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Materiality and Brand Discursivity:

Study case on commodities and discursive practices in the Swedish market.

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2. Abstract

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This thesis analyzes the link between materiality and brand discursiveness. This study examines how material culture contributes to brand narratives' meaning and symbolic construction. For this purpose, the creation of commodities with metal obtained from molten guns is analyzed through a discursive analysis and anthropological theory.

This research describes how the brands analyzed deploys discursive practices to endow products with symbolism and meaning. In doing so, the commodities and material objects are represented from a communicative function. They account for notions of place, agency, memory, and emotions, elements that contribute to the confirmation of a value regime grounded on ideas of morality and sustainability.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis; Brand discourse; Materiality; Commodities; Social Biography of Objects

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Ray Rodríguez M.

4. Introduction

My interest in carrying out this thesis began from my professional experience in Colombia when working on establishing startups from an organizational stance. While collaborating along on companies' establishment and development, I was always struck by how the successful cases, the ventures that managed to endure over time, were those that firmly adopted a corporate narrative that worked as a communication instrument that provided credibility and trust between clients and stakeholders. Something that caught my attention was that some of the ventures had similar designs and raw materials for their products. However, those who stood out in the market usually had a noteworthy usage of the corporate narrative communicated through the brand's production and origin.

During the first year in the MACA program and the approaches to research with companies and stakeholders, I affirmed my interest in studying how, from a cultural perspective, brands establish communication in the market and with the consumer. In this way, my interest arose in addressing the relationship between commodities, brand narratives and value creation in the light of the current economy. With this idea in mind, I came across the Humanium Metal project, part of IM-Individuell Människohjälp. I did the work placement practice for the course Fieldwork and Cultural Analysis in Applied Contexts with this organization. This initial research conducted during this course served as a departure for this thesis.

Humanium Metal is a Swedish ONG founded in 2016. Its mission is to establish contact with local governments to collect and smelting firearms confiscated or delivered in disarmament campaigns. Thus, as a product of the smelting of weapons, the metal formed is branded as "Humanium Metal." The brands involved in the initiative use this metal to produce commercial items such as watches, pens, jewelry, and headphones¹. Part of the sale of these commodities is earmarked to subsidize projects to help victims of gun violence.

¹ The brands analyzed in this study will be described in greater detail in Chapter 10.

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The products elaborated by Humanium Metal have different shapes and presentations. The brands manufacture watches, accessories, artistic elements, and pens with this metal. The brands included in this analysis are Triwa, A Good Company, Arild Links, Frank To, Togetherband and Yevo:



Watch made of Humanium Metal

Fig. 1. Image from Triwa's website. <https://www.triwa.com/sv/product/all-collections/humanium-39-blue>



Bracelet made of Humanium Metal

Fig. 2. Image from Arild Links' website. <https://arildlinks.com/collections/arild-links-x-humanium-metal>

The above images depict some of the products manufactured by the brands that collaborate with Humanium Metal. The products are presented to provide the reader with a mental image of what will be discussed throughout the text.

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To this extent, the Humanium Metal initiative allows the articulation of private and governmental initiatives. Humanium Metal is based in Sweden and has operations in Central America, Africa, and the United States. This effort of multiple organizations in different countries results in commodity displacement or motion; this will be further elaborated. In the absence of this initiative, firearms would probably remain stranded in the places where they have been confiscated or would be put to some other use within the countries. It is true that the logistic chain that Humanium Metal propitiates the transformation of objects and the circulation of commodities; this turns out to be a dynamic with an analytical potential from the perspective of materiality and cultural analysis.

Thus, motivated by how this initiative mobilizes different actors, organizations and individuals around a material that circulates in a commercial distribution chain, my interest arose in analyzing how multiple actors contribute to the production of narratives and meanings associated with the metallic product of gun melting.

4.1. Aim & Research Questions

Considering the theory of materiality and discourse analysis, I intend to analyze how the brands collaborating with Humanium Metal elaborate narratives from the materials and products they create. This thesis aims to analyze how the interrelation between materiality and discourse contributes to the meaning and symbolic construction of brand narratives on product development and ethical consumption.

Research questions

1. How can materiality and discursivity contribute to the meaning and symbolic construction of brand narratives in Sweden?
2. What are the elements contributing to brand discursiveness?
3. What is the role history plays in brand discursiveness?

5. Previous Research

The review of previous research showed that few publications were made on Humanium Metal or projects with similar approaches. Among the academic approaches that stand out is the thesis developed by Kapur and Steuerwald (2019). This research focuses its analysis on the description

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of the Humanium Metal model as a cross-sectorial effort, namely, on leadership and organization. Thus, this study explores how cross-sector collaborations enable social development toward enhancing socio-economic and political security in regions afflicted with armed violence (Kapur & Steuerwald, 2019). This research has an analytical focus on the concept of value. Nonetheless, it does it from the dimension of social impact or the value that a particular organization contributes to society over time.

The review of previous research yielded some works that approached the brand from its narrative dimension and its effect on culture or society (Greska, 2019; Lo Dolce & Ryan, 2017;). Greska conducts a discourse analysis of some of the advertising campaigns of the Nike brand. This work highlights how the brand employs discursive elements around the feminine. Thus, the analysis from a feminist and intersectional perspective identifies postfeminist elements and black women's sports representation (Greska, 2019). This research takes Multimodal Discourse Analysis as a method of analysis to explain how the different modes of the campaigns interactively construct meaning. On the other hand, Lo Dolce et al. (2017) presents a discourse analysis of Apple's advertising and analyses how these ads use the fear of social exclusion as an implicit element of emotional condition and persuasion. Although these studies have approached brands from their discursive production and their relationship with social phenomena such as leadership, representation or social exclusion, there is a gap in the research on how brands cooperate to construct narratives as a means of symbolic production and value.

5.1. Overview of structure

The following sections of this text describe the theoretical framework used in this thesis. Subsequently, Chapter 7 describes how the digital resources that allowed obtaining the data were approached and the methodology chosen in this study. Chapter 8 is the starting point of this analysis, addressing the first stage in analyzing how firearms and gun-related violence are described concerning spatiality and life experiences. Chapter 9 describes the discursive production of Humanium Metal and its relation to agency. Chapter 10 deals with discourses on products made with Humanium Metal and how they operate as material objects that communicate memory and emotions. Finally, this study's executive summary and conclusions are presented as applicability considerations.

5.2. Theoretical framework

Commodities are commonly studied considering economic understanding, namely, production, exchange of economic value and their role in the market. For a detailed approach to this type of study, the work of Simmel and Marx can be reviewed. However, the study of commodities from a cultural perspective can shed light on how commodities influence social life (Appadurai, 1986). Similarly, the study of brands has been developed mainly by marketing academics. Nevertheless, few studies have analyzed how brands impact different social phenomena (Heilbrunn, 2006; Schultz & Hatch, 2006; Semprini, 2006).

Analyzing commodities and brands from a cultural perspective requires identifying how they relate to different dimensions of social life and their link to social practices. Considering that this study focuses on the narrative production regarding commodities elaborated with Humanium Metal, the analysis of this research takes as its theoretical and conceptual basis precepts of material cultural theory and discourse analysis. This chapter addresses theoretical considerations around materiality and discursivity regarding commodities and discursivity in organizations and brands. The following section develops the proposal of cultural analysis of commodities proposed by Appadurai (1986, 1990, 2006) and Kopytoff (1986).

5.3. Analyzing commodities through the lens of culture

Generally, commodities are defined as things or objects (also services) that possess value while they are produced and circulate in the economic system and are susceptible to being exchanged in economic transactions (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). Thus, according to Appadurai (1986), objects have a social life and are endowed with properties of social relations.

“Yesterday’s commodity is tomorrow’s found art object. Today’s art object is tomorrow’s junk. And yesterday’s junk is tomorrow’s heirloom.” (Appadurai, 2006)

In this sentence, the author illustrates his idea about the fluctuating characteristic of commodities and how their value operates. Appadurai (1986) suggests an approach to studying objects from an anthropological perspective, in which commodities or economic objects are defined as "objects in motion." Thus, drawing on Simmel, Marx, and Baudrillard, Appadurai proposes that commodities

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have a "particular type of social potential, that they are distinguishable from "products," "objects," "goods," "artefacts", and other sorts of things — but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view" (1986, p. 6). In this sense, for Appadurai (1986), the social potential of commodities lies in the economic exchange, in their movements, and it is in this way that value is embodied in commodities.

In this manner, tracking objects' pathways and moves emerges as an approach to studying how the objects are inscribed in their forms, uses, and trajectories. "It is only through analyzing these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things". (Appadurai, 1986 p. 5). In sum, this post-modern analytical approach points out that value is generated in the production process, as the Marxist theory indicates, and goes further by implying that value is re-negotiated in subsequent exchange processes. Additionally, it suggests that as "objects in motion", things are not just "social"; they possess animated features, as a "cultural biography" as Kopytoff posits (1998). In this wise, "the social dimension of things can be narratively approached through the conventions not only of traditional historical exposition, but through that venerable anthropological device, the 'life history'" (Ferguson, 1988. p. 492).

Understanding the life history of commodities requires analyzing the circumstances in which the "cultural biography" of economic objects transits in different regimes of value in space and time (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; 17). Appadurai states that "regimes of value account for the constant transcendence of cultural boundaries by the flow of commodities, where culture is understood as a bounded and localized system of meanings" (1986. p. 15). This conceptualization of regimes of value has been critiqued for its lack of specific definition and some ambiguity (Murakami, 2016). The concept of regime of value will be developed in greater detail in the analysis section.

One of the weaknesses observed in Appadurai and Kopytoff proposes that it does not establish a structured methodology for studying the social life of things. While recognizing the study's potential of object biographies, the authors do not indicate what methods or techniques can be employed for such analysis. On the contrary, they leave an open path of establishing forms of analysis of how objects circulate in society. Thus, rescuing the potential of the social analysis of objects from this perspective, this study proposes analyzing commercial objects' biographies from

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a narrative perspective and the relation of narratives with relevant concepts in humanities such as place, agency, situatedness, power and memory. For this purpose, this thesis develops a discourse analysis to trace the trajectories of the objects and identify how they are described in light of the cultural concepts aforementioned. These are theoretical concepts needed to further my argument in the analysis section, when necessary; to illustrate the understanding of how brand discourse operates within a cultural frame

In this manner, this study analyzes the objects made with Humanium Metal from the biographical perspective of objects in motion previously described, having a documentary basis in the discursive production of the brands. For this purpose, the biography of Humanium Metal is analyzed from the perspective of the narrative production evidenced in the digital sphere, i.e., the scope of this thesis does not encompass the analyze the biography of objects from the perspective of the consumer or user. Thus, the following section examines how organizational discursivity is approached from a socio-cultural point of view.

5.4. Organizational discursivity

Since this research seeks to analyze how Humanium Metal's objects are depicted, the texts produced by the organizations are analyzed to identify how they circulate and describe them. To this end, it is relevant to examine the relationship between organization and discourse. Some studies have pointed out how scholars are "conceptualizing societies, institutions, and identities as discursively constructed collections of texts and, in so doing, are focusing on language use as the central object of study" (Hardy, 2011, p 25). This section examines how organizational discourse is conceptualized and the possibilities this perspective presents for the analysis.

Fairhurst and Putnam (2014) posit that organizational discourse analysis represents the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of texts and the role of discourse in a socially constructed reality. Here, texts and speeches are embodied the material representation of discourse in spoken or recorded forms. Mumby & Claire (1997) address the relationship between discourse and organizations by exploring how subjects, through discourse, integrate and participate in large, coordinated, and institutionalized structures. Thus, the authors define the organization as a "social collectivity" that produces, reproduces, and transforms itself through communication practices, interdependent and deliberate with its members. Mumby & Clair (1997) state that organizations

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contribute to the development of shared meaning. Therefore, discourse is how the members of an organization create a coherent social reality that frames their perception of their own identity; thus, organizations exist to the extent that their members create them through discourse (Mumby & Clair, 1997).

This perspective presents a definition of the organization-discourse conceptual link; however, it limits its explanation to industry or institutional organizations and does not explain how brands can be analyzed from the perspective of discourse. The following section examines the relationship between brand and discourse and its approach from a cultural analysis perspective.

5.5. Brand and Brand discursiveness

Before explaining the relationship between brand and discourse, it is necessary to describe what is meant by brand for this thesis. The brand concept is typically defined as intangible elements that can be materialized into tangibles, e.g., name, logo, service, guarantees, quality features and packages (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). A brand is a "perceptual entity" grounded in the material realm but reflects consumers' perceptions and idiosyncrasies in its intangible form. The intangible form of brand encompasses different types of brand associations, such as ideas of aspirational usage, imaginaries, and consumption experiences (Keller, 2003; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Thus, the brand refers to the relationship between a range of material object-signs (commodities, trademarks, etc.) and some abstract conceptualization proposed by marketers as the brand's "image," "essence," or "personality" (Nakassis, 2013).

Although these approximations from a marketing and management theory acknowledge a brand as an abstract entity based on symbols and associations, they do not elaborate much on brands' cultural and social implications on society. More than ever, commodities are wrapped in symbols and meanings. Brands replace objects in Baudrillard's perspective; that is to say, brands are at the heart of the "signifying fabric" of the current consumption society (Arvidsson, 2006a). Understanding that the consumption of commodities answers to a social function rather than individual economy (Baudrillard, 2005), different studies have approached the study of brands from a socio-cultural perspective (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006; Arvidsson, 2006a; McCracken, 1986).

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From an anthropological perspective, brands are part of the "blueprint" of human action in culture, and consumer goods are "way-stations" of meaning. Phenomenologically, culture constitutes the world in two manners, as a "lens" and as a "blueprint" (McCracken, 1986). Culture as a "lens" refers to the way through which the individual pictures the world, determining how it is interpreted and processed. Culture as a "blueprint" of human activity refers to social action and productive activity towards behaviors and objects. Thus, objects and brands take an essential part in the production of the culturally constituted world precisely because brands work as a "method of meaning transfer" to objects, defined as a "vital, tangible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible" (McCracken, 1986. p. 73). From this perspective, "brands infuse culture with meaning" (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling. 2006), and the workforce from advertising takes a relevant part in the "meaning transfer".

In a simplistic definition, brands are symbolic extensions of products. Nonetheless, in the modern consumer society, products are becoming the material extension of a brand (Heilbrunn, 2006). In this manner, a brand delivers discourses on existing products by implying that its offer is superior or distinct from what exists, and the competitors' offers. Consequently, brands could be defined as a "semiotic engine" at the service of the production of meaning and value that stands by itself as a natural source of significance (Plascak, 2009; Heilbrunn, 2006). As brands find their ground on the narrative and meaning production, branding can be defined as a model of/for symbolic relationships between human beings through the use of signs and meanings. In this light, brands act as "symbolic resources" (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006) and "social discursive devices" (Semprini, 2006), articulating "a complex web of commercial intertextuality that becomes the main use-value of the product" (Arvidsson, 2006a, p. 5). In this web, consumers negotiate a variety of spheres of social life, such as identity, gender, sexuality, status, or class (Heilbrunn, 2006; Arvidsson, 2006a).

Up to this point, the brands have been approached as products of culture: a kind of relationship with consumers mediated by symbolism and meanings. In recent years, brands, far from being naive entities or "culturally neutral" (Askegaard, 2006), have been analyzed as a historical and institutional force that entails an ideology (Arvidsson, 2006a; Heilbrunn, 2006). Brands work as a value generator in the capitalist system. They are a form of "immaterial capital" that occupy a relevant place in the lifeworld of consumers, an advantageous position that "enables a brand to subsume and appropriate what consumers do with the brand in mind as a source of surplus value

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and profits" (Arvidsson, 2006a. pp 7). Brands operate to take advantage of the human capacity to create common meanings in the social world (Arvidsson, 2006b). In this way, as Arvidsson (2006b) argues, Brand management evolved from the work of common-sense-making we do as humans (consumers and other kinds of actors included), an endeavor achieved by employing socialization processes while communicating and interacting in everyday life. This generative capacity of the common social world makes bolsters brands' commercial values (Appadurai, 1990).

In this way, brands find their ground in the symbolic universe production or "ideoscapes". Following Appadurai, an ideoscape is an "image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (Appadurai, 1990. p, 299). In such manner, brand's ideoscapes provide an ideological foundation for forming meaning systems, practices, and identity forms for the members of the consumer culture (Askegaard, 2006). It is not surprising that the main criticisms of branding are related to the excess of meanings associated with commodities, where value reaches a point beyond the goods material costs (Nakassis, 2013).

To this extent, brands resort to symbolic elements by employing images and narratives in their communication. In this manner, brands and organizations use their discursive communication tools that can be analyzed from a socio-cultural perspective. As language reproduces social phenomena, texts and speeches are issued from positionalities in which there are intentionalities. In this manner, no text is innocent (Van Dijk, 1997; Machin & Mayr, 2012). As a reflection of social reality, the discourses analyzed in this research account for how brand commodities can evidence a relationship with processes of memory, agency, emotions and situatedness. These concepts will be explored detailly in the analysis section.

6. Ethical considerations

The material analyzed in this research was collected from publicly available sources and documents. The researcher has no contractual relationship with the companies mentioned in this research. Likewise, the handling of the material was carried out in a rigorous and systematic manner, and the interpretation was supported by theorists and academics.

7. Data and Methodology

The following is a description of how the data collection was conducted and the methodology employed in this study. Being founded in 2017, Humanium Metal is a recent business model, developed in one of the decades of the most significant expansion of internet use globally thanks to the development of mobile technologies. Thus, the organization uses its digital space as a critical tool in its communication. Having a comprehensive and active presence on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) and a website where you can find general information about the organization and news and results of the work that has been developed over the years.

Having this in consideration, this research draws on information hosted on the virtual platforms of the Humanium Metal organization and the brands that collaborate with it. Thus, the documents analyzed comprise the following:

• Humanium Metal Website	19 websites
• Humanium Metal Instagram Live	7 transcriptions
• Humanium Metal Videos	1 video
• Brand Websites	24 websites

These documents were analyzed using NVivo software. The texts and videos were reviewed and coding following open and axial coding. Here, open coding refers to the first level of coding to identify distinct concepts and themes for categorization; additionally, axial code refers to the process of identifying relationships between the categories obtained in open coding and their subcategories. (William & Moser, 2012). This classification made it possible to identify discursive patterns and their distribution in the texts, as well as, to identify the elements or thematic blocks that were related to how the metal Humanium Metal, the products and the different discursive resources referring to materiality, symbolism, persuasiveness, and emergent categories, like local-global narratives.

7.1. Describing fieldwork in the digital space

To this extent, this section exposes the way the data is inscribed in the digital sphere and the manners that social sciences analysis methodologies adapted to analyze online cultural phenomena. The settings in which people interact have transcended beyond face-to-face interaction. The use of the internet has grown since the beginning of this century, and it has been boosted by reason of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. Given the events in recent years, cyberspace gained momentum as a place for socializing, intermingling, and as a place to purchase consumer goods. Thus, the Internet has become a system where not only people interact but also organizations, companies, and institutions. The digital space is then composed of interaction networks formed inside and outside the Internet. Most of the interactions in the digital space are presented on platforms such as blogs, forums, social networks, chat rooms and other online platforms where members share not only ideas and thoughts but also experiences in the use of products and services and thus generate objective and honest information (Kozinets, 2002).

The potential of the digital space as an environment in which communication modes are manifested between people and groups of people who have common interests has attracted the attention of researchers who have considered that the interactions generated on the web should be understood as a source of study and analysis of social behavior. Thus, the concept and application of netnography were proposed as a model of qualitative ethnographic research applied to virtual scenarios. This approach is especially relevant for this analysis since it studies the discursive productions of the organizations associated with Humanium Metal, which focus their communication on the digital sphere, evidencing a form of intertextuality or interdependence that will be addressed in the analysis section.

7.2. Netnography

Kozinets (2015) offers an initial definition of netnography as studying emergent online cultures and communities. An adaptation of traditional ethnography to the online world that helps to understand the new social forms in the digital sphere and the old forms it reconfigures. However, during the last decade, netnography has been redefined to respond to emerging phenomena in cyberspace that required the nuances of destabilized (online) culture and community concepts. Thus, Kozinets (2015) presents Social Network Structures Analysis to complement netnography.

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Social Network Structures Analysis focuses on the patterns and structures of relationships and information flow between social actors in a network. The actors in these networks can be persons, teams, organizations, technologies, or even “non-human actors like bots, ideas, messages, products, cities or other concepts” (p, 36). Thus, Social network analysis considers multiple resources exchanged in communications in the cyber space, including “communications which are textual, graphical, animated, audio, photographic or audiovisual”. Kozinets point out the opportunities for synergies “between the structural analysis of social networks and the more identity-, story-, discourse and meaning-centered analyses of netnography” (p, 37).

To this extent, the analysis approach proposed by Kozinets is relevant to the present study since it allows us to analyze how organizations (Humanium Metal and brands) are articulated around a common project, creating a network where different discourses (textual, graphic, audiovisual) and meanings emerge around the objects and products they produce. In this sense, the analysis in this study seeks to point out those “structures and patterns of relationships between and among social actors” (Kozinets, 2015, p, 36) involved in the Humanium Metal Project. The following section sets out how this study approaches discourse analysis considering the methodology proposed by Teun Van Dijk (1997; 1998) and Machin and Mayr (2012).

7.3. Discourse analysis

The term "discourse" refers to a communicative event that involves different social actors who intervene in the communicative act itself and carry it out in a specific situation due to various particularities of the context (Van Dijk, 1997). This act combines verbal and non-verbal dimensions and can be oral or written (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Van Dijk (1997; 1998) proposes that the study of discourse focuses on its form, meaning and mental process, and complex structures and hierarchies of interaction and social practices, including its functions in context, society, and culture. Thus, to examine the social functions of discourse, this section examines the conceptual framework for discourse analysis. Here, Machin, Mayer and Van Dijk's dimensions of analysis are presented to break down the components that structure and give meaning to texts verbal elocutions. Thus, Van Dijk suggests the following categories of discourse analysis: Action, Context, Power, and Ideology.

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Action: Discourse action analysis refers to the evaluation of discursive intentionality, as discourse is a controlled, intentional, and purposeful activity. Here, it is proposed to focus on the perspective of how discursive interactions can be reasonably heard or interpreted, that is, inferred as actions from what is concretely said, shown or displayed.

Context: Understanding the context is necessary to properly understand the environment or circumstances in which the speech act occurs; this requires attention to the aspects that function as background, environment, conditions, or consequences. In the same way, the analysis of context involves parameters such as the participants, their roles, and purposes, as well as properties of a framework, such as time and place. These stated aspects impact the text and speech and its comprehension. In context analysis, the concept of frame emerges as the set of dimensions in which a social relation is situated. Thus, time, place, position of the speaker and their enunciations, and variables such as the institutional relationship of the discourse, whether it is private or public, informal, or formal, global, or local are factors that flow into the structure and comprehension of discursive acts, whether written or verbal.

Props in the context of the speech act comprise those material elements or typical objects that have a certain relevance for texts or formal speech, such as uniforms, flags, or special furniture. Although material elements are relevant in speech acts, they become key elements of the context if their use has a certain systematicity in verbal interaction or in the discursive genres of these situations.

Power/Persuasiveness: Van Dijk (1997) refers to the "social power" of discourse as a specific relationship between social groups or institutions. To this extent, the explanatory concept with which he defines social power is that of control. For Van Dijk, the analysis of power in discourse is relevant in that it defines power not as a coercive factor of action but rather from a persuasive point of view. For Van Dijk, the power-discourse link is demonstrated in persuasive elements; in other words, the essential means used to influence other people's minds to act as we wish are written text and speech. For this author, discourse makes it possible to direct people's intentions or purposes based on persuasion rather than physical force.

Ideology: Van Dijk (1997) explains that ideology is traditionally understood to reproduce domination; in this sense, ideology allows coordinating the social practices of the dominant group

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members to perpetuate its position of dominance as a group. Thus, ideologies are related to the coordination effects of the acts or practices of the individual social members of a group. Once shared, ideologies ensure that members of a group incorporate similar modes of action in similar situations, will be able to cooperate in common tasks, and thus contribute to group cohesion, solidarity, and successful group reproduction.

The method chosen for analyzing the material from this study was the Multimodal Discourse Analysis, a variation of Critical Discourse Analysis that focuses on the uses of language and textual and visual communication. Language, from this perspective, is a way people and organizations promote particular views of the world and naturalize them (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In this manner, CDA studies aim to examine how language and grammar can be used as ideological instruments by pointing out the underlying implicit assumptions or aspects communicated indirectly behind the lines (Van Dijk, 1998). Additionally, the Multimodal Discourse Analysis proposes that meaning is created through the interplay of language, images, and other modes of communication. Multimodal critical discourse analysis assures that meaning is generally communicated through language and other semiotic modes, e.g., visual features. This approach allows the analyst to describe the features and elements of images and how these worked together as a composition (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

From this perspective, the analysis of discourses can provide information about how they categorize the world (people, events, places, or actions). Thus, the intention of a text can be affected by the choices of how these categorizations are disposed of, foregrounded, backgrounded or even excluded from the text production. In this way, analyzing brands from a discursive analysis perspective implies considering that the texts they produce are not "innocent texts" and that their study can shed light on how they reproduce ideas and promote modes of social interaction and representations of the world. Thus, brands and their textual production use language as means of social construction, given the fact that language both shapes and is shaped by society (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Consequently, the analysis of this thesis accounts for the relationship between the materiality of metal and the discursive production of brands. Hence, the material analysis is presented in three sections to trace a biographical line of the metal and its products. The first section deals with how

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the NGO presents its work, the problem of firearms, and how it establishes a corporate memory. Following the biographical approach, the second section deals with the allusions to metal smelting and how they speak of a "potentiality" of the metal, establishing initial elements regarding the material agency. The third section focuses on the products made using metal, examining how these are configured as "vehicles of memory,"; the persuasive elements related to consumption, and the temporal elements in representations of the future or "brand utopias."

8. Tracing guns and Humanium Metal

As objects in motion, the products made of Humanium Metal have a traceable biographical path given by its material. The initial phase of this material is in the form of firearms. This is the starting point. The NGO uses its digital platforms to communicate how the weapons are collected and aspects related to the organization. This section deals with the first stage of the biography of objects made with Humanium Metal. The following analysis focuses on how the NGO refers to guns; this will allow identifying elements in the discourse by drawing upon thoughts on place and situatedness. This chapter analyzes the discourses from the NGO, including websites, reports, and Instagram Live transcripts.

8.1. Guns, authorities and rhetoric elements of discourse

Following the initial stages of the supply chain of Humanium Metal led to the collaboration with local authorities and civil society organizations to coordinate the collection of confiscated weapons and the planning of disarmament campaigns.

“Humanium Metal launched a destruction of illegal and turned-in firearms in the United States. Humanium Metal operates as a platform that governments can use to highlight and expand their ongoing work to seize and destroy illicit firearms.”

(Humanium Metal, n.d.)

As seen in the above quote, the NGO refers to firearms destruction campaigns, resulting in destroyed firearms. The following image illustrates and initiates the analysis of this section:



Fig. 3. Disbarment Campaign [Online image]. Humanium Metal. Inform. Voices of Women: On guns, violence, and activism.

This image conveys the idea of the collaboration between local authorities and the NGO with the aim to collect confiscated guns. The actors present in the picture are members of military forces, as indicates their uniform and helmet. The image depicts how a group of weapons and rifles are agglomerated and tied up together on a surface, denoting control over them. It also demonstrates surveillance by government agents wearing the uniform of a state force and the arms as a central element in the composition. Thus, this image expresses the duality between legitimate and illegitimate weapons and the intention to centralize the confiscated material and to control its circulation. Focusing on illegal arms, Humanium Metal describes guns as it follows:

“Humanium Metal turns weapons of destruction into commodities for peace. In cooperation with local governments illegal seized weapons, or voluntarily handed in weapons, are destroyed. IM [Individuell Människohjälp]² converts that metal into high-quality stainless steel and then works with vetted companies

² Individuell Människohjälp is the main organization that Humanium Metal is part of.

to produce a wide range of commercial products from them.” (IM Sweden, n.d. a)

“Small arms are weapons of mass destruction. I support the Humanium Metal initiative as an important action toward a more civilized world. Hans Blix, Swedish diplomat.” (IM Sweden, n.d.)

” Peace does not come through prayer; we human beings must create peace. Also, power of truth is more powerful and enduring than the power of gun. Therefore, the Humanium Metal initiative is a laudable effort at making this world more peaceful through concrete human action. Dalai Lama” Humanium Metal (2019, June 17).

These are discursive styles in which arms are described, the citations are part of a document report on gendered violence, a report on arm destruction, and a Facebook post correspondingly. The first quote works as an introduction on Humanium Metal, highlighting the negative effect of arms and how they have potential to be transformed into un harmful objects. The second, is a quote by Swedish diplomat Hans Blix embedded in a report and the last one is the quote from the Dalai Lama Posted in a photo post on Facebook.

In addition to positing that firearms have a negative connotation and represent a problem in society, the subtext in parallel reveals another cohesive element in these three quotations: the intention to convey authority and legitimacy. Following Van Dijk (1997), understanding how power operates in discourse is relevant to identifying the actors and the intentions involved, therefore, these examples display the support politic-religious figures (explicitly) and academic knowledge from the research reports (implicitly).

In these cases, the discourse here denotes a knowable management of the gun violence problem supported by the field's authorities. However, as mentioned above, these uses of discourse published by the NGO emphasize pointing out the problem of firearm and the results of their work as an organization in the countries they work in. This is denoted using rhetoric elements (Machine & Mayr, 2012), specifically, hyperbole when equating sized arms with mass destruction. Up to this point, the discourse conveys the relevance to the organization's mission while using the

exaggerated statements in the form of hyperbole and validating the need for their presence and action.

Furthermore, similar statements about firearms were identified in Instagram Live broadcasts, spaces described by the organization as a platform to foster dialogue on gun related violence. These events consisted of chats transmitted on the Internet through the social network Instagram. The following is a description of the way in which these conversations account for discursive elements regarding weapons.



Fig. 4. Image from Humanium Metal Instagram. Source:
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CPqygMVpOhS/>

These online events were conversations between two participants connected through Instagram, using their cell phones to converse and broadcast the event internationally. The participants of these talks are part of organizations/institutions that collaborate with Humanium Metal, such as Gun Free Africa, Survivors Network or Maine's Justice Department. The topics addressed in these spaces revolve around gun violence, relating local experiences from countries such as Malawi, South Africa, El Salvador, and the United States. The analysis of these talks sought aims to identify how firearms were described.

8.2. Local experiences on gun violence

In each of these conversations, local aspects related to gun violence were detailed. From their knowledge and experience, each guest provided information about their work in the country they represented. Likewise, aspects of the theme of the event, whether it was gender violence, domestic violence, or gun control laws, were discussed in depth. The following excerpt illustrates how some of the participants share how they got involved on working against gun violence.

“I think the work just stood out for me... especially considering that I grew up in a township where gun violence was a thing. I mean living at my grandma's house we'd constantly hear gunshots, if not this night, then that night. The topic stood out to me; the works stood out to me.” (@Humnum Metal, 2020)

“I just felt like there's something that needs to be done and that something must come from one people that is why I'm so engaged in in in trying to resolve gun violence in my community. Living in Alexandra, which is a very there is a lot of gun violence so it's it was not something that I had to read about it, was something that I was experiencing. Lucky enough I've never been directly affected by it, because I play safe in a manner of, I try my best to get home in time” (@Humnum Metal, 2020e)

These quotes show how Marianne and Dopper express their closeness to a context in which guns and violence are recurrent. The participation of these guests and their guests encourages a dialogue based on their personal experiences, which are legitimized by their links with organizations that work on issues related to minimizing the effects of gun violence. Although the talks are intended to address issues related to gun violence, the fact that the guests share personal experiences fulfills a function of validity from an experiential perspective and knowledge of the local context (Haraway, 1998). In this light, knowledge is situated; locatable constituted by a partial perspective where objectivity “turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment” (pp 590).

“With countries like Malawi, I think most people overlook the fact that people actually own guns. Yeah so, the fact that people think not many people own guns... is even putting women at risk because they're living with people who own guns, and nobody seem to care” (@Humanium Metal, 2020)

The above examples show how IG Talk guests share ideas and experiences that are directly linked and embodied to territories. That is, participants share their knowledge and opinions on causes or issues related to firearms in El Salvador, South Africa, Malawi and the United States, countries in which Humanium Metal has developed or is currently developing projects. In this perspective, the multiple life experiences provide a space for dialogue in which intersections are established between firearms and race, gender, socio-economic conditions, and mental health in local contexts. In doing so, Humanium Metal spatially locates the firearm issue geographically as these experiences are attained to the locations where they operate and where the metal is collected. In this manner a link between the metal and place (a territory of origin) is created.

Much has been discussed about the importance of people's relationship with space and places. Lefebvre (1991) is one of the authors who studied space from a social perspective. In his work, he refers to space as a product of social relations. He establishes a “spatial triad” in his argument, where there is a physical space, an imagined space, and a lived space. Lefebvre argues that the physical space is related to special practices from in specific locations.

Furthermore, the imagined space is conceived from the perspective of power, ideology and knowledge. The last one, the lived space, is experienced employing symbols and images (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 2000). This conception of space makes it possible to establish an abstraction of space and thus establish relationships that go beyond physical boundaries.

Similarly, Escobar (2001) proposes a characterization of place as an event; that is to say, place configures things, thoughts and memories. This anthropologist recognizes how place, body and environment are integrated with each other. In this way, the place is not just a "thing" but rather an event where, from an anthropological perspective, place is characterized by "emplacement of all cultural practices, which stems from the fact that culture is carried into places by bodies - bodies are enculturated and, conversely, enact cultural practices" (pp, 143).

In this way, the relationship between embodied experiences and the place is evident. From a materiality perspective, it can be observed that there are links with the space and the objects or things that inhabit or are produced in it. A clear example is that of products that acquire characteristics linked to their place of origin or "terroir". Here, terroir refers to how the identification of the origin of a product is constituted by the interplay of the spatiality, the properties of the land, the tradition and the individual and collective cultural practices of a population (Paxson, 2010). The products acquire a "sensory apprehension of and semiotic significance given to being-in-location" (Escobar 2001:152-153, cited in Paxson, 2010). In this sense, it is possible to link the Humanium experiences in each place and the materials that intervene there.

This intersection between, place and experiences are evident in the Instagram Live broadcasts in the Humanium Metal's account. The following quotes illustrates this argument:

"Living in Alexandra, which is a very... there is a lot of gun violence so it's it was not something that I had to read about it, was something that I was experiencing. Lucky enough I've never been directly affected by it because I play safe in a manner of, I "try my best to get home in time. I try my best to make sure that everything is locked before I sleep. But I feel like that is not the society that I want to live in, or a society more wants my fellow young people to live in." (@Humnum Metal, 2020e)

"When we'd hear like gunshots, and so it would always be alarming because we wouldn't be home... and then you hear a gunshot at the park. Because we live just in front of a park. Our backyard is a park, and you hear a gunshot. It's like "oh my gosh, is it him? Is it not him?" and it's turning off the lights. and running inside." (@Humnum Metal, 2020)

"Well because you know I mean I grew up on a farm in very rural Maine, and you know **I wasn't even aware of the guns in the house**, because dad kept them locked in a cabinet in his closet. I mean they were just they were out of view" (@Humnum Metal, 2020b)

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Here, Dopper Ramapulana and Marianne Novelli share personal experiences on how guns and violence, to some extent, affected their communities and how they have reacted to avoid being affected by conflict.

“I think there are a **range of issues in South African context in particular**. One of the factors has been that the state was captured. That's the terminology that's been used, a lot of criminal networks were able to access the state and state resources. In order to prevent them being arrested there was also a capturing of the criminal justice system” (@Humnum Metal, 2020ba)

“I was saying, I believe that in south Africa, I have noted that whatever paper you read... news... guns are used to intimidate women, to kill women, to rape women, to keep them hostage... and you wonder what it is? that our laws are weak? or what is going on?” (@Humnum Metal, 2020f)

As these quotes illustrate, these experiences represent spatially situated knowledge. These testimonies are personal experiences that contribute to the delimitation of the context in which Humanium Metal operates. While the NGO describes these chat spaces as a platform for open dialogue on gun-related violence, these Instagram lives serve a secondary function of documenting the context of action. The fact that these experiences are hosted on the web and available for consultation in cyberspace allows for a sort of documentation of testimonies. Thus, by compiling these life experiences, the organization implements uses of history to strengthen the organization and "legitimate their initiatives" (Hatch & Schultz, 2017). The following quote illustrates this idea:

“I think that community-level intervention is important but as important is that is that the Humanium Metal project gives hope to people” (@Humnum Metal, 2020d)

In this manner, the participants in these live chats explicitly manifest the importance of Humanium Metal's action, validating, in a way, its labor on their communities. Thus, as mentioned before, by documenting experiences, the NGO performs a “rhetorical organizational history” or “use of the past as a persuasive strategy to manage key stakeholders of the firm.” (Suddaby et al., 2010; pp

215). These personal experiences have a direct link with the place, and this link will be addressed in more detail in the analysis on the next chapter.

In the same way, the NGO refers to events that refer to an episodic memory or "event-based memory" (Oertel & Thommes, 2015). In this manner, an organization's memory signifies "the means to retain and transmit information from past to future members of the social system" (Stein, 1996). On the one hand, firearms collection campaigns are milestones in the organization's trajectory.

"The first weapon destruction program took place in November 2016 in El Salvador where 1 ton of Humanium Metal was produced" (Humanium Metal n.d. a)

"Humanium Metal has to date participated in four destructions in El Salvador, resulting in the permanent removal of nearly 6.000 weapons from El Salvador's communities. In addition, in 2020, Zambia was the first African country to collaborate with Humanium Metal in which over 6 000 weapons were destroyed." (Humanium Metal, n.d. a)

Although these quotations represent a self-promotion function, they also establish milestones in the organization's trajectory to maintain those memories over time (Stein, 1995). By documenting and constructing a context through life experiences, milestones, and places, the metal produced by the melting acquires meanings related to the context of origin. The existence of an organizational memory presupposes that the company is an entity capable of remembering in some situations in a similar way to human beings, leading to questions related to the identification of the mechanisms used by the organization to learn, produce knowledge and retain it. As can be seen, these milestones mentioned by the organization are closely related to where they took place. In this way, the NGO contributes to the historicization (Barolini, 2009; Brunninge, 2009) of the metal produced by melting firearms; that is to say, it indicates and provides its historical trajectory. In this way, through historicization, the metal takes on the form of the brand Humanium Metal.

In summary, this section addresses the discourses regarding firearms and the consequences associated with their use and the dependence between the context and the functionality in the Discourse (Van Dijk, 1997). The key elements developed in this chapter are: The Discourse on

firearms is based on the impact it generates on society. This argument is reinforced by actors representing political, religious, and academic authority and the use of hyperbole and rhetorical elements of language. Additionally, how weapons were described in Instagram transmissions was presented. On the other hand, it is described how situated experiences provide a context for firearms while connecting them spatially to specific territories; this argument will be developed in chapter 10, commodities for peace. Finally, the corporate uses of history are analyzed and demonstrated in an episodic memory, evidenced by the adherence to annual campaigns against gun violence. The uses of history in the previous section give an account of the manners in which it uses discourse from an organizational perspective. This is a subject that will be taken up again in the following chapters concerning products made from Humanium Metal.

9. A metal with a purpose

The previous chapter addressed how the NGO alludes to the firearms from which the metal branded "Humanium Metal" originates. To continue exploring the biography of Humanium Metal, this chapter explores how metal is described and how the organizational discourse endows elements such as agency or the potential to influence the transformation of society and contribute to an imaginary future.

“Basically, Humanium Metal is, as the name suggests, a type of metal... but it's also so much more. **It's an active contributor to peace** because the metal is made of illicit firearms, illegal guns that are destroyed so they don't end up in the wrong hands again.” (@Humnum Metal, 2020e)

In the previous quote, Jaqueline Duerre gives an account of the metal as an actor in society, as an entity that can contribute to the achievement of peace. This can be seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, the metal has agency or the capacity to act, or on the other hand, the use of discourse shifts the result of human action to objects. To explain both scenarios, it is necessary to address the notion of agency and how it has been approached from the perspective of materiality.

9.1. Agency and human action

In the following chapter I will further the understanding of the discursive uses, by drawing upon thoughts on actants, agency and social relations (Latour 1994, 2005, 2014; Bennet 2010; Gell,

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1998; Giddens, 1984). Agency is a way of explaining social action concerning social structures (Giddens, 1984). For Giddens, people are not subject or bound to the rules and dispositions of their environment; on the contrary, this author refers to the fact that people are "social agents". Agency is a concept that precisely refers to the capacity to act, influence our position and where we are heading, accept certain things, discard others, and modify, personally or even as a group, what characterizes a system.

In this sense, agents have an awareness of resources (recursive awareness), which allows knowing the elements provided within the structuring, but also agents are aware of elaborating their discourse (discursive awareness), embodied it in language. This allows agents to interact, relate, negotiate, defend, and question the environment in which we find ourselves, whether it is accentuating a word, organizing a revolt, or wearing a hat or pocket watch. In short, an agent is one who can contribute to changing the structure of the system in which they find themselves. The following quote shows how Humanium Metal accounts for a certain level of agency:

“Humanium Metal is a commodity for peace, enabling brands to reinvent their products for a better world. The instant emotional impact of holding something that used to be a destructive force, now transformed into something useful and productive, connects Humanium Metal to the most powerful lobbying group of them all – the consumers” (IM Sweden, n.d.)

The above quote is an excerpt from a report on illegal arms smelting issued by Humanium Metal. Here it can be seen how the material is referred to as an element that has a contribution to a "better world". In this way, the NGO puts the action of human capacity in the background, i.e., the group of people working for this cause. In this way, this action is displaced to the object, as the human act is silenced, and the material's potentiality is enhanced. To a certain extent, the metal accounts for human action. But it is worth asking, are objects and materials endowed with a capacity for agency?

The so-called material agency approach has focused its reflections on the way in which artifacts and products possibly generate agency (Latour, 2005). Latour refers to objects as actants, thus, there is no difference between human and material agency. His theory is inclined to examine how agency has an impact on social structures, without differentiating it from human action. For Latour,

action is framed in a network of actors who jointly contribute to its achievement, the actors being human and non-human agents. From this perspective, agency is not particularized or attributed to subjects but is distributed and analyzed in a network, in a set of relationships. In this way, this theory considers a second kind of agency to that proposed by Giddens, which is manifested as the agency manifested when objects are mixed and affect a web of social relations (Bennet, 2010; Latour, 2005, 2014).

“It is neither people nor guns that kill. Responsibility for action must be shared among the various actants” (Latour, 1994, p, 34)

It seems that certain entities, once constituted, i.e., once in existence, behave independently of the one who constructs them. While it is possible to say that such entities play a causal role in the world, it is very difficult to say that a gun is homicidal or a pacemaker. This idea of the responsibility towards action is related to a "secondary agency," proposed by Gell (1998), who proposes that objects act as distributors of the intentional agency of human actors.

Following Latour, neither people nor Humanium Metal does good. While it is true that human action is what makes the existence of the Humanium Metal project possible, the metal product of the foundry acquires an articulating role in this network, adopting the role of actant-node that enables action and gives meaning to the association of multiple actors.

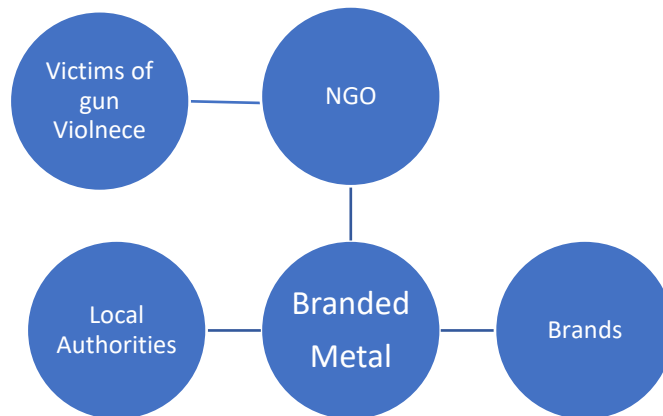


Fig 5. Visual Representation Humanium Metal Network

Thus, as shown in the figure above, the actors closest to the metal are those involved in its procurement and transformation. The victims appear to be disconnected from the central node since they are part of the network; however, as mentioned initially, they benefit from a percentage of the sales of the products manufactured by the brands. Thus, the brands and the NGO have acted around the metal due to the joint work with local authorities. Although human action makes this network possible, the metal evidence a secondary agency mobilizing the actors.

Although the NGO's discourse shows agency's designation through language (Ahearn, 2001), it is impossible to affirm that this is done deliberately. However, as it could be observed, the postulates of Latour (2005, 2014) and Gell (1998) allowed us to understand how the agency operates in the network of actors around Humanium Metal. Thus, it is possible to affirm that the distribution of agency to objects allows them to have a purpose, in this case, contributing to the search for a "better world". But what does it mean a better world in the context of this network?

9.2. Agency and Language

As Hoskins posits, "Material objects can be used to both reveal and conceal secret histories" (2006, p, 80), in this light, objects can be carriers of narratives or discourses that are transferred from human action (Latour, 2005; Gell, 1998). This perspective opens the door for the analysis of the relationship between language-agency and the way it manifests itself in material objects. However, social theorist "have not elaborated on the linguistic implications of their theories beyond a number of provoking but generic claims regarding the social implications of language usage" (Duranti, 2004, p, 452) As Ahearn (2001) mentions, some studies in linguistic anthropology have pointed to agency as a product of discourse. Since before Giddens, linguistic anthropologists had been accounting for language as a form of social action:

"For years, linguistic anthropologists examined specific speech events in order to illuminate how people think their own and others' actions" (Ahearn, 2001, p 124)

Here, speech events refer to discursive acts oral or written verbal enunciations in relation to human action. From this perspective, culture emerges from everyday linguistic agency through

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sociocultural formations (Ahearn, 2001). Thus, linguistic agency takes different forms, which is why it is necessary to pay attention to sociocultural linguistic contexts when trying to understand particular social dynamics, in this case, the use of language in the commodification of material objects.

"These weapons are no longer in the streets; we have melted them down and **they are doing good**. The profits from the sales from Humanium Metals products also changes the lives of these victims". (IM Sweden, n.d., b)



Fig. 6. Video screenshot from 'Leading Swedish Brands Launch Humanium Metal Products

The above quote and figure accounts for this secondary agency capability in the metal branded as Humanium Metal. As much as the weapons were taken out of circulation, melted down and transformed into Humanium Metal they "are doing good" in society and adopting "capacity of change". Once again, it becomes evident how the agency of human action is distributed in the network shaped by Humanium Metal using language.

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In this regard, Duranti (2001) proposes two dimensions of agency: its linguistic realization (performance) and its linguistic representation (grammatical encoding). The way in which agency is evident in Humanium Metal's products is related to the encoding dimension of the agency. The following quote gives an account of how the Arild Links brand refers to the materials from which its pieces are made, specifically Humanium Metal:

“Changes is rooted in the spirit of materials by using destructed illegal firearms and Sustainable Leather.” Arild Links (April 22, 2022).

This quote illustrates how the Arild Links brand refers to materials and how they imprint the products with properties of "change" and even animist characteristics such as "spirit". Duranti (2004) states that through speech acts, people participate in constructing certain types of beings, moralities and social realities. “Those beings can exist and make sense of each other’s actions”. Thus, this author refers that, in its encoding dimension, the “agency is represented through grammatical and discourse devices” (2004, p, 459). Thus, the dimension of agency operating in this case is linguistic representation, so that, in describing the properties of the material, discursive tools such as rhetoric elements are employed (Machine & Mayr, 2012), in this particular case, personification by attributing human characteristics to an inanimate being and synecdoche by assigning the word "rooted" a broader content than usual.

“So far, the organization has transformed almost 6000 illegal firearms into ‘peace metal’. We’re passionate about this incredible way to breathe positive new life into what was once a terrifying ‘metal of death’.” (Togetherband, 2022).

“Crafted out of something that was once a destructive force, the metal is melted and molded to form something useful” (Triwa, 2022).

The above quotes show how the Togetherband and Triwa brands refers to the material. Once again, we can see how, through language, Humanium Metal is given the characteristics of a certain type of being, which is given a "new life" for the purpose of being "useful". This illustrates how the brands allude to Humanium Metal as a raw material. Although these allusions do not directly reference the victims' life experiences or the place of origin indicated in the chapter, this is by omission, i.e., not mentioning those agents involved (Duranti, 2022). However, by making

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references to metal as "metal of death" or "destructive force", by association, it highlights the past in the biography of metal when it was in the form of a firearm. Thus, how the NGO and the brands generate a discursive continuity through direct or indirect references is evidenced, which gives account of a biographical trajectory or objects in motions, where the metal mutates its form and the values assigned to its functionality.

Up to this point, how Humanium Metal is represented by the NGO and some of the brands that incorporate this material in their products has been reviewed. This chapter examined how agency I evidenced in the metal and how language, and thus discourse, serves an integrative function between human action and secondary agency.

The next chapter addresses the next stage in the biography of metal. Thus, the manner the products made from Humanium Metal are described and the discourse employed by the brands is analyzed. Thus, the analysis focuses its attention on describing how commodities account for the use of brand utopias or ideas of the future concerning the Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, it describes how these products are related to memory uses and how they account for their biography.

10. Commodities for peace and a better future.

In the following chapter I will further the understanding of the discursive uses, by drawing upon thoughts on Memory (Jelin 2007; Hamliakis & Labayani, 2008) and the orientation of object have on emotions (Ahmed, 2010). This section examines the last stage on the biography of Humanium Metal and its products, at least the one traceable on the digital sphere. It is important to reiterate that after the purchase, the process of consumption and use of the products is a continuity in the biography of the objects that exceeds the scope of this thesis. Thus, this chapter describes how products made with Humanium Metal are described, highlighting the different discourses elaborated on the functional and material properties of the product and the discursive attributes that relate to the embodiment of memory, emotions, and moral values. Thus, the chapter begins with an analysis of the Togetherband brand.

Togetherband is a brand of bracelets made from recycled materials, including fibers obtained by processing pet bottles and a clasp piece made with Humanium Metal. From the following quote, it is possible to appreciate how this brand describes its product:

“The Humanium Metal Clasp: There are hundreds of millions of illegal firearms in the world. As a result, someone is shot every minute, making small arms ‘weapons of mass destruction.’ Humanium Metal is an upcycled stainless steel repurposed from destructed illegal firearms, which are seized by local authorities in Central America. The firearms are melted down and transformed back to raw stainless-steel material by IM Sweden Development Partner in Sweden. Your clasp is made from the resulting Humanium Metal molded into the shape of the signature upcycled ring pulls BOTTLETOP uses in the creation of our products. This gives the steel a new positive life as your #TOGETHERBAND clasp whilst helping to put an end to armed violence and creating new sources of funding for victims and projects aiming to rebuild conflict-torn societies.” (Togetherband, 2022a)

As can be seen, when describing the product, specifically the piece made using Humanium Metal, the brand refers to ideas exposed in the previous chapter. Thus, by providing a context for the metal, allusions are made to the transformation and new purpose that the weapons acquire when melted and the idea of a new life concerning their functionality. Additionally, reference is made to the fact that the product can act in "helping" to minimize the conflict generated by firearms and contribute to improving the communities in which Humanium Metal has active operation.

“A symbol of change TRIWA x Humanium Metal watches come with the iconic designed solid Humanium Metal case, made completely from recycled illegal weapons. It is made with contrasting metal finishes, stamped out indexes, revolver chamber crown design and signal red details. Each watch is uniquely numbered on the backplate, and you can choose between organically tanned leather straps or recycled PET nylon. Wear your values right on your wrist and make a statement against gun related violence.” (Triwa, 2022a)

This quote taken from the Triwa brand website shows how the purchase of watches is associated with the support of values. This is an example of the way in which products made with Humanium Metal fulfill a double functionality, firstly the practical function, in this case the watch as a tool,

and on the other hand, a communicative function. The following quote from the Arild Link brand allows to elaborate on this idea:

“Embodied with a history the bracelet is designed for casual wear and should be part of an everyday outfit as a symbol for your true values and a proud reminder of your support against gun violence” (Arild Links, 2022a)

The above quote describes Humanium Metal products as an element that have a history. As explained in chapter 8, when made with Humanium Metal, the products tell a story of origin related to places where the firearm conflict is present, precisely those where the NGO operates. This accounts for how material objects reveal stories of their social biography (Hoskins, 2006; Kopytoff, 1986).

10.1. [Commodities, memory and emotions](#)

The communicative function of products allows us to understand how material elements act as "vehicles of memory" (Jelin, 2007). Jelin defines memory as “the ways in which people construct sense or meaning of the past, and how they relate that past to their present in the act of remembering” (2007, pp,141). In the same way, she defines memory as a process in which subjectivity plays an important role since (the memory) is socially constructed in interaction and dialogue. In this way, for Jelin, memory accounts for a "sharing of cultural knowledge", a sharing of experiences that takes place through language and material expressions. Regarding the relationship between memory and materiality, Jelin proposes the following:

“This perspective involves understanding memories as subjective processes anchored in experiences and in material and symbolic markers. There is a dynamic link between individual subjectivities, societal or collective belonging, and the embodiment of the past and its meanings in a variety of cultural products which can be conceived as vehicles of memory, such as books, museums, films, rituals of commemoration and photographs.” (2007, p,189)

In this way, memory is incorporated into material objects and circulates in society. This becomes evident in how the products made with Humanium Metal account for the gun violence present in North and Latin American and African countries. Thus, the products made with Humanium Metal

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are "vehicles of memory" with which it communicates about the past of metal and the work that the NGO carries out concerning gun violence. In this way, the analysis of memory in brands' discursivity is relevant as it allows reconceptualizing time about products, thus "understanding the multi-temporal character of human life and appreciate the capacity of matter and of materiality to embody this multi-temporal process" (Hamilakis & Labanyi; 2008). Concerning the multi-temporal process, Humanium Metal's products account for how memory operates in material objects. In the same way, the products made with this metal give an account of ideas about a better future. The following quotes illustrate this idea:

"This might seem like a small item, but it represents a big idea: a less violent world and a **brighter future**" Video 1



Fig 7. Look book Triwa.

https://ornsstore.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Triwa-Lookbook-2019_lowres.pdf

As the image shows, the brands presenting ideas about the future represented in ideas of an imaginary world and visual pieces that give an account on modern elements of a future technology. By associating products with a hypothetical outcome such as "a better future," brands use temporal resources in which they project future scenarios in which the world is a better place. In doing so, these brands create utopian scenarios (Heilbrunn, 2006) or "possible worlds" (Semprini, 2006). These "possible worlds" are characterized by their positive connotations, such as "better world" or "world at peace".

“With this most precious metal of them all we hope to add new values to the industry and make our contribution for **a more peaceful world.**” Triwa

“More and more people care about consuming sustainably and contributing **to a better world.**” (Arild Links)

In this sense, as Ahmed mentions, the products analyzed in this study reflect the manner in which “objects accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around” (2010, p, 29). This author posits that objects has the capacity of transmitting affects, this “sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (2010, p, 29). In this sense, in the same way that objects convey and communicate memory, they also have the capacity to be vehicles of emotions. Thus, products made with Humanium Metal have the ability to affect by evoking the possibility of a better future, in doing so those products are turned into "happy objects". In this light, happiness is described as an "orientation" or "intentionality" in the objects (Ahmed, 2010). In this case, Humanium Metal product's intentionality (Van Dijk, 1997; Ahmed, 2010) is expressed by mean of language and brand discursivity. Thus, some things become happy on account of human action.

“The circulation of objects is thus the circulation of goods. Objects are sticky because they are already attributed as being good or bad, as being the cause of happiness or unhappiness. This is why the social bond is always rather sensational. Groups cohere around a shared orientation toward some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight” (Ahmed, 2010, p, 35)

In this way, the social biography of the metal Humanium Metal, promotes the circulation of the products, and with this, the evaluations that are made of it. That is to say, the connotations of metal in terms of being “bad” or “good” vary according to the state of the metal.



Fig 8 Video screenshot from 'Leading Swedish Brands Launch Humanium Metal Products' by Humanium Metal (n.d.).

“When I hold certified Humanium Metal in my hands (which has the same weight as an AK47: 3.08 kilos) it’s a bit strange to think about that this has been a weapon used to be a tool for killing and now it is turned into a positive thing”
(Video 1)

This quote illustrates the idea that the more the material circulates, the more favorable or positive attributes are "sticked" (Ahmed, 2010) to the products in the verbal descriptions. Although the gun and the ingot weigh the same, they are made of the same raw material, the moral load on objects is achieved by means of human language action. In this sense “This affective differentiation is the basis of an essentially moral economy in which moral distinctions of worth are also social distinctions of value” (Ahmed, 2010, p, 35), in this argument, moral distinctions towards objects are a contributor to value in a moral economy. Following Appadurai (1986) the commodities’ value is negotiated in exchanges processes, not only economical one, also meaning exchanges. As expressed throughout this study, the exchange of meanings is closely related to the discourse attributed to the products. Another factor contributing to this exchange of moral distinctions is the

adoption of narratives from other organizations such as the United Nations and its proposal of Sustainable Development Goals (SGD).

“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who're furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls. The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context. (UNDP, 2022).

Although these objectives emerged as a social action agenda for the improvement of institutions and development projects, they have been adopted by brands in their marketing strategies in recent years. Thus, the inclusion of the SDGs has been implemented to communicate companies' social responsibility orientation (Voola, et al. 2022). From a cultural analysis perspective on brands, to address the SGDs refers to a project of meaning created around the brands. In this way, the brands propose imaginary scenarios associated with the purchase of the products. Scenarios where the SGDs are accomplished. The following are examples in which the brands refer to these objectives:

“The first target of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 calls for significant reductions in “all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere”. Humanium Metal by IM Swedish Development Partner provides a tool for specifically addressing this challenge, on an individual as well as societal level” (IM Sweden, n.d. b).

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The previous quote shows how the NGO addressed the SDGs. However, this organization has a detailed explanation of how its work covers each of the 17 sustainable development goals.³ This description in each of the objectives shows that the organization is aligned with the 2030 agenda, which supports the claims made regarding utopias (Heilbrunn, 2006), or ideas of regarding “better future”. Below are some of the ways in which brands are addressing SGD on their websites.

“SDG 12 focuses on limiting global consumption and the over-extraction or degradation of environmental resources through production. This is our North Star and the basis of all our processes and decision making. But, as mentioned above, we’re new kids on the block [...] A Good Company + UN Sustainable Development Goals? We support them all, that's a no-brainer! And because June is the official month to support Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, we will be spending this upcoming month on talking about what the different goals mean to us and how we can support them together – as a community.” (Good Company, 2022)

“Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions HOW WE'RE USING GUN METAL TO SAVE LIVES. Gun violence kills around 200,000 people a year. In this special investigation we reveal the truth about gun crime and how we're determined to help” (Together band, 2022)

By associating the purchase with a hypothetical outcome as "a peaceful community", the brands acquire legitimacy from Humanium Metal's actions and project them towards the future through the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. In doing so, these brands are creating utopian scenarios (Heilbrunn, 2006) or "possible worlds" (Semprini, 2006). Here, the brand utopia operates as a rhetorical device, being "conceived as a metaphor whose aim is to convey across time some guiding principles of ideal societies though a criticism of existing political systems" (Heilbrunn, 2006). Thus, the SDGS are used as signs and narratives to express the brands' ideals.

³ For a complete list visit: <https://humanium-metal.com/app/uploads/2020/06/Humanium-Metal-Two-Page-Position-Paper-Human-Security1.pdf>

"By purchasing a product from Humanium Metal, you are part of the solution and help finance more destruction programs of illegal weapons - take a stand!"

(Arild Links, n.d.)

Following the previous quotes, one could say that brands are performing as "social discursive devices" (Semprini, 2006) that imposes themselves as sources of ideological guidance by coordinating a set of 'actions on others' actions' (Heilbrunn, 2006). Additionally, it could be arguable that the symbolic effect of brands has grown significantly in occidental societies emerging as "ideological sources of power [...] [where] seems to be a sort of displacement of current ideology sources from the theological and the political towards the economic" (Heilbrunn, 2006. Pp, 95). In this sense, the brands analyzed on this study case are not only producing symbolic universes, but also, they are producing, to some extent, a discursive ideological guide that can have effect on foreign policy of countries under the scope of the brand ecosystem (Bergvall, 2006) of Humanium Metal. In this case, the brand discourse of evidence how is linked to existential values, rather than mundane/banal values regarding luxury or uniqueness. Brands are appealing to the moral of customers by implying their products have a positive ethical impact on society.

In this manner, brands are elaborating narratives of value to communicate that its offer is better or different from what already exists on the market or the competitors. These statements can be legitimized through claims of difference in the material realm (best functionalities, quality, new colors, or materials) or discursive realm (how the brand portrait their products). In this manner, brand discursiveness "promote a system of material and discursive differences so as to justify and legitimize its existence among other brands" (Heilbrunn, 2006. Pp, 95).

"Wear your values right on your wrist and make a statement against gun related violence." (Triwa, 2022a)

"I think both, watches and weapons have super strong symbolic values. Today the watch industry is focusing on status and precious metals. If we can take away the precious metal and bring something like this (Humanium Metal) into the watches, that has much stronger symbolic value, then we are done our job" (Appendix 1).

While brands are highlighting material features or luxury ideals from the product, at the same time they elaborate on the association between the product and the values from SGDs and the collaboration with Humanium Metal represents, ethical ideas on a better world. Thus, it is possible to appreciate the way in which these brands allow themselves to create symbolic universes (Appadurai, 1990) from the social biography of Humanium Metal and the products made from it, as well as the discursive production about them.

10.2. Persuasive elements

Following Van Dijk (1997), power in discourse manifests itself in persuasive effects in communicative acts. Thus, by means of persuasion, the aim is to direct modes of behavior and mobilize moral or opinion affiliations. Thus, the brands that collaborate with Humanium Metal and the NGO highlight in the content of their websites a series of "calls to action". The following quotes illustrate this argument:

“Your personal belongings tell the world what you believe in. **Take a stand against gun violence by choosing products** from our partners below”
(Humanium Metal. n.d. b)

“By choosing your Goal and wearing your #TOGETHERBAND, it brings you closer to the issue that you are championing as both a reminder and a call to action” (Triwa, 2022b).

“By purchasing our pieces you’re contributing to stopping the largest mass destruction weapon of our time” (Arild Links, n.d. b)

As the previous quotes illustrate, these “calls to action” are guiding the potential consumer to take a stand regarding gun related violence. In this manner, the purchase act acquires moral connotations, either supporting cause buying a product or ignoring the call to action. This corresponds to what Kosnik (2018) refers as ethical consumption as a practice of consumption in which “consumers address their concerns about the world—from climate change to the living conditions of farmers and workers—through their individual market choices” (p,123). An ethical consumer is a socio-economic figure who accept the responsibility of “making wise spending choices as an independent individual” (p, 127). These purchasing decisions are evaluated according to their impact on the environment or on society.

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Askegaard posits, “all these changes are bringing new awareness to both producers and consumers of the meanings attached to products and brands in a consumer society context and consequently are leading to changes in behavior regarding the production and marketing.” (2006, p, 88). In this way, it has been pointed out the manner in which commodities are becoming vehicles of meanings, memory and moral connotations. Being made from reused firearms, the products manufactured from Humanium Metal possess a social biography that conveys the idea of social repositionability, as they allow funding projects on behalf of the victims of gun violence.

11.Executive summary and Conclusions

As demonstrated throughout the text, the social biography of the objects is nourished by the discursive acts that the NGO and the brands perform on obtaining the metal and the elaboration of the products. The collaboration of the organizations evidences a process of the intertextuality of their discourse and the SGDs (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling. 2006). Intertextuality refers to the extraneous relationship between different texts (Van Dijk, 1998). Thus, the collaboration between brands and the NGO allows the co-creation of discourses that derive in persuasive communicative acts to promote the purchase of products from a perspective of ethical and moral consumption. Thus, “... speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning, to persuade people to think about events in a particular way, sometimes even to seek to manipulate them while at the same time concealing their communicative intentions.” (Machin and Mayr 2012, 1).

Throughout this text it has been exposed how approaching the life history of commodities requires analyzing the circumstances in which the cultural biography of economic objects moves in different regimes of value in space and time (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; 17). In this regard, Appadurai states that "regimes of value account for the constant transcendence of cultural boundaries by the flow of commodities, where culture is understood as a bounded and localized system of meanings" (1986. p. 15). Murakami (Murakami, 2016), drawing on the arguments of Appadurarai, Mayers and Villareal, proposes a broader definition of a regime of value, as it follows:

"a regime of value is constituted by a set of rules for valuation, which is created, reproduced, and transformed through the entanglement of the material properties, the acts of production, exchange, and consumption, and the agency of producers, intermediaries, consumers, and other groups of people. Multiple regimes of value can exist for the valuation of different material objects [...] More importantly, the creation of values is political in nature in that it is negotiated [...] As such, regimes of value provide an important basis for negotiating, defining, and constituting power and identity among varying social segments, including elite and non-elite populations, and at multiple scales of social interaction ranging from households to polities to interregional relations. Thus, our understanding of how material objects were valued forms an essential part of our interpretation of sociopolitical processes" (Murakami, 2016. p, 60).

The analysis of the social biography of Humanium Metal's products shows the configuration of a regime of value that is defined by rules of valuation governed by the relationship between the material (metal), the products and the discourses that are elaborated about them. In this regime of value, persuasion is used as a discursive element that denotes power by seeking to influence the consumption practices of potential buyers.

This thesis has addressed the applicability of discursive management towards commodities throughout the text to this extent. In this way, organizations and brands can collaborate in the conformation of discursive and moral universes in terms of materials and commodities. Thus, as a result of this research, the capacity of brands to influence social phenomena such as memory, discourse and consumption practices is recognized.

This thesis suggests some routes for future research. One of them is to involve the perspective of users or potential buyers. This would broaden the perspective on how the audience receives messages directed by brands. Another possible research is to analyze the interaction processes that brands, and organizations maintain in their social networks; this would mean a better understanding of how people create universes of meaning around material objects and how objects influence social life.

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13. Appendix

Transcription video: Leading Swedish Brands Launch Humanium Metal Products

Description: "Humanium Metal by IM is a material made of recycled metal from seized illegal guns. The first products are expected to hit the shelves this summer, available for Swedish consumers."

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gA85S5egHUE&ab_channel=IMSweden

Time	Video description and dialogue
0:00,0 - 0:04,0	<p>The video starts with a black background. Subsequently, a molten metal cauldron is shown into which two rifles are being thrown. The Humanium Metal logo appears after the weapons fall into the cauldron, stoking the fire. In the background, the rising pulsation of a low volume sound can be heard.</p> <p>The video changes its colors to black and white. At the same time, a female voice in English starts the dialogue.</p>
0:04,0 - 0:13,0	<p>The dialogue begins by mentioning the date of the inauguration of the Humanium Metal project, describing this metal as</p> <p>"Humanium Metal is the world's most valuable metal made from destructed illegal firearms and available for commercial mass production".</p>
0:13,0 - 0:22,0	<p>The video mentions that since the beginning, the company has collaborated with 5 Swedish brands and other organizations to explore the production of products based on Humanium Metal.</p>
0:22,0 - 0:50,0	<p>Six People are introduced:</p> <p>Ann Svensén: Secretary General IM Swedish Development Partner Andreas Vural: CEO Yevo Labs Mårten Claesson: Architect, Claesson Koivisto Rune Ingederd Råman: Designer Viktor Blomqvist: CEO Skultna 1607 Axel Isberg: CEO Local Electronics</p>
0:50,0 - 1:06,0	<p>Initiates a multivocal speech, each of the persons listed mentions a sentence from a text regarding the impact of firearms.</p>
1:06,0 - 1:30,0	<p>“When i hold certified Humanium Metal in my hands (which has the same weight as an AK47: 3.08 kilos) it’s a bit strange to think about that this is been</p>

	a weapon. it used to be a tool for killing and now it is turned into a positive thing”
1:30,0 - 1:38,0	The dialogue changes language, now in Swedish with subtitle support, and one of the participants gives her opinion on how encouraging Humanium Metal's initiative is.
1:38,0 - 1:59,0	One more person is introduced in the video. Pelle Lundquis: Creative director a Day's March. Here he talks about the product he makes, a close-up of a hand holding a button is shown.
1:43,0 - 1:52,0	“To know that this little button actually used to be a weapon, and to think of that weapon is not around anymore”
1:52,0 - 2:04,0	The dialogue continues with another person: I really feel that this metal has capacity to change how we think and how we act as humans.
2:04,0 - 2:09,0	Another person is introduced: Ludvig Scheja: Triwa's Creative Director. Ludvig continues the dialogue
2:09,0 - 2:34,0	The images used in the background are those of a foundry. An operator can be seen wearing leather gloves, opening a hatch through which a stream of molten metal comes out. Then, a close-up of the metal part of firearms, followed by a close-up showing a pair of hands holding an ingot of Humanium Metal. “I think both, watches and weapons have super strong symbolic values. Today the watch industry is focusing on status and precious metals. If we can take away the precious metal and bring something like this into the watches, that has much stronger symbolic value, then we are done our job”
2:34,0 - 2:50,0	There is a change of narrator. The video shows a place where there are informal trade booths on a cobblestone street. Then fairground rides are shown, with a

	<p>man driving a carousel by hand. A woman is also shown cooking in a street food place.</p> <p>"These weapons are no longer in the streets; we have melted them down and they are doing good. The profits from the sales from Humanium Metals products also changes the lives of these victims".</p>
2:50,0 - 2:58,0	<p>Narrator change: "From my perspective the fact that you produce and sells this metal is what makes it unique"</p>
2:58,0 - 3:15,0	<p>Narrator change, Axel Isberg is shown holding with his hands a charging cable that has a metal ended part:</p> <p>"At this point we use a small amount of Humanium and attached it to this fairly simple product, but in the long term, for us as brand, is really important and we are really proud to be able to stand in forefront, driving ethical and sustainable values into the consumer electronic segment"</p>
3:15,0 - 3:23,0	<p>Narrator change, Pelle Lundquis is shown holding a button made of Humanium Metal in his hands.</p> <p>"This might seem like a small item, but it represents a big idea: a less violent world and a brighter future"</p>
3:23,0 - 3:49,0	<p>Narrator change, Andreas Vural is shown holding headphones: "This is the first product that we created out of this material, the Yevo 1. It's been a challenge creating this product. But now that we know how to work with the material, we are eager to create more products like this. To be able to take some of the illegal arms from the streets and create something that you can really enjoy.</p>
3:49,0 - 4:11,0	<p>Narrator change, Ingederd Råman is shown sketching using pencil and paper. Dialogue is supported by subtitles:</p>

	<p>“To design a spoon in Humanium Metal was really exciting but it also connects to food, and food is about survival. I made the connection with the material and the destructed firearms and what give life and that's why i think the spoon is such a powerful object”.</p>
4:10,0 - 4:30,0	<p>Narrator change, Mårten Claesson is shown holding a tealight made out of Humanium Metal.</p> <p>“Our plans for Humanium Metal with Claesson Koivisto Rune, is that we made a tealight out of this material, we do hope for it to become successful, we do hope to be able to make new products with these materials in the future”.</p>
4:30,0 - 4:59,0	<p>Narrator change, Viktor Blomqvist is shown.</p> <p>"Our plans for Skultuna with the Humanium Metal are to develop our most well-known designs in this unique material. Is very linked to our core. I think is the first time we came across a metal initiative with a good cause for humanity".</p>
4:59,0 - 5:17,0	<p>Change of narrator, Ann Svensén is shown. Then the faces of 4 people, 2 men and 2 women, are shown in the foreground:</p> <p>"At the end of the day is all about empowering the people living in countries affected by armed violence. Is all about people, the metal, the problem, and the solution".</p>
5:17,0 - 5:28,0	<p>The background changes to black and the logos of Humanium Metal and IM and the brands are displayed.</p> <p>"All sales generated by Humanium Metal will contribute to IM's work to empower people living in societies affected by armed violence".</p>