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## Two strands of rhetoric in advertising discourse

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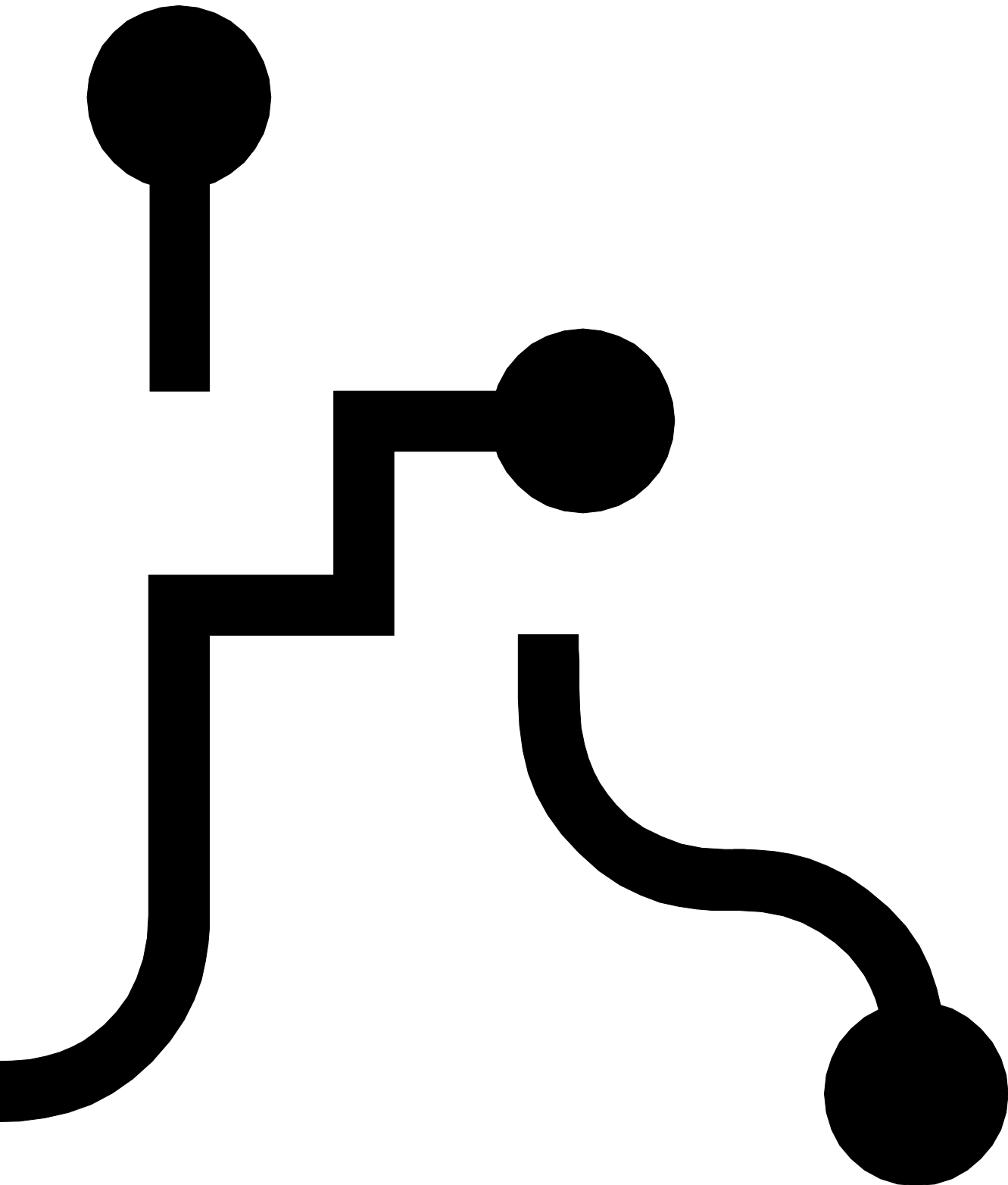
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# Introduction

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Rossolatos

# Contents

## *Two strands of rhetoric in advertising discourse*

Göran Sonesson..... **6**

## *Representations of children in food advertisements in Cyprus: A sociosemiotic perspective*

Evipides Zantides & Evangelos Kourdis..... **25**

## *IKEA: Ego and its Alter in inter-cultural communications*

Jennie Mazur..... **46**

## *An anatomy of the rhetorical landscape of the world's most valuable brands*

George Rossolatos..... **73**

## *Applying archetypal frameworks to brand identity and packaging research*

Marcie Connan & Crystal Sarantoulas..... **126**

## *Semiomarketing and fashion semiology: The business language of fashion and luxury*

Cinzia Ligas and Fausto Crepaldi ..... **132**



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# Two strands of rhetoric in advertising discourse: A cultural semiotic account

Göran Sonesson

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# Abstract

There are two interpretations of rhetoric that are backed by a long tradition: as the theory of argumentation and persuasion, which is how it was born in Antiquity, and as the taxonomy of rhetorical figures, which is the form in which it reigned supreme from the 16th century onwards. In both of these senses, advertising discourse today is the favoured, and in fact almost exclusive, domain of rhetoric. In this essay, we consider the revival in recent decades of both traditions, by Chaïm Perelman and Groupe  $\mu$ , respectively, and their importance to publicity, in particular to advertising pictures. In both senses of the term, rhetoric relies heavily on the presuppositions that are to a greater or lesser extent shared between the initiator of the message and its recipients. In the case of rhetorical figures, it is the organisation of the world of our experience according to topological properties such as neighbourhood, sequence, enclosure, and the like that has to be taken for granted; in the case of persuasion, more particular socio-cultural values have to be shared. We will see, however, that publicity occupies a paradoxical position from this point of view, since it has to rely on a consensus to have any influence, but must at the same time redefine the objects of our experience. As we will see in the case of Absolut Vodka, it was redefined for the international consumer as part of a rich European heritage, while car service was redefined for a Turkish audience into the likeness of fast food.

**Keywords:** rhetoric, presuppositions, source adaption, target adaption, rhetorical figures.

## 0. Introduction

The term rhetoric evokes many different associations. In popular usage, something is rhetorical when it is prolix, but does not contain any substantial information, and/or when it trades in falsehoods. But rhetoric is also an academic discipline, whose official history dates back, with several interruptions, to at least 25 centuries. As the history is long, it is not surprising that it has led to many bifurcations of meaning, the result being that today there are two different senses of rhetoric, each backed by a long ideational history.

There is no doubt that rhetoric started out, at least officially, in Ancient Greece, as the art of persuasion – or as some latter-day luminaries of that branch of rhetoric have said, as the art of getting someone to adhere to the propositions advanced by another. A common conception that dates back to Ancient Greece was that the principal means for convincing somebody was through the use of figurative language, and when rhetoric was revived in the Middle Ages, the theory of figures soon came to the forefront. Petrus Ramus seems to have been the pioneer of this new usage, and for the next 500 years, rhetoric was more or less synonymous with the taxonomy of figures.

At the beginning of the 20th century, rhetoric was supposed to be stone dead. Around the middle of the last century, revivals of both traditions of rhetoric took place, but even today, the two traditions have not really come to terms with each other. Several British and North American authors made some attempts to renovate rhetoric as the theory of persuasion at the beginning of the last century, but a real new beginning was only made by Chaïm Perelman (1977), who was the one who reformulated



persuasion as an attempt to get others to adhere to one's propositions. Meanwhile, in the ideological jungle of French structuralism, Groupe  $\mu$  (1992), combining the inspiration of structural semantics and mathematical set theory, proposed a new way of analysing the classical rhetorical figures into fundamental operations, which was already ground-breaking as applied to verbal language, but became even more radical when it was adapted to media not dreamt of by the Ancient Greeks, such as, notably, pictures and other visual phenomena.

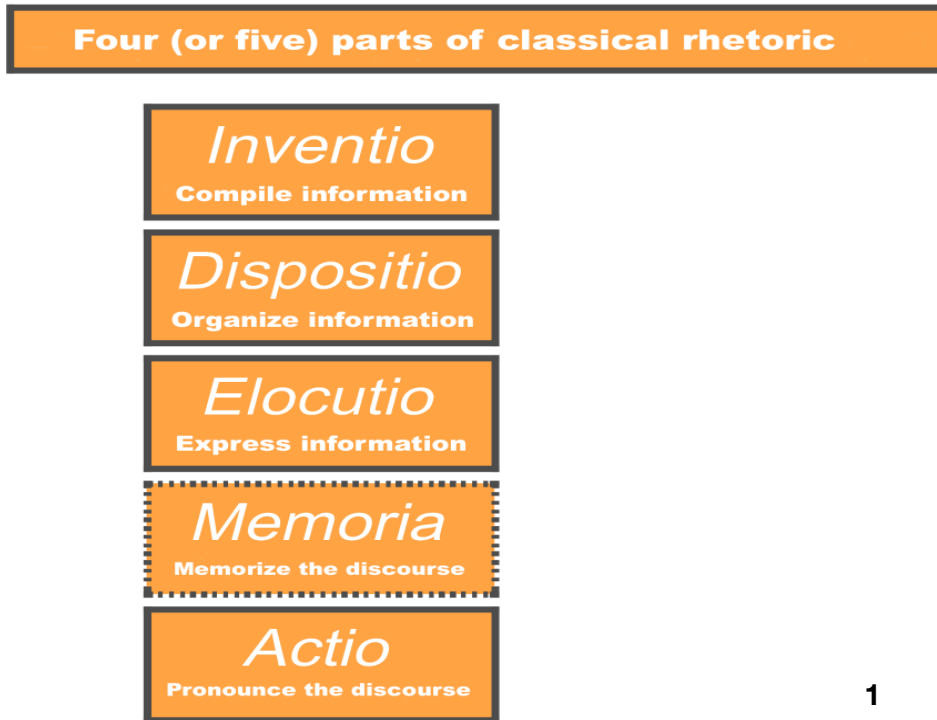
The Greeks said there were three kinds of rhetorical discourse, i.e., the political speech, the juridical argument, and panegyrics. This is repeated even today in the courses of rhetoric that are given at our universities. But, in fact, our lawyers and politicians do not use much rhetoric in any of the received senses, and even though they may still do some panegyrics, they do not contain much invention, which is the beginning of rhetoric in any sense of the term. So whatever we may think of publicity from other points of view, publicity discourse is today practically the only domain in which rhetoric is alive and well – in both classical senses of the term, that is, as both *dispositio* and *elocutio*. And this, I think, is particularly true about publicity conveyed by pictures.

## 1. Rhetoric as communication

We will have a look at the traditional division of rhetoric, two parts of which have in recent centuries competed at being the whole of rhetoric, and we will then go on to suggest that rhetoric, in the first sense of the term, just like semiotics and hermeneutics, is only a particular perspective on the situation of communication, in the sense in which meanings are transacted between different subjects. This will prepare us to encounter the world taken for granted in the next section, which has to be shared between the subjects involved in communication, and particularly so in the case of publicity.

### 1.1 The parts of rhetoric

In its original, classical form, rhetoric has four parts: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, and *actio* (cf. Barthes 1970: 197; Reboul 1984: 20ff), to which later, *memoria*, the technique of memorising the discourse, was added. Already in Antiquity, the means developed within these specialities were made to serve purposes other than strict persuasion, such as, most notably, aesthetic function and philosophical argument. We can here dispense with any further discussion of *actio*, since, in the case of pictures, as in that of written language, it cannot be divorced from *elocutio*, and has thus not given rise to any generalisation within more recent rhetorical theories. The same applies, even more obviously, to *memoria*.



1

**Fig. 1.** The four (or five) parts of rhetoric.

*Inventio*, of course, is the art of finding out what to talk about, but it also already involves a certain organisation of the material, taking into account both social and psychological aspects, such as what is taken for granted within society (the *topoi*) and the way to influence people (*ethos* and *pathos*). This is an aspect that so far has been more or less neglected in the attempt to create a visual rhetoric; in the following, however, I will be particularly concerned with the former aspect, to the extent that I will seek recourse to the notion of the Lifeworld, also known as the ecological sphere.

*Dispositio* more specifically consists in putting discourse in order, and thus it has something to do with what we today would call the structure of the argument. One of the different “new rhetorics” developed in recent times, that of Chaïm Perelman, conceives of rhetoric as a theory of argumentation, but so far it has not been directly applied to pictures (except, in passing, by Meyer 2005; ed. 1999). Indeed, if, as Perelman (1977) claims, the purpose of rhetoric is to produce *adherence* to the proposed arguments, then the scope of rhetoric will go far beyond that which is usually suggested by the term persuasion. Clearly, even pictures, and not only openly propagandistic pictures, aim at producing adherence to the values of their producers. And yet, it is important to establish whether pictures are capable of giving expression to an argumentative structure, which is something that has often been denied in theory, but seems to be borne out in the present-day practice of the mass media. It is conceivable that, fundamentally, an argument can be carried out in an identical manner in pictures as in verbal language, but it is also possible that the pictorial argument takes quite a different form from the verbal one.

As for *elocutio*, which is the stylistic elaboration of the argument, it involves, most notably, rhetorical figures, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and many others. There have been numerous attempts simply to apply the existing repertoires of rhetorical figures to other domains, such as pictures, but the result has never been satisfactory. If not at the level of argumentation, pictures are certainly entirely different from language at the level of “style”, that is, more properly speaking, as far as the semiotic resources at their disposal are concerned. There is, to begin with, nothing similar to words and sentences in pictures. In fact, the differences are even more wide-ranging: there is even a sense in which rhetoric is more immediately present in pictures and other iconic signs than in verbal language. It is in the nature of the iconic sign to posit at the same time its own resemblance and dissimilitude with respect to its object: because of the first feature, the sign creates an expectation of identity that, by means of its second aspect, it necessarily disappoints. That the iconic sign is essentially motivated and just marginally conventional is something that I have tried to show elsewhere, against authorities such as Eco and Goodman (cf. Sonesson 1989; 2006; 2010a), and with regard to the different ways in which the iconic sign may modulate its similarities and dissimilarities (cf. Sonesson 1996a, b; 1997; 2001a; 2004a, b; 2005; 2008; 2010b).

The second tradition of “new rhetorics” is the one initiated by Groupe  $\mu$ , which attempts to go beyond the traditional figures, to discover a set of general operations responsible for the functioning of these figures in verbal language, which can then be seen to work in another way, given the kind of resources offered by other semiotic domains, such as pictures. There is nothing new about this rhetoric, to the extent that it continues a part of rhetoric present in the Greek tradition and dominant in Western thought since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is new, however, in that it furnishes us with the tools for analysing *how* such expression is brought about, going beyond the level of figures, and permitting a meaningful application to domains other than verbal language. My own work in pictorial rhetoric has basically concerned this tradition, trying to go beyond Groupe  $\mu$  in the enterprise they have initiated (cf. Sonesson 1996a, b; 1997; 2001a; 2004a, b; 2005; 2008; 2010b).

## 1.2 The communication model

Complementary to its various facets, rhetoric has of course a communicative function, in the sense in which one subject conveys a meaning to another subject, though not necessarily in the sense of an artefact being transferred from one place to another, as suggested by the so-called “conduit metaphor” (cf. Reddy 1979). The mathematical theory of communication has created a lot of confusion as far as the meaning of communication is concerned. A letter is of course an instance of communication in both senses of the term. Communication in this sense does not require encoding either. A telegram, in the classical meaning of the term, is, however, an instance of encoding, as well as of communication in both senses of the term. If there is a transmission, it may very well involve the transplantation of the initiator of the communication or its receiver. A publicity poster will send its message each time somebody passes by it on the street, and an advertising message can only be sent once the journal in

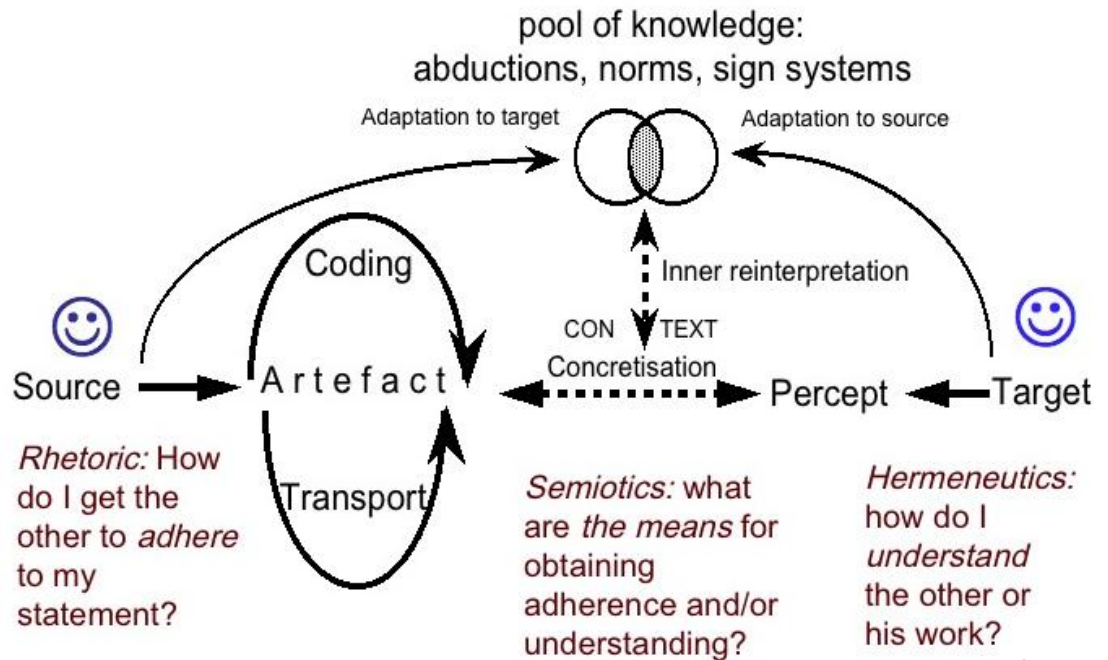
which it appears is acquired by somebody and that person starts turning over the pages. The only thing that is necessary for communication to take place, in this sense, is that someone sets a task of interpretation to somebody else.

Instead of a continuous process initiated by a subject and affecting another, communication really should be seen as a *double set of acts*, which may coincide spatially and/or temporally, but often do not, and which are initiated by at least two different subjects, the sender and the receiver, or, to choose more appropriate terms, the *creator* and the *concretiser*. Curiously, the case of the radio, and to some extent even the telegraph, should really have suggested this model: no matter how much a program is broadcast, no communication will take place until somebody puts his radio receiver on. Nowadays, when we have to start up our computer, connect to the Internet service provider, start the e-mail program and then pick up the mail from the server, we get an even more acute idea of the double initiative required for communication to take place.

According to the conception of the Prague school of semiotics, as it was notably developed by Mukařovský and Vodička, *norms*, which in part are purely aesthetic, and in part have an extra-aesthetic origin, determine the production of the *artefact* by its creator, both directly, as a *canon*, or set of rules, and in the form of a *repertory of exemplary works of art* which are offered for imitation. In order to become an *aesthetical object*, or as we shall say generalizing the term, a *percept*, the artefact must be perceived by the public, and this process of perception, termed *concretisation*, itself depends on the existence of norms, which are ideally more or less identical to those employed by the creator. More commonly, and more interestingly, the norms may have been modified and even exchanged for others since the artefact was created, in which case a new interpretation of the artefact will result. Concretisation involves the determination of the *dominants* appearing in the structure of the work of art, that is, the elements that are to receive emphasis and which will then organise the remaining elements of the structure according to their purpose; it also allows the perceiver to fill in lacking details from his own experience. In these terms, what the Prague model says is that the two subjects involved in a process of communication may initiate their acts in time using different sets of norms. One tends to think of cultures as individuated in space, but of course we may also distinguish cultures in time; indeed, cultures may be dispersed in time, as well as in space, to the extent that they correspond to different subcultures, interest groups, and so on. This is a way of saying that the meaning that is there for the receiver is not exactly the meaning that was there for the sender. In terms of the conduit metaphor, what goes in is *not* what comes out.



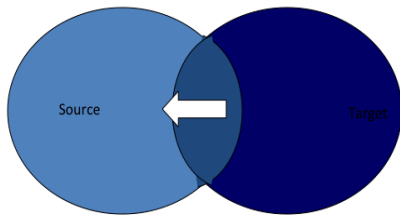
## General Model of Communication



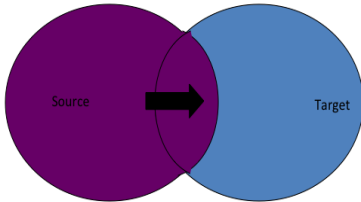
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**Fig. 2.** Communication model, as suggested in Sonesson 1999, and related to the rhetoric, hermeneutic, and semiotic poles.

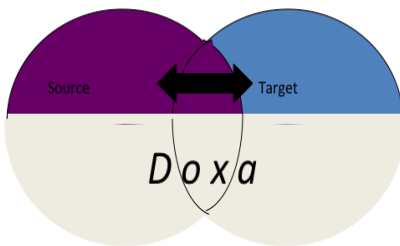
According to an idea, suggested by Jury Lotman, the sender and receiver in any situation of communication start out with "codes" — or, as I would prefer to say, systems of interpretation —, which overlap only in part, struggling to homogenise the system of interpretation as the communication proceeds (cf. Fig. 2. and Sonesson 1999). We can extend this idea by referring to the conception elsewhere propounded by Lotman and his collaborators in the so-called Tartu school, according to which cultures may be sender-oriented and receiver-oriented, and by transferring these properties to situations of communication. As proposed by Sonesson (1999), the communicative act may then be said to be *sender-oriented*, to the extent that it is considered to be the task of the receiver to recover that part of the system of interpretation, which is not shared between the participants. It will be *receiver-oriented*, to the extent that the task of recovering knowledge not held in common is assigned to the sender (cf. Fig. 3). Art, as conceived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been characteristically sender-oriented; mass media, in the received sense of the term (which is not really applicable to all modern media), have been noticeably receiver-oriented. The situation of teaching is clearly receiver-oriented. Publicity, however, is in a rather strange situation, because in order to attain adherence, it needs to share a lot of presuppositions with those it targets, but at the same time it needs to convince them of things which they certainly will not easily take for granted, such as that Absolut Vodka carries with it all the values of traditional European culture, or, as we shall see, that car service may be as good as a hamburger.



### Adaptation to source



### Adaptation to target



### Persuasion

3

**Fig 3.** Retrieval of message as adaptation to source, adaptation to target, or mutual adaptation on the basis of background information and presuppositions (“doxa”).

With reference to this model, it is easy to see that rhetoric, semiotics and hermeneutics are situated at different points of the communication process. They all partake of the whole process, but from different perspectives. Rhetoric takes the point of view of the creator of the message: it asks how one is to express oneself in order to obtain adherence on the part of the receiver. Hermeneutics takes the point of view of the receiver: its question concerns how to understand the message of the other (and/or his work). Semiotics takes up a position in between, that is, within the phase going from the artefact to its concretisation: it asks what resources are available for bringing about the process.

It is misleading, of course, to say that rhetoric is only concerned with the creator: on the contrary, it concerns the relationship of the creator to the receiver, mediated, or not, by the resources at their disposal. The real question, then, is how the creator has to act in order to produce adherence in the other or, alternatively, how he is to use the resources at his disposal in order to obtain that same adherence. The hermeneutical question really involves what the receiver is to do in order to be able to understand the other (or the work of the other) or, alternatively, how he is to make use of the resources available to be able to understand the other (or his work). The semiotic question, finally, relates to the nature and kind of resources being available at the moment of communication or, alternatively, to the way in which the thoughts of the creator have been mediated by available resources to the receiver. The alternative versions of the rhetorical and hermeneutical questions are



semiotically informed variants. The alternative version of the semiotical question is a rhetorically and hermeneutically informed variety. At the centre of semiotics, then, is the question *how*: in what way is meaning produced, conveyed, and collected.

### 1.3 Conclusions

Communication, in the sense in which it interests us here, is primarily a task of interpretation set by one subject for another. Rhetoric, hermeneutics, and semiotics may be considered different perspectives on the communication process, which take the entire process into account, but with an emphasis on the sender, the receiver, and the resources of interpretation, respectively. Historically, rhetoric, hermeneutics, and semiotics have evolved as separate traditions. Rhetoric was split in two directions, by concentrating, on the one hand, on the theory of advancing arguments (not necessarily logical ones) with view to aligning others with one's propositions, and, on the other hand, on rhetorical figures, which in recent times has meant going beyond a simple taxonomy to find the general principles that allow for the creation of figures. In contemporary advertising discourse both orientations are pursued, the latter in particular in the form of advertising pictures.

## 2. Meanings taken for granted

All communication rests on certain shared presuppositions. To the extent that all subjects involved are human beings, there are a lot of things they all take for granted. Phenomenology has called this the *Lifeworld*, and James Gibson (1982) has talked about the *world of ecological physics*. In the rhetorical tradition, this is known as *doxa*. Others have used terms such as "background", "presuppositions", "commons", etc. In the Lifeworld and in ecological physics, contrary to the world described by modern physics, the sun goes up every morning and down every evening. We certainly have to take that for granted, if we are going to know when to switch on the light to browse through a paper, but that may not be among the most obvious presuppositions of advertisements (cf. Sonesson 1989; 2001b). There are also presuppositions which are specific to particular socio-cultural Lifeworlds, which may correspond to countries, such as Germany, Sweden, or Turkey, or to wider domains such as Europe or the Occident, and even to groups of people within a particular Lifeworld. Since advertising's focus is on the ways whereby a public may be brought to adhere to the propositions of the sender, rhetoric has been interested not only in presuppositions shared by all human beings and by people in a particular culture, but in the presuppositions taken for granted by a particular targeted audience during a particular act of communication – the public in Perelman's (1977: 32) sense of all those whom the initiator of the act wants to influence.

## 2.1 *Vodka and European values*

Elsewhere, I have often used a particular publicity campaign involving Absolut Vodka, the so-called “European cities” series, which disguises the distinctive bottle of Absolut by using shapes which are, in one way or another, also recognizable as scenes taking place in one or other European city with well-known history (cf. Sonesson 1996a, b; 1997; 2001a; 2004a, b; 2005; 2008; 2010b). As I have pointed out elsewhere (Sonesson 2010b), the most general procedure underlying all rhetorical figures could best be described as *the production of meaning resulting from a divergence in relation to that which is expected*. At the level of rhetorical figures, the divergence concerns the divisions of experienced reality: on the one hand, what we are accustomed to experience as complete and independent objects, or “substances”, to adopt Gibson’s term, only appear in part, and sometimes in other orders and proportion than in perceptual reality; on the other hand, something which is clearly one “substance” to normal perception appears as being both that thing and another quite different one. In one extreme case, “Absolut Naples” (reproduced, along with the following Absolut examples, in Sonesson 2004a; 2008, cf. Lewis 1996), the Absolut bottle is made up of a combination of a street lantern and cords spanned over narrow streets on which laundry is suspended. What is on one level a single substance, the bottle, is thus on another level several different substances, also of different types. Order and proportion may also be affected, as is the case with “Absolut Athens”, where the bottle consists of parts of a Greek column, but in a different order and with different proportions than the parts have in the column.

Groupe  $\mu$  (1992) tried to account for this kind of rhetoric, suggesting a cross-classification of elements which are absent or present, and which are conjoined or disjoined. They have thus taken the important step of abandoning the taxonomy of figures, instead defining some general principles, which may account for all instances of figurative rhetoric. These principles are certainly partly implicit in the traditional classification of figures, but they are new as they stand, and, beyond that, as they are formulated, they allow us to dispense with the particular figures altogether. Elsewhere, I have suggested that the particular principles they proposed are not quite adequate for the task. First of all, in most cases there is both the absence of one element that is expected and the presence of another, unexpected element. Thus, in “Absolut Rome”, there is an absence of an expected bottle cap, and the presence of unexpected handlebars of a Vespa. This may be more obvious in cases in which parts of different substances (in Gibson’s sense) are mixed in the representation, for instance when bottles are present where the pupils of Captain Haddock’s eyes should be. In the second place, there would seem to be many different modalities and intermediaries of disjunction and conjunction. Indeed, all kinds of relationships defined by mathematical topology, such as proximity, separation, inclusion or interiority/exteriority (that is, encasing and envelopment), succession, and continuity, are relevant here (cf. Sonesson 2010b). We expect an onion to be made up of onion parts, but it may also consist entirely of hands and feet. Something may be both a cat and a coffee pot, which are made to share some parts, while others are peculiar to one of the interpretations. It is also possible for substances to be present integrally, but combined in surprising ways. It is normal for ice to go together with an ice-



pail, but rather strange for the ice-pail to be exchanged for the Coliseum. A lot could be said about the perceptual reorganisation occasioned by rhetorical figures in pictures.

There is however quite another level of the Absolut publicity, which I have hardly touched on. From the point of view of argumentation and persuasion, the important issue is of course why the initiator of the message should have chosen to create a picture suggesting a similarity between the Absolut bottle and different parts of culturally rich places in Europe – for this similarity is certainly created, since it would hardly emerge spontaneously in our perception of the real world. Indeed, it is just as much created by the picture as the near-identity of a cat and a coffee pot in Julien Key's "Chat noir", of the similarity between a woman's face and a trunk produced by Magritte's "Le viol". The external, perceptual similitude is no doubt there to induce the idea of there being a deeper similitude, between Absolut Vodka (the content rather than the bottle – or, rather, the mark) and the cultural values which these European cities represent. In the real world, it is not at all clear what the European cultural heritage has to do with an alcoholic beverage produced in Sweden. Absolut Vodka is fabricated in the small municipality of southern Sweden called Åhus. There is no advertisement called "Absolut Åhus" (that is, not in the "European cities" series). There is, however, an "Absolut Stockholm", which predictably shows one of the traditional boats cruising the Stockholm archipelago, the shape of which is curiously reminiscent of the Absolut bottle. Åhus is more than 560 kilometres south of Stockholm. Long before the Absolut bottle was invented, there was a kind of Swedish liquor called, in literal translation, "absolutely purified alcohol". It was never called vodka, because that is a Russian term, which is however more internationally recognized than the Swedish "aquavit", or, to make a literal translation once again, "burnt wine". There was evidently a lot of packaging going on well before the advertisement series "European cities" and any other advertisement pictures featuring Absolut Vodka. Indeed, there never was any publicity for "absolutely purified alcohol", since all publicity for liquor was – and is – prohibited in Sweden. The characteristic bottle serves to separate Absolut Vodka from "absolutely purified alcohol". The name vodka does not necessarily make Absolut into something Russian, but certainly into something more international than "aquavit". But none of the above is sufficient to make Absolut Vodka the carrier of any particular values.

Absolut Vodka is clearly being sold as a European product, enriched with the long traditions of the combined European cultures. There is a paradox to this, since Sweden, which is nowadays a part of the European Union, only became a member after a long internal discussion, during which some Swedes advanced the argument that Sweden was not really a part of Europe. Historically, this is of course quite unfounded, but it may reflect the political reality of this country having been more ideologically connected to the US than to the rest of Europe since the end of the Second World War. This poses the question: why would anybody want to sell a Swedish product as being part of the European cultural heritage? I can only offer the following explanation: the Absolut Vodka argument depends, in its visual presentation, on a widely recognized *topos*, according to which Europe is "the old world" with its rich cultural heritage, as opposed to the U.S., which, in turn, is the more modern part of the world. This *topos* no doubt today seems somewhat dated, mostly flourishing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and

at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its *locus classicus* being, notably, the novels of Henry James. If so, it is no accident that the Absolut publicity appears exclusively in American news magazines such as Newsweek and Times, as well as in the in-flight magazines found on international flights. This serves to delimit somewhat the public which the initiator of the message (whether we take this to be “Vinoch spritcentralen” owned by the Swedish state at the time, the publicity agency which created the series, or the photographer who made the specific pictures) wanted to influence – to get it to adhere to certain values transferred to the merchandise, as Perelman described it. For the advertisement to work its magic, this *topos* must still be surviving in some part of the American public that reads news magazines and that goes on flights to Europe – at least in the projected ideal audience, to use Perelman’s term. There is no reason to think that anybody would take such a *topos* seriously nowadays: it may be exchanged between the parties as an internal joke. Whether this *topos* has any relevance for other passengers is difficult to know. One would hardly imagine Chinese people looking at Europe as being any kind of old culture.

There is of course a third party, which, in terms of our communication model, is neither the source nor the target of this message, and that is Swedish people in general: what does it do for them? As European values have been transferred by the advertisement series to the Swedish aquavit, there has perhaps been, to adopt a Freudian term, a counter-transference: just as the international fame of Ingmar Bergman and Astrid Lindgren have added to the international image of Sweden, as has the IKEA publicity, the Absolut Vodka advertisements may well have made Sweden a little more European – at least in the eyes of the members of other cultures.

## 2.2 A difficult burger to chew

To understand how much is taken for granted in the Absolut publicity, nevertheless, it is worth considering an advertisement that appeared in a country which is not a prototypical Western culture, although, as most cultures at present, it is certainly very much influenced by Western culture: Turkey. Indeed, it may even seem that educated Turks are imbued with Western values. At a conference in Izmir, in Turkey, in 2002, where I was invited as a plenary lecturer, a Turkish scholar commented on an advertisement, which, from the point of view of figurativity, manifested a similar organization to that of the Absolut Vodka advertisements (Fig. 4). In his lecture, my Turkish colleague Yusef Devran expressed himself in terms similar to the ones found in the acts of the conference: after observing that the advertisement “may not be decoded properly by the readers who don’t have enough information about the Western food culture”, Devran (2002: 219f) goes on to write: “A person who eats a cheeseburger satisfies his hunger and this person’s body functions in a much better way. Therefore, if you care for your car, as you care for your body, your car will function much better and will be much safer”. He is right, of course, that if you do not know that burgers are a kind of fast food, you do not understand the analogy in the publicity. At the same time, however, people who “have enough information about the Western food culture” would hardly see the consumption of burgers as a way of properly taking care of your body and would thus not make the analogy to taking good care of your



car. So, if Devran is right, it seems that the intended public must, in addition, have information about what Turkish people think about Western food culture.

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**Fig.4.** Turkish advertisement for (as it turns out) rapid car service. The text reads as follows: "Big choice – 1-15 December – Chrysler and Jeep Winter maintenance days – Free check-up – 20% discount for the workers' wages and spare parts – Original spare parts guaranteed in workers efforts at our authorized Services – The authorized services of the Chrysler and Jeep Company" (translation courtesy of Yusuf Devran, email to the author on June 12, 2002).

Let us, therefore, start by taking a close look at the advertisement, avoiding, as far as possible, all prejudice. Always, when two substances (again in the Gibsonean sense) are combined in a picture, there is an ambiguity as to which one is meant to lend its values to the other. In the Absolut campaign, we know that the Absolut bottle is the theme, because Absolut Vodka is that which the advertisement is out to sell, so it is clear that the values of the European cities are to be transposed to the bottle, not the other way round. But which is the tenor and which is the vehicle of this figure? What we see is a burger confectioned out of automobile parts. If the goal of the advertisement is to sell burgers, it is a

mystery how the creators of the advertisement imagine that anybody should find it tempting to buy this kind of food because of the suggested similarity to spare parts of a car. One rather gets the impression that this particular burger will be somewhat hard to chew. If they are selling cars, what positive values might be transferred from burgers to cars? Perhaps the car is as cheap as a burger, but then it would seem to follow that whatever is the equivalent of nutritional value for a car must also be as low as in a burger. That the cars, or something involving the cars, are the theme of the advertisement becomes clear even to those of us who do not read Turkish when we see the words “Chrysler” and “Jeep”. But, at least to me, it still remains difficult to understand how any positive values can be transferred to cars from a burger. But this is of course because I have in fact not avoided the prejudice of Western values, and perhaps even those of a certain group of Westerners.

Once the meaning of the Turkish text has been explained (see caption to Fig. 4), we understand that the idea is to suggest that in this place the servicing of the car is as rapid as the serving of food in a hamburger bar. I cannot judge whether to a certain audience this meaning is evident even without reading the text (as I think the Absolut Vodka publicity is). Even so, the logic of the argument puzzled me. Rapidity may be a positive value, but how can you transfer it from burgers without at the same time evoking a series of negative evaluations, such as bad taste, nauseating smell, low nutritional value and perhaps even big chains selling goods of poor quality? When I pointed this out in Izmir, it turned out that the other invited (European and North American) lecturers agreed with me, but the Turks, who were in the majority, did not see the problem. I have since then shown the picture at many conferences in Europe and the Americas, and it seems that my reaction is widely shared. I cannot of course demonstrate that this is a difference between the values of a Turkish audience and a Western one generally, for which a different approach would be necessary, but it suggests at least that such a study may be worth-while.

### **2.3 Selling Swedishness**

As explained by Jennie Mazur (2013; this volume), the publicity produced by the Swedish furniture company IKEA is different in different countries, and is thus produced with a specific, and certainly non-Swedish, public in view. Contrary to the Absolut publicity, the IKEA publicity does not try to hide the Swedish origin of its products, but on the contrary uses it as an argument to sell its products. Not Europeanness, but Swedishness, is the higher value that IKEA wants to associate with its products. There is a paradox to this, since the products are most of the time fabricated in some other part of the world than Sweden, but, as the label always reads, “idea and design” remain with IKEA Sweden. As Mazur also observes, the idea of Sweden featured in the IKEA publicity, at least in Germany (and I think that is also valid for at least some other countries, such as, notably, France), consists mostly of stereotypes, i.e., the kind of things people outside Sweden may believe they know about Sweden, but which all Swedes know to be untrue. Thus, this publicity occupies a complex position between two cultures: the values that they transfer to their products are not real Swedish values, but values projected by Germans to a Swedish culture. So, although the senders of the message are Swedes, it



is an outside view of Sweden they try to sell. IKEA originally used – and still uses – the same strategy within Sweden. The first IKEA department store was situated in Älmhult, a small town itself located in the province of Småland (“the small counties”) in southern Sweden (but still to the north of Åhus). In Sweden a traditional stereotype says that people from Småland are very thrifty, or, perhaps, rather extremely miserly. IKEA explicitly makes use of this stereotype, selling their products as being from Småland. This is made to explain that IKEA products are so inexpensive in spite of being of such high quality. Of course, this information is normally not available outside Sweden, so, when going outside the country, IKEA had to invent something else. They counted on stereotypes about Swedes, but not concerning people from Småland. In France, the slogan was “these Swedes are out of their mind”, selling such good products for so little money. As Mazur shows, this is also, in part, the spirit of the German IKEA publicity.

There seems to be several dangers to this strategy. First of all, how can IKEA sell their products with Swedishness, if Absolut Vodka had to shed its Swedishness to become an international brand (similar to how IKEA has to liberate itself from its origin in Småland)? In the second place, how can IKEA avoid transferring negative values to their products, which is after all what makes up much of the content of stereotypes, in the sense of being an outside view of a culture or cultural group? The answer to the first question is probably that IKEA is playing at another level than Absolut. IKEA wants to be homely, but Absolut wants to cover itself in the prestige of the whole European culture. They are directing themselves to different intended audiences.

The second question is more difficult. First, you have to pick your stereotypes. The Turkish company that advertised their service using an analogy to burgers would no doubt have to think again if it had intended to address a wider audience than the Turkish one. According to some common stereotypes, Swedes, in spite of having sex all the time, lead a very boring life, which explains that they drink a lot of alcohol and end up committing suicide. These are not the stereotypes featured by IKEA. Most of these stereotypes do appear, however, in the “Banned IKEA publicity” available on YouTube (cf. Mazur 2012: 223ff). Second, you can present some of the stereotypes you marshal with a distinct ironical distance: you present it as something we have all heard, but we know it does not really apply. There is the risk, of course, that some people in Germany really believe you have to fear for your life if you go out on the street in Sweden on the 20th day after Christmas, known in Sweden as “Knut”, when Christmas trees are dropping all around. But perhaps the initiator of the message may have reason to think that most people will see this as an ideal type of a stereotype, i.e., an exaggerated example of what is really going on. This will not help, however, if the recipient takes all the message of Swedishness at the level of jokes. He or she must really believe in the seriousness pertaining to the Swedishness of the “idea and design by IKEA of Sweden”. To the extent that this communication is really, most of the time, felicitous, this has probably not much to do with the particular message, but with the structure of the world taken for granted, and the extent to which it corresponds to expectations in the concerned cultures. If so, this means that we need to make more progress in fundamental research with respect to cultural semiotics.

Cultural semiotics, on which I have written many articles, is about the relationship between cultures, as shaped by the ideas one culture entertains about the other, and vice-versa. The origin of cultural semiotics is found in the Tartu school of semiotics, and, beyond that, in the Bakhtin circle and the Prague school of semiotics. I have tried to develop this branch of learning, suggesting that there is a difference between two kinds of relationship a culture can have with another culture: either it treats the others as being *Alius*, which is more or less the same as identifying its members with dead things; or it treats them as *Alter*, as being different, but still within the limits of the circle of those with which it is worth talking to (cf. Sonesson 2000; 2002; 2004c; 2012 as well as Cabak Rédei 2007 and Mazur 2012). This double duality is, of course, an over-simplification, but it already goes beyond the subtlety of standard and, in particular, postmodern approaches to the relationship between cultures. What we need now is really more fundamental research into cultural semiotics, i.e., the relations between cultures as conceived in the terms of these very cultures. This is important, not only for the classical humanistic and humanitarian reason of understanding better the world in which we live, but also as a background for the analysis of publicity pictures, the issues resulting from migration, and all kinds of intercultural relations.

## 2.4 Conclusions

All communication depends on knowledge taken for granted. If we assume the point of view of the initiator of the message, the rhetorical perspective, we have to consider what knowledge is accessible to him or her, which he or she can also suppose to be present in the receiver. Similarly, from the point of view of the receiver, the hermeneutical perspective, we have to ask whether the knowledge accessible to the receiver may also have been present in the initiator. Rhetoric as *elocutio* basically reorganises the perceptual world, its substances, wholes, and parts, and thus the kind of knowledge involved is mostly common to the human Lifeworld, the ecological niche of the human species. Rhetoric as *dispositio*, on the other hand, has more to do with the specific traits of each particular socio-cultural Lifeworld, and thus the possibility of the same information being available to both the initiator of the communication and its target depends on both of them being members of the same culture, in space and/or in time. Publicity messages that cross cultural boundaries may easily go completely wrong. Where such messages adapt to other cultures, and trade on stereotypes, there is a risk of communication's being overwhelmed by negative associations. Thus, from the point of view of advertising discourse, it is mandatory to filter the *topoi* that underpin ad messages through the palette of hermeneutics, rhetoric and semiotics.



### 3. General conclusions

Two long since segregated parts of classical rhetoric have undergone a revival in the past half-century. *Dispositio* as the theory of adherence according to Perelman, and *elocutio* as the general theory of divergence from that which is expected as suggested by Groupe  $\mu$ . I have tried to bring these traditions together in this essay, while laying emphasis, as I have never done before, on the *dispositio* side. I have picked my examples from the domain of publicity, which in contemporary society would seem to be the standard bearer of both kinds of rhetoric. Both conceptions depend on background conditions, in other words, on the Lifeworld, the world taken for granted. Rhetorical figures are divergences from the general principles of the Lifeworld, the laws of ecological physics, while argumentation rather centres on specific presuppositions within singular socio-cultural Lifeworlds. In the semiotics of culture, the issue that now looms large is how we are going to understand the structure of this knowledge taken for granted. It may not be too difficult to understand why Swedishness can be a selling argument for some kinds of products, but is better eliminated in other cases; but how are we to understand that such messages may deal with stereotypes, while avoiding transferring negative, rather than positive values to the products they are intended to promote? This is a fundamental question that is inviting of further research in cultural semiotics.

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