

Semiotics and Visual Communication III

Semiotics and Visual Communication III:

Cultures of Branding

Edited by

Evripides Zantides

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to Aspasia, Orestis, Raphael, Achilles
&
all the graphic warriors

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PREFACE

The chapters in this book consist of selected papers that were presented at the 3rd International Conference & Poster Exhibition on Semiotics and Visual Communication at the Cyprus University of Technology in November 2017. It is the third book in a series of volumes that were published as part of the previous two conferences on Semiotics and Visual Communication that occurred in 2011 and 2015. While this institution brings together researchers and designers from all over the world to share their research, and to explore and practice their ideas, it also places Cyprus on the world map of Semiotics, Graphic and Visual Communication.

The current manuscripts investigate the theme of the third Conference, *The semiotics of branding* and look at branding and brand design as endorsing a reputation and inhabiting a status of almost mythical proportion that has triumphed over the past few decades. Emerging from its forerunner-corporate identity to incorporate advertising, consumer lifestyles and attitudes, image-rights, market-research, customisation, global expansion, sound and semiotics, ‘the consumer-as-the-brand’, the word ‘branding’ currently appears bigger than its own umbrella definition. Habitually, in contemporary societies of mass-consumption, branding is associated primarily with marketing and commodities. However, it immediately becomes apparent that what we call branding is an all-pervasive social semiosis that arises from a widespread and multifaceted practice in the cultural field, rooted in the history of all human societies since time immemorial. From tribal markers such as totems, scarifications and tattoos, to emblems of power, language, fashion, architectural space, insignias of communal groups, heraldic devices, religious and political symbols, national flags and the like, a form of branding is at work that responds to the need to determine the presence and interaction of specific groups, persons or institutions through a shared code of meaning.

In the current context of global networks and mass communication, where we often talk of a boundless “ocean of information”, we are witnessing a proliferation of branding devices, mostly (but not exclusively) visual signs, which are indispensable both in the field of marketable goods and in all manner of cultural domains, conventional and unconventional. Branding can be applied to a tiny local coffee shop [consumer-led branding – the brand emerging from the lifestyles of its potential market audience –

not imposed from ‘above’]; to a football club’s global brand; political parties; countries, huge corporations; pop stars, a government agency, charities. Branding can be used to ameliorate a tarnished company’s image with a name change and a brand-change. Consumers are living-brands; and, many young people enthusiastically identify with their brand-choices and buy fully into brand values and signifiers – no longer standing ‘outside’ the mainstream culture [rebellion] but fully incorporated within it. Those who protest against the globally-homogenised culture do so often in choreographed protests that have been branded for maximum impact across media networks.

Under the above framework, and from a wide spectrum of semiotic and design approaches, the authors have initiated a critical, insightful and inspiring debate on *the semiotics of branding* in the context of culture and visual communication. **Sonia Andreou** goes through a close examination of the ways in which an object representing the official culture of a state, such as a postage stamp, can be studied as a carrier of ideologies. Through focus group interviews, the study explores the perception of citizens with regards to the representation of their official culture through stamp design. She also compares and critically discusses them among predominant representational themes and the sociopolitical context in which they are published. From a semiotic practice perspective, **Nicolae-Sorin Drăgan** investigates the dynamics of the positioning acts of political actors in dialogic forms of interaction. While he explores final TV debates of presidential elections from the perspective of positioning theory, multimodality and functional theory of political campaign discourse, he argues that political actors use various semiotic resources to strategically position themselves in discursive interactions, in the sense of a symbolic construction of presidential character. **Miguel Januário** and **Heitor Alvelos** analyse, as well as interpret, the impact and results of a mock up political propaganda exercise in the enclosed space of *Iminente Festival*, a festival of music and urban art held in the city of Oeiras in Portugal in September 2016. Their results are aligned with a set of sociocultural interpretations and reveal the capacity and influence of the incisive implementation of contents and propagandistic processes in a ludic and cultural context. **Katerina Marazi** explores the semiotic dimensions of superheroes, and argues how the conflict, as well as the ‘brand’ of justice amongst them, mirrors actual societal conflicts that penetrate the understanding of an established status quo and its interpretation or even adoption by society’s people. Through the lens of visual semiotics, **Omiros Panayides** and **Marina Hadjilouca** analyse the logotypes and symbols used by different political action groups which were staged within the walled area in the unoccupied part of Nicosia from 2008 onwards. Their study investigates how these groups brand

themselves and their political actions as well as how their branding changes depending on the context of the action undertaken. **Vassilis Vamvakas, Erasmia Tsipou** and **Afroditi Xenidou** examine and compare the significance of the family as a branding value in Greek cinema and in Greek advertisement during the period of the financial crisis. In so doing, they describe and explain how the directors, on the one hand, and advertisers, on the other, use the image of the family as a tool for aesthetic, ideological and commercial contemplation. Through a semiotic analysis of the Trumps' images as well as a qualitative survey accompanied by eye-tracking heat-maps of the Trumps' pictures, **Alicja Waszkiewicz-Raviv** argues that visual representations of Donald Trump and Ivanka Trump connect brand archetypes, deriving from Jung's theory. The study shows the results of a qualitative survey accompanied by eye-tracking heat-maps of the Trumps' pictures, fulfilling the multi-modal methodology approach to current visual communication research appeal, and provides both biometric and declarative proof on how ideological meaning can be conveyed through images.

From the perspective of color semiotics, **Mony Almalech** traces changes in the color design of Marlboro cigarettes and applies his original approach to color semiotics to decode the natural and associative meanings of colors. Through a multidisciplinary approach, **Matthew Caley** explores how – due to heavy rotation/continual repetition through media, the coverage of continual wars and terrorist attacks, and the proliferation of spectacular action film, the explosion has become the unofficial logo of the 21st Century – and contrasts this with the explosion of brand-signifiers and logos produced by branding. He does this through 20 episodes by referring to Jasper Johns, news' footage of 9/11, Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, and through reportage photography and a dominance of 'the big loud action movie'. **Rikke Hansen** and **Barnabas Wetton** explore how interdisciplinarity acts as a lever to innovation in the field of design as well as why design is often allotted to objectives of innovation. **Evangelos Kourdis** argues for the logo's rebranding as a translation process and examines the role of the different semiotic systems in synergy, in the prototext (initial logo) and the metatext (new logo), and especially, the role of the plastic visual signs which are codified iconic signs. In his manuscript, **Jasso Lamberg** investigates the similarities and differences between the concepts of imagined personality during newspaper redesign processes to help art directors with their decision making, and the concept of brand personality used in marketing and advertising. **Ifigenia Vamvakidou, Germanos Vasileiadis, Andromachi Solaki** and **Nikolaos Fotopoulos** apply visual semiotics as a research tool for analyzing the brand/images which have been chosen by the *Prespa Preservation Society*

(PPS) as well as, an educational tool in order to teach visual literacy. **Evripides Zantides** describes the art and design process that was undertaken for the development of a new logotype for the Cyprus University of Technology, and critically argues that semiotics and design are key factors in the conceptualisation and making of a successful brand logo.

Jeff Leak studies how messages are projected onto and into urban spaces, both to promote and develop audience awareness of their immediate environment, and to affect their sense of place. He does so by analysing audience perception of these projections in relation to the message, design and site. As a popular tourist destination in the past two decades, **Nicholas Lourantos** and **Evangelos Kyriazopoulos** map the evolution and the reasons behind the branding ideas of Kythera, a remote southern Greek island. As a secluded southern Greek island with a small population, it has been associated, since antiquity, with Aphrodite and her image has been used as the island's visual brand, as early as the late 1800s. **Isabel Marcos** and **Ana Ferreira** analyse the link between Praxis and Theory as fundamental components of any architectural approach, using the example of the Nouvel Manifesto applied to the project "Le Grand Pari(s)" (The Greater Paris), in an attempt to show the scope of the wider question: "what is Territorial Branding?"; and, why this issue is important to architects. **Helena Pires** discusses a series of visual semiotic strategies in the work of eleven photographs by Matthieu Cadiou as presented in the official press kit in the "European Best Destinations Site" at the time. **Athina Stamatopoulou** explores how design processes negotiate the identities of a place by creating representations and symbols. She also describes the logic of a methodology of an open mapping and focuses on its possible applications as a bottom-up place branding tool.

Anastasia Aslanides explores the power of music in the branding process as a kind of "trademark". Through a multidisciplinary approach from different fields of social science, she provides a conceptual framework, as well as focusing on the case study of nation branding through cultural identity, based on the musical theme of the film *Zorba the Greek*. **Sotirios Bahtsetzis** addresses aspects of popular culture in the service of branding. From the perspective of visual semiotics he discusses science-fiction blockbuster movies, music video clips as well as MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) and analyses the impact of mediatic image-dispositives on the formation of subjectivity. **May Kokkidou**, **Christina Tsigka** and **Paul Metsios** study Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* (2016), and argue that video, music, image, lyrics, and narrative elements function both interdependent and independent. Their multimodal analysis takes under into consideration the cultural references of the text and

the complexities of the industry of contemporary culture. According to their results, *Lemonade* functions more as a cultural object with artistic-aesthetic traits and as a political manifestation, than as a solely commercial or entertainment product. **Loukia Kostopoulou** analyses film trailers in terms of their compositional structure, and explores how the synergy of various semiotic systems produces meaning. In doing so, she also examines them as techniques of film branding, in an effort to reproduce a specific brand of the film. From a cognitive semiotic perspective, **Ana Maria Ovalle Muskus** analyses the scenes in which brands appear in films, as well as the space occupied by the products on screen, types of placement, duration of appearance, number of occurrences, type of camera shots, emotion exhibited, attention given, and the message shown. **Eirini Papadaki** semiotically analyses the websites of both the Metropolitan Opera of New York and the National Opera of Greece, as well as their social media palette of visual and verbal expressions. She outlines digital branding as a way of relation-branding, and argues that online platforms can also be used to co-create with, strengthen for, apply adjustments due to the comments of, and widely circulate a brand identity among an organization's audiences. **Joselyn Sim** discusses how digital content creators have managed to build brand content to gain hits on social media platforms. She also studies how digital content creators construct trends to engage users into meaningful social conversations, as well as considering the engagement of audience through innovative activities and how designers play an important role in the facilitation of social media content.

Through an exploratory qualitative analysis, **Evagoria Dapola** questions how charismatic engagement can be mediated through social media and selfies. She argues that it is possible for selfies to prevail as a photographic genre because they present styles of bodies that visualise different parts of the body and/or are emotional traits inspired by the political economy of a celebrity culture of fame. Through a personal brand named *El Crayolas*, **Carl W. Jones** investigates whether semiotics can be used as a case study to encode a personal brand by appropriating advertising tools and techniques. **Nicholas Qyll** proposes an integrated approach of cognitive semiotics of brand imagery, emerging from the theoretical convergence of social-semiotic and cognitive-psychological access to the phenomenon of the image. He explores the concept of personal branding as a pictorial strategy and means of design to which successful person brands avail themselves through the example of Karl Lagerfeld.

Miltos Frangopoulos revisits the well-known work of Roland Barthes together with the somewhat neglected concept of the 'narrative paradigm' proposed by W.R. Fisher in the 1980s, and examines whether branding

mythology tends to cultivate a way of thinking, which increasingly conflates reasoned argument with story-telling, and utilitarianism with flights of fancy. **Konstantinos Michos** investigates different forms of brand piracy and classifies them into a semiotic square based on the "manufacturing-branding" pair of opposing qualities. While he analyses a corpus of pictures that imitates known products, he discusses the complexity of brand piracy as a mirror in its definition. Through empirical research, based on both primary and secondary data, **Aspasia Papadima** examines how patriarchy is demonstrated, promoted and preserved, in other words, branded, within the Cypriot coffee shop culture. While she observes "gender performance" in the spatial and visual infrastructure of traditional Cypriot coffee shops, she discusses the semiotic notions attributed to patriarchy. Through a socio-semiotic analysis, **Eleni Sykioti** and **Athanasios Stavrou** explore Muslim women's fashion and its adoption by western clothing brands. In particular, they study big fashion houses and clothing chains which have started launching garments that are customarily worn in Muslim societies, such as the Burqini/Burkini, a special full-body swimsuit intended not only for Muslim women, but for all women who do not want to be exposed to the sun. **Dimitar Trendafilov** demonstrates how the set of concepts in given product category can form its three-dimensional mapping. He argues that this map visually depicts the 'mythological space', in which the brands circulate and position themselves by simultaneously generating and modifying the meaning of it. **George Vasilakis** identifies, in biblical texts, a strategy which is very similar to the definition of Branding as a procedure of building a customer orientated relation based on the aspect of faith. Through a Greimasian perspective, he juxtaposes the promotion of the Kingdom of Heavens with biblical descriptions as verifications of Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle" theory. Employing the Greimasian semiotic square as a testing device, **Lia Yoka** suggests a cultural-ideological analysis and a critical discussion of branding practices in relation to regimes of property and value, pivoting on the examples of sneakers, drugs, and genes.

We hope you enjoy these readings, each one has its own perspective and approach on *the semiotics of branding*. While they broaden knowledge and critical thinking of branding in the context of culture and visual communication, they also provide a platform of debate and further research in the field.

Prof. Evripides Zantides, Ph.D.
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CHAPTER ONE:

BRANDING FOR POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDEOLOGIES

BRANDING IDEOLOGIES THROUGH STAMPS: OFFICIAL CULTURE CONSTRUCTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF CITIZENS

SONIA ANDREOU

Introduction

This article discusses the notion of nation branding through visual communication and more specifically, postage stamp imagery. The idea behind nation branding is simple, yet it can be achieved by using various and sometimes multi-layered means. The process in itself aids a particular nation or country to define an identity, resulting in successfully promoting itself, drawing attention to its “uniqueness” therefore, to be differentiated from others (Cotirlea, 2014). It should go without saying that behind a nation’s branding there is always a careful strategy and therefore a vast amount of visuals that aid in its construction by addressing both internal and external audiences. Following this rationale, we are enabled to study a large array of a state’s products, such as promotional (touristic) posters, banknotes and coinage, or official websites containing imagery.

Nonetheless, our work is focused on postage stamps, the themes and messages they contain and communicate to internal audiences, as well as the citizens’ viewpoint on the matter. It is a fact that postage stamps play a significant role in the establishment of a country’s image, as they carry a variety of meanings through their visual representations (Raento and Brunn, 2005). They are artefacts which project a country’s or nation’s identity, since they are simultaneously defined by the official culture of a nation, and can be considered the “visual ambassadors” of the country they represent. The particular purpose of stamp imagery however, has not been empirically researched and this has created an issue for consideration. The inclusion of the citizen’s perspective aside from introducing a new approach in researching the particular subject, was required in order to

substantially explore how ideological meanings are constructed through stamp design, since everyday objects, such as stamps, contribute to the shaping of collectiveness within a state, as Edensor (2002) has suggested.

This study concentrates on the Republic of Cyprus, a relatively “young” post-colonial state, established independent in 1960. The principal motivation that encouraged us in our selection was the lack of substantial and rigorously documented bibliography as far as Cyprus is concerned, in regards to postage stamp design in general. Furthermore, the Republic of Cyprus presents an intriguing case for research due to the lack of a specific collective identity. Recent studies have shown the difficulty of the population of Cyprus to express their own identity as well as their collective identity (Akcali, 2007). In this study, we are consequently interested in exploring the themes of imagery chosen to represent a country whose citizens cannot easily assert a specific collective identity, and whether this ambiguity manifests in official culture, more specifically postage stamp imagery, and the ideologies they carry. Let us not forget that as Edensor (2002) argued, a country’s or nation’s identity is substantially interlinked with the representation of official culture, and also with “everyday” objects, such as stamps in our case. Most importantly, we concentrate on the views of Cypriot citizens regarding their country’s representation on stamp design, a perspective which remained unexplored, and is perennial for a deeper understanding of the process of meaning-making in national branding through stamp design.

Nation branding, visual communication and postage stamp imagery

The theoretical framework we adopted for this research aimed to investigate stamps in relation to national branding and the views of citizens. We had to consider that the particular objects balance on two axes and therefore their reading should always respect these parallel characteristics. Postage stamps as objects of visual communication simultaneously serve different needs, on the one hand, they are relevant to the citizens of the state and can be considered ordinary and everyday objects, and on the other, they are official documents of the country, representing it to audiences abroad. In this sense, we needed to explain the presence of ordinary, mundane and ephemeral objects and imagery in the construction of a solid profile for a nation, and therefore its national branding. We placed stamp imagery through Billig’s (1995) and Anderson’s (1991) idea of the banal, lending the foundations for the creation of a national sense of belonging. Furthermore, Edensor’s (2002) arguments on how official

manifestations of a state can be directly influenced by the mundane, every day and mainstream aspects of a culture, helped us in discussing stamps as government documents without neglecting the fact that we are dealing with quite prosaic and usual objects that reflect and contribute to the cultivation of a distinct national branding.

In order to better frame the duality in the nature and therefore study stamp imagery, this article has adopted the term “official culture”, as expressed by both Debord (1957) and Lewis (1992). Official culture can be defined as the form of culture that has been socially accepted and most importantly, politically legitimised (Lewis, 1992). In order to create a consistent official culture, the state uses various sources including the mainstream, popular and everyday forms of culture. This also implies the existence of institutional support given by society. Institutionalisation occurs in order to guarantee consistency, hierarchy and to preserve the imagined community’s values and cultural norms (Edensor, 2002). In this context therefore, we could study stamps and their imagery as objects serving the official needs of their state, without excluding the fact that these could be influenced by mainstream, every day and popular aspects, all facets that influence the creation of national branding (Dogan and Petkovic, 2016).

Our paper aimed to discuss Cyprus’ stamp production from the perspective of the official state, without excluding the perceptions of citizens, since we treat the entire process as a dialogue. In other words, the interest of this research is concerned with studying stamp production as a process that interacts with culture, and stamp imagery as a cultural manifestation that influences and is influenced by the society which produced it. This approach allowed us to concentrate on the perception of the citizens in this process, instead of taking their views for granted in favour of studying a country’s mechanism of branding through stamps, solely from the scope of the government.

Postage stamps as ambassadors of the nation

The reading of postage stamps as objects that aid in the cultivation of a national brand has been discussed by two writers (Adedze, 2012; Osmond, 2008). Both of these authors explored the idea of symbolism and references belonging to the sphere of mainstream culture, being used by the official state for the design of stamps and the establishment of the nation’s brand.