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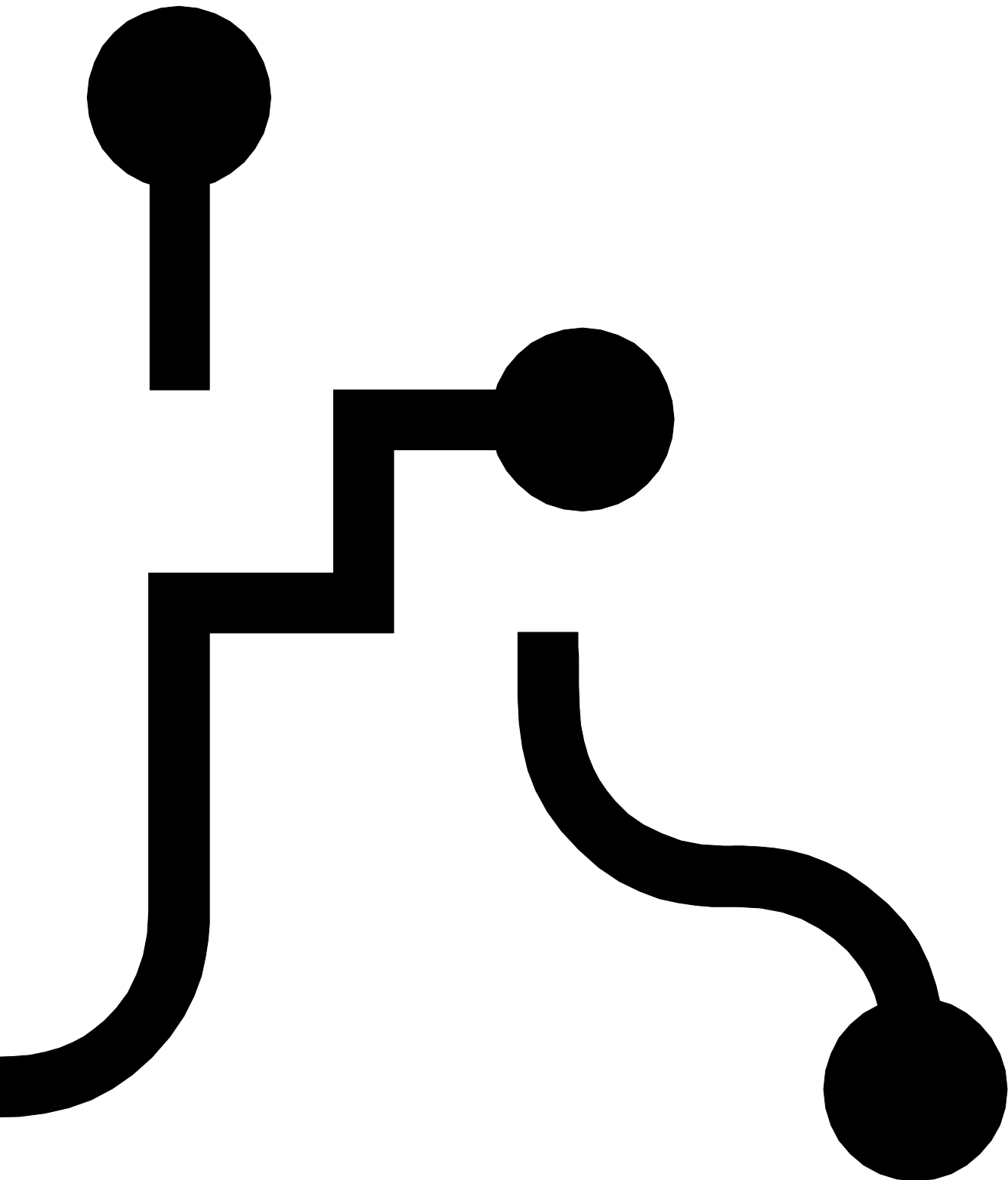
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# Introduction

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

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

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



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

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

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

including the adoption of the cultural practice of throwing Christmas trees off windows during St. Knut's day.

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

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

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

George Rossolatos

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