

Intellectual irradiations: A decade of collaboration with the Graduate Program in Communication Sciences of the University of São Paulo

Irradiações intelectuais: Uma década de colaboração com o Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Comunicação da Universidade de São Paulo

■ FERNANDO RAMÓN CONTRERAS^a

University of Seville. Seville – Andalusia, Spain

ABSTRACT

In this article we present a synthesis of collaboration with the RCT over a decade in Communication research. Our contribution always had an epistemic origin in studies on visual culture, and we present our findings in an interdisciplinary format. Among the most relevant issues are the notions of semiotic irradiation, publicism, and the contribution of visual studies in the knowledge of the phenomenon of the reception of advertising. We highlight in the conclusions the importance of emotions, feelings, and sensory sensations in the current phenomena of communication. The body is the artifact of postmodernity to merge history, industry, advertising, and politics by the expression of human desires in media discourses.

Keywords: Culture, visuality, art, advertising, communication

^a Full Professor of Visual Studies at the Journalism Department of the University of Seville. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1105-5800>. E-mail: fmedina@us.es

RESUMO

Neste artigo apresentamos uma síntese de colaboração com a Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP) ao longo de uma década em pesquisa de Comunicação. Nossa contribuição sempre teve origem epistêmica em estudos sobre cultura visual, e apresentamos nossos achados em formato interdisciplinar. Entre os temas mais relevantes, há as noções de irradiação semiótica, publicismo e a contribuição de estudos visuais no conhecimento do fenômeno do acolhimento da publicidade. Destacamos nas conclusões a importância de emoções, sentimentos e sensações sensoriais nos fenômenos atuais da comunicação. O corpo é o artefato da pós-modernidade para fundir história, indústria, publicidade e política através da expressão dos desejos humanos nos discursos da mídia.

Palavras-chave: Cultura, visualidade, arte, publicidade, comunicação

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A DECADE AGO, WE were invited by the Program of Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Comunicação (PPGCOM) of the University of São Paulo (USP) – to present the inaugural conference “La cultura errabunda: arte, publicidad y posmodernidad” at the IV Encontro Pró-Pesq PP – Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Publicidade e Propaganda (2013). The event was organized by the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Publicidade (ABP2), Grupo de Estudos Semióticos em Comunicação, Cultura e Consumo (GESC3), which since 2010 was constituted by professors from the PPGCOM and the Department of Public Relations, Propaganda and Tourism (CRP). Behind the institutions, in the direction of these meetings, I met my dear colleagues Dr. Clotilde Pérez and Dr. Eneus Trindade. The cast of teachers and students later expanded, to the point where it is impossible to name all here.

During all these years, the meetings occurred at USP – Escola de Comunicações e Artes of USP, except for the VII Pró-Pesq PP. Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Publicidade e Propaganda in the city Rio de Janeiro, at PUC-Rio – Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, held in 2016. In 2020, with the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the collaboration with PPGCOM USP had to be carried out by videoconference for the Pró-Pesq PP meeting and with the same technological means as those for the investigations developed around the Pandemic Observatory organized by Professor Clotilde Pérez.

Since the first invitation to the PPGCOM USP we have collaborated with them consolidating thematic tables with their professors in international congresses such as The International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS-AIS), the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIC), or the Associação Portuguesa de Ciências da Comunicação (SOPCOM). We have participated in publications of proceedings, articles, and books. Just to mention our latest publication, the Spanish publishing group Tirant Lo Blanc publishes this year 2022, “Visual Studies in Brazil”. In this work, several professors have been translated from Portuguese to Spanish, not only from PPGCOM USP, but also from other Brazilian universities.

Collaborations have been many and fruitful during all these years. In our case, fundamentally the main contributions correspond to cultural studies and specifically to visual studies in communication and advertising creativity. In the following sections, we will present some summaries of issues addressed, discussed, and resolved in our work with the PPGCOM USP specialists.

ERRAUNDA CULTURE: A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ADVERTISING

Behind this title was hidden the purpose of presenting a unique research question. Has advertising ceased to be a professional practice of communication to become a mass ideology amid postmodernity? After the question, we seek to argue what we call “publicism.”

The reasoning exposed in the USP communication forum is inspired by people who read social and political causes in advertisements. The studies on advertising, in our view, had not paid due attention to politics, and more could have been said about the consequences for popular culture, the politicization of advertising during postmodernity. Then, we affirmed: “publicism” is an added value to advertising to its original function in strategic communication in the market of exchanges of real goods and services.

In a new economy of desires, visibility is more important than the economy of exchange of real and tangible objects. The commodity is consumed in its semiotic formula, rather than in its utility. The form in the new informational capitalism feeds this lifestyle, the multiplicity of identities, and multiplies desires. Advertising will resort to traditional expressions (design, urbanism, literature, music, cinema, video), including art, as creation models for exhibiting ideas and in consolidating its own self-referential discourse.

Fragmentation of the consumer society has caused the proliferation of different cultural manifestations and lifestyles. These facts are kept in a continuous rhythm of discontinuity and rupture, which is another sign of the present. Advertising appears colonized by other revolutionary discourses against authoritarian homogeneity and the expansion of institutional culture. Actions of resistance or subversive discourses are indistinguishable from proper to capitalism and its representative discourses by the advertising simulation.

If, in postmodernity, aesthetics has become politicized and politics has been aestheticized, it is not surprising that advertising has drifted towards publicism. New extravagant, aggressive aesthetics, improvised on some occasions in a cycle of birth and disappearance with the duration of an occurrence, conquer current advertising. The experience goes from estrangement to detachment, reducing advertising creativity to mere aestheticizing practices. Politics has also been simplified to a regime representative of fragmented social realities. It has been the irradiation of identities of the self by the very politicization of the body. Art has become politicized in visible ways. Images have become independent of words, as Aby Warburg, Georges Didi-Huberman (2010), and other authors have shown, who consider the *pathosformeln* formula another narrative different from

literature. The resistance of visuality in stagnant discourses is a consequence of the heterogeneity of a dissensual world, in which we now include fashion, consumption styles, and advertising.

Advertising is now a model of self-critical discourse, continuous deconstruction, and social innovation. The forms of consumption combat emptiness, isolation, and the distance between individualized consciousnesses. The new signs of opposition to selfishness justify a solidary, community, and corporate publicism. Publicism finds its place in the post-modern aesthetic experience of territories bordering between the common and the private, between the visible and the invisible (in the sense described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty), looking for signs of belonging destined for the recognition of our own existence in a light metaphor of appearances, detached from the modern notion of humanity.

SEMIOTICS OF IRRADIATION: THE VITALISM OF ADVERTISING SIGNS

At PPGCOM USP, Professor Pedro A. Helln and the author present a research work developed between the Spanish universities of Murcia and Seville, which is a basic research aimed to design a new theoretical perspective in analyzing the reception of advertising creation. The central thesis revolved around a symbolic composition of emotions and feelings that encompassed those exciting desires that allow us to forget the existential tragedy or what we could understand from that tragedy of culture that Nietzsche defined as the continuous state of conflict between the human being and the world.

Advertising is lucrative to the rhetorical individual by anesthetizing existential anguish (here we appropriate the words of Carlo Michelstaedter for our argumentation). Postmodernity seeks suitable remedies that grow happily in these discourses, where the thought of death seems to hide behind vital irradiations full of noisy desires for life. In the uproar of consumption triumphs the effect of multitude in a vitalist disorder of longings that are projected in the future. This visual composition of emotions and feelings can only be traversed from a semiotics of irradiation: a language that climbs around signs of longings.

But signs are endowed with geometric intentions. Consciousness installs intention on external things, including images. Husserl argued that consciousness is intentional. Human action is necessary to find the transcendence of the sign. The verb represents the essence, the entity of being, as Heidegger explained in the past. The limits of the world were stuck at the frontiers of language, that is, of logic. For Wittgenstein, the same logic put in the service of what it was

created for, to dominate the universe, has been used to construct the existence of that which once did not possess it. Things begin to have existence in modernity, as the Austrian philosopher described, due to the relationship with other things. The world is in a clash of meanings, and when language is poetic, whether pictorial, advertising, literary, it emerges from its usefulness, and, in it, we find the deep voices of consciences. Wittgenstein thought that by eliminating those specific qualities of daily languages, with greater or lesser skill, we reached the extraordinary, where the mystical or the secret that approaches the world by its imitation of the world is preserved.

To do this, language ceases to be a private issue becoming only a social activity that anthropomorphizes communication. Private languages do not mean, since meaning implies that another shares our language, that is, our world. On the other hand, a language with private meanings that is understood only by one being is illogical. Thus, language can only be an activity that unravels its meaning in a social environment. In the restoration of the community, language games are generated (as Wittgenstein called it) when we speak.

Language has been the refuge of modern man's despair relegated to the impossibility of complete realization. Semiotic impartiality articulates in its convenience the stories of eternity that it had already discarded for its absolutism and for its immobility in this last stage of modernity. Its projection into the future demanded the presence of signs without temporal expiration, so that man resorts to the reiteration of the infinite instant not only in the visual anachronism of words or art. Semiotics locates these vital irradiations (as we have called the eternal desires of infinity) in the premodern resources of our civilization: 1) in the anthropological proximity to the images of the mythical, the ritual, and the symbolic ancestral that have survived the passage of the cycles of formalisms (or formats), whose signs have not been isolated from their original meaning; 2) in the intentionality of art, that is, in the poetic or artistic language whose nature allows the continuous deconstruction without its semiosis being altered, or so it seems, to detach itself from the ideas of the Prague School: What, then, is that indeterminate reality to which the work of art points? It is the total context of so-called social phenomena such as philosophy, politics, religion, or economics. Art, as recognized by Aby Warburg, Heinrich Wölfflin, Edgar Wind, Erwin Panofsky, or Ernst Gombrich, has the quality of characterizing and representing culture in its history. For this very reason, the history of art ends up being separated from the history of culture in the broadest sense of the word; and vice versa, universal history tends to borrow, for delimitating its periods, the moments that mark an epoch in the history of art.

Therefore, we understood in this research that the visual forms that enveloped consumerist illusionism could function as miracle mediators of desires, behaviors, axiological values, fragmentary texts of dreams, dominant fantasies of the unconscious, and collective entelechies. Trends in the visual presentation of consumption demand an experience of temporality with social memory. It is a suspended sign, an empty meaning appearing in an image capable of dominating the future from the present, avoiding visual anachronism.

In conclusion, admitting the existence of a semiotic irradiation would consist in recognizing the appearance of agreement in the meanings that reflect the inner desires in signs external to us. But the external is no longer born of the body; between us and reality remains the void whose link only lends itself to subjective interpretation. Thus, irradiation reveals the nihilism of the space between what we know (our desires) and the immeasurable of external reality. We will find the traces, the signs of disintegration, of the decay of reality, and of false flashes. Semiotics uncovers a cynical exteriority, built by culture and its production to hide the final cause of temporality. The dialectic between the life and death of things is reproduced in the dialectic of continuity and rupture, of eternal return, and of the eternal conflict between humanity and the world. And just as modern painting places the viewer in front of the work in a discreet position, as if what is exposed on the canvas wants to hide what is in front of it, advertising offers its meanings before the authentic ineluctable truth.

Modernity evaluated universalization to recreate a symbolic totality that would end dissent in human conflicts. Sharing the same values could mean the peaceful unification of humanity. Behind desires always lies politics, which is equally the desire for survival. Multiple attempts throughout history demonstrate the failure of a body politic moved by a desire. Body and utopia, intimate and political, have no relationship, since the desire is external to the body, it is in another part of the world, or as Georges Didi-Huberman affirms, it is not in the world, it is elsewhere.

In recent decades, the crisis of meaning and postmodern pessimism has spoken out in the face of the farce of hyperreality simulacra. The tendencies of the social factors only compensate for the consciousness at the cost of representing itself before itself. With his symbolic production, not so much the temporal perspective, it is as if the spatial perspective of the subject was described by things and a context of references that concretize the *idealtypen* in different periods and cultural currents (or at least at the psychological level). The subject's wishes will be articulated via ethical/religious, and then political/secular narratives. With the crisis of the great stories of Modernity

(Democracy, God, State, Freedom, Justice) the essence of the entity being also dissipates between confusing and dark signs. The observation model based on the subject-world relationship no longer satisfies the new questions about the common destiny. This void will be conveniently completed with the gesture of hope to give meaning to existence, a mission that will be carried out by the industries of desires. Thus, postmodernity recovers the ideal of romantic expressiveness, the heroic ideal of being good and holy (in the Christian Middle Ages) will be transformed into signs of consumption. Postmodern signs will offer a discourse made of easily observable elements, such as material or visual: power, plurality, appearances, mastery of space and public relations, etc. The other reasons, heroism, kindness, generosity, have disappeared due to being impersonal for individuals, even for the new divinities.

NEW INTERTEXTUALITIES: AESTHETICS, CITY, AND ADVERTISING

This research project brings together aesthetics, city, and advertising in a single category. The glows in the streets of advertising visuality impact a kind of search for the look whose sensation is extraordinary. The advertising fragments scattered around the city draw desires: they show reactions. They show what is looked at, and it is like letting the eyes intervene between the real and the imaginary. The phenomenology of advertising located in the streets is a visual work that acquires presence in the public space, from which several senses are distilled: archive, document, or artistic work. In other words, the advertising of cities acquires the category of archive when it recalls a time (even its existence is due to the celebration of an event), of document when the destination of the image is informing a generation – ‘Planet Reebok’, ‘Pepsi Generation’¹ – or simply, artistic work when its approach is often absorbed in its own meaning.

Like art, current communication practices organize collective remembrance and memory. Advertising images divide time into periods, and public space (physical or symbolic) into places based on the social imaginary. The propositions of individuals creating meanings behind meanings are beyond the surface of the images.

Advertising creativity has a link with aesthetics when it breaks with the borders of what would correspond to it by its very nature. That is, when it is interested in the particularities of (psychic) complexity, and its essence is reduced to aesthetic experience. Subtraction from the aesthetic experience also relates to visual attention (the materialistic conception). Our perception has changed over the course of history due to the absence

¹ Popular names for the new generations of young consumers who are fans of specific brands.

of visual continuity. Advertising is just a choice in the montage between aesthetics and experience and the narrative that the era itself forms with a story made of discontinuities.

The city is ultimately a showroom for advertising that completes the urban aesthetic when we ignore the constellations of industry and consumption. To broaden the emotion released in the advertising image, we must demystify the creation process; something that Walter Benjamin already did when he recognized the loss of the aura in the work of art. To take this step, raising the view is required, that is, the advertising object is made to be looked at, or whoever looks does so from the desire (to be needed) and the intensity (which prevents withdrawing the gaze):

In contemplation of the advertising trail, the gaze that examines it subtly accommodates itself to its intended place: advertising is embedded on its floor. In the memory of the ground, the objectuality of advertising achieves unity in the viewer's multiple visions, but, above all, it makes its product seem like something. The object is seen attached to its environment.

By carefully linking all the components of that space, the viewer incorporates the entire scene into a whole. In the city, shop windows, posters, and monuments overlap, produce a singular symbolic fusion, and that back-and-forth movement of perception (an irradiation of semiotic sense) gives the sensory flashes of the immediate, the sensitive, that which remains on the surface. Their contemplation goes beyond knowledge. Things appear with power: see as never before. Its meaning transcends the pure communicative function that led to its creation.

The exuberant baroque of the "Trevi Fountain" (Rome), the work of Nicola Salvi in the seventeenth century does not eclipse the electric lights incorporated in the British square "Piccadilly Circus" (London), giving it the visual relevance that made it equally famous for urban tourism. They are places of social polarities, of exuberance of individual singularities, and of agility in sentimental expression. They are not dead locations in the city, "they are not anyone's land," and owe their existence to their openness to the eyes. On the contrary, they are displays of popular movement, dynamism, and social conquest in the face of the urban elitism of the reserved territories, of the exclusive neighborhoods, of the fields of resistance against popular culture, of rejection of bourgeois symbolic hegemony. They are urban locations with industrial signs transfigured into popular culture. Procedural impurity and perfect visibility adhere to social fissures, not to consumption itself. Denying the post-modern transgression that images only lead to appearances of each way of being is impossible. It is about conceiving the splendors displayed by advertising as memories, slogans, or signs in our cities.

Passersby recognize in every place of the city the lightning of the fugitive beauty of urban design. Literally, the advertising object finds in its place a contaminated surface par excellence: the lifting of desire. In advertising, something similar to beauty survives, not in the usual balanced sense. Here, the beautiful thing is a montage, an assembly that invents passionate connections. The aesthetic experience is adaptive and is based on antecedents formed by proto-aesthetic elements and aesthetic preferences. The human mind and the aesthetic experience evolve in unison. In particular, aesthetic experience requires a reading mind and metacognition, and this, in turn, helps the mind to investigate the metarepresentational architecture of the world.

As a result of this action, advertising acquires a historical dimension in its narratives. Its textuality accommodates the transfiguration of the industrial symbolic into an aesthetic body prepared for the exchange (of looks, but also of being property). Transfiguration is not a purely communicative phenomenon, it is not only symbolic and does not result from media transformations, hybridizations of social habits, and even from the force of a neocolonizing semiosis of cultural capitalism. It also does end at the end of a rite of consumption, although we could consider the possibility of a fetishism based on the exaltation of *kitsch*, or perhaps an effect more produced in popular culture by *camp* objects, when art elevates bad taste to good taste. No doubt, this interpretation would correspond to the perspective of an aesthetic elitism that considers art always faithful to its Kantian genetic heritage. After a more humble and relative position about the matter, we find another more opportune cultural notion, the pastiche.

Pastiche opens the visual interpretation to intertextuality. Let us think of an aesthetic that introduces several elements in the interpretation of the great discourses of the brands: 1) the interpretation the subject makes of the object/text considering other previous objects/texts; 2) the transtextuality of the grafted object of other texts of different natures, since advertising is interdiscursive and intermedial.

The transfiguration of consumerist desires into an aesthetic body is theoretically persuasive but, brought to the realm of advertising practice, this possibility has never been considered. The principle of profitability in professional activity and communicative effectiveness in its messages have rewarded this discipline, eliminating all possible speculation about it. Perhaps for this reason, currently abounding, advertising lacks reflections on its historical dimension, in which the mass is fading into the disinterest that produces everything that is useless. Shifting the gaze of the “great works” on interdiscursion, transtextuality, and the cultural transfiguration of small communication practices is necessary.

VISUAL STUDIES, ADVERTISING, AND CULTURE

In the RCT, we discussed how the knowledge of the image has deteriorated considerably in the Social Sciences and in the study of communication. The concept of image is used both to talk about the notoriety of an institution, corporation, or person, and to refer to the opinion that most of an audience has about a specific something or someone. Audits, interviews, content analysis, and ethnographic tactics end with these conclusions. Investigating advertising creativity errs in recognizing the image when it entangles its symbolic nature with planning issues. This error about the symbolic nature comes from a close paradigm. The equivocation is derived from the relations between the philosophy of dialectical materialism and art. From a materialistic perspective, art and the satisfaction of its images can be quantified: the presence of measurement symbols (numerical or graphic tables) participate in this false belief that the meanings of art are quantifiable. Kenneth Clark is categorical in this question, art cannot be measured in material terms since it is a set of singular sensations in each individual: the value of the symbol lies precisely in the impossibility of analyzing it, since it fuses an inseparable confluence of ideas, feelings, and memories.

The visual analysis not focused on the history of art extends an interdisciplinary methodology towards a deep knowledge of culture. This is apparently already valid for advertising. The proposal of a “semiotic turn” in visibility resides in operations that endow the gaze with the invention of a language: the social construction of the visual by gazing towards others and their daily practices and, at the same time, of being looked at by others (and the visual construction of the social). The semiotic turn is a postsemiotic and postlinguistic discovery of the image: a crossroads between visibility, institutions, discourse, body, and figurativism. Writing visual studies implies the conviction that gaze, contemplation, and observation, alongside the alternatives of the spectator, manage to displace the great figures of the image (always the objective of iconology) towards the backgrounds and the extras.

The debate over visual studies does not focus on the innovation of visual rhetoric. It wants to erase the distinctions between high and low culture and transform the history of art into the history of culture. In this equalization of competences, the visual culture created by advertising not only appeals to semiotic or discursive models, revealing ideological projections, but also surpasses the basic notions of “similarity or mimesis” that incorporate traditional theories of art and aesthetics. The images of advertising become part of a set of images framed in the political gesture of the gaze, since they are now further away from the positivist, empirical analysis, or the study of perception.

It is not a question of equating visual analysis with a history of images or of exalting it to an art history, but of showing the dialectical virtue of knowledge that ordinary observation prevents us from perceiving. The problem between art history and visual studies arose with Kant's attempt at pure reason to differentiate art from other cultural artifacts, instead of postulating universality in the construction of aesthetic value and not defending its discovery so much. If it had been otherwise in Western tradition, we would study aesthetics in art and advertising without making any difference. Kant marked the distinction in history between images of art and non-artistic images. But today we know that the heuristics of art teach one to look at other visual discourses such as television or advertising. However, it is about teaching people to look without limiting the visual experience to the set of concepts of this discipline. Accepting a universal epistemological basis in the face of contemporary forms of visual production is impossible.

The epistemic roots of visual research are born in the affirmation of the heterogeneity of images, in the study of the different circumstances of their genesis, and in the various functions they develop within culture and society. The new heuristic strategies in their interpretation remember to combine the different traditions of visual production. Thus, a television spot can be analyzed by adopting visual anthropology, audiovisual narration, media sociology, visual semiotics, human psychology, marketing strategies, and include political diversity.

THE QUESTION OF ADVERTISING IN VISUAL STUDIES

In later years, we continued to debate with the PPGCOM USP experts about the influence of visual studies on the knowledge of mediation, mediatization, and manipulation practices. Poststructuralism coupled with the new identity politics has prevented consensus in the community on what visual artistic quality is. The notion of art is not radically opposed to the idea of visual culture. Advertising can be admitted as a particular form circumscribed by the cultural interweaving of the community, which differs from other forms of cultural production. For this reason, visual studies are too ductile to allow comparison and contrast in the analysis of advertising with other forms of image creation with which they had no relationship in the past.

Visual culture involves combining rhetorical political strategies that are connected to history. Therefore, in analyzing visual practices, it is interesting to compare and contrast all their theoretical and methodological presuppositions, despite historians establishing differences difficult to overcome, by affirming that advertising as art itself is based on lies of a

relatively naïve and admissible class: the only difference is the environment that enriches it, materialism or spirituality.

The particularity between the images seems to be very sharp, but there are points of connection (even if those are in the past and based on lies). Poststructuralist criticism (Derrida, Lacan) insisted on a dynamic semiotic system and the unfolding of time during semiosis. The meaning of any particular sign could not be placed in a fixed (timeless) meaning by the internal operations of a synchronous system. For poststructuralism, meaning arises exactly from the movement of one sign or signifier to the next, in a perpetual motion that prevents a starting point for semiosis from being found and a final moment in which the meanings of the signs can be considered concluded and closed from existing.

The link between semiotics and art history offers an opportunity to reflect on the origin of current images of advertising. This alliance also recovers the thesis of the existence of a possible inventory of exemplary images whose cultural heritage (*Kulturwissenschaft*) allows deciphering their meaning. Aby Warburg worked on an inventory and articulated the traditional categories of art history in the analysis of images without caring so much about the artistic or aesthetic dimension (*Bildwissenschaft*). Semiotics involves three problems that complicate the historical search: intertextuality, polysemy, and the location of meaning. These three problems arise when we use images from the past (as advertising does) in new visual compositions for creating meaning. The visual repertoire protects iconographic resources from visual anachronism. These resources are basically the reuse of previous forms, patterns, and figures from the past. Semiotic research finds these visual archaeological remains to understand current visual culture.

However, holding this idea of a visual past that explains the meaning of images would put art in an eternal passivity since the possibilities of a new creation would be reduced. Reinvesting the passivity of that perspective would consist of considering the work of the last artist as an active intervention on the transmitted material. This investment would also amount to a deconstruction of the relationship between cause and effect, since it challenges the idea of precedent as origin and thus makes the claim of historical reconstruction problematic.

Different studies show that iconographic analysis often conceals revelations of the meaning of other borrowed motifs. While a work may borrow the motif from another image, in contrast, intertextuality does not imply borrowing its meaning. The selected sign is a sign that comes with a sense. However, the image creator does not have to accept that meaning, being able to reject, dodge, or incorporate it into the new visual text. In this way, advertising visibility is an intertextual fabric

with taken signs that reuse the sense brought by them, but that also fractures their past meaning according to the synchrony of the present culture.

Visual studies offer several tactical visual analysis strategies that should be considered in advertising studies. Not only can a methodology that provides quantifiable results clarify the numerous human and cultural phenomena that occur in the production and consumption of advertising images, but can also clarify the numerous human and cultural phenomena that occur in the production and consumption of advertising images. A methodology sandwiched between different scientific territories can manage knowledge closer to communication. The interdisciplinarity between semiotics, aesthetics, art history, and communication, as we have argued, reveals different aspects in the treatment of advertising images beyond pure forms or diagrams of numerical values. Our reasoning opened a debate at PPGCOM USP on the functioning of the visual paradigm. Currently, the theory of visuality finds its strength in two fundamental ideas: 1) the change from a linguistic turn to a pictorial or visual turn; and 2) the autonomy of images as living organisms.

OBSERVATORY ON THE BEHAVIOR OF BRANDS DURING THE PANDEMIC (COVID-19)

During the pandemic, the collaboration with PPGCOM USP did not cease. The group of Spanish researchers working with USP continued their work, using new technologies: The meetings were held by videoconference. USP organized an observatory on the behavior of advertising and brands during the pandemic under the initiative of Professor Clotilde Perez.

During those debates, the use of aesthetic morality by brands was discussed. The marks showed an affective unification with great glorious themes of the spirit. The exaltation of panvitalism in expressing that every living thing suffers, and that love is the way to suffer the universal pain of “reality.” Brands addressed loving messages to their audience in their advice, with their company in confinement, and above all, in recognition of the harshness of life circumstances. Aesthetic morality shows the emotion, of which Schopenhauer speaks, of compassion in the sight of the suffering of others.

The marks were contingent on pain everywhere; it was about extolling the ethical value of sharing the suffering of the pandemic experiences. Also a consequence of the times, the logic of capitalism and cultural relativism opened the way to a diffuse aesthetic.

Diffuse aesthetics are characterized by the lack of norms, rules, or canons that differentiate between beauty and ugliness, the authentic object of its

imitation, the cultured and the vulgar, and, at the discursive level, the content does not condition the internal structure of the form. Capitalism made aesthetics an element of distinction from social classes, rather than a matter of social or particular preferences. Faced with this individual spirit of consumption, corporations worry about rising “heroically” and free from it, to run towards an enthusiastic life that reaches affective unification.

In the past, the subjective component of representations of reality varied according to the characteristics of the place, the climate, and the way of being of people. The aesthetics were shaped according to the physical needs and moral habits, reflecting the design, climates, customs, ideas, tastes, and character of the people. The sensitive becomes a field on which one can no longer (or should not) judge only from the outside by means of understanding. The sensitive is rather in itself a power to establish normative differences; the distinction of right and wrong is internal to the sensitive. The feeling that arises from aesthetic judgment teaches us what it is before we even think about examining it.

The marks of the cooperation of sympathetic functions, according to the philosopher Scheler, are: a) affective unification; b) understanding the same as the other; c) love for the human beings; d) acosmistic love. With this, it is recognized that the sensitive forms emphasize the love of man as the foundation of the acosmistic love for the person and for God. The purpose of the brand during the pandemic was to accomplish the emotional realization of humanity as a narrative genre. The challenge of acosmistic love appeared in advertising messages in visual forms that represent a universal love that surpasses the love of the nation, God, or the circle of culture itself: an ideological transformation against individualism and the distinction that differentiates personal identities. That is, an opposition to the “customizing” ideology of brands.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

All open debates at PPGCOM USP had one purpose: to describe communication as a phenomenon of continuities is to err on the true meaning of networking. Technological heuristics suggest that communication is a mesh of connections, but that is just a visual analogy that makes understanding the complexity of human relationships easier. Communication is fundamentally a phenomenon of discontinuous nature in the thought, fragmented between human groups, multimodal regarding its means, and disconnected in cultural differences. The network exists only in simplistic explanations contingent on its methodological commitments. Communication invokes the sensitive, but the sensitive complicates the body. The body is the artifact between the human being and the world that

is agitated by gesture, and gestures express desires and emotions. Emotions arise from the darkness of the unconscious, from the corners of the psychic course, so that, uniting time and history, industry, advertising, and politics in a model, they vibrate in tension with the images. In these debates of the PPGCOM USP we have read these images, assuming that the space of the sensitive is in postmodernity the expression of the history of culture, linked to a more extensive project of *Kulturwissenschaft*. ■

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