinal sin' has been carried over and quite solidly rooted in the entire fields of branding and consumer research (see, for example, the analysis on the 'symbolic meaning' of brands in Elliott and Wattanasuwan 2000: "We live in a symbol-rich environment and the meaning attached to any situation or object is determined by the interpretation of these symbols", where 'symbol' actually performs the function of 'sign', albeit unjustifiably invested with value). Not only 'symbolic' has come to be identified in the marketing vernacular with 'valuable', but this unfortunate misnomer has been intensified by the ascription of 'iconic' to even more symbolically symbolizing brand symbols. Both symbolic and iconic imbrications with value are so embedded and widespread in the marketing literature and trade press that it would be more preferable to rewrite Saussure, rather than change deeply held misconceptions.

Now, there have been instances in the wider humanities literature where the symbol has been identified with an 'object of higher value' (cultural, aesthetic etc.; cf. Nöth 1990), however such definitions are neither semiotically informed, and particularly by the above-mentioned seminal Saussurean definition of value which is of utmost pertinence for both brand image and brand equity (as argued in Rossolatos 2014a), nor, by implication, favourable to conceptual frameworks that lay claim to be adopting a semiotic perspective (which is our concern here), in which case any further analysis on 'symbolic' grounds is likely to be severely misguided. It is hoped that the above function both as words of caution for brand semiotic researchers, but also as inspiration for further scrutiny of the seminal distinction and inter-dependence between meaning and value, as well as empirical applications.

Moving on to the cognitive/psychology related definitions, we observe that (iii) focuses partially on the signified (in Saussurean terms) or the plane of content (in Hjelmslevian terms), without reference to the signifier, in which context the conceptual leaning of brand image is correctly identified, albeit dislocated from sources (e.g., brand communications, word-of-mouth, brand usage) that give rise to specific image concepts or from a brand's plane of expression (in Hjelmslev's terms). And where expressive units are included in brand image definitions (e.g., (iv)), they are conflated with pictures in the mind, regardless of any non-mind dependent source of brand communications and the incidence of multimodal brandcomms texts, their units and, even more importantly, their combinatorial rationale. As noted in Rossolatos (2014b), the same disregard for sources of brand image as concepts or 'associations' (following a connectionist/associationist rationale) is evinced in Keller (definition (v)), who considers associations as sources of equity, rather than as outcomes of communicative sources of equity. But even more importantly, equity is not confined monoplanarily either at the content or the expression planes, but emerges as superior configurations of elements from both planes, along with their figurative syntactic counterparts, from a brand textuality point of view (as argued in Rossolatos 2013d,e,f, 2014a,c).

Moreover, and this point concerns a call for a wider paradigmatic shift from the cognitive psychological paradigm that buttresses definitions (iii), (iv), (v) towards a brand textuality paradigm, the relationship between brand image and consumers is neither an epistemic one (i.e., a matter of 'knowing' a brand, and hence reducible to a 'brand knowledge structure'), nor a matter of decoding, but of enculturation, textual memory, the participatory configuration of an enunciative structure and its conceptual transfiguration, and destructuration (Rossolatos 2013g), as will be shown in greater detail later on. Let this be called a fallacious epistemology (rather than epistemological fallacy), as we are not tracing a syllogistic flaw in an

epistemological theory, but questioning the applicability of an epistemic perspective when describing the process whereby brand image becomes meaningful. As will be shown later on, brand image is a product of memory, but not solely a mind-dependent one, and hence not a matter of cognition, but of enculturation. Enculturation is not reducible to knowing, as it does not follow a procedure for mastering the causal process that spawns phenomena, but of assimilation through learning, uncritical valorization based on group norms, mimetism and inter-subjective mirroring (see Rossolatos 2015f).

11.3 Iconicity as invariant textual condition of brand signification across the linguistic, visual and multimodal turns

Brand semiotics offers a descriptive metalanguage of deductive validity for designing brand languages and for managing them over time. The deductive validity of textual semiotic models emerges from their ability to prescribe alternative courses of action of the elementary units that make up their immanentist universe.

As amply argued throughout the Chapters of this volume (cf., for example, Marrone and Mangano; Mangiapane; Ruiz Collantes and Oliva; Scolari), contemporary semiotics has largely abandoned sign-dependent or sign-originating theorizing, in favour of text-centered perspectives and conditions of textual signification, in a context where the meaning of 'text' has eschewed the strict confines of the verbal mode and of literary oeuvres, to encompass the textual constitution of culture and subjectivity. This shift toward holistic (or, more aptly, comprehensive) frameworks has been notable over the past thirty years not just within the province of semiotics, but across linguistics related disciplines, such as discourse analysis, CDA, cultural pragmatics. In semiotics, its clearer manifestation may be identified in the school of sociosemiotics, where the textual metafunction is posited as the substratum against which analyses

alongside the ideational, interpersonal and experiential metafunctions are enacted (cf. Rossolatos 2015b), and whose orientation has been assimilated largely with that of a textual paradigm by its originator (Halliday 1978).

The textual semiotic approach to culture, which has been antedated and widely popularized by Lotman (cf. Rossolatos 2014b; Mangiapane, this Volume; Marrone 2013), continues to resonate, in more systematic form, in contemporary semiotic accounts that seek to chart the inter-textual embeddedness of cultural artefacts, such as Rastier's extension of micro, meso, macro-semantics to terra-semantics (cf. Rastier 2005a,b,c; Rossolatos 2013b). The vestiges of this pan-textualist, one might say, approach were ingrained in Greimas's programmatic declaration regarding the scope and objective of his inaugural work *Structuralist Semantics* (1966), viz. to furnish the conditions for textual signification (meaning), in a manner akin to the main task of the Kantian epistemological project. Greimasian structuralism, in a sense, inaugurated anew the Enlightenment, against the background of the linguistic turn that took place at the beginning of the 20th C. (only to be, sadly, obliterated, by historically misinformed perspectives, such as cognitivism) which has been succeeded by a visual turn (cf. Mitchell 2005) and, as of late, with a multimodal turn (Rossolatos 2015b).

Each turn has been coupled with a re-orientation in research priorities concerning the type of grammar that could accommodate heterogeneous textual configurations. Wittgenstein's (1953) linguistic (pragmatic) turn pointed to the need for attending to cultural practices and language-in-use, rather than logical semantics, for understanding how words and sentences assume meaning, and to cultural domains, rather than 'semantic domains', for understanding how signs are constantly re-interpreted according to distinctive contexts of use by situated social actors.

The visual turn, that was coupled with and conditioned by the rise of a visio-centric media language to dominant

communicative mode, sensitized researchers to the prevalence of images over verbal expressive units in understanding the language of media, but also to how an image-driven culture morphed in a consumer cultural ethos. The visual turn also rendered compelling the need for and subsequently spawned bespoke treatises and 'grammars', capable of addressing the idiosyncratic signification pathways of the visual mode (e.g., Groupe μ [1992], Kress and van Leeuwen [2001]). The visual turn has been reflected in advances in branding research in aesthetically informed works, such as Schroeder's (2008) analysis of images in brand culture.

Finally, the multimodal turn expanded the scope of scrutiny of 'expressive units' employed in communications (cf. O'Halloran et al., this Volume; Machin and Per, this Volume; Bateman, this Volume); and, subsequently (in small steps), in branding and brand communications research (cf. Rossolatos 2015b), from the visual domain to the multimodal domain. As was the case with the visual turn, the multimodal turn became increasingly concerned with charting the contribution of distinctive modes in the signification of multimodal segments (rather than sentences), the interaction among modes (above all), and the development of bespoke grammars (as befits the mission of social semiotics) that reflect distinctive cultural practices and are more attuned, compared to standard grammar, to their syntactic and semantic aspects.

A textual signification condition, though, that has remained invariably salient across the different turns, is that of iconicity. Brand image intuitively appears to be synonymous to brand iconicity as, after all, an image is a synonym of icon. However, there are significant differences between *iconicity* as (i) *condition of brand signification*, (ii) as *brand image,* that is intelligible (intangible) concepts that are ascribed to brands through correlations with expressive units (iconic and/or multimodal), and (iii) as *brand images* (or, more aptly in the context of the multimodal turn, as multimodal expressive units).

Thus far, we have been mostly concerned with clarifying semiotically categories (ii) and (iii). In the following Section we shall dwell on (i) as a condition of brand textuality.

Despite the fact that the notions of iconicity and pictoriality are occasionally conflated, as will be shown in the ensuing Section based on Eco's (1975, 1978) conventionalist approach to iconic signification, the pictorial sign neither entails, nor presupposes an iconic relationship with an extra-semiotic referent. This thesis entails both that brand images (or multimodal signs) (cf. *supra* type (iii)) establish an iconic relationship with a brand by dint of a convention that allows their recognizability as images of that brand, inasmuch as that the brand image (cf. *supra* type (ii)) with which they are correlated is based on the same convention: this convention is called *iconicity* (cf. *supra* type (i)).

The iconic object is more like an intra-iconic gestalt, as noted by Lindekens, a concept that is akin to Greimas's notion of logico-semantic simulacrum as self-subsistent structure with a particular internal logic of organization (also echoed in Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum as what resembles nothing, but itself; cf. Rossolatos 2015e; and Muller's [2001: 310] notion of 'autoiconism'). The difference between Greimas and the proposed iconicity avenue as textual condition *sine qua non* and principle of brand image configuration and transfiguration is that we are rather concerned with brands as *rhetorico-semantic simulacra*.

11.3.1 Iconicity in Peircean semiotics

The discussion on iconicity which assumes as its vantage point Peirce's triadic conception of signs as iconic, indexical and symbolic, dwells on the fundamental presupposition that the iconic sign has a relationship of similarity between what is depicted and the picture. However, Peirce himself did not approach iconicity as devoid of conventionalism. It is a popular misconception that Peirce's notion of iconic sign is a simple

relationship of resemblance between sign and object. In Peirce's universal categorial system, the icon belongs to the category of firstness, in contrast to the index and symbol, which belong to secondness and thirdness. Firstness is the mode of being which represents "the absolute present […], something which is what it is without reference to anything else" (§ 2.85). The icon participates in firstness because it is "a Sign whose significant virtue is due simply to its Quality" (§ 2.92), or "An Icon is a Representamen whose Representative Quality is a Firstness of it as a First. That is, a quality that it has qua thing renders it fit to be a representamen" (§ 2.276)" (Nöth 1990: 121).

If the criterion of similarity between icon and object rests with some qualia of the object that render it fit to be a representamen (which, as shown by Eco [1978: 154], does not hold), then the question is transposed from the icon's relationship to the iconized object to the mode of cognition whereby these extra iconic qualia may be known. If the relationship between icon and iconized object is incumbent on modes of re-cognition, then a naively realist similarity might as well be mitigated by some sort of Cartesian evil demon. Hence, Peirce is forced to acknowledge that the referential object does not even have to exist. This argument about the potentially erroneous re-cognition of an object's presumed likeness to an image becomes even more compelling if we consider the rhetorical dimension of 'catachresis' that was posited by Eco (1978) in defense of his conventionalist argumentation of iconicity.

In this context, the combined import of the ontological dimension (i.e., object properties) and the dimension of prior perceptual experiences in the formation of 'resembling' memories is recognized, albeit complemented by the rhetorical function of catachresis, that is of the process whereby a metaphorical resemblance has been reified into an arbitrary recognition by virtue of repetition, thus culminating in being perceivable as 'real'. The impact of catachresis on the resemblance potential of an image, and, subsequently, on its distorted portrayal, is

inevitable. The catachrestic distortion of an iconic resemblance is further compounded by graphic conventions (i.e. styles of representation). Furthermore, it is likely to be gravely complicated as we move from single objects (e.g., a flower) toward multimodal expressive units such as filmic sequences that portray "states of affairs" or "slice-of-life" advertising genre executions featuring "life-world emplacement" (Holt 2002: 84). In the case of the latter, the Cartesian "evil demon" is considerably more likely to produce erroneous memories and distorted resemblances. This is why any presumed ontological leaning of semiotic construals in terms of resemblance has been termed by Greimas and Courtés (1986: 111) referential impression (as a milder rendition of Barthes's referential illusion). While presaging the analysis that will follow, such referential illusions were in fact posited by Castoriades (1985) as foundational underpinnings in the constitution of society, as what he termed imaginary social significations that lie at the heart of pseudo-rationality (or the presentation of informally logical premises as rational arguments) and formal institutional forms.

Up until now we have been concerned with analyzing the notion of 'icon' as regards its referential status vis-à-vis objects, This is one among many research areas that have been scrutinized in the icon-related scholarship. Nöth (2001) identified three main classes of iconicity, viz. imaginal, diagrammatic and metaphorical. In the first category, the sign evinces an immediately perceptible similarity to its object of reference; in diagrammatic iconicity, the similarity is purely structural or relational; in metaphorical iconicity, the idea(s) conveyed by a sign are mediated by a *tertium comparationis* (between tenor and vehicle).

In branding terms and against the background of the three categories of image as previously delineated, we may discern a correspondence between diagrammatic iconicity and type (i), that is iconicity as condition of textual signification, and metaphorical iconicity and type (ii), that is brand image. Nöth

(2001) draws a further distinction that is of relevance to our classification, between endophoric and exophoric iconicity. The latter type retains a relationship with an external to the sign referent, whereas the former type is purely self-referential and points to the intra-textual (and, by implication, inter-textual) similarity among signs. In these terms, the textual condition of iconicity as self-referential mirror of culture is an instance of endophoric iconicity (which in many respects is on a par with the definition of simulacrum, as used by Baudrillard, among others; cf. Rossolatos 2015e for further analysis).

The endophoric type of iconicity spans all modes and genres, from literature to advertising, and from verbal, visual to kinetic signs (or expressive units), while its mirroring effect on a rhetorical level is identified by Nöth in the employment of figures such as chiasmus (also see Muller 2001: 320) that repeat the order of lexemes in a clause in inverse order than the preceding one (e.g., day by night, night by day). However, endophoric iconicity as textuality condition, from the point of view of the Brand Imaginarium, runs deeper than the manifest structure of the figure of chiasmus (or antimetabole), as it encompasses and conditions both the perceiving subject and the cultural practices in which a subject engages. From this point of view, as will be shown in greater detail in Section 11.3.3, this form of iconicity as the internal self-referential mirror that binds culture and subjects, is of a pre-reflective nature, and hence more primordial than the processing cogito.

11.3.2 The conventionalist approach to iconic signification

The thesis that what is depicted in an iconic sign is a conventional representation is tantamount to approaching the iconic sign as a matter of habituation into a particular aspect of seeing. Insofar as iconic signs are embedded in a structure of signification, they acquire meaning in the context of brands as motivated signs. Hence, as Eco (1976) argues in *Theory of*

Semiotics (also see Eco 1978), the relationship between iconic expressive units (functives in sign functions) and their counterparts at the content plane is not arbitrary, but motivated and depends on cultural correlational rules (albeit often tacit ones).

These rules, from a brand language point of view, concern a brand's 'inner logic' as rhetorico-semantic simulacrum. Thus, for example, Tony the tiger as iconic sign does not resemble a tiger as its extra-semiotic referent, but the brand Kellogg's Frosties as a plenum of brand images and brand image concepts. The portrayal of an episode from Tony's adventures as a slice-of-life from his counter-factual, fictive, cartoonist universe, does not have an extra-discursive referent, but an intra-fabular resemblance with Tony's lifeworld and the expressive inventory that renders it apt for being assimilated to that lifeworld (also see Nöth 2006).

In fact, the example of slice-of-life sequences, amply employed in advertising, is more relevant for justifying iconic similarity, as it includes a variety of interacting objects, movements, social actors, dialogues, settings that may be recognized as partaking of a brand language by virtue of far more complex relationships of iconicity than any of the cases involved in assuming as points of argumentative departure individual objects (or graphs, paintings, abstract outlines) that are usually evoked in the semiotic literature on iconicity. In this case, we are concerned not simply with iconic signs (which is how iconicity has been largely theorized in the relevant marketing literature thus far; cf. for example Grayson 1998), but with iconic texts (cf. Eco 1978: 164). This type of motivated similarity between a dominant element of a brand's plane of expression and an element of a brand's content plane is an instance of metaphorical iconicity, in Peirce's terms. And in the context of metaphorical iconicity "anything whatever […] is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it" (§ 2.247)" (Nöth 1990: 133; also see Nöth 2001: 21).

Eco spearheaded the iconicity debate in his earlier works *La Structure Absente* (1972) and *Theory of Semiotics* (1976). Throughout his argumentation he follows a conventionalist route to the iconic dimension of pictures. I would like to emphasize his point about the transformations involved in the process of conventionalization of the iconic sign. "Every biunivocal correspondence of points in space is a transformation. A transformation does not suggest the idea of natural correspondence; it is rather the consequence of rules and artifice" (Eco 1976: 200). Quoting Gibson, "similitude is produced and must be learned". The iconic sign, based on Eco's view, is as much conventional as the symbol. Its signification is a matter of enculturation as a prerequisite for correct interpretation. This brings us effectively back to the issue of the figurativity of branding language where similarity was posited in terms of contrived and motivated relationships between objects or concepts that become correlated as terms of a metaphorical similitude.

Eco's account of the conventionalist relationship between iconic signs is plausible insofar as it addresses rhetorical relata as modes of transformation, which is in line with our fundamental position that rhetorical operations of transformation are responsible (in part) for the figurative constitution of brands. Thus, iconicity as figurative similarity among brand textual elements concerns their semantic coherence and syntactical cohesion (Muller 2001: 310; also see Groupe μ's [1970] classification of figures based on whether they perform primarily a semantic or syntactical operation, e.g., metataxes, metasememes) which may be recognized as such based on a brand's inner logic. Iconicity is an instrumental concept for brand semiotics, as conceived in its conventionalist dimension by Eco, insofar as it accounts for the 'internal mirroring' of elementary units of signification as components of identifiable structures.

11.3.3 The expanded version of iconicity as inter-subjective mirroring

Having, thus far, analyzed how the endophoric type of iconicity works as textuality condition (11.3.1), from the point of view of the Brand Imaginarium, and why due to the conventionalist nature of iconicity it constitutes a brand's inner logic (11.3.2), let us proceed with the expansive outlook to the mirroring process, from brands to culture, and consumers in between.

This mirroring process has been theorized by Luckmann as lying at the heart of the internalization process of social structures: "through processes of "intersubjective mirroring" which are based upon the fundamental reciprocity of the we-relation" (Vaitkus 1990: 122). Even if one does not agree with the so-called internalization hypothesis (which I do not find plausible), Luckmann's insightful conceptualization, from a sociological point of view, does have its counterpart in Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the mirror phase is conceptualized as "an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito* (Lacan 1977)" (Dolar 2003: 3), an individuation process that begins with the infant's reflection in its mirror image, and conditions the evolution of subjectivity throughout adult life (a process that largely accounts for the phenomenon of contagion and the viral, pre-reflective[4] diffusion of brand imagery through inter-subjective identifications; cf. Rossolatos 2015d).

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[4] An analogon of how such pre-reflective mirroring functions toward the generation of a collective identity in the face of a music artist as brand may be found in Rossolatos (2015d). In that study, Lacan's Schema L that maps how individual subjectivity is formed inter-subjectively through multi-directional gazing encounters among fans and between fans and a semiotized musical act as brand on stage was applied against the background of participant observation and in-depth interviews.

The mirror stage, insofar as it is indeed formative of the function of the I, demonstrates that the I, the ego, is a place of an imaginary blinding, a deception; far from being the salutary part of the mind that could serve as a firm support of the psychoanalytic cure, against the vagaries of the id and the superego (such was the argument of ego-psychology), rather, it is itself the source of all kinds of fantasy formations. If such is the nature of the I, then it must be most sharply opposed to cogito, with its inherent pretension to self-transparency and self-certainty. (Dolar 2003: 3-4)

It should be noted that this conceptualization of inter-subjective mirroring is of social ontological orientation, as a primordial mode of being-with, which antedates and underlies social psychological conceptualizations of pre-reflective mimicry as "social glue that promotes communication" (Janiszweski 2008: 405).

This foundational identificatory mirroring is an exemplary case of the imaginary constitution of subjectivity, as remarked by Silverman (1983: 157), which is reflected, in turn, in the inter-subjective constitution of the subject (particularly important for communicative memory, as will be analyzed in Section 11.4). As shown quite vividly by Taylor (2004: 23), "the social imaginary is that common understanding [my note: tacit and pre-reflective] that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."

The Brand Imaginarium is an attempt to expand the scope of this mirroring as all-encompassing iconic condition of cultural textual production, that includes an account of the interplay between cultural (collective) memory and individual memory (which relationship is effaced or noted *en passant* in cogito-centric cognitivist models). To understand how this mirroring works, we need to dig deeper into the relationship between imagination, memory and what Castoriades called imaginary social significations as constitutive of culture.

The semiotically inflected thesis formulated by Castoriades resonates the fundamental Aristotelian distinction between primary (productive) and secondary (re-productive) imagination, where the former functions ontologically as primary condition for creativity (McLean 2003) or, as called by Castoriades (1985), radical imagination or originary phantasmization (which resonates Heidegger's assimilation of productive imagination [phantasia] to the originary act of truth's movement as bringing forth from unconcealment; cf. Rossolatos 2013h).

By virtue of imagination's semi-dependence on sensory 'stimuli' and semi-dependence on already stored memories or images, *imago* or icon is by definition 'erroneous', as noted by McLean (2003), as it does not correspond *stricto sensu* to either of these sources of memory formation. As will be shown later on, this 'erroneous' nature of images, and the imaginary that spawns them, are in fact ontologically necessary for the subject's mis-recognition of itself in another, a pre-reflective mirroring that is responsible for sustaining a cultural imaginary and the figurative constitution of brand language that is mirrored in imaginary social significations (Castoriades 1985).

Imagination performed a pivotal role in Kant's apparatus of Pure Reason[5] in the Chapter on Schematism in his first Critique, at the intersection between sensibility, perception and the formation of concepts of empirical understanding (also see Rossolatos 2013h). According to Kant (1781: 182) "it is schemata, not images of objects, which underlie our pure sensible concepts." No specific image could ever be adequate to a concept in its universality. Schemata, as acts of pure synthesis

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[5] Kant dwells on the role of imagination throughout his writings, including his moral and aesthetic philosophies. However, since here we are concerned primarily with a critique of cognitivist epistemology, the focus is laid on the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For critical discussions on the role of imagination in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*, see Freydberg (2005) and Kneller (2007) respectively.

of imagination, are responsible for furnishing such abstract universal concepts. Kant's schematism was a truly revolutionary philosophical (rhetorical) stratagem, insofar as he leveraged imagination not only as a faculty that produces empirically contingent images (brand images in our case), but as a faculty that by virtue of clinging onto the armory of Pure Reason, is burdened with producing purified, one might say, images that depend on Reason, and not on the senses (although imagination borrows from both sources). Nevertheless, judging from consequences, this is a case of Reason's deluding itself while investing the contingency of the singular with the cloak of necessity of the universal, which is why in the *civitas* of cognitivism imagination had to be effaced. Yet, within the contours of Kantian epistemology, imagination's synthetic activity was foundational in fleshing out empirical concepts. The synthetic activity of the faculty of imagination was called by Kant figurative synthesis, to which he referred as a hidden art in the depths of the human soul. Thus, not only the foundational character of imagination in furnishing brand languages was laid bare, as con- and transfigurations, but also as being responsible for configuring the social imaginary. Insofar as these configurations are incumbent on rhetoric, "rhetorical iconicity does not consist in a mirroring of objective reality, but in structuring reality" (Muller 2001: 307). Not at all surprisingly, the Kantian figurative synthesis that resurfaced in Husserlean phenomenology as passive synthesis, was invested with the power to answer "'all the riddles of the "unconscious" and the various processes of "becoming conscious" (Elliott 2005: 54).

The schema that results from the figurative synthetic process of the imagination is akin to a second-order image, not simply as type of an empirical image (i.e., the type of tree that may be instantiated in various empirical images of trees), but as image of a pure concept in all its abstraction. For example, in terms of brand language, a schema of adventurousness that may include images of wild-life, jeeps, heat, etc. This interim faculty in

the cogito is pivotal for understanding how categories (ii) and (iii) in 11.3.1 (brand images and brand image) interrelate in the imagination (albeit in a restrictive fashion as regards the source of meaning of each category, and, above all, of their modes of configuration/transfiguration). However, it is a necessary stepping-stone, and not simply in terms of the history of ideas, for understanding the fashionable concept of schema in the context of cognitivism, and the role that schemata perform as super-ordinate containers of subordinate representations. "The schema, throughout its history, has been a concept shrouded in mystery. Kant's use of the term has been provocative but difficult to understand" (Rumelhart et al. 1986: 17). Despite the question-begging nature of this proclaimed 'difficulty', schematism raises questions as to why the faculty of imagination was later suppressed by cognitivism (but not schematism as such, at least not by all strands), only to re-emerge in more sociologically and psychoanalytically inclined perspectives, while having survived as traces in legacy concepts that were carried over to cognitive psychology, such as imagery (verbal and visual; see, for example, Anderson 2015: 79). An exegesis that looms quite plausibly in the horizon concerns the cognitivist need for acquiring scientific status, and hence, the need for doing away with any ambiguity in cogito's ability to obtain knowledge, rather than furnish epistemically ambiguous representations (due to, as explained earlier, being informed in its synthetic process by both prior memories and by actual stimuli). Insofar as the hybrid memories furnished by the imaginary might as well constitute the outcome of an 'evil demon' who draws on stored memories and defiles the sensory input of representations (a dual source of 'stimuli' that was coupled with *phantasia* quite recurrently from Plato until Kant; cf. Cocking 1991), imagination does not abide very neatly by cogito's demands. Let it be noted in passing that if imagination poses challenges to the integrity of cognitivist structures for these reasons, then cognitivism would be even more uncomfortable with Hegel's account of memory, recollection

and imagination, for whom "memory involves the repeated traversing of the associational pathways of the imagination" (Bates 2004: 104), but this is a wholly different chapter.

Returning now to Peirce, "the Icon does not stand unequivocally for this or that existing thing, as the Index does. Its Object may be a pure fiction, as to its existence (§ 4.531)" (Nöth 1990: 123). "Both existent things and non-existent, merely fictional or imaginary ideas can thus be the objects of a picture" (Nöth 2003: 7). The issue with the latter formulation is that it does not take account of the productive character of imagination in shaping the object in the first place, and hence employing a denigrating (to the imaginary) distinction between fictive (e.g., centaurs [cf. Nöth 2006] or unicorns [cf. Dureau 2000]) and non-fictive. This false dichotomy is what often gives rise to a mirage, as noted by Sartre, who adds that "I believe that the object of my consciousness is a complex of real but not externalized sensible qualities, whereas these qualities are perfectly externalized but imaginary" (Sartre 2004: 87). Yet, as suggested by the preceding analysis, the mirage is not the fictive, but the non-recognition of the imaginary's constitutive character with regard to non-fictive objects and concepts. This asymmetric conceptualization compared to the constitutionally pivotal role performed by imagination in the production of representations has been carried over to contemporary cognitive psychological theories of narrativity, such as transportation theory (cf. Green and Donahue 2009, and Ruiz Collantes and Oliva, this Volume).

11.4 Memory as iconic re-cognition and re(as)semblance

If iconicity is the overarching brand textuality condition whereby heterogeneous expressive units are correlated with specific brand image concepts under the aegis of a brand name, the question emerges as to how this 'formalist' condition is reflected on an individual level in brand-related memory. Extensive answers have been provided by cognitive psychology to this end, in terms of stimuli processing under variegated experimental conditions,

which have fuelled consumer/advertising research studies, nevertheless, as is customarily the case, not absolutely conclusively (due to variations in samples, test-conditions, etc.).

Although the branding literature thrives with associationist models as adaptations of the increasingly popular perspective of connectionism[6] that has sought to explain at least aspects of brand memory, still these applications employ terminology of 'mixed origin', one might say, that is by assuming as elementary units whereby test subjects are primed for responses 'stimuli', that are half inspired by information theory *qua* signals, and half inspired by a naturalistic, medicinal paradigm *qua* sensory input from an external to a human organism environment (but also macaque, rat, etc., organism, depending on the species of the test subjects by experimental occasion and without taking into account that these species are not brand-savvy; or at least we think they are not).

This fundamental assumption about the elementary units of memory formation and retrieval is one among the various points where connectionism is at odds with the paradigm of brand textuality, and for semiotically valid reasons. As noted repeatedly by semiotic scholars (e.g., Eco, Nöth, Rastier; cf. Rossolatos 2014a), in human communication (whence stems the 'input' for the formation of brand associations, rather than from some hazily conceived 'external environment'), the elementary units are not signals, but signs, or, as framed thus far in this Chapter, 'multimodal expressive units' (e.g., a print ad, a hierarchically subordinate expressive unit of a print ad in a multiply articulated structure or a shot/frame/sequence from an ad film). Let this be considered as the most foundational difference between cognitivism and brand textual semiotics, the importance of which will become increasingly compelling as the argumentation progresses. In the following Section, we delve

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[6] cf. Rossolatos 2013c, 2014a for a literature review, and McClelland 2000; McClelland & Cleeremans 2009 for an overview of connectionist models, regardless of their adaptation to branding.

further into the most eminent differences between the cognitivist perspective of connectionism that is currently dominant in brand image (and equity) research and the propounded brand textuality approach, against the dimensions of memory formation and memory retrieval. The deploying argumentation will pave the way for a revision of memory towards a more culturologically pertinent direction.

But, first, let us define memory in the light of iconicity as condition for brand textual signification. As explained in the previous Section, iconicity essentially accounts for how heterogeneous expressive units come to resemble a brand name and its image. This principle incited us to identify brands with rhetorico-semantic simulacra or as intra-iconic gestalts. The subject that is exposed to brand related expressive units (and not just stimuli, as non semiotically pre-formed syncretic entities; cf. Fontanille 1999), then, is not summoned merely to recall, but to reascribe meaning by resembling the presented units with the brand's structural gestalt (a resemblance that corresponds to Nöth's diagrammatic iconicity category as displayed in Section 11.3.1). What is not accounted for by the connectionist models to memory formation is the way whereby this resemblance is effected or how iconicity is fleshed out. The answer to this 'how' lies, while running ahead of ourselves, with modes of textual configuration or rhetorical figures as relata among a brand's multimodal expressive units. This is a massive weakness in the connectionist perspective that may be filled by the proposed brand textuality approach, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following Section, viz. that whereas connectionism assumes as sufficient explanatory ground for how links are created between nodes in memory their relative strength (regardless of any qualitative criteria that would further identify the nature of those links), the proposed iconicity approach qualifies these links as rhetorical figures, thus explaining why the highly figurative language of brands is responsible for their constitution as rhetorico-semantic simulacra.

Recollection, against the background of the overarching principle of iconicity, is tantamount to re-cognition as re(as)semblance of expressive units and image concepts, which re(as)semblance is brought about by a rhetorical figurative syntax that determines how expressive units are linked, and hence how they are assembled under the aegis of determinate image concepts. The more we move from primary iconicity to tertiary iconicity, as will be shown in Section 11.5, the more effortlessly this re-cognition as re-collection/re(as)semblance is enacted, not because of more solid memory patterns in the neocortex, but because of the attainment of the respective brand memory in becoming deeply rooted into cultural memory.

11.4.1 Individual memory formation and memory retrieval: Connectionism vs. brand textuality

In this Section we discuss key differences between connectionism (and more specifically the Parallel Distributed Processing [PDP] strand that is often evoked in brand associationist studies), and brand textuality, vis-à-vis the dimensions of memory formation and memory retrieval.

The process of memory formation according to the PDP perspective consists in "a set of changes in the instructions neurons send to each other, affecting what patterns of activity can be constructed from given inputs. When an event is experienced, on this view, it creates a pattern of activity over a set of processing units. This pattern of activity is considered to be the representation of the event" (McClelland 2000: 584). The generation of a recollection has been couched as follows: "under some circumstances as, for example, when the constructive process takes place in response to a recall cue, the cue may result in the construction of a pattern of activation that can be viewed as an attempted reconstruction of the pattern that represented the previously experienced event. Such a reconstructed representation corresponds to a recollection. The patterns themselves are not stored, and hence are not really

retrieved: recall amounts not to retrieval but to reconstruction" (McClelland 2000: 584).

According to the popular cognitivist PDP perspective, almost dominant in inherited conceptual frameworks (and, subsequently, constructs) in consumer behavior (including brand image research) from cognitive psychology, brand related representations constitute relational networks of nodes and links (akin to synaptic relations among neurons) that are stored in different parts of the brain, to be activated in the face of salient stimuli (cues) such as priming a test subject with a brand name. "In PDP models […] the patterns themselves are not stored. Rather, what is stored is the connection strengths between units that allow these patterns to be re-created […] For learning, the implications are equally profound. For if the knowledge is the strengths of the connections , learning must be a matter of finding the right connection strengths so that the right patterns of activation will be produced under the right circumstances" (McClelland et al. 1986: 31-32). The 'perception' of a brand name automatically triggers a process of recognition in the form of co-occurring processes of retrieval of relevant properties from memory, pertaining to the concerned brand, that is properties that have been stored in memory with stronger links among them than others.

The stimuli with which subjects are primed may be a brand name or expressive units from its advertising. The latter presents a more complex scenario and, largely, empirical studies of activation patterns have been enacted against the background of brand names, rather than complex configurations of ad stimuli. As noted repeatedly by cognitivists, this is a simulation of synaptic processes[7] and not an exact replication of the processes

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[7] "Connectionist models are like simplified maps of cognitive systems inspired by the organization of the brain. They are not atlas-like maps of the nervous system, but relatively abstract representations that seek to capture key functional features of neural information processing" (Flusberg & McClelland 2014).

that deploy in different parts of the brain in the light of multifarious configurations, rather than simple stimuli. And the more complex the stimuli, as "configurations of cues" (van Osselaer 2008), the less canonical the activation patterns, given that such models are robust only against the background of a limited number of satisfaction constraints. The same inverse relationship between added layers of complexity in a model (in terms of endogenous or exogenous variables) and the fulfillment of the criterion of parsimony has been noted in structural equation modeling (cf. Bagozzi et al. 1991).

Each memory (and its recollection), according to the connectionist model of memory, is made of processing units (microfeatures). Although not explicitly recognized as such, this approach to the building blocks of memory follows an atomistic rationale, viz. that a concept is formed atomistically by combining individual units. It is just that instead of positing an additive process whereby this combinatory is achieved, connectionists opt for a networked approach among individual units, based on values that reflect the weight of their inter-connections. The reason why connectionists hold that what is stored in memory is just units, and not patterns, is that they have not incorporated schemata (i.e., 2nd order, grouping representations, as per Section 11.3.3) in their approach. On the contrary, as amply shown by the gestaltic camp, representations tend to form on the grounds of an interplay between individual units and abstract schemata, i.e., gestalts that organize them in higher levels of abstraction.

The recalling subject, at least as regards the figurative language of brands (which are not comparable to objects, such as chairs, that are regularly evoked by cognitivists to illustrate how memory works: see, for example, Brakus 2008), does not activate a network of atomistic units in knitty-gritty structures that are distributed in different parts of the 'brain', but, each time

one is exposed to a salient expressive unit, one is driven to re-configure it in a figurative structure of nodes and links, where different nodes are linked by dint of rhetorical figures as figurative relata. If this were not the case, and if we were concerned with simple instances of decoding, rather than of complex textual destructuration (cf. Rossolatos 2013g), then we would not be encountering so many cases of aberrant positioning and incorrect association of ad messages with their semantic content. And here we are not referring simply to metaphorical/metonymic relations which have been the sole (figuratively related) province of cognitivism (also applied to ads), which was presaged by the Freudian theory of the formation of the dreamwork (and which it hardly managed to surpass; cf. Rossolatos 2014 for parallels between the dreamwork and the 'brandwork'), but to a much wider roster of figures that have been establishing all sorts of nuanced relations across modes and expressive units in brandcomms vehicles (cf. the model //rhetor.dixit// in Rossolatos 2013f, 2014c).

What is of particular interest at this juncture is the exclusion from connectionism of schemata (McClelland et al. 1986: 7) or higher order representations in memory. This exclusionary tactic, alongside the most alarming exclusion of imagination[8], as already noted in Section 11.3.3, contravenes the very essence of brand image concepts. As explained in Section 11.3.3, a brand image concept (e.g., adventurousness) is meaningful against the background of individual brand images, with which it relates iconically (through endophoric iconicity) and without which it is not meaningful. The main task of brands is to solidify these transfigurations between concrete brand images and brand image concepts, in a manner that thwarts similar

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[8] And yet, most remarkably, Flusberg & McClelland (2014) invite their readership to "**imagine** that activations of units are updated continuallyin time, just as the position of a moving object changes continually." (my emphasis)

dovetailings by the competition. Hence, not only brand image concepts, by definition, may not be atomic units, but, quite contrary to a basic assumption made by connectionist psychology, they should be stored as patterns in memory in a gestalt that includes brand name, brand image concepts and their corresponding brand images (or multimodal expressive units). Otherwise, during the recall stage, there is no guarantee or no way of calculating probabilistically that through spreading activation, the priming of a subject with a brand image will trigger a superordinate brand image concept, in a manner that also connects this 'co-firing' with the even more superordinate brand name. Thus, a simple network approach, completely cut off from any hierarchical relations among the 'units' themselves simply does not make sense, from a branding point of view. In other words, a brand image concept cannot be included in a network as unit of the same level of abstraction as brand images as units (and the same holds for a brand name).

But the differences between brand textuality and connectionism do not stop here. Assumptions are radically divergent as regards: (i) the connectionist precarious imbrication of mind with brain (ii) the localization of the source of stimuli at the level of the 'external environment' and concomitantly (iii) the expulsion of imagination and schematism from the mind's apparatus (iv) the adoption of an information theoretic perspective as against a semiotic one in terms of the nature of minimal units, viz. signals rather than signs (v) the identification of cues with simple stimuli (mostly objects and simple names) rather than with rhetorical relata and complex states of affairs (vi) the dislocation of the processing subject from any inter-subjective sphere of interaction and sub-conscious, pre-reflective modes of imposing iconic similarities (vii) the dependence of individual memory on cultural memory and the power of the latter to furnish schemata for subsuming stimuli as signs that do not depend on individual brain processes, but on culturally defined aspects of seeing or seeing *as* (cultural memory will be

displayed in the following section) (viii) As a consequence, whereas connectionism follows a reductionist path to knowledge formation, a brand textuality approach recognizes that the source of meaning of 'representations' lies with the distinctive cultural practices in which a situated individual engages, including power structures that provide orientation markers as to how representations will be configured and transfigured in patterns that are independent of brain-related formative processes (and hence conditioning of retrieval cues). And the praxiological meaning of signs tends to change often radically based on which cultural practice angle it is seen from (ix) the importance of a-typical representations (singular associations) for brand language renovation and infusing life into a culture, rather than a 'problematic' and maladjusted/able aspect of network homeostasis, or, in connectionist lingo, "catastrophic interference." Let us now consider these points in greater detail.

As regards (i), Descombes' (1990) sweeping arguments against cognitivism have been instrumental in demonstrating the lack of any causal relationship between a material substratum (brain) and a manifest phenomenon (mental processes) that would legitimate us to assimilate the mind with the brain. This is a most naively realist instance of naturalized epistemology, whereby faculties that have been traditionally assigned to the Mind (as a non-physical entity) throughout millennia of philosophizing, suddenly, and in utter disregard of lengthy philosophical discussions as to why such an imbrication is not permissible, cognitivism chose to reify philosophical concepts. Suffice it to point out, for the sake of historical antecedents and solutions to such problematic imbrications, that Kant's transcendental idealist epistemology sought to overcome the impasses of the prior philosophical perspectives of realism and idealism. Kant rejected any material dimension of the Mind, as by doing so he would reduce the Mind to a *res extensa* which is a property of empirical objects that are cognized (construed) by the Mind, and not of the Mind itself. Surely since Kant's time

epistemological perspectives have arisen that have challenged transcendental idealist premises, while involving the entire body in the process of cognition (e.g., Varela 1991; also see Petitot et al. 1999), however the reason why it merits invoking Kant is that cognitivism's reductionist approach of mind to brain is very similar to pre-Kantian naïve realism (which largely informs any form of biologism), rather than post-Kantian perspectives.

As regards (ii), the localization of stimuli in a hazily conceived external environment, rather than signs that are part and parcel of cultural fields and their attendant cultural practices, and hence already semiotized according to specific contexts of use and exchange, has been coupled with the possibility of blending stimuli as 'raw sensory material' or 'brute facts' with images stored in memory, thus producing illusory perceptions ("conditions exist in which normal subjects also produce substantial illusory conjunctions" Henderson and McClelland [2011: 162]). Not only this thesis is utterly inadmissible from a brand textuality point of view, but also, as shown in the context of imaginary schematism, any 'input' constitutes an already quasi-elaborated re-enactment of or assimilation to schemata stored in memory. As shown in 11.3.3, not recognizing this by definition mixed origin of representations is the source of 'mirages', rather than assuming fictive representations as 'real'.

The difference from the brand textuality paradigm is that what connectionists tag pejoratively as 'illusory correlations' reflects the very essence of imaginary textual structures, from which viewpoint, quite on the inverse, what is 'illusory' is the presumption of the 'reality' (a most naïve form of realism indeed) of connectionist associative patterns, whence stems the term so often used by Barthes, Greimas, Rastier, among others, viz. 'referential illusion'. And if the most striking manifestation of these presumed illusory correlations is the so-called "catastrophic interference principle", viz. "any attempt to add arbitrary new information into connection weights" (McClelland 2000: 18), where connection weights "are generally viewed as the repository

of prior experience that survives the patterns of activation produced during the experience itself" (McClelland and Cleeremans 2009), then this principle reflects the unease experienced by connectionists in the face of highly singular configurations and transfigurations at the level of primary iconicity. The bad news is that this principle is the principle of ad creativity that fuels brand languages and that is responsible for their renovation, inasmuch as for infusing life into cultural forms. Highly figurative brand language may be said, according to the connectionist rationale, to be catastrophic, as in the context of constant and often radically new configurations among expressive units (as 'input') and the intended equally novel transfigurations into brand image concepts, they do confer oscillations in linked units in memory. Rhetorical configurations are surely catastrophic for the ideal, repetitive type envisioned by the connectionist model, that assumes a very restrictive notion of similarity, akin to the most naively realist version of Peirce's theory, as outlined in Section 11.3.

The connectionist solution (cf. McCleland 2000) for circumventing such catastrophic interferences is the (speculative) suggestion of another memory system, compared to the neocortical slow-learning one, where such potentially catastrophic stimuli for the maintenance of more stable episodically stored memories are provisionally contained, prior to either being forgotten or integrated into episodic memory based on a process of interleaving (cf. McClelland 2000: 592). "The fast learning MTL system, working together with the neocortical system, thus provides a way to eventually knit the newly formed memory into the fabric of what is already known to the slow-learning neocortical system" (McClelland 2000: 19). Ultimately, "possible fixes (allowing changes only in certain layers of weights or using different learning rates in different layers) could be proposed" (McClelland 2013: 14), such as the heuristic of "sparse random conjunctive coding [that] allows rapid learning of new memories in a very simple way. It assigns a distinct representation,

minimizing overlap with other memories" (McClelland 2000: 584), however a final solution to this 'principle' is still pending.

As regards (iv) and (v), as stressed earlier, connectionism integrates units in networks based on their strength of connection, while leaving unaccounted for any qualitative dimension of these connections. The metric of constantly re-adjusted connection weights masks a plethora of processes of configuration and transfiguration whereby brand images are linked syntagmatically (horizontally) and transformed in brand image concepts. These modes of brand language configuration are incumbent on rhetorical operations and rhetorical figures as shown in Rossolatos (2013c,d,e,f; 2014a). From a brand textuality point of view, we are not concerned merely with making suggestions about which expressive units are connected with what semantic content, but, even more importantly, with qualifying these modes of connectivity with rhetorical modes of configuration.

"We assume very simple connection strength modulation mechanisms which adjust the strength of connections between units based on information locally available at the connection" (McClelland et al. 1990: 32). On the contrary, a textual memory approach qualifies these links in a number of ways: as (i) production techniques – regarding ad films (ii) rhetorical relata (figures) (iii) logical relations (e.g., follows, is preceded by, explains etc.). And this account is far more nuanced than the simplified PDP approach. For example, is a set of cues strongly correlated with a concept because it has been communicated as such through the differential employment of a pun or a hyperbole (considering competitive discourse and a category's diachronic communications)? Was a strong link registered in memory because of this exact figurative stratagem that enhanced the probability of its recall when presented with the correct stimuli? Unless a perspective is potent enough to answer such questions, chances are that the simplified account offered by the cognitivist perspective will simply afford to level off what

matters most in brand communications, that is the rhetorical constitution of brand language and, by extension, the figurative construal of its receiver as partaking of the structural edifice of brand language.

An ad cue or 'stimulus' is never presented in isolation, but as already configured in a textual setting by employing figurative relata. Nowhere and never is it possible to present exactly the same configuration in a new ad film, for example. This is also due to the inherently erroneous, as previously noted, nature of imaginary significations that are partly conditioned by material stimuli and partly by an inventory of already configured signs in memory. Hence, the presentation of a stimulus is never a simple case of re-producing a faithful image based on exactly the same input. Surely the same expressive units may be identified, but the appeal of the message is incumbent on its configurational modes, and not, atomistically, on expressive units

Relata, from a structuralist point of view (and let it be reminded that PDP functions within a structuralist mindframe), are more important than units. Unless these relata are accounted for, in a more nuanced fashion than calculating their strength, then it is impossible to account for differential modes of brand textual configuration. Hence, a brand textuality perspective in brand image generation and modes of storage/retrieval should at least be considered as being on a par, in terms of importance, with the cognitivist/connectionist approach that addresses similar matters. Whereas a PDP model works in branding terrain within a neatly identified roster of schemata that are populated by representational units that are linked in their clearly identified domains at a disproportionately higher level than other links/modes/ patterns, textual memory recognizes the figuratively rich and tropically unpredictable employment of networks between expressive units (rather than stimuli) and semantic content. Indeed, whereas when they refer to syntax Rumelhart et al. (1986) consider only grammatically correct syntactical configurations, textual memory also considers

figurative/rhetorical correlations, that are highly idionsyncratic, idiolectal and often akin to private languages (that may not even be expressed in verbal terms).

The brand textuality paradigm, by virtue of assuming as point of departure for the generation of semiotic constraints cultural practices, problematizes the type/mode of minimal units that should be posited as expressive elements, as well as how such units will branch off both to lower and toward higher strata. McClelland (2000) contends that connectionist units and whole connectionist networks can be construed as optimal Bayesian estimators of conditional probabilities, without having elaborated on the nature of 'units' that may be accommodated by such probabilistic models in the first place; and at this juncture, Metz's remark that it is impossible to delineate a priori a minimal unit in filmic language (and, by extension, ad filmic language, as key source of brand language), should be 're-called' as a ubiquitous challenger to connectionist assumptions: "The minimal unit is not given in the text; it is a tool of analysis. There are as many types of minimal units as there are types of analysis" (Metz 1974: 194).

The entire cognitivist explanatory endeavor appears to be a clear case of what Zizek (1992) has called, with reference to the unconscious, retroactive causality, which constitutes a recurrent instance of the logical fallacy of affirming the cause from its consequences (rather than from direct observation). Indeed, this is how the notion of the soul that preceded that of the Mind in classical antiquity was coined, that is via a sheer nominalistic procedure by Aristotle in *De Anima* in the face of an aporetic argumentation about what is that human faculty that may move an entire organism without being moved by external stimuli, that is the soul (to the same extent that the mind may spawn memories of representations which, in turn, may be traced to, or wishfully reconstrued as 'external stimuli').

11.4.2 Breaking through to the culture side: From individual, to communicative and cultural memory

In order to address points (vii) and (viii) that were raised in the previous Section, two additional to individual memory types will be considered, viz. communicative and cultural memory.

Assmann (2008), by drawing on Halbwachs' seminal concept of collective memory, divides it more sharply into "communicative" and "cultural memory". These two forms complement his tripartite division of memory into individual, communicative, cultural, while remarking that the only recognized form of memory ever since the 1920s has been the first type (which is the case with cognitivism).

The reasons why cultural and communicative memory are more important than individual memory as explanatory mechanisms both of identity formation and of the ways whereby brand meaning is shaped, may be elucidated by attending to Assmann's discussion of each of these two types in turn, while linking them to the cognitivist primary material on which memory works, that is the 'stimulus'.

Thus, from the point of view of cultural memory, as noted by Assmann (2008: 111) "things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other lieux de memoire." This explanatory remark is crucial as it points out clearly to the fundamental precondition for shaping individual memory, that is the essence of a stimulus. Thus, what is hazily referred to as stimulus of the external environment by cognitivism is not a thing or some sort of culturally unqualified 'sensory manifold' (as Kant would term it), but, instead, an always already culturally mediated and meaningful artifact that is related to concrete cultural practices.

This position holds even more forcefully for states-of-affairs, rather than objects, and let it be noted that a major reason why epistemology in Kant's first Critique took a

naturalistic path, rather a social one, is that his focus lied with conditions of possibility of knowing 'objects', rather than states of affairs, and/or objects as dislocated from states of affairs, e.g., how the empirical concept of a tree is formed, regardless of the discrete functions of trees, as decorum, as oxygen-providers, as sources of fireplace wood. In short, Kant never deemed that the culturological context of use of an object is largely responsible for determining this object as such and such, rather than a faculty of the Mind.

This lack of perspective spawned the same impasses that plagued Husserlean solipsism, viz. how come different individual minds form the same representations or the same meaning of objects (an impasse that social phenomenologists set out to overcome precisely by seeking recourse to what Assmann called in the above distinction communicative memory, rather than individual memory)? The same holds for the term 'advertising stimulus' that is standardly employed in quantitative and qualitative advertising studies, where stimulus is also used for a finished creative execution. Firstly, a finished ad (say, print) is not an individual stimulus, but an ensemble of stimuli that have been concatenated according to a specific combinatorial rationale, and, hence, the atomistic term stimulus (if not complex stimulus), does not hold by definition. Second, even if we employ a term such as 'complex stimulus', still we fail to account for how its components have been concatenated, or their combinatorial rationale, or their existing meaning(s) according to specific contexts of use. Surely no stimulus is projected in an ad message in the absence of specific assumptions that undergird its mode of configuration. Hence, any study that sets out to gauge consumers' perceptions of different stimuli without having explained what is the intended meaning of the stimulus, suggests that the process of rendering a percept meaningful is simply a process that depends on consumers' 'minds'. This, evidently, is not the case, as either stimuli are loaded with specific, perhaps more than one, meanings and hence are parts of a cultural

memory, or constitute novel configurations, in which case they depend on communicative memory. In either case, individual memory is the last resort for understanding where lies the repository of meanings of stimuli, or, rather, cultural artifacts. And if stimuli are already loaded with meaning, then we are not concerned with 'brute facts' or 'sensory input', but with more or less well-formed signs. And if the Mind is incited to recollect or form associations based on re-presented signs, then the Mind is not the cause of representations, but an intermediary between receiving and storing signs, either temporarily in a buffer zone as parts of short-term communicative memory, or more permanently in long-term memory as parts of cultural memory (until revised in a constantly evolving learning curve that involves forgetting).

There is ample conversational analytic evidence on how recollection (and forgetting) are enacted in ordinary communicative interaction (cf., for example, Middleton and Brown 2005: 84-100), a crucial aspect that, again, may not be captured by focusing on individual cogitations. Attempts have been made by the so-called discursive psychological field to appropriate this interactionist approach to memory formation (cf. Brown and Reavey 2015), as of late. However, its historical formation and the disciplinary framework wherein it was born and developed are traceable to social phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (and still practiced within these disciplines). Either way, signs are constantly renegotiated as to their interpersonal meaning in the context of regular engagement in communicative memory settings.

In this context, communicative memory is key in understanding how cultural memory morphs in a repository of meanings, and how this repository is, in turn, engraved in individual memory. It corresponds, in a sense, to the individual acts of parole which may crystallize in a system of meanings, in Saussurean terms, but may also perish as momentary and fanciful exchange of signs. In this respect, as noted by Assmann (2008), communicative memory is neither formalized, nor

stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited duration. We shall not examine which messages and why do not attain to become part of cultural memory, as this is a wholly different topic that by far eschews the limits of this analysis, save for highlighting the indispensable role this interim form of memory, that is between cultural and individual, performs in furnishing 'stimuli' for recollection. Communicative memory produces fleeting imaginary stimuli, inasmuch as reproduces symbolic representations that are culturally meaningful as parts of a collective repository and hence recognizable without particular effort (according to what Eco [1975] calls *ratio facilis*) by their recipients.

As Greimas has stressed repeatedly (see Rossolatos 2014a) structures are primarily responsible for the organization of the imaginary. According to Keller (1998), brand knowledge structures draw largely on cognitive psychology. Could the aforementioned Greimasian structuralist semiotic tenet be dissonant, one might ponder, with the cognitive psychological underpinnings of Keller's conception of brand knowledge structures? An ineradicable bifurcation inheres in the answer to this question. This bifurcation consists in the role performed by the imaginary in the formation of brand image. In the context of Keller's cognitivist approach there seems to be little space for the epistemic accommodation of the imaginary. In fact, imagination appears to have been expelled from the epistemic dimension that the construct of brand knowledge structure seeks to encapsulate. The suppression of this faculty within the contours of Keller's cognitivist approach that passed under the critical radar, constrains our ability to account for how brand image emerges through a highly figurative discourse, such as advertising.

Not at all oddly, but sadly truthfully, the majority of idiolectal brand communications produce memories (according to the function of communicative memory) by employing expressive units that partake of both the symbolic, as well as the imaginary.

But given that cultural memory depends on communicative memory for its formation, we may surmise that the symbolic is in fact produced by the imaginary. And, by implication, individual memory, which does not simply and uncritically reproduce existing symbolic cues from a cultural repository, but actively and 'imaginatively' recreates existing symbols, but also coins novel signs that are inserted anew in the trajectory of communicative memory, the subject and its individual memory are formed via the faculty of imagination. In other words, the subject does not process, it is rhetorically configured through communicative and cultural memory, with which it engages re-configuratively. This virtuous circular relationship amongst the three types of memory affords to elucidate how Castoriades' (1985) imaginary social significations are brought about and circulate in the social imaginary.

The communicative memory, proposed by Assmann, on the one hand, accounts for the missing link between how Halbwach's collective memory is reflected in individual memory, while, on the other hand, affords to shed light to why perception is not concerned with stimuli as 'brute facts', but as already semiotized through a "rhetoric of collective memory" (Erll 2008: 392), and, hence, pre-mediated through an inter-medial rhetoric (Erll 2008). This rhetoric is capable of being transformed into parts of cultural memory and, hence, through habituation to shape individual memory (which is why it has also been called 'habit memory' [Connerton 1996: 24-30], explicitly distinguished from individual/cognitive memory).

In these terms, individual memory is not the causative mechanism that produces meaning by processing stimuli, but shaped through communicative memory in interactional contexts. Communicative memory furnishes the mirror where meanings engraved in a cultural repository are reflected, inasmuch as the locus where signs become part of a cultural repository. To conclude this Section, individual memory should not be the focus of research into the process of meaning formation of 'stimuli' (or,

cultural artefacts), but a phase in the circular process of meaning generation, involving cultural and communicative memory.

11.5 The pathway to the Brand Imaginarium: Primary, secondary, tertiary brand iconicity

The preceding textual qualification of memory and its dislocation from the strict confines of 'ego-psychology' was intended to bridge an often encountered criticism against textual approaches that is launched by, not at all surprisingly, psychologism's exponents (that is ego reductionism in lieu of text reductionism). Surely methodological questions are involved regarding the operationalization of these types of memory, but such issues may not be addressed in disrespect of similar issues that still plague ego-psychology, such as the naturalized epistemological premises that undergird the localization of knowledge structures in brain structures: "Neurons and synapses constitute the physical substrate for our active mental states and our memories" (McClelland 2011). This localization constitutes at best a nebulous imbrication in the context of a scientific imaginary that posits levels of approximation in a self-expressed horizon as absolute identification of mind and brain, that is, from a deconstructive viewpoint, another limit metaphor that seeks to recuperate a virtual totality through an ideational transposition in a utopian space that, yet, performs a regulative function as to the degree of the totality's reification. Such yet unresolved issues that beset cognitivism, though, by far eschew the focus of this Chapter.

In continuation of the delineation of the communicative and cultural memory types, as essential complementary facets of the inherited ego-psychological concept of individual memory, we shall now endeavor to link these types to the three types of brand image, viz. brand images, brand image and iconicity as brand textuality condition. The resulting relationships amongst the components of this conceptual model constitute the Brand Imaginarium, as an expansive textual precondition for what Keller

(1998) calls 'brand knowledge structures' from a restrictive individual memory point of view.
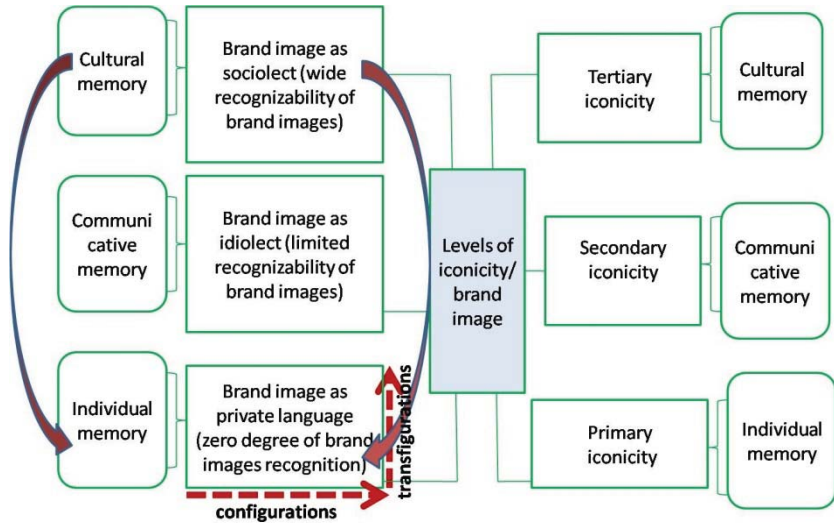
Figure 11.1: The pathway to the Brand Imaginarium: Relationships between brand image and brand images on different levels of iconicity and memory types

The Brand Imaginarium consists of three distinctive and interlocking levels of iconicity, viz. primary, secondary and tertiary iconicity. Each level is responsible for shaping brand language (as its textual condition) in different ways.

Primary iconicity designates the endophoric resemblance between multimodal expressive units to a brand structure, as rhetorico-semantic simulacrum, with zero degree of recognizability or assimilation/re(as)semblance by an intended target-group. This is the stage where a brand is born in the imaginary of a Creative Director and which resembles a private language, if not by virtue of minimal units (given that such units may have been sourced by existing and recognizable cultural milieus, thus not being wholly alien to potential receivers, e.g.

slice-of-life brand images), at least due to the invented correlational patterns with brand image concepts. This is the province of a Creative Director's individual memory, yet informed by and in constant interaction with cultural (or collective memory), as suggested by Fig.11.1.

Primary iconicity, at its most exemplary, may also be viewed as an instance of what Groupe μ (1970) called 'rhétorique folle' (crazy rhetoric), that is atypical configurations, yet without deviating from the scope of acceptable assimilations within its definitional contours. In this case, primary iconicity as assimilation, or, more aptly, as re(as)semblance is very close to the Deleuzian notion of *assemblage* as a form of hyper-hybridism (cf. Rossolatos 2015e; Deleuze and Guattari 1987), a concept that recently found its way in brand cultural research through Latour's socio-technical agencements (Bjerrisgaard et al. 2013). "An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows […] and the only assemblages are […] collective assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 2). Such configurations, anyhow, lie at the heart of creativity (singular lines of flight, according to Deleuze and Guattari; cf. Rossolatos 2015e) and radical innovation and, hence, are germane to the constant rejuvenation of a brand language, to rhetorical *inventio* (i.e., coining new brand languages and new expressive elements onomatopoetically), as well as to the coinage of novel transfigurations. Hence, the interpretative value of primary iconicity is to be located at an ontogenetic level. However, given the irreducibly cultural constitution of subjectivity, it is also located at a phylogenetic level, or, more aptly, as Moles (1984: 69) has framed it, at a mythogenetic level.

And the reason why this level of iconicity is akin to a private language is not attributed to the non-recognizability of minimal units (in standalone mode), given that as noted in Fig.11.1, individual memory is always in interaction with and conditioned by cultural (group or collective) memory, but due to the as yet unrecognizably novel modes of (a) rhetorical

configurations among individual units (b) their transfiguration into brand image concepts.

Levels of iconicity have been suggested in the past, for example by Moles (cf. Eco 1978), albeit with a wholly different rationale to the one proposed in this model, viz. according to the level of abstraction between copy and original, and with regard to individual signs, rather than patterns of configuration and transfiguration. Furthermore, this conceptualization of iconicity is not consonant with Eco's (1975) code theory and the three levels of codedness (also adapted by Groupe μ [1992], as demonstrated elsewhere; cf. Rossolatos 2014b: 202-205), which I applied to the Generative Matrix of Equity Potential model (cf. Rossolatos 2012b).

In greater detail, as regards differences from Eco's code theory, it should be noted that code theory did not address how multimodal signs resemble each other in a brand language as rhetorico-semantic simulacrum or how they are transfigured into abstract concepts, save for noting that biplanar elements (or functives of a sign-vehicle as cultural unit) are combined based on more or less explicit combinatorial rules. For Eco, combination is not an issue of resemblance, but of encoding and decoding. The (de)coding rationale, however, on the one hand, inherits the step-wise information processing legacy (which has been found to be heavily dependent on a presumed principle of goal-directedness at the expense of incidental exposure), while, on the other hand, it is rooted in the by now antiquated hierarchical propositional model of Quillian, that, as noted by McLelland (2000), was prominent when Eco's *Theory of Semiotics* was written (1975), but by now largely overridden by connectionist models.

Re(as)semblance and assimilation were posited earlier as key aspects of iconic memory, whereby re-cognition of emitted brand-related multimodal expressive units is sought. Recall, and here we have already proceeded to the explication of **secondary iconicity** (Fig.11.1), presupposes re-cognition, and re-cognition

assimilation/re(as)semblance of brand related con- and transfigurations with other brand or category related con- and transfigurations in memory. The emitted con- and transfigurations may become assimilated to consumers' cultural ethos in communicative settings if their modes of co-occurrence resonate positively with consumers' textually configured cultural milieu. This is a particularly sensitive aspect, as this assimilation does not take place consciously[9] (or in a goal-directed fashion in a process that moves from attentiveness, to interest arousal, to comparison among alternatives, to choice, to storage in different parts of memory [episodic/semantic]), but tacitly based on stored (in a cultural unconscious) modes of rhetorical configuration that allow for latent analogies between the ways novel brand textual configurations fire together in such ways as to be recognized and iconically re(as)sembled. Is this an untestable hypothesis? It surely is, inasmuch as cognitivist testable hypotheses about the workings of memory are enacted against non salient hypotheses (for the highly figurative brand language) about the incidence of a step-wise process against isolatable bits of information, rather than configurations that have been interwoven on the grounds of rhetorical relata, and for which there is not even explicit proof of literacy (beyond the trope of metaphor and perhaps metonymy) on behalf of assimilators/recallers.

This awkward inasmuch as realistic scenario of communicative memory and secondary iconicity, in the face of a highly figurative mode of discourse, where a zero degree of iconicity is highly local, and not global (cf. Rossolatos 2013a), already attains to bring the 'Other' into the process of memory formation/retrieval (either as physical interlocutor or as evoked cultural inventory) that has been lacking so far from solipsistic cognitive processing models. This is also the iconicity level where a brand language is greatly in a state of flux, and hence more

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[9] "Much relevant fantasy life and many key symbolic meanings lie just below the threshold of consciousness" (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982: 36).

akin to an idiolect, that is a language with limited recognizability from a wider audience, but also where semi-symbolic structures are manifested at their most prominent, that is as structures that oscillate between idiolectal imaginary configurations/transfigurations and inassimilable (unrecognizable) ones.

The above may be illustrated by the communicative circulation of puns that are often featured in ad films and that may be reiterated by interlocutors in ordinary communicative settings in a humorous fashion, albeit not tied up with the concerned brand language. In this manner, the pun has been recognized tacitly as rhetorical mode of configuration of a brand text by recourse to an embedded cultural memory, but not attributed to the brand. Hence, it constitutes a more idiolectal facet of a brand language that has not yet attained prominence among its target audience (or it may be the case that this punning replication is an incidence of off-target recollection).

Finally, **tertiary iconicity** is a case of a brand language's having attained sociolectal status, that is being re-cognizable by a wider target audience and hence assimilable to a cultural ethos that is partly conditioned by the unique idiolectal aspects of the brand language with which it is in constant interaction, and partly conditioned by already existing cultural practices and the respective product-category discourse, brand image concepts and modes of configuration/transfiguration.

This level of iconicity constitutes a textual condition of brand signification by dint of cultural memory, that is more deeply engraved in a cultural unconscious as configurational and transfigurational schemata that include inter-textual references, over and above strictly brand related ones (which textual semiotic conceptualization differs greatly from the social psychological approach to cultural knowledge as, simply, stock of cultural representations; cf. Chiu and Hong [2007: 786]). The 'processing unit' of this cultural memory is not the sum of individual processing units as individual social actors or monads who

'happen' to be processing the sociolect's configurations and transfigurations in the same manner (by dint of a rhetorical stratagem called, in Husserlean terms, Lifeworld). Rather, the subjects are bound in a common cultural predicament by virtue of a pre-reflective, and non-conscious, mirroring effect that constitutes, at the same time, a radical act of misrecognition of their identity in the face of another.

This misrecognition is a necessarily erroneous conflation of a primary narcissistic drive for identification with another as oneself. In other words, the subject is duped by its own will for introjection of the 'external environment' and assimilation to itself, which are manifested in an impersonal mirror of misrecognition as inter-subjective mirrorings. Tertiary iconicity brings about re(as)semblance among culturally situated subjects on the grounds of brand image configurations/transfigurations, not due to mimicry, but to a will for identification with oneself, an impossible task that would amount to drowning, just like Narcissus. Thus, the subject re(as)sembles itself through brand-related configurations/transfigurations that are part and parcel of an impersonal mirror that sustains inter-subjective mirrorings, as mass mis-recognition. This is equivalent to saying that every act of re-cognition is a repetition of a missed encounter, between a subject and itself, where self, *pace* Lacan, does not consist in the subject as substratum of language ('the sub-ject that is sup-posed to know'), but as conditioned by language (the impersonal mirror); and, by implication, by figurative brand language through which the subject does not come to know, but becomes con- and transfigured alongside other subjects that are commonly conditioned in the same cultural milieu.

In these terms, the processing correlate of cultural memory is the social imaginary, and not an individual's imaginary. "Social imaginary significations cannot be thought of on the basis of an alleged relation to a 'subject' which would 'carry' them or 'intend' them. They are not the noemata of a noesis -- except in a secondary and inessential way" (Castoriades

1985: 230) and "points up the impasses awaiting any attempt to 'explain' the social on the basis of the individual' (Castoriades 1985: 231) cogito.

The subject that re-cognizes the brand's sociolect is compelled to do so by the mirror of the sociolect's social imaginary significations which it mis-recognizes in lieu of itself. Thus, the subject is lost (gone missing) in the process of recognizing itself in the mirror of collective memory that it does not actively re(as)semble, but mirror (*simpliciter*). The subject is configured in the text that it configures. As argued by Erll (2008a), memory or re-collection is a metaphor, that is a figurative process whereby the subject is transposed to the milieu of cultural memory.

The subject remembers by being transposed to a repository of cultural memories and hence its memories are always assimilated to a cultural machine, rather than being haphazard, purely individual impressions on a fleeting sensory manifold or stimuli. And it is no accident that Castoriades (1985: 232) assigned to social imaginary significations the status of conditions of possibility of cogito-centric representations, in the same manner that we identified here iconicity as textual condition of possibility of a brand language, and given that the former was posited as the 'processing' correlate of the latter.

The highly figurative language of brands, as explained throughout this Chapter, consists of configurations and transfigurations, and, hence, the social imaginary processing correlate of cultural memory at the tertiary iconicity level that produces social imaginary significations "emerges as otherness and as the perpetual orientation of otherness, which figures and figures itself, exists in figuring and in figuring itself, the creation of 'images' which are what they are and as they are as figurations or presentifications of significations or meanings" (Castoriades 1985: 232).

All three levels of iconicity are inter-dependent, while a brand language evolves diachronically as it passes from one level

to another. This evolution is not necessarily reflected in a brand's growth (in sales and market share terms), as highly recognizable and culturally significant brands may be niche-market or even obsolete or even configurational vestiges from another phase in a product's life-cycle (but still constituting staples in a cultural ethos). This is why it is important to approach brand language in terms of its iconic textual condition, as the interpretive depth afforded by iconicity resonates not simply with individual memory and individual recollection processes, but, even more importantly with communicative memory and cultural memory, while putting in branding perspective the fundamental cultural semiotic tenet (and more widely key culturological premise) concerning the conditioning of an individual by a collective memory; yet, while taking into account, at the same time, how collective or cultural memory is constantly refueled by individual creativity at the level of individual memory in the self-reinforcing virtuous circle of the Brand Imaginarium.

11.6 Conclusions

In this Chapter an attempt was made at disentangling the notion of brand image from the web of confusion that besets it, by recourse to the semiotic concept of iconicity. The preliminary definitional clarification of brand image resulted in distinguishing between three interlocking aspects, that is brand image as abstract concepts that make up a brand's semantic content, as multimodal expressive units (brand images) that populate its expressive inventory and as iconicity, or condition of brand textual signification. The highly figurative and motivated nature of brand language urged us to consider it from a pan-rhetorical semiotic viewpoint, both horizontally in terms of expressive concatenations as rhetorical configurations, as well as transfigurations through which expressive units become correlated with brand image concepts.

The highly figurative nature of brand language is amenable to structuration alongside structuralist tenets,

according to which we are concerned with structures of the imaginary. If this is so, then iconicity must be somehow linked to the imaginary. The ensuing discussion sought to identify this intricate relationship by engaging critically with the cognitivist (connectionist) approach to memory formation and retrieval, from which the imaginary has been expelled. An attempt was made to restore the role of the imaginary, by retracing its function in key philosophical writings, such as Aristotle's and Kant's, with an ultimate view to demonstrating that not only brand texts (from a sheer materiality viewpoint) are inherently imaginary rhetorical configurations, but the subject of enunciation is concomitantly an imaginary construct, by dint of being imbricated in brands' figurative structures.

The release of subjectivity from the isolated, monadic processing constraints where it has been placed by cognitivism and the demonstration of the importance of imaginary social significations for shaping subjectivity, culture and, by implication, of the embeddedness of brand language in this nexus, that draws on existing cultural artifacts, while constantly renewing cultural forms through rhetorical *inventio* and idiolectal configurations/transfigurations, paved the way for defining three levels of iconicity. These levels were shown to be involving different ways of memory formation (other than individual), viz. communicative and cultural. Ultimately, brand image was shown to be part of a more encompassing Brand Imaginarium that includes distinctive levels of iconicity as textual condition for shaping brand language, as con- and transfigurations, in the context of social imaginary significations that form a constantly renewed virtuous circle between cultural and individual, through communicative memory.

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