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**Semiotising the film auteur:
a conceptual model of brand identity**

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Abstract

The film industry is an inherently risky landscape as the production of motion pictures require extensive resources, much of which is reserved for marketing communications. However, the film marketing enterprise is obscured by the lack of literature to the purpose. As of now, corporal contingencies have been disproportionately privileged by the academic community, delaying the understanding of more artistically entangled subjects, such as creative personnel of the industry. To recoup for this palpable scarcity in branding research, the following paper conceptualises the brand identity of film directors who possess high dimensionality of auteurism. This is supported by the fact that directors are among the first considerations of film audiences. The author opted for semiotics to fulfil the demands of the interdisciplinary construct, hence the multifold reasoning behind the paper's semiotic approach. Firstly, it draws parallels between brands and signs to seal the semiotic rapprochement between the aspiring brand elements of the auteur identity by means of inductive reasoning. Secondly, the principles of film semiotics provide the necessary scaffolding to handle artistically intricate auteur attributes such as pictorial style and narrative cues as signs, simultaneously expanding their capacity to effectively exhibit the brand phenomenon. Thirdly, the paper's model operates on a semiotically reinforced brandscape basis, which facilitates the recognition, understanding and configuration of the auteur's integrated identity. In spite of the fact that the focal subject of the paper coexists with sparse literature in terms of branding, some extant theories and constructs were found to be highly applicable, such as the film brandscape and the human brand identity typology of directors. Once examined through the lens of semiotics, the film auteur's œuvre can be established as collection of cultural texts from which the auteur's identity ultimately emerges. Fundamentally, the auteur identity is bisected into two: (i) the auteur's body of work and the (ii) effective person of the auteur as a simultaneously professional and non-praxis individuality. Succeedingly, the director's œuvre is further split into its film-specific and archetypal characteristics. Thus, the integrated brand identity of the auteur materialises in three distinct categories of signs: (i) the filmographic identity; (ii) the cinematic identity; and the (iii) personal identity. These divisions of the auteur brand may be envisaged as three concentric circles: the inner circle, the personal; the middle circle, the cinematic; and the outer circle, the filmographic identity. After the theoretical framework is set, the paper demonstrates the usage of the model through an illustration by applying it to the curtailed filmography of renowned Japanese auteur Akira Kurosawa. At last, the paper provides managerial implications by highlighting three premises of symbolic consumption that marketing professionals have to bear in mind during communication with prospective consumers. Audiences exhibit an increasingly symbolic consumer space where they are likely to engage with the auteur's body of work to acculturate themselves accordingly to their symbolic needs and cultural agendas. In consequence, the auteur's brand becomes a symbolic vehicle for the self-construction tendencies that film audiences gradually exhibit. Research suggestions are formulated along the lines of other cultural and creative industry creatives, whose brand identities still remains obscured by artistic contingencies. Accordingly, the author calls for the interdisciplinary experimentation that marketing, semiotics and anthropology must jointly undertake.

Keywords: Auteur, Auteurship, Brand, Brandscape, Director, Film, Semiotics, Sign

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Semiotising the film auteur: a conceptual model of brand identity

Chapter 1 - Introduction

*“How do you tell the genuine director from the quasichimpanzee?
After a given number of films, a pattern is established.”*

– Andrew Sarris

1.1 Background

Cinema enjoy a precious place in our way of life. The world of motion pictures, both as an industry and an art form, fruitfully unites the commercial, the cultural and the societal. However, as the ‘moving image’ is getting ever-so-commercialised, extant branding literature related to film remains remarkably scarce (O’Reilly & Kerrigan, 2013). Furthermore, previous research disproportionately privileged the subjects of corporal brands and the commercial institutions of the industry, troubling both academic and practical understanding of more genuine subject matters, such the branded profile of industry creatives (e.g., director, cinematographer, writer). Thus, as the inner workings of the cinematic enterprise continues to linger obscured, as studios, producers and investors alike navigate towards profitable projects by means of speculative way-finding. The innate riskiness associated with filmic endeavours renders such circumstances even more cumbersome: in Hollywood, the standard budget for a blockbuster starts at about \$100 million, of which circa 50% is dedicated to categorically marketing activities (Young et al., 2008).

1.2 Problem Formulation

In the course of marketing communications marketers rely on specific selling points to convince audiences. These comprise the production company, the hook of the storyline, genre, etc. Currently there is a growing trend to focalise the director as a branded label in the

movie marketing enterprise, as they are among the first considerations for prospective movie audiences (Kerrigan, 2009). The directors whose cinematic personality and discernible style pierce the zeitgeist of the industry are most commonly referred to as auteurs. As mentioned by Pluntz and Pras (2020a), auteurism is one of the key dimensions of human director identities. However important auteurs may be in terms of marketing, the academic understanding of their brand identities remains shallow. In the case of such an intricate brand phenomenon we must also grapple with the elusiveness of identity due to its artistic attributes such as pictorial or narrative motifs. While recognisability is the most fundamental vehicle that clears the way for the cultural and commercial aspirations of the auteur, there are no extant theoretical frameworks that establish such artistic particulars as branded entities.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this paper is to establish the auteur from the ground up as an inherently semiotic construct to eliminate his enigmatic identity contingencies. Semiotics (the study of signs) represents an effective and efficient framework for stimulating identity constituents to operate as signs in their appropriate socio-cultural fabric. Subsequently, to reconstruct the auteur from an ‘assemblage of signs’ to an ‘assemblage of brands’, the brand phenomenon is simultaneously scrutinised through the lens of semiotic principles. Once both brands and identity attributes are established as proper signs, the paper formulates the auteur brand identity by virtue of inductive reasoning.

1.4 Purpose

Once the auteur brand is considered within its own distinct conceptual category, the granular identity can be handled by internal stakeholders such as producers and studios to render marketing communications aimed at prospective audiences more efficient. As a result, the obscured commercial environment of the cinematic enterprise is navigated with more

intelligibility, as illumination is cast at the symbolic relationship that audiences effectuate with auteurs and their respective filmographies.

1.5 Research Question

This research asks: “How does the brand identity of film auteurs materialise if approached through semiotic principles?” To answer the question, two distinct categories of phenomena has to be inaugurated as signs: (i) the common brand and (ii) the diverse characteristics that grant the auteur his discernible identity. This is followed by the semiotic rapprochement between the two phenomenon.

1.6 Research Design

The reasoning behind the paper’s semiotic approach is multifold. Firstly, it draws parallels between brands and signs to seal the semiotic rapprochement between the brand elements and identity specificities by means of inductive reasoning. Secondly, the principles of film semiotics provide the necessary scaffolding to handle artistically intricate auteur specificities such as pictorial style and narrative cues as signs, simultaneously expanding their capacity to effectively exhibit the brand phenomenon. Thirdly, the paper’s model operate on a semiotically reinforced brandscape basis, which facilitates the recognition, understanding and configuration of the auteur’s integrated identity. The extant construct of the film brandscape by O’Reilly & Kerrigan (2013) was moderately reconfigured to accommodate certain dimensions of the auteur identity, such as film-specific signifiers.

1.7 Theoretical Contributions

Following the semiotic rapprochement between the brand phenomenon and the identity attributes (such as narrative motifs and cues relating to audiovisual identity), the findings of

the paper are as follows: the film auteur and his corresponding filmography forms an integrated assemblage of signifiers, with his identity is fundamentally bisected into two parts: (i) the auteur's body of work as a collection of cultural texts and the (ii) effective person of the auteur. The personal identity comprise of characteristics such as affiliated star iconography (e.g., Wong Kar-wai's sunglasses) or the affiliated consecrations as conferred by industry institutions (e.g., an award at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences). Concurrently, the auteur's filmography is further split into its film-specific (e.g., genre, theme, actors) and archetypal signifiers (e.g., pictorial style of the auteur that overarches his œuvre). As a result, the integrated brand identity of the auteur distills down to three distinct categories: (i) the filmographic identity; (ii) the cinematic identity; and the (iii) personal identity. These divisions of the auteur brand may be envisaged as three concentric circles, as this paper's conceptual model illustrates.

1.8 Overview of Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the paper's topic. Chapter 2 is literature review of the assorted research domains. In Chapter 3, the findings and the conceptual model of the paper is presented. Chapter 4 provides a brief illustrative case of Akira Kurosawa's auteur identity, demonstrating the model in practice. At last, Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the paper, summarises contributions, provides managerial implications, assesses limitations and also suggests future research directions.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The theoretical framework of this paper is particularly interdisciplinary, comprising material across the assorted domains of film and cultural studies, branding and semiotics, besides relevant research from complementary research areas. Due to this interdisciplinary nature, the literature review introduces the applied theories and constructs in clustered waves, similarly to disciplinary sets. The order of the topics is the following: (i) branding within the film industry; (ii) practices of brandscaping; (iii) cultural branding; (iv) semiotics; (v) auteur theory; (vi); and at last, (vii) the marketing/branding around auteurship. Prior to the first topic, the author presents a brief account of the assumed auteur brand in action, showcasing the utter importance of the phenomenon.

2.1 Defying the film marketing establishment: “How Do You Live” in Japan

A group of friends decide to go to the movies to see the latest picture of an acclaimed director. Prior to the screening, they gather at a café to diligently anticipate the event by virtue of an amicable audit: why they all demonstrate such passion towards this particular director? One declares without hesitation: it must be the delicate manoeuvres of his aesthetic craft. Another one fends off such a premise, highlighting the relentless *élan* and lively performance of the cast in his previous films. Concurrently, somebody has already begun to recite the most memorable storytelling instruments of the artist, while the rest of the group chewed over the ceaseless concerns that his themes recurrently upraise: the meaning of childhood, life and wonder. The assemblage of friends chanted in unison. Although their associations, affiliations and personal aspirations concerning the director differed greatly, genuine contradictions were absent from the conversation. These insights echo the words of the renowned film critic, Andrew Sarris: “Such are the joys of the *auteur* theory” (1962, p. 564). The brand identity of the auteur is a multiplex phenomenon, presents itself the takeaway. However, regardless its intricacy, respective ramifications are equitable lucid.

On the 14th of July, the Tokyoite ambiance was decorated by inquisitive murmurs. Streets, squares and vicinities of film theatres were crowded with people, as tickets sold out for the long-awaited première. Yet, in spite of the fizzing masses, nobody in the queues was aware of the film’s cast, theme or storyline, as the sole source of information for the movie

was a single poster (see Appendix A). No trailers or advertisements, no synopsis nor any other marketing material.

The 2023 production titled *How Do You Live* (titled internationally as *The Boy and the Heron*) persisted to make box office history in Japan, regardless of its peculiar release strategy. During its opening weekend, the production earned 13 million USD (Box Office Mojo, n.d.) and broke IMAX records in its domestic market (Brzeski, 2023, July 27th). After the Japanese picture screened in foreign markets (where film promotional conventions were adhered to), the movie eventually amassed over \$173 million at the global box office (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). It is also noteworthy that aside from its commercial triumph, the picture enjoyed critical acclaim, winning awards for best animation at the Oscars, Golden Globes, BAFTA, and at many other academy ceremonies (IMDb, n.d.).

As follows, the latest picture by Studio Ghibli, a production company matriculated by state-of-the-art animation films, was arguably successful, more so in its domestic market, where it was accompanied by a release strategy that curbed conventions of film marketing. Hayao Miyazaki, who wrote-directed the the picture, not only signifies the highest of qualities when it comes to the medium of animation, as his name became a hallmark in international popular culture. He is also the renowned auteur who was a creative pioneer and technical innovator of Japanese animation. By some, he has been considered a sort of Japanese Walt Disney (Moist, M. et Bartholow, 2007). The impetus that cemented the the picture's success at the box office was arguably the celebrated public persona of the studio, complemented by director's looming retirement that put a productive spin on his allure. This paper attests that thanks to such extensive auteurship such as Miyazaki's, film audiences can take advantage of implied and tacit movie characteristics, substituting promotional material by notions of the director's coherent creative footprint.

As mentioned by Pluntz and Pras (2020a), an eminent artist's image who approaches the end of his/her career often turns into a cultural icon. While this particular case of Miyazaki might showcase the potency of such auteurs at their functional extremes, it still casts illumination at the significant gaps that branding literature has to fill in relation to such immensely intricate and valuable brand identities. Accordingly, the following section overviews extant branding literature related to the movie industry.

2.2 Extant branding literature in film

Cinema is frequently referred to as the seventh art, as baptised by Italian film theoretician Ricciotto Canudo over a hundred years ago. The cachet was eventually brought into vogue by the French cinephile intelligentsia, and as the industry has been enjoying growing cultural vigour, the label is now enjoyed as a public code of belief. Historically, motion pictures has been one of the world's most thriving industries (Ravid, 1999). However, extant branding literature related to film remains scarce (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013). Taking into consideration the ever-so-competitive landscape (due to low-cost production technology and digital disruption), this academic restraint reserves particular difficulty for the industry, especially once considering the significance of related branding imperatives.

The potency of brands is increasingly embraced by corporations and other organisations, considering branding among their highest management priorities (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). The rationale behind this prioritisation is the proliferation of commercial alternatives to be purchased, consumed or experienced in current market climates we occupy (Keller, 2003). And while outlining brands by definition is no easy endeavour: "Brand definitions are innumerable, and almost every author in the field has his or her own" (Kapferer, 2008, p. 52), their functions in corporal environments are well-established: to set up a name to speak for legitimacy, value and prestige, with the goal was to inform the consumer and to act as a signal for quality and reliability (Holt, 2002). This cordial momentousness of the 'brand' is also present culturally, as its symbolic substance progressively gets recognised as one of the most valuable organisational assets (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

While film branding literature previously focused on corporal brands (Grainge, 2007), in recent years there has been attempts to depart from the strictly commercial contingencies of the industry. Most notable ones includes that of O'Reilly's and Kerrigan's (2013), who firmly contributed to the development of a film brand theory with their theoretical framework behind the *film brandscape* (a key construct for this paper's theoretical framework); Kohli (2017), who depicted the manner in which audiences can engage with films as brand,

supplemented by rich theoretical and empirical pillars alike; and finally, Pluntz and Pras (2020a, 2020b), who approached specifically film directors through the lens of branding.

2.3 Branding literature related to directors

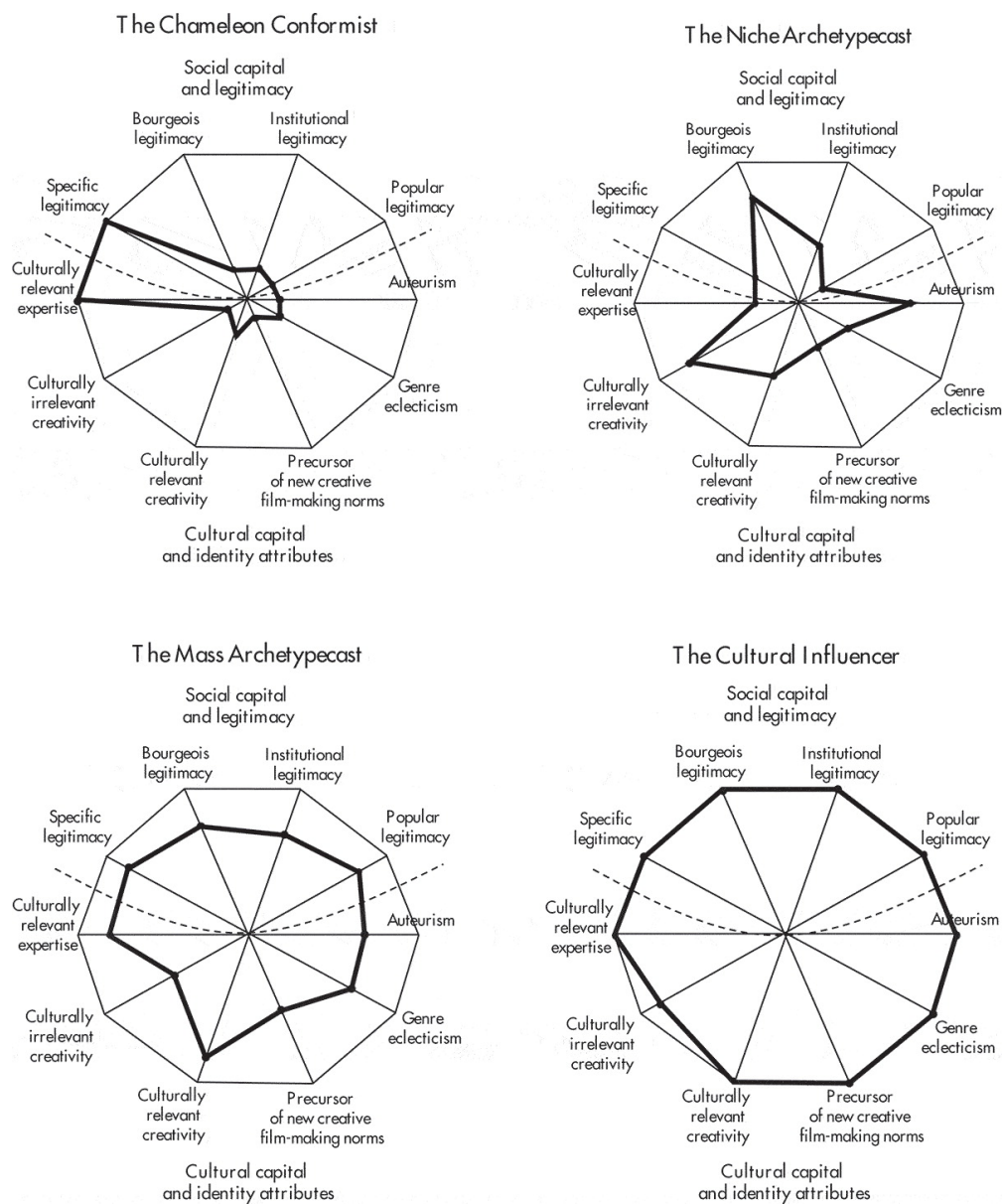
Extant literature addressed to film directors is still in its infancy. Pluntz and Pras (2020a; 2020b) grounded their research on socio-cultural foundations to tackle two separate matters: (i) they typologised film director identities in light of social legitimacies that are associated with identity attributes by utilising the Bourdieusian framework of cultural and social capital (1983/1986), which they deemed particularly appropriate due to its capacity to explain the savoir-faire and skills required to pursue the praxis of professional directors (2020a); apart from (ii) mapping the mediating role of legitimacy and film performance related to changes in the director's human brand identity (2020b).

Pluntz and Pras not only abundantly contributed to film related literature, their research discoveries also considerably contribute to this paper's theoretical framework. This is due to their approach to study the director brand inasmuch as it constitutes a professional human brand identity, that is a strictly personified phenomenon. Thus, their typology of human brand identities offer valuable insights into the inner-working of directors within strictly socio-cultural context (see Figure 1). The six identity attributes that emerged in the course of their study was: (i) auteurism; (ii) genre eclecticism; (iii) precursor of new creative film-making norms; (iv) culturally relevant creativity; (v) culturally irrelevant creativity; and (vi) culturally relevant expertise. These six attributes, along with the four legitimacy types [(i) specific; (ii) institutional; (iii) bourgeois; and (iv) public legitimacy], incarnates four categorically distinct director identities. The first among them, the 'chameleon conformist' is an entirely commercial figure with a very low score of auteurism, while all the remaining three are iterations of auteurs, as defined by their appropriate social recognition. Besides providing valuable insight in terms of how an auteur's creative philosophy or cinematic personality is shaped by attributes such as genre eclecticism or cultural relevancy, the typology of directors supplies prospective associations that can be

embedded as brand elements of film-makers, as demonstrated in the Findings chapter of the paper.

Figure 1

The professional human brand identity types of directors



Note. As found in Pluntz & Pras, 2020a, p. 843.

2.4 Non-directorial branding literature

Upon inspecting the industry in a bird's-eye view, it is easily discernible that it is dominated by a few prevalent vertically integrated studios, among which the most well known ones are the “Big Five” of American cinema, Hollywood: Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros., Walt Disney Studios and Sony Pictures. These entities and their strategic film brand portfolios constitute well established brands in the industry of entertainment (Grainge, 2007). Among highly valuable branded franchises the most notable ones includes those of Marvel, Lucasfilm and Pixar, a set of intellectual properties for which Disney paid a total of \$16.1 billion in the course of just six years (Kohli, 2017). Keller's (2008) words related to branding as a primary tool differentiation puts these acquisitions into context: “a strong brand is valuable because of the fervent feelings that names generate as a result of pleasurable past experiences” (p. 25).

Once we leave the messy commercial contingencies of the industry behind, we approach the more ‘genuine’ branded subjects: individual and concrete films. That branding process behind particular motion pictures is much more nuanced than that of more conventional corporate bodies, since films have a very strong cultural capacity: “The film brand is both artistic and commercial, and these values cannot easily be decoupled” (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2013, p. 773). Additionally, Grainge (2007) accentuates the wide palette of cultural instances (i.e., texts, symbols, images) that weaves the film branding process into a synergic unity. Hence, films are also referred to as ‘content brands’ that can seamlessly appear across various media platforms (Arvidsson, 2006; Grainge, 2007). Along these lines, Marshall (2002) has also labelled them ‘intertextual commodities’, that can exploit their brand elasticity and high degree of communicability (Laforet, 2010). Maybe the most representative instances of such ‘content brands’ or ‘intertextual commodities’ are, once more, the blockbuster franchises of Hollywood (e.g., James Bond, Pirates of the Caribbean, Jurassic Park, The Matrix, Back to the Future, Terminator).

Nevertheless, Kohli (2017) formulates criticism of Grainge's take on the film branding process, because it puts too much emphasis on the commercialisation and corporate structures. Kohli argues that: “[Grainge] only focuses on Hollywood's industry culture, roles

of production house logos, product placements and industry politics in developing branded texts, properties and spaces to better promote films” (p. 28). The author also refers to Keller, inasmuch as Keller (2008) suggests that by merging several brand elements (e.g., name, characters, symbol, packaging) films can successfully set themselves up as brands. Kohli also points out here that Keller did not provide any measure or process that would facilitate such a branding success. Another commentary that the author draws is that relating to Kapferer (2008), who rules out a film brand entities as long as they do not have a supporting product or service that provides a degree of tangibility, thus embodying the brand. Kohli challenges this notion, calling attention to the progressively intangible value offerings by contemporary brands.

Kohli (2017) aimed at breaking away from this academic reticence by examining how, why and when consumer may engage with films as brands. His findings show that the attribute of coherent identity is a key factor in consumer engagement, while emotional bonding, popularity and sequels mediate the process. Moreover, marketing activities and a sense of iconic status and timelessness can produce positive WOM and intention to watch films, ultimately contributing to a film’s capacity to be engaged as a brand. These notions, especially that of coherent identity, are deemed very important in relation to the particular brand identity of film auteurs. However, as progressive as Kohli’s findings are, it is important to note that his paper endorses a consumer-centric approach to branding, simultaneously abandoning further significant socio-cultural insights.

In the domain of film branding the key cultural oriented research is on behalf of O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), whose conceptual paper outline the multitude of branded elements that conjointly synthesise into a film project’s integrated brandscape and also emphasise how these, as “signs constructed in social interaction, meanings which are produced, communicated and consumer by film-makers and their audiences” (p. 777) integrate with their appropriate cultural fabrics. O’Reilly’s and Kerrigan’s *film brandscape* and its appropriate theoretical framework has two critical features that has to be resolutely accentuated, as these firmly determined this paper’ theoretical framework: its (1) cultural viability and (2) semiotic underpinnings. As a result of these characteristics, the author of this paper considers this category of brandscapes inherently semiotic cultural spaces that provide

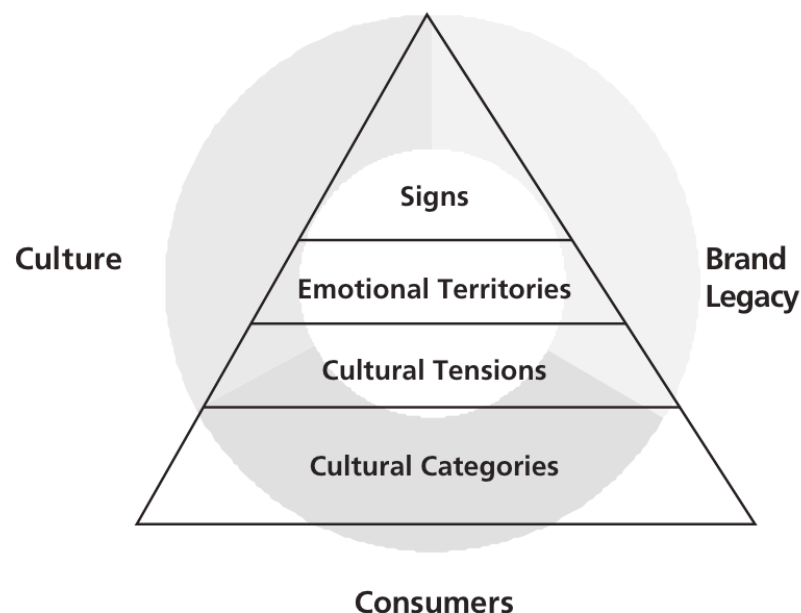
comprehensive, in-depth and expansive account of their appropriate brand phenomenon. Before closing on the film brandscape itself, the following sub-chapter delivers a brief overview of the practice of ‘brandscaping’.

2.5 Brandscape as granular representation and its conceptual iterations

It is easy for the day-to-day consumer to assume that a brand constitutes only a commercial product or logo, however, as a matter of fact, the brand constitute a complex apparatus in which cultural and social veins substantially shape its existence (Oswald, 2012). Thus, the brand materialises itself on synchronously real, virtual and symbolic terrains, the aggregation of which Oswald refers to as the ‘Consumer Brandscape’.

Figure 8

The Consumer Brandscape



Note. As found in Oswald, 2012, p. 71.

Oswald's (2012) iteration of the brandscape is a highly integrated construct, that is, the model consider not just the brand and its appropriate cultural fabric, but also the consumers and their emotional dimension:

I use the term to define a symbolic system that integrates the social, cultural, and semiotic dimensions of brands in a coherent yet flexible whole. The Brandscape system includes several dimensions of meaning: the codes structuring the cultural category, the emotional territories associated with the category, and the material signifiers used to communicate these meanings in representations such as packaging and advertising. (p. 70)

While we can regard to this particular iteration of the brandscape as a highly efficient way to handle the brand and its socio-cultural cogency, Oswald herself highlights that any discussion of brandscaping confronts the rudimentary problem of its discordant practices and conceptual inconsistency. Oswald mention the brandscape as a 'branded corporate environment' as formulated by Sherry (1998), the "constellation of meanings that consumers associate with brands" as conceived by Thompson and Arsel (2004) and the "branded urban environment" by Klingman (2007).

As the term 'brandscape' means different things to different people (or different things in different research contexts), the author of this paper designates a two-by-two matrix within which brandscapes in the literature seem to conceptualise, more specifically, across the dimensions of the (i) environment they substantiate in (either in the mental or physical domain) and along the (ii) scope they cover (either on the macro or individual level). Accordingly, in the literature we can encounter brandscapes throughout these four possible ontological variations. Before the author closes in on the brandscape category this particular paper revolves around (the mental-individual variation, similarly to that of Oswald's construct), the following sub-chapters give a brief overview of the three other categories.

2.6 The mental-macro brandscape

Originally, the word ‘brandscape’ was coined by marketing anthropologist John Sherry. Past citations indicate that the term was first used at a consumer research oriented conference in 1986. The conference paper discussed brand loyalty in consumer culture and the process of brandscaping was described by Sherry as a process that enables brands to operate on a cultural level (Sherry, 1986). Thus, the multitude of brands in a market or market segment can be visualised as a cultural expanse or landscape of competing brands. Hence the term’s etymology: ‘brand’ plus ‘landscape’, that is, ‘brandscape’. This is the first notion of the ‘brandscape’ as such: the ‘ecosystem’ of *multiple* brands available in a particular market. A very helpful definition is Sherry’s brandscape is that of Thompson and Arsel’s (2004): “consumers’ active constructions of personal meanings and lifestyle orientations from the symbolic resources provided by an array of brands” (p. 632).

There are many who sympathised with this initial concept of the brandscape construct. Among the most notable ones we can find the notorious branding scholar, David Aaker (1996): “Usually there are a few limited positioning strategies used in the industry; a good exercise therefore is to arrange advertisements into a "brandscape" of clusters representing firms with similar positioning strategies” (p. 194). While Aaker’s text approaches brandscaping through the lens of positioning, his comments endorse the idea of conceiving a market or segment as a landscape of congregated brands according to their similitude.

Other mentions of this particular category of brandscapes include that of American author James B. Twitchell (1999): “creating a consumption "constellation," entering a brandscape, conforming to a fashion” (p. 199); that of Fenichell and Bedbury (2002): “Because the tables can turn incredibly quickly in today's high-flux, low-loyalty brandscape, it pays for even the strongest and most seemingly imperious brands to continually refresh themselves” (p. 82); and that of Gerzema and Lebar (2008): “ConsumerLand runs on a Darwinian principle. Like animals in the wild, consumers handle a vast, diversified brandscape by staying alert to movement” (p. 189).

Some mention of this category of brandscape even contextualises it within the current consumer culture. As articulated by Carah, 2010:

Experimental branding follows this post-political logic. The brandscape directs political and social action toward particular issues that are conceptualized within a brand- and capital-producing framework. The market becomes the totalizing domain of social action. In the brandscape, brands can be celebrated and critiqued and put to work to achieve social and political ends. (p. 160)

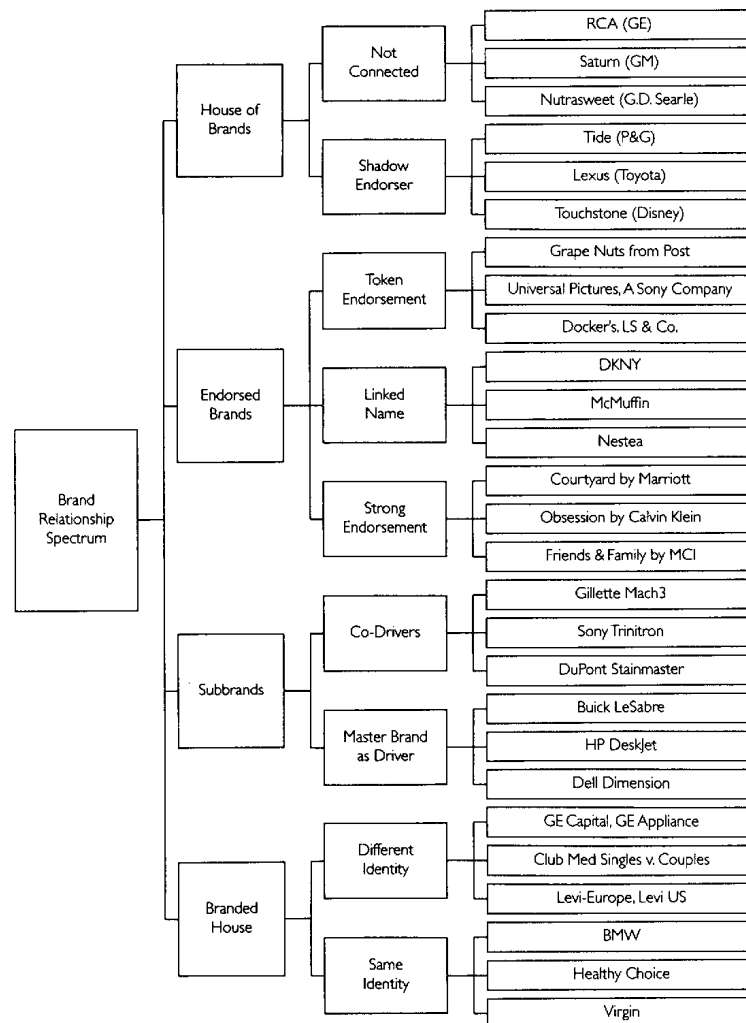
Naturally, this category of brandscape also constitutes a form of battleground, where brands can get ‘lost’ by being overshadowed by more prominent brands.

A more recent research that embraced this mental-macro level category brandscape was that of Baker et al. (2022), reviewing the sports brand ecosystem, aiming to redraw the sports brandscape. However, the authors of this paper only referred to the term ‘brandscape’ merely twice during the course of the article, as they rather referred to ‘brand architecture’, based on Aakers’s and Joachimstahler’s (2000) “organizing structure of the brand portfolio that specifies brand roles and the nature of relationships between brands” (p. 8).

Aaker and Joachimstahler named their tool the “brand relationship spectrum”, intended to turn confusing and messy brand portfolios into a clear framework of brands based on their origins, functions, and most importantly “driver role”, which mirrors the extent to which a particular brand contributes to the product or service being bought and engaged with: “When a person is asked, ‘What brand did you buy (or use)?’ the answer they give will be the brand that had primary driver role responsibility for the decision” (p. 10). Aaker and Joachimstahler also comments on the two extremes of their brand architecture construct, embodied as either a “house of brands” or a “branded house”. The contrast between the two lies inasmuch as the former involves an ensemble of independent brands, while the latter spotlights a sole master brand that holds authority over its appropriate sub-brands.

Figure 3.

Brand Relationship Spectrum



Note. As found in Aaker and Joachimstahler, 2010, p. 9.

The brand relationship spectrum is segmented into master and sub-brands. This feature and its strictly hierarchical nature was fully embraced by sports researchers Baker et al. (2022), as their framework operates on clearly differentiated vertical and horizontal hierarchies. Hence their usage and their preference to refer in their text to brand architecture (though the paper playfully includes the term ‘brandscape’ and excludes that of ‘brand architecture’ from its title).

2.7 The physical-macro Brandscape

A very different category of brandscapes emerged swiftly after Sherry's construct. The difference between Klingman's (2007) iteration and the previous category materialises to the extent that Klingman considers real environments, that is actual physical landscapes that are 'branded'. According to him, cities are not just skylines but also brandscapes, where architecture and design constitute a strategic apparatus for economic and cultural change. To this category of brandscape it is inherent to express a sort of identity, which can encompass the brand of actual cities. Notable instances of such brandscapes is for example Times Square in New York or the Shibuya Crossing at Hachiko Square, Tokyo.

As Klingman handles his iteration of the construct quite inclusively, he also refers to corporal entities in his text, for example to Disneyland or NikeTown in London. While the author of this paper acknowledges these notions, he believes that Klingman's concept is more significant to larger scope landscapes and that the account of specifically corporate sites require a narrower and more focused perspective than what Klingman represents (e.g., Sherry's servicescape).

2.8 The physical-individual brandscape

In terms of more specialised prospects, the term 'brandscape' can also be used to exclusively refer to branded corporate environments, most commonly retail sites. When consumers enter a physical selling environment where they wish to purchase products, services or experiences, it is of particular importance that their customer journeys and impressions are well managed. To streamline and refine this process, companies can turn common retail environment into a branded terrain composed of carefully assorted design elements, ranging from colours to music, so the selling environment becomes a tangible extension of the brand itself, a brand-themed environment. This is what John F. Sherry (1998) referred to as the 'servicescape', or in other words, the 'emplaced brandscape' (take careful notice of Sherry's differing concept of the 'brandscape' and the 'servicescape').

Riewoldt (2002) also alludes to this category of brandscapes. According to him, brandscaping is the process through which design and even architecture operates on the basis

of marketing tools, so companies can turn real, physical places (e.g., retail areas, shopping centres, showrooms, theme parks) into a branded microcosms, which consumers can embrace with their natural senses. Specific examples from the author include such brandscapes as Volkswagen AutoStadt, NikeTown in London, and the Qiora showroom in New York.

2.9 Focusing on the mental-individual brandscape

Once we finally close on the brandscape category that actively shapes this paper's theoretical framework, we have to refer back to Oswald's Consumer Brandscape, that combines that physical, the virtual and the symbolic dimensions of a chosen brand. The reader may rightfully pose the question of how Oswald's construct fits into the Mental-Individual brandscape category, once it explicitly takes account of the "physical". The author of this paper has two justifications for his choice.

First of all, Oswald incorporate the physicality of a brand inasmuch as it amounts either to the tangible aspects of the tangible product that relates to the brand (e.g., packaging) or to things such as offline promotion material (billboards). In the words of Oswald (2012): "...the material signifiers used to communicate these meanings in representations such as packaging and advertising" (p. 70). Consequently, Oswald's construct is not ought to rationalise physical environments that are comprehensively branded, and while such a "branded microcosm" (Riewoldt, 2002) could be considered within the framework of the Consumer Brandscape, it is not its primary aim or purpose.

The author of this paper warns the reader that while the definitions and appropriate scopes of the different brandscape categories are of great service and can operate as proper guidelines, the distinct brandscape variations still have facets that extend over their dominant functions, hence why clear categorical boundaries are slippery.

The second justification to include Oswald's Consumer Brandscape in this category is the undeniable comprehensiveness of her construct, which is discernible through the construct's model. Besides signs and cultural features (tensions and categories) the emotional terrains of the consumers associated with the category are also accounted for. This

characteristic alludes to the elusive boundaries that govern brandscape categories, as Oswald not only tackles a particular brand within her brandscape model, but also contextualises it within the product category and its related codes.

Oswald (2012) also mentions an iteration of the brandscape construct as “the constellation of meanings consumers associate with brands” (p. 70), referring to Thompson and Arsel’s (2004) method. This construct is similarly a mental-individual variation, but contrasted to Oswald’s brandscape it is much more specific in its function: “We reconfigure this consumercentric definition to encompass the hegemonic influences that global experiential brands exert on their local competitors and the meanings consumers derive from their experiences of these glocal servicescapes” (p. 632). This particular brandscape “is a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant (market-driving) experiential brand (p. 632). However, this iteration of the brandscape is not accompanied with a graphical model or representation. The authors lay it out as an analytical instrument to elucidate the cultural, consumptive and symbolic terrains on which “consumers experience these glocalized servicescapes and articulate personal and collective relationships to them” (p. 638).

After considering all this, the brandscape of this particular paper’s theoretical framework calls to be more concentrated than that of Oswald’s (2012) consumer brandscape and more extensive than that of Thompson’s and Arsel’s (2004) constellation. It stays rather at a conceptual midpoint, resembling the nature of O’Reilly’s and Kerrigan’s (2013) film brandscape.

2.10 Approaching the film brandscape

As priorly stated, O’Reilly’s and Kerrigan’s film brandscape and its appropriate theoretical framework has two critical features that this paper wishes to highlight: its (i) cultural viability and (ii) semiotic underpinnings. Consequently, the author of this paper considers this category of brandscapes semiotic cultural spaces that are able to provide comprehensive, in-depth and expansive account of their chosen brand phenomenon. The following sections

expands upon these features by reviewing the cultural approach to branding alongside semiotics and its most essential semiotic concepts.

It's necessary to inaugurate these sub-chapters by emphasising the overlay and parallels between the film brandscape's cultural and semiotic application. Notably, the underlying semiotic nature of brands inherently (theoretically) precursors the cultural school of thought to branding. As a result, semiotic motifs reverberate across the coming overview of cultural branding. While the section of cultural branding recurrently refers to semiotics, this referential duress is light and readers may be able to navigate through by contextual clues, even if they do not have any prior experience of semiotics.

2.11 Brand as communication

For us, people, conveying information from one mind to another is an indispensable natural faculty. We may talk or write to each other, use our body language or facial gestures to dispatch a message or else can resort to the commodious repertoire of cognate mediums: books, the radio, etc. Our words, acts and mere being transmits information to anything or anyone willing to decode their content and messages. Altogether, we refer to this comprehensive process as communication, an activity which our cultural fabrics materialise from: "the whole of culture is signification and communication" (Eco, 1976, p. 22).

Communication and culture share further intimate folds with one another: "Cultures are created through communication; that is, communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural characteristics are created and shared. It is not so much that individuals set out to create a culture when they interact in relationships, groups, organisations, or societies, but rather that cultures are a natural by-product of social interaction" (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011).

A brand, exclusively in the role of a concrete economic apparatus, can also be considered a category of communication (Lury, 2004), or put differently, brands are by-products of a particular set of social interactions (e.g., those relating to trade or commerce).

Conventionally, this communicative attribute was to be accrued solely between the producers and consumers of economic goods:

To borrow the image of the roles of producer and consumer as being in some semiotically interesting sense analogous to those of speaker and hearer: 'brand' enters upon phenomenal reality as a mode of connection, of communication, between two parties. Successful branding, then, is successful communication. (Moore, 2003, p. 335)

However, a firmly economic attitude (not arguing that Moore endorses such views) falsely captures the brand as an entity that is hermetically sealed from cultural and societal forces. On the contrary, the 'brand' goes beyond being a by-product of social interactions, as it unfolds as forebearer, mediator and as bellwether of our sociocultural reality. Thus, the 'brand' as a solely economic phenomenon becomes a conceptually cramped construct, while the 'brand' transcends 'the mere market'. Among the seven main approaches to branding (Heding et al., 2008), the cultural school of thought makes the most effort to resolve the theoretical deadlocks of such presumptions, constituting brands their appropriate headway towards their properly recognised sociocultural cogency.

2.12 The cultural approach to branding

Approached from the social point of view, we can assert that a culture exists once we find mutually shared cognisance of meanings and values among its appropriate members (du Gay et al., 1997). The compelling depth of these spaces, their richness in materiality and wide spectrum of (often contrasting) values conjointly render cultural affairs the complex occurrences they are. Culture is one of the axiomatic landscapes we, humans, have to strenuously and insistently manoeuvre through.

Cultural branding frames the focal phenomena in a very particular way. Brands are regarded as cultural artefacts (Holt, 2004) that integrate into our broader cultural fabric (Kates, 2004). As brands constitute a cultural resource for humans, their function is widely

different from that of merely economic instruments. By deviating from simple marks denoting quality, brands become vehicles of meaning, that can either not resonate with us, or can reverberate our collective identity's values and beliefs, ultimately rendering them successful (Askegaard, 2006). If brands are successful along these lines, their meanings become collective representations within distinctly enculturated social groups (du Gay et al., 1997). In other words, a collective representation emerges from the shared intersubjectivity of the particular meaning that the brand is being a vessel for.

Altogether, the critical contribution of the cultural approach is the capacity to which it can explain the integration of brands into our cultural fabric, as culturally crucial constituents. In contemporary markets, brands' success largely depends on their cultural sonority: "...iconic brands are those who have managed to integrate themselves into culture more skilfully than others..." (Heding et al., 2008, p. 212). However, this reliance between brands and its 'users' is reciprocal, as brands harness more and more cultural agency. This notion is closely tied to the idea of a postmodern consumer culture (Holt, 2002).

2.13 Postmodern consumer culture and its dialectics

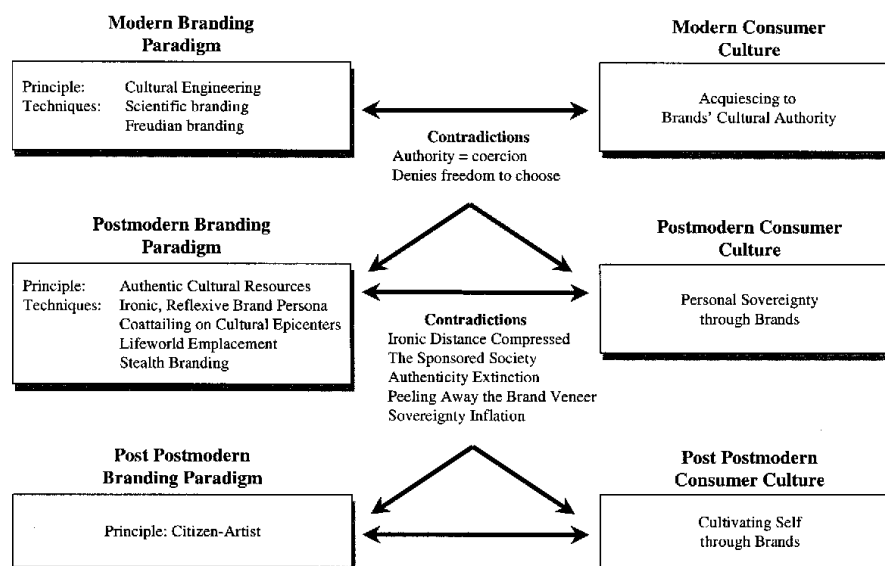
According to Holt (2002), the growing importance of brands can be explained with the dialectical relationship that consumer culture and branding paradigms have with one another. To define both shortly: "Consumer culture is the ideological infrastructure that undergirds what and how people consume and sets the ground rules for marketers' branding activities. The branding paradigm is the set of principles that structures how firms seek to build their brands" (p. 80). The dialectical relationship emerges as companies continually pivot branding standard to the current paradigm's logical extreme, while at the same time consumers build literacy of current marketing practices and start to challenge the status quo. Holt's dialectical model distinguishes a post, current and future sets of branding paradigms and consumer cultures, which constitute the main focus of analysis within the cultural approach to branding (Kohli, 2017).

It is important to point out that the ‘post postmodern’ paradigms foreseen by Holt are not materialised yet, and our focus is on the middle paradigms of the model, where the personal sovereignty of consumers is achieved by brands and where brands operate as authentic cultural resources.

Contemporary customers find themselves within the postmodern consumer culture that originates from the 1960’s cultural overhaul, where there was “...a passionate, reflexive concern with existential freedom” (Holt, 2002, p. 82). The axiomatic assumption of the modern branding paradigm before this was that of cultural engineering, as the market dictated epochal ideals that consumers had to obey. However, as counterculture gained ground, people began to sovereignly manage themselves as works under construction by conducting their own choices, including those of consumption (Dickstein [1997] 1997).

Figure 4

The dialectical model of branding and consumer culture



Note. As found in Holt, 2002, p. 81.

Consumers in the postmodern paradigm interpret their actions analogous to constructing themselves and regard their “consumption as an autonomous space in which they could

pursue identities unencumbered by tradition, social circumstances or social institutions” (Holt, 2002, p. 82). Connoting oneself to brands became crucial, as brands became channels through which cultural content circulates. In conjunction with the postmodern consumer culture, the postmodern branding paradigm was also established, as corporations adjusted for novel consumer needs by endorsing people’s mission to individuate themselves, fully embracing this “distinctively postmodern mode of sociality” (p. 83). Thus, brands became palettes for self-presentation, besides operating as vehicles, resources and ingredients to meld our sociocultural reality. These functions highlight the instrumental actions of brands through certain metaphors for consuming (Holt, 1995), such as consuming as integration, where “consumer are able to integrate self and object, theory allowing themselves access to the object’s symbolic properties”, and consuming as classification, where “objects–viewed as vessels of cultural and personal meaning–act to classify their consumers” (p. 2).

This ever-so-present manner of ‘constructing-oneself’ consumption is also alluded to in how the consumer is frequently labelled throughout the cultural branding literature, that is, the *homo mercan* (Kohli, 2017). The ‘market man’ is intertwined in the sweeping symbolic meaning that emerges from all appropriate economic products and offerings (Holt, 2002), from which the *homo mercan* expresses, represents and navigates himself in the cultural space that he exhibits. In the words of McCracken (1988): “...these cultural notions are concretised in goods, and it is through their possession and use that the individual realises the notions in his own life” (p. 88). This manner of self-construction assumes a profound cultural consumption and a corresponding consumer culture, where all productums manifest circulators of meaning (McCracken, 1988).

Consumers and their identity forming pursuits is also an evident theme in the brandscape literature. As referred to by Thompson and Arsel (2004): “[the brandscape] shapes consumer lifestyles and identities by functioning as a cultural model that consumers act, think and feel through” (p. 632). The authors further allude to how the conventionalised social customs and the assemblage of objectified meanings contribute to a wide array of identity-forming uses. Thus, “brand meanings generate consumer identities, social networks, and marketplace cultures” (p. 641). The significance of brands in our everyday experience is

also well captured by Belk et al. (1989): “Like it or not, to our benefit or peril, consumption has become such a transcendental vehicle for many” (p. 32).

Finally, as the anthropologist Jules Henry (1973) assessed his concerns for corporate networks and the state of the economy, similar notions of their appropriate consumer culture light through:

Yet even such power, unmatched in the history of our culture, is still inadequate to convince us that the economy is here to stay; and for this reason people must be taught to buy as they breathe; and the average person must be trained to feel a sense of pecuniary suffocation if he does not spend much of what he earns. A consequence of this is the suburban Saturday at the department store, where teenagers and younger go to while away the week-end, have rendezvous and perhaps pick up a free sample... Department stores have become the new museums of our culture. Not the Art Museum or the Museum of Natural History, but the Museum of Dry Goods is the greatest centre of culture of our time. These children are learning much more that is worthwhile in the department store, much more that will save the culture from disaster, than they would in a conventional museum; they are learning how to buy, how to ransom us from the catastrophe of a vulnerable economic system. (pp. 84-85)

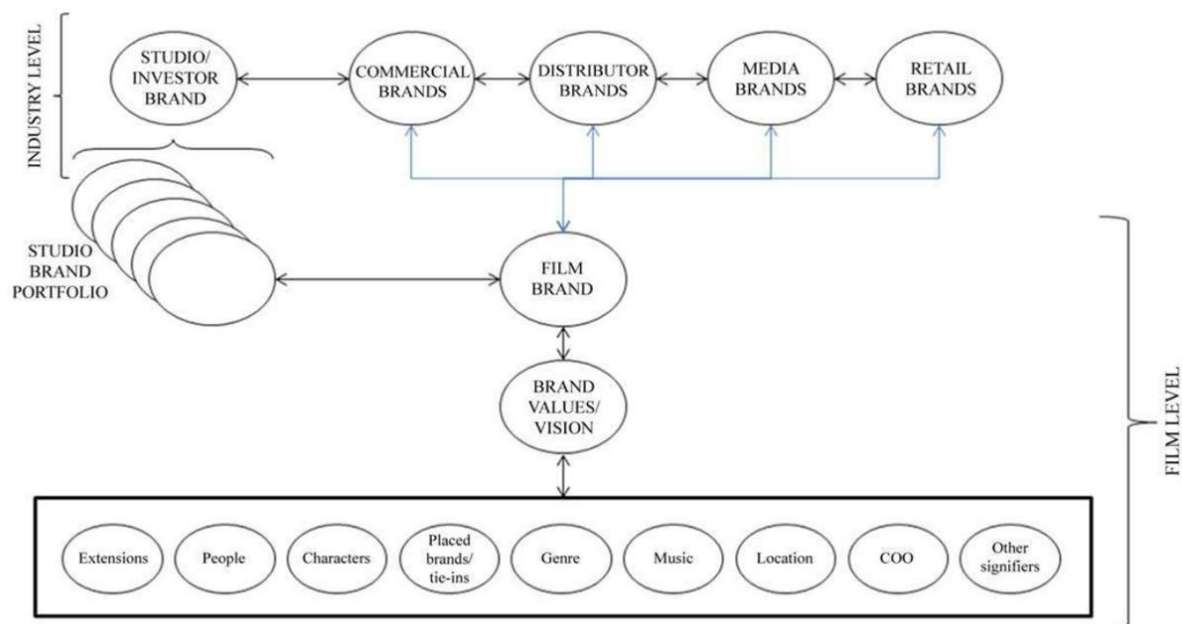
2.14 Navigating the film brandscape through the cultural lens

O'Reilly's and Kerrigan's (2013) conceptual paper is arguably the finest attempt to embrace the cultural school of thought as related to film branding. The authors introduced the extensive and granular brandscape of the cinematic industrial complex, where individual brand elements contribute to the general brand identity of the particular experiential product, that is, to a film. According to the authors, the film brandscape consists of two separate layers: “The industry level brandscape includes the studio, distributor, media and cinema/retailer brands which operate the relevant supply chain. The film level brandscape concerns those brands which relate to the production, content and consumption of the film itself” (p.

781). This dynamic constellation of brands renders the branding imperatives of a film project remarkably nuanced.

Figure 5

The Film Brandscape



Note. As found in O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013, p. 780.

Categorically, we need a primary mode of navigation amidst these competing/co-operating brand elements to coordinate a brandscape that attains high marketability and playability, two key measures in film marketing practice (Kerrigan and O'Reilly, 2010). By definition, a brandscape is normatively a cultural space, that is “a culture or a market where brands and brand-related items such as signs and logos increasingly dominate everyday life” (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård, 2010, p. 412). Subsequently, as claimed by the same authors, the expressiveness of goods as signs has its roots in the increasing prominence of the experience economy. They also maintain that “consumers’ experiences are ideologically infused” (p. 413).

According to Kerrigan and O'Reilly (2013), a socio-cultural approach to branding has sufficient utility, while also highlighting that this socio-cultural dimension of film offerings is among the issues that has complicated film branding developments:

There is currently no theory which frames films as brands. We argue that, because of the symbolic nature of films as cultural texts, it is particularly necessary to accommodate this cultural dimension into any theory of film branding. Film is a particular kind of object, a vehicle for symbolic, cultural, representational and ideological meanings. A theory of film branding which ignores these dimensions would therefore fail to account thoroughly for the very product it purports to explain. (p. 777)

Along these lines, Kerrigan and O'Reilly (2013) formulate that every element of the film brandscape is rooted in cultural context: "Production involves the encoding of discursive resources (ideas, images, words, sounds, gestures) into film texts (which we carry the brand identity), which are communicated and consumed, or decoded, for meanings or brand image" (p. 781). This is established on the grounds of the circuit of culture, developed by Du Gay et al. (1997) and Hall (1997).

On the above mentioned accounts, the basis of this conceptual paper draws heavily from the cultural branding approach of Kerrigan and O'Reilly (2013), whose condensed theoretical implication is the following: film brands are to be regarded as cultural texts that are constructed in social interaction and are subsequently created, consumed and transmitted within cultural circuits by audiences and film-makers.

Upon inspecting the elements of the film brandscape, we can observe that brands have varying reliance or dependency from the actual film. On one hand, some elements are reliant on the project they are part of, such as character brands. The notion of this dependence is implied in the illustrative case of Kerrigan and O'Reilly (2013), by referring to character brands of the James Bond franchise, for instance to the villains of Goldfinger and Dr No. These two personas do not have brands on their own as they are originating from their corresponding film projects. On the other hand, the majority of brand elements in the film brandscape are fully-functioning brands in their own right, for instance country of origin,

commercial brands with placement deals, studios and distributors, or that of actors: “Other important figures are the Bond girls, whose actors can be important brands in their own right” (p. 782).

Dissecting the structure of film brandscapes, Kerrigan and O’Reilly (2013) identified ‘people’ as a fundamental brand element for films: “...the producers, directors and stars of films may themselves be read as individual brands” (p. 770). However, in the existing literature, the creative team or individual investors of films received limited consideration, as the corporate brand of studios (Grainge, 2004; Grainge, 2007; Grainge, 2008).

Nevertheless, the individual brands of these creative people insinuate proficient prospects to be further explored. Directors and actors possess potential capacity for cultural influence, leading to some high-profile actors (Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004) or even directors (Promkhuntong, 2014) to become celebrities. At the bottom of all this, these creatives are marked by their professional reputation: “Throughout their careers, directors and actors accumulate the resonances of the film projects in which they have worked, lending a symbolic heritage to their own personal brands” (Kerrigan and O’Reilly, 2013, p. 774).

As mentioned above, brands are extensively ingrained in the motion pictures industry, namely among the commercial and corporal institutions of film-making. However, history testifies to the cultural power of great creative figures in cinema, such as directors, actors, cinematographers, set designers, writers and so on. Furthermore, there have also been instances in the past where affluent film producers amassed considerable cultural capital. O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2013) mention such a figure in their case study:

The long-time producer of the Bond films was Albert R. (‘Cubby’) Broccoli (died 1996), whose daughter and step-son have co-produced the remaining films. There is a dynastic element to the production of the films, and the continuity of the Broccoli brand lends stability to the franchise. (p. 782)

Within the conceptual framework of O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), films as texts and their assemblers (producers, creatives and commercial agents) can be considered within a constellation of brands that operate in the symbolic space of brandscape. As film creatives are also a part of the film brandscape, a door opens to a surge of new conceptual frameworks,

where the overall brand identity to which individual signifiers accumulate is not that of individual films, but that of directors, actors, screenwriters and other people who contribute to the creation of a motion picture. In other words, the creative corps itself becomes the object that bears symbolic, representational and cultural connotations, as it simultaneously morphs into sets of signifiers that co-dependently contribute to the overall brand identity according to the available codes within its circuits of culture. In other words, film creatives are able to possess their own particular brandscapes, where the overall meaning is synthesised from all the available brand-affiliations that are available to the film-makers.

2.15 Embracing the semiotic: going beyond culture

As we present ourselves at the gateway of the semiotic terrain, we are struck with the question: what exact relationship does semiotics and culture have with one another? Or maybe the best question is the following: what is semiotics anyways? Chandler (2022) articulates the rudimentary problem of the semiotics very well:

If you go into a bookshop and ask an assistant where to find a book on semiotics, you are likely to meet with a blank look. Even worse, you might be asked to define what semiotics is – which would be a bit tricky... (p. 1)

Whatever semiotics may be, it underlies all our socio-cultural reality in terms of communication and meaning: “the whole of culture is signification and communication” (Eco, 1976, p. 22). To fully appreciate the semiotic outlook of our world, we need to resolve the elusiveness and obscure nature of the semiotic enterprise, which is no easy task. Semiotic literature is meticulously nuanced and its constructs often lack an agreement on their definition and functions. Furthermore, consensus is also in short supply regarding its principles, methodology and scope.

In fact, O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013) rarely referred explicitly to semiotics in their conceptual research (precisely once, in the last paragraph), while their theoretical framework

build upon semiotic principles. In fact, their construct of the film brandscape is inherently semiotic apparatus, as it consists of a wide array of brands that effectively operate as proper signifiers: “Of course, to say that a film is a sign is rather simplistic. Rather, films offer a large number of signifiers set in certain relationships to one another” (p. 777). The authors disclose explicitly that they allude to brands as signs, however, they only refer to cultural studies upon mentioning the construct, withdrawing from any due given to the actual discipline of semiotics. In other words, the semiotic underpinning of the paper is ‘out of focus’, while semiotic principles and concepts are omnipresent in their paper (e.g., codes and texts). Consequently, the author of this paper feels the weight of obligation to justify the primary role that semiotics play not just in relation to the brandscape construct or to cultural branding, but to our comprehension of culture in general, it being a symbolic form of human activity itself: “Humans are symbolic, and a society consists of such cultural ideologies as language, myth, art and religion created by humans using symbols. Human mind, language and communication cannot be separated from symbols” (Dongxiang, 2018). It’s also worth mentioning that contrary to O’Reilly and Kerrigan, Kohli (2017) does allude to semiotics when reviewing the cultural approach to branding..

This is exactly at this theoretical vantage point where the author of this paper recognised the film brandscape’s lack of semiotic establishment. Hence the aim to revitalise the theoretical framework that of O’Reilly’s and Kerrigan’s, or in other words, to semiotically reinforce and simultaneously adapt their category of brandscape to bear the capacity to represent more intricately nuanced artistic brands, such as the film auteur brand.

To act in accordance to this revelation, the author provides a brief but satisfactory overview to core semiotic concepts and principles. Besides arching over the history of semiotics, the paper also thoroughly examines the brand as a sign, not hesitating to take a glance at some of the academic discussions that stretch out the semiotic treatment of brands to its theoretical extremities.

2.16 A brief history of semiotics

When referring to rationality as an inadequate competence to examine human culture in all its opulence, the Neo-Kantian philosopher Cassirer (1953) expressed himself in the corresponding fashion:

...all these forms are symbolic forms. Hence, instead of defining man as an *animal rationale*, we should define him as an *animal symbolicum*. By so doing we can designate his specific difference, and we can understand the new way open to man—the way to civilization. (p. 44)

Not lacking *grandeur*, Cassirer's high-scope interpretation of signs and symbols were highly influential in the academic realms of cultural studies, anthropology and semiotics, encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue across these domains. Cassirer's enthusiastic stance that signs and symbols were primary means of communication in culture was shared by other influential figures, such as Lévi-Strauss, as expressed by Singer (1978): "In Lévi-Strauss's semiological telescope everything looks like [a] sign and symbol..." (pp. 219-220).

Semiotics as a discipline can often be elusive to people outside the field, although in the simplest terms it can be just referred to as the theory of signs. Griffin (2012) defines it more in-depth: "[Semiotics is] the study of the social production of meaning from sign systems; the analysis of anything that can stand for something else" (p. 332).

Semiotics firmly emerged from the discipline of linguistics, and our languages can be referred to as systems of sign. Common instances of everyday signs include that of signs on street, the siren of ambulances and scribbles and banners above corner stores and bars in our neighbourhoods.

However, as pointed out by Barthes (1967):

[Semiotics encompasses] any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification. (p. 9)

In terms of fashionableness, semiotics began to emerge in the late 1960s, when it gradually became one of the approaches of cultural studies. Although it has stagnated through recent decades, Chandler (2022) still considers it indispensable to scientifically approach media, communication or cultural. Thanks to the work of Roland Barthes, who communised the usage of semiotic tools in the realms of media and non-verbal mediums, such as photography and film (1970; 1977). The semiotic enterprise was a critical instrument to close in on cultural studies in the 1960s, and although it may be less of a focal approach now, it still remains essential to understand communication or cultural studies, and even mediums of mass media, such as radio, television, etc (Chandler, 2022). In fact, semiotics is said to exhibit an auxiliary function (semiotics is always the semiotics of something), by which it can be applied to practically any cultural phenomenon (Boroch, 2018). It is also of critical importance to point out that semiotics is not necessarily about *what* signs mean, but *how* signs mean (Sturrock, 1986).

One of the most original and comprehensive attempts to formulate a theory of semiotics is on behalf of Eco (1976), who considered all cultural phenomena accessible by means of semiotic analysis, inasmuch as cultural activities are considered as communicative processes. Eco considers the development of codes (with signification systems being the substrata of culture) to preexist any forms of communication (sign production), as communication is the means by which codes are transmitted. We allude once more to Eco's words, in a slightly extended format: "the whole of culture is signification and communication and that humanity and society exist only when communicative and significative relationships are established" (p. 22). Eco also warns that his theory does not endorse a reductionist outlook on culture: "The two hypotheses are: (i) the whole of culture must be studied as a semiotic phenomenon; (ii) all aspects of a culture can be studied as the contents of a semiotic activity" (p. 22). He deeply aligned his work with the second hypothesis.

This emphasis of the auxiliary feature of semiotics pre-existed Eco, dating back to the birth of the discipline. The same idea in the words of Peirce (1977):

...it has never been in my power to study anything, – mathematics, ethics, metaphysics, gravitation, thermodynamics, optics, chemistry, comparative anatomy,

astronomy, psychology, phonetics, economics, the history of science, whist, men and women, wine, metrology, except as a study of semiotic. (pp. 85-6)

Therefore, the sign happens to be a quite comprehensive construct. Chandler (2022) shares a comical way to put this:

Semiotic analysis has been applied to a vast range of modes and media. Since this involves ‘invading’ the territory of different academic disciplines, it is understandable that semiotics has often been criticized as imperialistic. (p. 291)

Basically, what signs capture in themselves, in the simplest of words, is meaning, which is regarded as the unit of culture by Eco (1976): “What, then, is the meaning of a term? From a semiotic point of view it can only be a *cultural unit*” (p. 67).

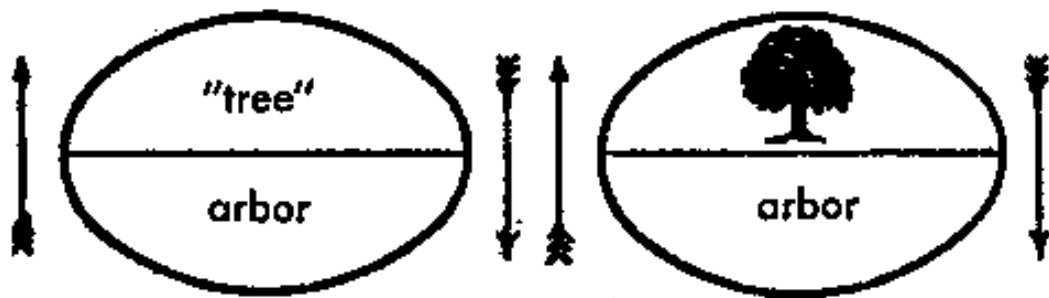
In light of the sign’s significance and wide applicability, it is important that we are able to distill it down to its core components. As outlined by Boroch (2018), we find across time multiple pertinent paradigms in semiotics that can be categorise roughly into three distinct generations. The first generation mainly comprises the Peirce-Saussurean dichotomy, who are considered to be the respective founding fathers of semiotics. As for the first paradigm, discourses were mainly centred around the distinct meaning of signs and symbols in different cultural aspects. The difference between the two was innate inasmuch as Saussure, who was a linguist, primarily approached the sign from the perspective of linguistics (note that Saussure referred to his study of signs as semiology,), while the scientist and mathematician Peirce approached it through the lens of logic. One of the most distinct differences between Saussure and Peirce is their conceptions of the sign’s ontological construction.

Sign, as defined initially by Saussure (2011), is the unity of the signifier and the signified. On Figure 2, we can see a representation of his sign, which he describes to be “a two-sided psychological entity” (p. 66). The bottom half of the diagram, ‘arbor’ is the signifier (*signifiant*) and the top half, the image of a “tree” is the signified (*signifié*). The relationship that connects the two is referred to as signification. However, Saussure, a stringent linguist, sharpened his theory of signs as an explanation predominantly for language, where the “linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a

concept and a sound pattern” (p. 66). On Figure 2, the sound-image takes the form of the signifier, while concept the form of the signified. Consequently, Saussure has developed a very narrow category of signs inasmuch as his theory endorses phonocentrism, privileging the orality of language and the medium of speech over its written counterpart (Li, 2018). Despite these characteristics, this Saussurean model of the sign is arguably the most commonly embraced model in the literature.

Figure 6

Diagram of Saussure’s Sign,

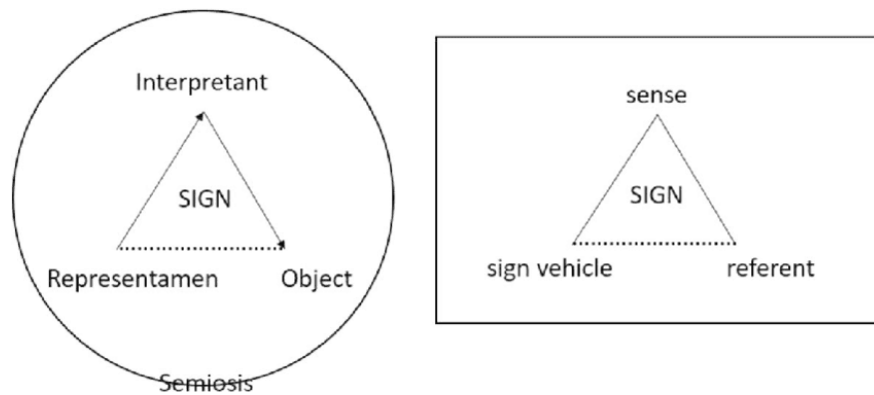


Note. As found in Saussure, 2011, p. 67)

In sharp contrast to Saussure, Peirce’s category of signs is extensive towards the extremities: “a sign... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce, 1977, p. 27). Peirce also declared that ‘every thought is a sign’ (Peirce, something something). However, the primary aspect by which their outlook differs is in how many parts signification as a relation manifests in ‘semiosis’ (the action of signs capturing and conveying meaning). According to Saussure, signification is a dyadic relation, while Peirce refers to it as a triadic activity, with the insertion of ‘sense’ or ‘interpretant’.

Figure 7

Two interpretations of the Peircean sign model



Note. As found in Lackovic, 2018, p. 6.

This distinctively Peircean notion of the interpretant is captured in its essence within Short's (1981) recount: "A sign signifies only what it is capable of being interpreted as signifying; hence, that in which a sign is or would be interpreted (its interpretant) is the third relatum of signification" (p. 199). This contribution of Peirce has ultimately cemented his construct into the highest circles of the discipline and variants of his model have been proliferating since its inception (iterations on his model often just change Peircean terminology to accommodate for certain sensibilities).

Peirce's thought of the sign being able to only capturing the kind of meaning that interpreters are willing (or capable) to associate it with is an idea that has profound reverberation in branding, consumer culture and symbolic consumption, especially once they are considered in unison. This paper examines the semiotic implication of marketing in the following section.

Continuing the course of semiotic paradigms as outlined by Borocho (2018), the second semiotic generation refers to three distinct applications, namely that to Parmentier's as influenced by Peirce, secondly to Barthes' as inspired by Saussure and lastly to Lotman's extensive semiotics of culture. Lotman's semiotics, according to Borocho (2018), is "the most developed and original" (p. 218) among the second generation of semiotics. Lotman's output

establishes both a profound theoretical and conceptual point of departure in the direction of the next generation of semiotics, referred to as anthropological semiotics, backing Singer's call for a semiotic anthropology, which can be referred to as a semiotic approach "for the description of cultural phenomena" (Boroch, 2018, p. 211). The slow but secured unfolding of semiotic anthropology is a good sign of to what extent the 'sign' stirred a scientific catalyst in academics. In a sense, according to Singer (1978), culture theory has been tilting towards semiotics:

These explorations in culture theory coincide with and draw upon a veritable explosion in the general theories of signs and symbols, and particularly in the *semiology* of Saussure and in Peirce's *semiotic*. (pp. 221-222)

This semiotic impact is palpable as it has growing ubiquity in cultural studies, becoming one of its key constructs (Bennett et al., 2005).

2.17 A semiotic exploration of the brand

Signs and brands have a lot in common. Entertaining extremities, it could be argued that every brand is a sign, and *vice-versa*, every sign is a brand (Manning, 2010; Kotler, 2003). By embracing the parallels between the two phenomena, we can epitomise certain facets of our postmodern cultural landscapes remarkably well. As navigation diminishes in an ever-so-complex world, people turn to brands to render their identity utterable and their beliefs believable. People use branded signs constantly to reinforce, represent and express themselves, just as much in their own personal lives as in the realms of our shared cultural *milieu* (Holt, 1995; Holt, 2002). Brands have gradually become one of the most prominent mediums of contemporary communication, comporting themselves as meaning-packed proxies (Kotler, 2003; Oswald, 2012). Yet, we do not bear the moral upper hand to act with vexation against this branded omnipresence. This delicate transformation was carried out voluntarily by the public, as people adapted to branded concretism following a vacuum of principles during the 60's cultural overhaul (Holt, 2002). Indeed, the secular bounds have

been torn down as branded sacralisation increasingly enjoys a lofty role in our public affairs (Belk et al., 1989).

To abridge the shift they underwent, this paper centralises three primary characteristics or tendencies that brands currently employ to capture their semiotic (and respectively sociocultural) agency: (i) brands carry meaning (ii) as communicational instruments that (iii) circulate in cultural spaces. Here, meaning is taken as the unit of culture (Eco, 1976), that is predominantly captured in signs. These three features pave the way to befittingly examine the ‘brand’ through the lens of semiotics and are indispensable to successfully take the leap to frame it as an inherently semiotic apparatus: “brands are entirely semiotic” (Oswald, 2012, p. 77). This semiotic shift of the brand will contribute to the establishment of our category of the brandscape as an inherently symbolic cultural space.

Prior to looking at how specific semiotic principles apply to brands, it is of great value to draw more general parallels between the the phenomenon. Moore (2003) discusses how postmodern literature frames “the aura, the simulacrum ... the brand” (p. 331) as the fundamental value instead of the tangible product itself, as value now inheres in the symbolic meaning. This can be explained by the gradually salient role of the significative function of commodities in the postmodern landscape. Moore continues by pointing to the fact that now anything can be branded, from products through cities to wars and politicians, which highlighted the ubiquity of brands in our socio-cultural experience. In consequence, he calls the brand a phenomenon that is “blatantly semiotic”, also calling out the lack of semiotic inquire into the construct: “the absence from the academic literature of any semiotically sophisticated and ethnographically rich understanding of brands is downright shocking” (p. 332). Moreover, Moore talks about the dematerialization of brand, which, he argues, eliminates the “semiotic vulnerabilities” of brands (Moore, 2003, p. 336).

Formerly, when the intangibility of the brand was not established, the semiotic potency of brands constituted a clandestine capacity. In high contrast to that, currently the atmosphere around the brand is thick with notions of semiotic cogency, as the brand gradually shakes off its “messy materiality” (Manning, 2010, p. 35).

While outlining brands by definition is no easy endeavour, as stated by Kapferer (2008): “Brand definitions are innumerable, and almost every author in the field has his or her own” (p. 52), it is becoming increasingly understood that brands go well beyond the physicalities of a product or service. Consumers natively attach their own personal and other universal meanings to brands, and in a sense, a brand’s function is to essentially be discerned and recognised by people, operating as intangible labels that prospective customers and general stakeholders can affix their personal associations to. This take is reflected in the 2019 definition of the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO, 2019): “intangible asset [. . .] intended to identify goods, services or entities [. . .] creating distinctive images and associations in the minds of stakeholders, thereby generating economic benefit/values”.

All this adds a productive spin on the focality of the brand as a distinct meaning capturing apparatus, by virtue of sharpening in its semiotic potency. In the postmodern consumer culture their parallels get accentuated, as branding increasingly becomes a channel of cultural meaning. Referring to the statement made by Kotler (2003): “Everything is a brandA brand is any label that carries meaning and associations” (p. 8).

Moore (2003) not only called out the lack of semiotic inquiry into brands, but he also pointed out the hardships of such analysis:

How should a semiotic analysis of branding take account of the seemingly quite different ontological statuses of brands as such, versus branded products (as types), versus individual instances (tokens) of branded products, these last being what actual people engage with in activities of consumption, use, enjoyment, display, and so on? How can the concrete sensuous reality (e.g. color) of such tokens- in-use act as a relay for the more abstract associations (Young! Fresh! Edgy!) that branding professionals try to ‘encode’ in consumer experience? (p. 332)

This gives us a clear account of how the ‘rabbit hole’ of the intricately nuanced semiotic enterprise embroils the scientific examination of brands as signs and consequently leads it into theoretical quagmires.

Nevertheless, Moore (2003) draws theoretical insights in his personal inquiry. In his article, he semiotically affixes the brand upon the product. The consequent brandedness of the commodity implies communication. According to Moore, during this communicative process, the brand not just “summons people to participate in the market” and “interpellates people to act as consumers”, but it also determinedly authorises the producers to “extend themselves (in the ordinary as well as the philosophic sense) into the world inhabited by their erstwhile (or sought-after) consumers, indeed, into the world of contingency (success or failure) itself” (p. 335). These notions premeditate the symbolic behaviour within markets.

2.18 Symbolic Consumption

As stated before, Moore’s (2003) impression is that the intellectual current denotes value not within the commodity itself, but rather in the intangible: “The attempt to replace value with symbolic meaning grows out of sense that production has been transformed, or replaced, by signification” (p. 331). This idea befits the framework of Holt’s (2002) postmodern consumer culture and simultaneously underlines the fundamental notion of symbolic consumption, which is that consumption is a vehicle to craft or embellish identities, to associate oneself with social groups or to frame the changeover from one stage of life to another (Oswald, 2012). Oswald highlights that these symbolic consumer behaviours have been long identified by anthropologists such as Douglas and Isherwood ([1979] 2002), McCracken (1986), Belk et al., (1989) and Deshpande and Stayman (1994).

These symbolic consumption practices are deeply embedded within the interpretative frameworks of codes, which ultimately determine the meaning of brands as signs:

Like language, symbolic consumption is also culturally codified to some extent, since the meanings consumers attach to goods and rituals derive from the collective cultural consciousness of a group. For example, the colors associated with brands may mean different things in different markets. The Chinese associate red with celebration, happiness, and good luck; so the meaning of red in logos for brands such as Coke and McDonald’s fits well with this foreign market. Indians associate these meanings with

the color blue; so to succeed in India, Western brands may introduce blue accents into their marketing communications. (Oswald, 2012, p. 130)

Peirce's thought of the sign being able to only capturing the kind of meaning that interpreters are willing (or capable) to associate it with theoretically supports the above mentioned cultural codifications. Just as the interpretation of brand meaning, the interpretation of the sign/symbol is also contingent on the receivers of the message and on their cultural attainment: "The meaning of signs is arbitrary. In principle, anything could stand for anything else. It is the cultural context that frames the interpretation of signs and imbues particular signs with localized meanings" (Hackley 2003, p. 162). However, consumers are even capable to adapt the meaning of brands to their cultural agendas:

Symbolic consumption is a dynamic practice that not only "reflects" the meaning of a culture but also fosters cultural creativity—the process by which consumers create their personal realities by manipulating the signs of consumer culture. For this reason, the meaning of goods is not fixed in time nor shared by all members of a society. Consumers bend the meaning of goods to satisfy their own day-to-day needs from expressing solidarity with their group to participating in the mainstream culture. In this sense, symbolic consumption can be an important medium of consumer acculturation. (Oswald, 2012, p. 130)

The category of codes that are of particular significance in the case of symbolic consumption are with a social undertone. Fussell's (1983) account captures this very well, as he explains how a wide array of customary, everyday things form and communicate our social identities to the world around us, from the possessions we own to to our habits of eating, clothing, travelling and so on. As written by Chandler (2022): "Within a culture, social differentiation is reinforced by a multitude of social codes" (p. 160).

The following account of Oswald (2012) encapsulates how can semiotic intuition explain postmodern behaviour in Holt's (2002) consumer culture: "Semiotic codes are responsible for consistently integrating brand meaning" (p. 72). The author also details two high-profile and widespread accounts of symbolic icon in American consumption culture: (i) the Marlboro Man, who transcended its brand and morphed into a representation for freedom

and independence; and (ii) the Coke branded Santa Claus, who triggered consumers' associations with tradition and family by embedding the image of the soda within similarly significant social rituals (e.g., Christmas gathering). Another instance of such consumption highlights how the symbolic might constitute a price premium for the consumer: "if wearing a luxury watch endows the consumer with status, the symbolic or 'status' value of the watch is greater than the costs associated to manufacture, market, and distribute it" (p. 130). Thus, the consumption of the brand and its appropriate product transcends mere functionality, laying the foundations for symbolic authority.

2.19 Multimodality of the Brand-Sign and Typological Hardships

Similarly to Moore, Manning (2010) explores in-depth the functions that brands possess as semiotic instruments, demonstrating "...the various semiotic moments of brand on the model of the communicative act itself, replacing speakers with producers, consumers with addressees, referents with products, and messages with the brand itself" (p. 37). Manning distinguishes 5 main functions of brands as semiotic hybrids under the previously set conditions: (i) indexing the producer/source, (ii) indexing the circulatory space-times, (iii) indexing the product, (iv) indexing customer desire and (v) indexing lifestyles/characters.

Similar typology of either the brand as sign or signs as themselves are not deemed central in this particular paper. In support of this stance the author presents two reasons: (i) the strictly semiotic subject matter of sign/brand types based on the relationship between signifiers and their appropriate signifieds (e.g., based on degree of arbitrariness or conventionality) is considered way out of span for this paper, whose purpose is to preliminarily prepare the brand as construct to exhibit its semiotic capacity, and (ii) the typology of signs can be exhaustively elaborate, as Peirce originally projected 59,049 types of signs (Peirce, 1958), a number that constitutes an inconveniently complicated level of division. However, just to give semiotic justifications their due, we may take a brief glance at the basic classification that Peirce regarded as 'the most fundamental' division of signs (Peirce, 1958). This categorisation is graded on their conventionality: (i) symbol, where signification is purely arbitrary or conventional (for instance, human languages: the phonic/

acoustic sound image of ‘haberdashery’ does not comprise any innate attribute of what the signifier refers to); (ii) icon, where signification is based on resemblance or imitation (for instance, a portrait of a David Bowie signifies the artist through pictorial similarity); and lastly (iii) index, where the signifier is directly connected to the signified (for instance, the smoke in the air naturally refers to fire). However, it is important to mention, as Grayson (1998) puts it: “When we speak of an icon, an index or a symbol, we are not referring to objective qualities of the sign itself, but to a viewer’s experience of the sign” (p. 35).

It is worth noting that when Manning (2010) refers to the semiotic hybrids of the sign, his apprehension is that the brand aimed at consumers only has primarily indexical qualities (hence the 5 main functions are all indexical). While this paper does not hold any arguments against Manning’s take on the brand’s main indexical functions, the author would still like to point out that multiple modes of signification can be accrued to a single sign simultaneously. This principle must hold true for the ‘brand as sign’ as well. A good example of a particular sign possessing multiple modes is that of the photograph (see Appendix B), or to allude to something more encompassing, a motion picture. Film theorist Peter Wollen (2013) illustrates how a film uses all three modes described by Peirce, that is, a film has not only (i) iconic (image and sound), but also (ii) symbolic (writing and speech) and (iii) indexical features [as in the consequence of filmic recording, which inherently implies physical connection (Peirce, 1958)]. This notion of these three forms of signs not being mutually exclusive was well recognised by Peirce himself: “it would be difficult if not impossible to instance an absolutely pure index, or to find any sign absolutely devoid of the indexical quality” (Peirce. 1958, p. 306). This implies a hierarchy in which the three modes coincide, where, according to Hawkes (2003), one mode necessarily dominates the other two, by force of context. Along these lines, we can assure that the ‘brand as sign’ does have non-indexical tendencies, particularly in cases where multiple values, thoughts and associations are condensed within a single brand-sign, or when the consumer’s unconscious desire is displaced into the trivial object, product, service or experience that the brand-sign betokens.

In defence of Manning’s indexical emphasis that is put in the branded semiotic hybrid, the ‘brand as index’ notion is prevalent in Aaker’s (1991) take on the phenomena:

A brand is a distinguished name and/or symbol ... intended to identify the goods or services ... and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical. (p. 7)

However, a comment from another prominent figure from the branding literature makes the argument more nuanced. In the words of Kapferer (1992): “A brand is not a product. It is the product’s essence, its meaning, and its direction and it defines its identity in time and space” (p. 11). Kapferer thus captures that particular function of brands that transcends the product and rather ‘points to’ their intrinsic, symbolic meaning. However, this signification is arguably not purely symbolical, as the signifier (or sign-vehicle: the brand) naturally points back to the materialised product by “blind compulsion”, something that Peirce (1958) considers necessary for indexical signs (p. 306).

While the feature of multimodality among brands are unquestionably apparent, we have to give Manning (2010) his proper dues: upon examining the semiotic modalities of the brand, we will always be left with a certain amount of indexical residue, even surrounded by symbolic (or iconic) motifs. For example, applying Manning’s thoughts on the film brandscape of O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), we see that the brandscape consists of signs (signifiers), such as a brand of an actor. This actor is a real, universal, non-abstract unit of signified. Under such circumstances, Manning is right, the signifier indexes the actor as such, and it may even be principally indexical. However, when inspected in more depth, the type of signifier used also has symbolic undertones, as the actor’s brand is not universal and reserves personal associations that differ from person to person or from culture to culture, which brings us back to the notion of how cultural codes and context operate as interpretational framework for signs and their appropriate meanings. Brands’ symbolic notion is critical in terms of postmodern consumption and its conventions, and the lack of semiotic articulations of the film brandscape also shows that the authors abandoned considerations of how audiences as consumers might actually interact with the brand elements of the film brandscape.

2.20 Semiotics in film: in search for brands

As mentioned previously, this paper enjoys a multitude of contributions from the semiotic discipline. Firstly, it deepens our apprehension of the brand's inherently semiotic nature, which helps coming to terms with the artistic contingencies of the auteur brand. However, before sealing the semiotic rapprochement between the brand and auteur identity attributes, we have to grant intricate elements, such as filmic aesthetics, their semiotic admission.

Upon deciding to examine the brandscape of such artistically intricate subjects that film auteurs constitute, the research design has to facilitate for the proper approach to not just understand the phenomenon and environment of the subject, but also to appropriately identify and uncover prospective brand attributes of his. After all, the auteur's filmography is his most precious asset, whose singularity has to be broken down into a granular assortment.

Advantageously the semiotic framework was not only at one's disposal for such purposes, but semiotic literature happens to also be stunningly extensive in terms of non-verbal means of communication, such as media, photography and other visual mediums, including that of cinema. On the authority of Eco (1967): "The universe of action depicted by cinema is already a universe of signs" (p. 401). Eco is considered as one of the founding fathers of the semiotics that resolves around the moving image, besides Christen Metz and Roland Barthes. Film semiotics is an intriguing field that tackles the cinematic medium, which is, according to Eco (1985), natively establishes its own codified framework, which premeditates articulation. Barthes, who was conceivably the avant-garde of film semiotics as such (Lauridsen, 1988), also identified the cultural conventions that gave substance to films, as he uses a distinct code category when referring to the cultural particulars along the analysis of proper textualities, including that of motion pictures (Barthes, 1974).

However, the conventional Barthesian way of conducting textual analysis is exhaustingly immersive and resourceful, whose applicability and complexity surges beyond the scope of this paper. More than that, the dwelling into properly analytical textual investigations would be a misspending in terms of the purpose of the paper. The prospective criteria or inquiring aspects are only useful insofar as they indicate possible brand elements of the film auteur identity, a phenomenon that presupposes a kind of universal approval that

excludes more elaborated concepts, such as the *hermeneutic* or *proairetic* codes of Barthes. In any subsequent manner, the section has to set off its brand detecting trajectory by inaugurating the 'text'. Lauridsen (1988) examines the term in the light of Barthes's and Metz's (1971, p. 157) perception:

Referring, of course, to signifying practices Barthes often pointed out that the word *text* etymologically stems from the latin word *textus* which means *weaving* or *putting together*. A text therefore - etymologically - is something that has been woven or put together *regardless* of the actual material of expression, "the material nature of the signifier, or more exactly of the 'fabric' into which these signifiers are woven". (p. 70)

This can be reflected upon through the lens of O'Reilly and Kerrigan, by means of visualising the film, as an already established cultural text, to be woven together by its available branded constitutes, which effectively operate as signs in terms of their communicational abilities.

Moving images, being part of a full-fledged medium, naturally are contaminated by semiotic conventions and codified constraints, or in the words of Eco (1976), cinema "is charged with cultural signification" (p. 267). Chandler (2022) alludes to how even during the interpretation of the most unpretentious and straightforward texts we are dependent wide array of social and textual codes. He also presents us with his own tripartite framework of codes, of which the textual (or representational) codes sustain their applicability in this section's quest to find prospectively branded facets with the auteur and its respective filmography identity.

Chandler's (2022) typology of codes within the textual category includes those of (i) scientific; (ii) aesthetic; (iii) genre, rhetorical, stylistic; and (iv) mass media codes. Out of these, the aesthetic codes (as in the multitude of expressive arts) and genre, rhetorical and stylistic codes (in terms of for instance narrative and exposition) provide the most investigate imagination. These aspects also reverberate Eco's (1967) thoughts, who contemplated over the narrative schemes and aesthetic ingredients of the cinematic medium. According to him, this assembly of articulative aspects yielded film its heightened expressiveness. These aspects also resonate with the film consumption experience model of Hart et al. (2015), where

attributes such as iconography, plot and theme all constitute important signifiers to consumers during their considerations.

While filmic semiotics and its concepts offer a rich inventory of disposable tools to scrutinise filmic texts in terms of their aesthetic and narrative identity, the author does not consider the proper textual analysis to be within the scope of this paper, or within the room of purely marketing imperatives for that matter. Thorough textual analysis might distill down a film's identity to its most granular, based on sophisticated syntagmatic, paradigmatic or other analysis, however, these would not provide substantial value for branding purposes, at least not while the corresponding literature is at its current embryonic state.

Brand constituents that relate to filmic audiovisual or narrative style are generally speaking innumerable and imprecise, as the cinematic personality of directors are richly dissimilar and their identifiable set of signifiers are diverse. We find both creatively *moderate* and *more comprehensive* auteurships in the industry, and a particular director's degree of creative span configures his respective brandscape in terms of the constant or recurrent elements within his cinematic personality. For instance, Lynch has a very strong surrealist connotation in terms of his personal cinematic universe (Tavares, 2008), while other directors might not have any discernible world outlook that would overarch their œuvre.

2.21 Rise of the auteur-director

As early as the 1910's, the power of directors over the film-making process was discussed as a nameless concept among film critics and professionals alike (Hayward, 2017). The word *auteur* refers to directors who possess high degrees of creative control over productions and signify a discernible style. The term has its preliminaries dating back to 1913, with the formulation of "Autorenfilm" in Germany. With more and more directors exhibiting creative authority, this notion attracted special attention, notably among French film critics, as the commercial institutions of film-making were of different nature and directors had more freedom to express themselves creatively (Vincendeau, 2000). Directorial authority was greatly explored by André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc, until François Truffaut eventually

referred to it as ‘la politique des auteurs’ in 1955 (de Baecque, 2018). Truffaut interpreted the filmography of some directors to be having a constant, distinctive personality, which emerges from the creative control over the production of the film. Finally, American critic Andrew Sarris referred to it as the *auteur theory* (Sarris, 1962), effectively baptising the greatest of directors as auteurs for the decades to come, simultaneously bestowing emphasis upon the director’s integrated filmography, rather than upon films as isolated productions.

Three distinct premises of the auteur theory were identified by Sarris (1962), according to his comprehension of how the French critics gave their voice to it. The first one establishes the conventional competencies that open up the mere possibility of cinematic endeavour: “the first premise of the *auteur theory* is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value” (p. 562). The second one outlines the auteur’s distinct cinematic identity: “The second premise of the *auteur theory* is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature” (p. 562). Finally, the third one “is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and his material” (p. 562).

The auteur theory has been since intensely scrutinised by film critics, film-makers and the general public alike, while the term ‘auteur’ had been gaining popularity, and it’s still relevant today (Hayward, 2017). More and more directors are being referred to as auteurs due to their recognisable personal styles, including contemporary directors, such as David Lynch (Todd, 2012; Monovich, 2021), Quentin Tarantino (Dassanowsky, 2012; Mayer, 2019) and Martin Scorsese (Raymond, 2009; Howell, 2015). The presence of these directors in the cultural fabric of contemporary society is supported by the fact that their respective adjectives: Lynchian, Tarantinoesque and Scorsesean are present in the Oxford English Dictionary (2023a; 2023b; 2023c).

2.22 Why is Auteurship so Powerful? Consulting the MOVIEMOD Model

Film auteur as a branded label enjoys growing prevalence in the contemporary movie marketing enterprise as directors are among the first considerations for prospective movie

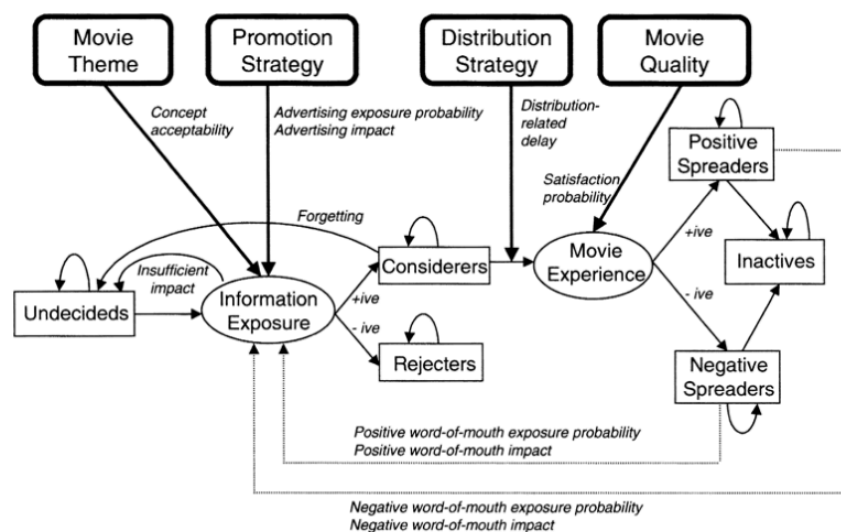
audiences (Kerrigan, 2009). They are potent marketability vehicles as cultural power (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013), and sometimes even star attributes are bestowed upon them:

In line with the marketing transformation of the auteur of the international art cinema into the cult of personality that defined the film artist of the seventies, auteurs have increasingly become situated along an extratextual path, in which their commercial status as auteurs is their chief function as auteurs: the auteur-star is meaningful primarily as a promotion or recovery of a movie or group of movies, frequently regardless of the filmic text itself. (Corrigan, 1991, p. 105)

The beginning of the literature review has looked at the singular case of 'How Do You Live' in Japan, a film that became a major commercial success in its domestic market without any promotional campaign (apart from a single poster). This case strikingly illustrates the power of the auteur brand, and regardless of how exceptional this case might be, it still put forwards a great opportunity to examine the underlying mechanics that grants auteurs the cultural and commercial capacity they expressly possess.

Figure 9

MOVIEMOD's Consumer Behaviour Representation



Note. As found in Eliashberg et al., 2000, p. 230.

Based on the MOVIEMOD of Eliashberg et al. (2000), which is a model for evaluating for movies before they have been released, the new Ghibli feature was treated with heavily restricted marketing vehicles for substantiating information exposure (i.e., media advertising) during its release window, as these variables were rendered inoperative due the lack of a proper promotional campaign (again, save for a single poster). According to the model word-of-mouth was the sole vehicle to drive exposure, which turned out to be quite positive, as people from the undecided state turned to the consider state. As the authors of the paper state, a rejecter state “suggests an unacceptable storyline or theme” (p. 229). Still, the audience had no clue about the picture’s plot and cast, or specific theme for that matter.

Beyond everything, the audience’s expectation cemented sweeping box office due to two reasons: people widely recognised the (i) production standards of Studio Ghibli, and most importantly, (ii) Miyazaki’s cinematic personality, that comprises all shades of his creative philosophy that pre-establishes the audiovisual and narrative identity of his œuvre. The significance of Miyazaki over the studio is no guesswork. Miyazaki retired from the industry for a timespan of three years (from 2013 to 2016), during which, according to Mes and Agnoli (2021) the studio has faced an identity crisis:

These features in turn became typical and expected of the studio’s non-Miyazaki output, in terms of their reception as well as in their production and promotion. Film critics have searched for Miyazaki-ness in every new film, while the studio itself has persistently attempted to create a brand-genre around select features identified with Miyazaki’s work, one that is controllable and subservient to corporate policy, in order to provide continuity once its creative figurehead is no longer creating. Recent fly-on-the-wall documentaries made with the studio’s cooperation – such as *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* (2013), *Never-Ending Man: Hayao Miyazaki* (2016) and *10 Years with Hayao Miyazaki* (2019) – have spotlighted Miyazaki as representative of Ghibli’s artistic as well as its corporate culture. Such nonfiction works reveal how much of the studio’s performance of its own identity hinges on Miyazaki’s public persona, presenting it as informing even the internal workings at the production house, such as in ways staff members are expected to operate and what standards they are asked to live up to. (p. 208)

This paper attests that in cases of auteurships, concept acceptability dissociates from a particular film's specific information stimuli. Conclusively, the prospective audience's enthusiasm was contingent on Miyazaki's cinematic personality as the acknowledgement of Miyazaki's auteurship was in itself an oblique stimuli of information that lucratively persuaded the audience to engage with the withheld picture. This was possible due to the strong and coherent creative footprint of the Japanese auteur, on whose account the audience could gather implied and tacit film characteristics without any promotional material.

In the words of O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), the existing cultural codes around Miyazaki were already well established and trusted thanks to the animator's consistent cinematic identity. The case of *How Do You Live* is a perfect demonstration how certain brand elements go beyond the film brandscape of O'Reilly and Kerrigan. These amplified, auteur-specific and artistically coherent identity characteristics that operate independently to any discrete unit of film are indispensable building blocks of this paper's model.

Chapter 3 - Findings

The paper's findings are organised as follows: firstly, the theoretical framework is distilled down to its most crucial aspects, summarising how the conceptual model is operating on a brandscape basis; secondly, the conceptual model of the film auteur identity is presented, followed by a thorough description of its three levels; and lastly, important remarks are made in relation to the model's variability and application.

3.1 Conceptual Overview of the Film Auteur's Integrated Brand Identity

To give a conceptual outline of the film auteur brand identity, it has to be initially accentuated that auteurs and their corresponding filmographies constitute a nuanced and multi-tiered assemblage of signifiers, similarly to that of the film brandscape. The model is essentially bisected into two: (i) the auteur's body of work and the (ii) effective person of the auteur as both a professional and non-praxis individuality. The auteur's body of work is further split into film-specific (characteristics unique to single units of film) and archetypal signifiers (that

overarch the director's filmography). Thus, the integrated brand identity of the auteur materialises in three distinct levels or categories of signs: (i) the filmographic identity; (ii) the cinematic identity; and the (iii) personal identity. These divisions of the auteur brand may be visualised as three concentric circles: the inner circle, the personal; the middle circle, the cinematic; and the outer circle, filmographic identity (see Figure 10, p. 52).

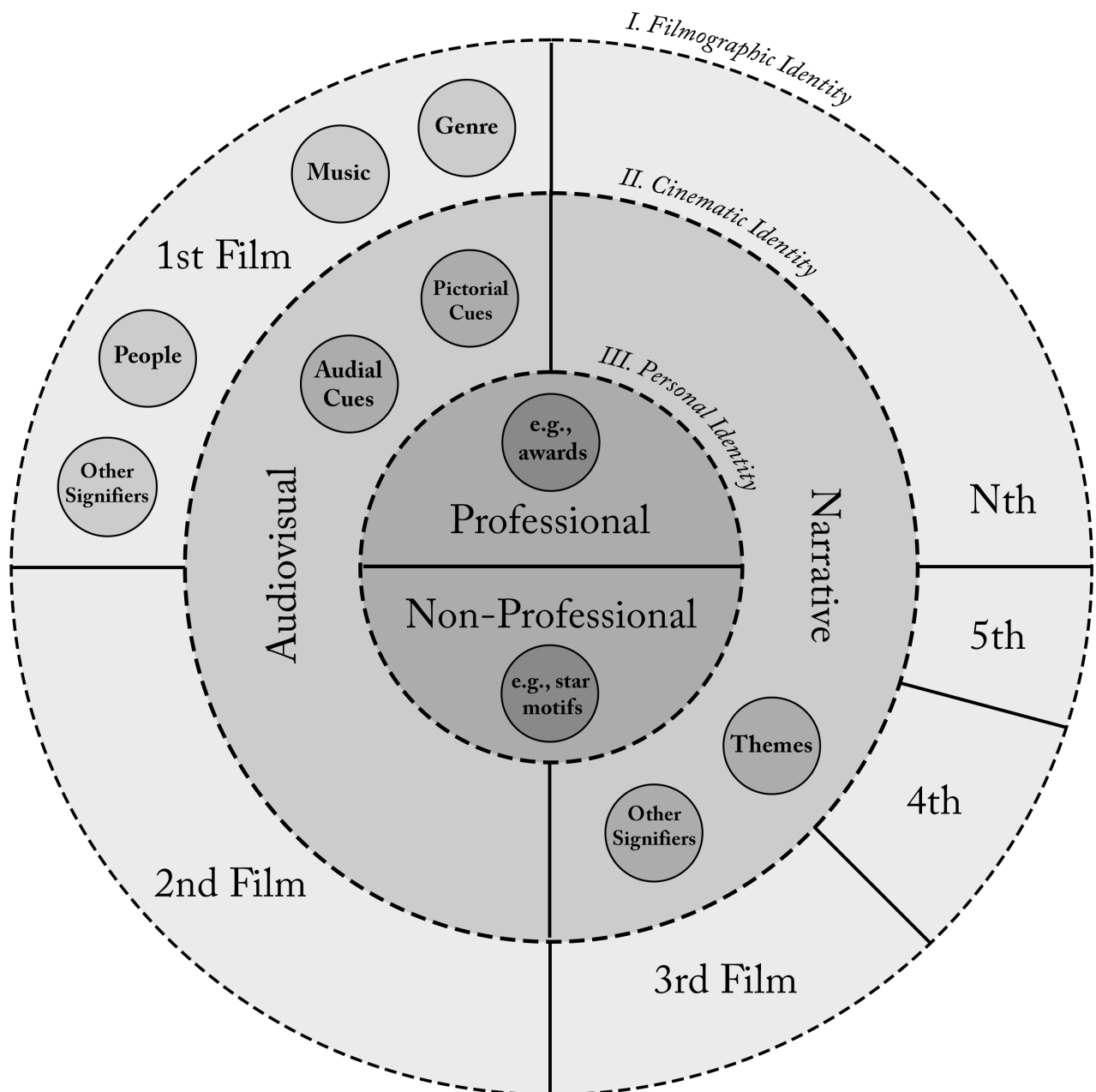
Essentially, approached through the lens of semiotics, the film auteur's œuvre is a collection of cultural texts. First and foremost, each text reflects a dynamic constellation of signifiers that we take as the brand elements of individual films, such as cast, genre or theme. These sets of film-specific signifiers aggregate to what could effectively be referred to as the brandscape of the filmography, hence the name: filmographic identity.

The next level of the auteur brand materialises more internally than the filmographic brandscape, encompassing the signifiers/brands that transcend individual films and are fundamentally archetypal to the auteur's filmic identity. These attributes essentially forge the distinct and recognisable style of the auteur, granulating his creative philosophy into recurring themes, narrative techniques, and persistent audiovisual cues (pictorial and audial) that possess omnipresence across the auteur's œuvre, hence the name: cinematic identity.

Finally, the inner circle of the model consists of the personal brand of the auteur, representing the artist at its most human. This level encompasses professional praxis-based associations (in terms of cultural attributes and social legitimacies), besides other non-praxis signifiers, such as popular, celebrity or star like descriptives along with other characteristics from the auteur's private life, hence the name: personal identity.

Figure 10

The Concentric Model of the Film Auteur Brand Identity



3.2 A Closer Look at the 1st Level of Auteur Identity: the Filmographic

As stated before, the auteur's œuvre is a collection of cultural texts. Texts are woven together by signs, whose respective signifiers operate as brand-vehicles for the films in which they materialise. Represented as the model's outer segment, the filmographic identity fundamentally emerges from this aggregated symbolic space comprised of film-level brandscapes.

The largest contrast between this filmographic and the succeeding circle of cinematic identity is as follows: a filmographic signifier is grounded in a single film and do not exist independent of one, while cinematic identity is a self-standing identity facet that does not direct to just one particular film. While it is true that multiple films can share the same filmographic signifier, such as genre or members of cast, these signs still remain filmographic inasmuch as they are not inherent to the auteur's cinematic personality. If that would be the case (for instance, each film being that of the horror genre), than it (the signifier of the horror genre) naturally transcends the filmography and materialises its own signifier as the appropriate audiovisual or narrative signifiers that constitute the genre. However, such cases are generally speaking extremes. Nevertheless, brand elements that have high recurrences can essentially become the "fixed starts" of the filmographic constellation.

Film-specific signifiers that get commonly accentuated in marketing communications are the 'people' of the production, such as actors, actresses, screenwriters, producers, cinematographers, set designers and so on and so forth. These creatives each own their distinct brand that reverberate through the identity of industry collaborators by virtue of indexical standards. For instance, the American writer-director-producer Wes Anderson has his own troupe of actors, including Jason Schwartzman or Bill Murray (with the latter featured in 9 out of Anderson's 11 feature films). Anderson is also heavily associated with production designer Adam Stockhausen, who greatly contributed to the Andersonian aesthetic, elevating the auteur's set design to the level of pure stagecraft. Such relations demonstrate the extent to which highly recurrent filmographic signifiers (Stockhausen was production designer for the last 5 Anderson features) can leave their mark on the auteur's cinematic identity.

3.3 A Closer Look at the 2nd Level of Auteur Identity: the Cinematic

The cinematic identity of the auteur envelops the archetypal: the stylistic and creative philosophy that drives the recognisable pictorial and audial cues, themed plots and narrative techniques; the aspects that ultimately render the auteur the distinguishable film-maker he is. These audiovisual and narrative signifiers not just pierce the zeitgeist of the aggregated filmographic landscape, but they also do it in unison, representing the true allure of the artist.

Cinematic elements of the auteur brand have paramount significance in the model and its framework, as these are those auteur's nonpareil signifiers that has not been accounted for in O'Reilly's and Kerrigan's film brandscape. However, as filmographies provide a coherent expressive identity, the doors open to rightfully (with a high degree of semiotic assistance) establish these aspects as branded constitutes of film-makers.

Such cinematic motifs include narrative cues and techniques. For example, most films of Christopher Nolan are associated with a very distinct category of editing that is rapid and relentless, resulting in fast-paced narrations. The nature of time and existential problems are prominent themes across the director's filmography, with two of his features (*Memento* and *Tenet*) basically playing backwards in time (2000; 2020). Other signifiers related to narrative identity might constitute Quentin Tarantino's iconic dialogues or his postmodern storytelling techniques, for instance heavily non-linear narration as in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) or metafictional tendencies as in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019). Moreover, his works are blatantly intertextual, another attribute that stamps his body of work.

Besides narrative elements, audiovisual identity also define the auteur. Being already in company with Tarantino, the paper gladly points to the director's firmly consistent and carefully curated soundtrack practices, resonating with Ashby's (2013) stance that contemporary auteurism is heavily oriented around music. Besides audial cues, the outflux of pictorial signifiers also determine the auteur's identity. This notion is for well mirrored for example in Krzysztof Kieślowski's filmography, where dynamic and unorthodox camerawork dominates aesthetic substantiality (this can be accredited to the director's early career in documentary film-making).

3.4 A Closer Look at the 3rd Level of Auteur Identity: the Personal

At the centre of it all stands the personal identity of the director, who is the conductor, vessel and origin of everything affiliated with the auteur brand as we know it. The auteur is not just a film-making professional whose character hinges upon industry related cultural attributes and affiliations with the milieu of the critics, the public, the institutions or any other industry professionals (Pluntz & Pras, 2020a), but he is a private individuality too, whose identity is morphed by influences outside of his professional praxis.

Professional attributes were articulated by Pluntz and Pras (2020a), who approached the director brand in the character of a professional human brand identity. As priorly stated in the literature review, their findings immensely contributed to this paper's theoretical framework, inasmuch as they outline the six cultural attributes and four legitimacy types that constitute brand elements for auteur-directors. The six attributes are: (i) auteurism; (ii) genre eclecticism; (iii) precursor of new creative film-making norms; (iv) culturally relevant creativity; (v) culturally irrelevant creativity; and (vi) culturally relevant expertise. While these characteristics are valuable, the author of this paper contemplates about their fewness and constrained explanatory power, which is solely the appropriate degree of these attributes. However, the four types of legitimacies outlined in the same paper offer much more fertile grounds to assess the auteur-director's relationship with his broader socio-cultural fabric. For example, an auteur might be associated with his accumulated consecrations (awards and other prizes) once institutionally organised bodies (e.g., Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences) have endowed him with such honours. The four legitimacy types that can elicit such association are: (i) specific; (ii) institutional; (iii) bourgeois; and (iv) public legitimacy.

Along with cues related to professional praxis, auteurs are also coexistent with associations that are beyond their vocation (or at least not directly derived from their auteurships), such as celebrity or star like characteristics derived from his public persona. For example, Promkhuntong (2014) mentions how biographical cues (emigration and childhood history) has helped establish the celebrated figure of Wong Kar-wai.

3.5 Flexibilities and Nuances of the Model

In the world of cinema we can find both moderate and comprehensive authorships. Accordingly, the director's degree of creative span and the dimensions of his brand constituents contour the appropriate model that is ought to be applied to the auteur. Being a conceptual model, the film auteur brand identity model is surrounded by limitations, however, as the visualisation shows it has been approximately configured to resolve most impending structural inconveniences. Headroom was left reserved for the multitude of motion pictures and signifiers that the most fertile film-makers and their filmographies desire, such as Hitchcock's or Yasujirō Ozu's, who respectively contributed to over 50 feature films.

To no one's surprise, this paper considers auteurism as the form *par excellence* of the directorial craft. While it certain that similarly integrative models are possible to be tailored to the general film director, the auteur-oriented nature of this paper offered the golden opportunity to include elements such as stylistic signifier. Most directors are simply too indistinctive to demonstrate a creative identity that elevates their creative identity to the level of brands, as their skills are obscured by being faithful to industrial conventions.

Chapter 4 - Illustrative Case

"Man is a genius when he is dreaming."

– Akira Kurosawa

4.1 Briefing

To demonstrate how the model is ought to be applied, the author of this paper decided to showcase its application by virtue of a brief, illustrative case. The examined auteur, although

into and out of hesitation, was chosen to be the prominent figure of Japanese cinema, Akira Kurosawa. Hesitation ensued as the director is in possession of a rather comprehensive auteurship, directing at least 30 motion pictures during his career spanning almost 60 years.

However, to not overwhelm the reader, the decision was made to detach the auteur's film-making endeavours from 1947 to 1949, for the purpose of identifying this curtailed period as the illustration's simplified subject of analysis. This time period comprise the following films directed by Kurosawa: *One Wonderful Sunday* (1947); *Drunken Angel* (1948); *The Quiet Duel* (1949); and *Stray Dog* (1949).

4.1 Applying the model to Akira Kurosawa's 1947-1949 filmography

Kurosawa's body of work, just as any other auteur's filmography, is a collection of cultural texts: films. To begin demarcating his brand, we need to assess the most fundamental facet of his identity, which is the aggregated identity of all his pictures.

Each films have their own brandscape signifiers, comprising the cooperating brands of industry creatives (actors, screenwriter, cinematographer), genre, country of origin, the story and so on and so forth. These are derived from O'Reilly's and Kerrigan's film brandscape.

Across the four films from the 1947-49 period, some actors have roles in multiple movies (Chieko Nakakita, Takasi Shimura and Toshiro Mifune each play in three out of the four films). As a result, they are amplified signifiers in the filmographic identity, becoming the 'fixed stars' of the brand constellation. Other creatives also have recurrence, such as Keinosuke Uekusa (screenwriter), Asakazu Nakai (cinematographer) and Fumio Hazasaka (composer). The respective brands of these industry creatives complement the auteur's brand by virtue of association and their artistic ramifications in the films. Besides creative individuals, other brand elements supplement the auteur identity, such as genre and the inherently Japanese disposition of his movies.

Those signifiers that are not film specific and relate to the auteur's cinematic temper constitute the next circle of identity. Specific audiovisual cues derived from auteur's style

include his meticulously elaborated mise-en-scène and authentic film sets that sets the stage for performance. As described by Kurosawa (1983) himself: “The quality of the set influences the quality of the actors’ performances. If the plan of a house and the design of the rooms are done properly, the actors can move about in them naturally. If I have to tell an actor, ‘Don’t think about where this room is in relation to the rest of the house,’ that natural ease cannot be achieved. For this reason, I have sets made exactly like the real thing. It restricts the shooting, but encourages that feeling of authenticity” (p. 197). Narrative cues comprise for instance his recurrent emplacement of Japanese cabaret clubs, that appear in *One Wonderful Sunday* (1947), *Drunken Angel* (1948) and also *Stray Dog* (1949). It is also important to point out that Kurosawa directed these films in Postwar Japan, which compelled him to embed his stories in the strenuous milieu of his contemporary environment. In his 1947-1949 filmography cues related to war reverberate all over his pictures.

At last, the model takes Kurosawa’s personal identity. Consecrations by institutionalised agents (such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences) can effectively shape a director’s professional identity, as his work is embellished by awards and nominations. This condition is not unfamiliar to Kurosawa. All four movies were bestowed by at least once institutional legitimacy, richly improving the professional image of the director. The wide array of his consecrations include awards for best director, best film, best cinematography, best film score, best art direction, and best actor (IMDb, n.d.). As far as non-professional attributes go, the director was actually the descendant of a former samurai family (Kurosawa, 1983), a peculiar attribute that arguably shaped his personal brand (especially in his samurai era of filmmaking).

Chapter 5 - Discussion and research suggestions

The chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical contributions provided by the paper. Next, it overviews managerial implications and research limitations, followed by suggestions for future research.

5.1 Discussion

Upon contending with the mystery of the auteur identity, a rigorously semiotic undertaking of his brand displayed the wide range of signifiers (filmic, stylistic or personal) that conjointly grants the film-maker his identity. The model of this paper operates on a brandscape basis, by means of reconfiguring the film brandscape of O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), which also initiated how filmographic signifiers are to be regarded as brands. The semiotic overview proved how other elements such as pictorial style and narrative cues are also to be considered as proper signs, simultaneously opening their capacity to be theoretically established brand entities. Thus, the conceptual model of this paper thoroughly assorts and categorises the prospective brand elements of the auteur, casting illumination on the nuanced symbolic relationship that audiences effectuate through associations and embedded meanings within the artist's personal figure and his respective œuvre.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

The semiotic rapprochement between the brand phenomenon and the applicable identity attributes (e.g., narrative motifs, cues relating to audiovisual identity), besides the modest reconfiguration of the film brandscape (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2013) conveyed the following conclusions: the film auteur and his filmography conjointly forms an integrated assemblage of signifiers; inside which his identity is fundamentally bisected into two parts: (i) the auteur's body of work as a collection of cultural texts and the (ii) effective person of the auteur. The personal identity encompasses characteristics such as affiliated star iconography (e.g., Wong Kar-wai's sunglasses) or consecrations as bestowed by institutions (e.g., an award at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences). Concurrently, the auteur's filmography is further divided into its film-specific (e.g. genre, theme, actors) and archetypal

characteristics (pictorial style of the auteur that overarches his œuvre). As a result, the integrated brand of the auteur distills down to three distinct levels of identity: (i) the filmographic identity; (ii) the cinematic identity; and the (iii) personal identity. These divisions of the auteur brand may be envisaged as three concentric circles, as this paper's conceptual model illustrates.

5.3 Managerial implications

This paper's conceptual model provides managerial implications to a sizeable degree. Firstly, to increase film marketability, following systematic analysis and empirical research, internal stakeholders of the auteur brand (e.g., producers, investors, marketers, studios and other peer institutions) can amplify the most valuable brand elements during marketing communications aimed at prospective audiences. This process, in light of postmodern consumer culture and symbolic consumption, is burdened with nuance. Practitioners have to make allowances for three particular considerations during crafting marketing materials and communication: (i) the cultural agendas and degree of cultural literacy of prospective audiences ; (ii) the derived values, beliefs and notions from cultural agendas that auteur brand elements have to mirror in marketing communications; and (iii) third. Once these considerations are properly maintained, marketing professionals can bring the intended meaning of their messages into correspondence with the effective meanings as realised by consumers. Consequently, audiences decode and interpret marketing communications as intended and internalise the auteur brand to acculturate themselves accordingly to their symbolic agendas.

5.4 Limitations

Due to the construct's interdisciplinary complexity and the embryonic state of its branding related literature, the application of semiotic principles to that of the auteur identity are so far insubstantial and require more theoretical footing, categorically to uncover marketing insights related to symbolic consumption by audiences. Also, film auteurs as such do not limit to directors in the strictest sense, as producers can also be the creative figureheads of movies. Although the producer's role as a cinematically recognisable figure is not commonly

emphasised anymore (as in the contemporary landscape it is almost entirely accrued to directors), future research may well approach the subject exclusively through the lens of producers and consequently yield valuable takeaways.

5.5 Future research directions

The theoretical framework of this paper casts illumination on a diverse range of freshly recognised brand phenomena. It is the belief of the author that the framework of this paper may be used as a basis to conceptualise integrative brands within other CCIs (creative and cultural industries) by means of the semiotically embraceable craft of these creative professionals. Accordingly, potential subjects of future research may constitute artists such as writers, painters, musicians and their respective body of work, as semiotics constitute a robust framework to study their artistic material. On account of the author, the scope of his framework is transposable to popular entertainment and fine arts alike. Also, as seen in the literature review, anthropologists such as Sherry (1986; 1998), Douglas and Isherwood ([1979] 2002), McCracken (1986), Belk et al., (1989) and Deshpande and Stayman (1994) have immensely contributed to intricate marketing matters such as symbolic consumption and consumer culture. In and on itself, cultural branding and its underlying semiotic underpinnings appeal to academic imagination. Along these lines, the author calls for interdisciplinary research imperatives across the assorted domains of cultural anthropology, semiotics and marketing to deepen the academic understanding of the wide array of intricate marketing phenomena that are deeply embedded in the cultural and semiotic fabrics of our social reality.

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Appendix A - The poster for How Do You Live (Codega, 2023, July 2)

Illustrated below is the sole promotional material for Miyazaki's film. Take note of how prevalent the auteur's name is on the right (宮崎駿, alongside the picture's title in red) as opposed to the studio's compact badge in the top corner.



Appendix B - Shiraga Kazuo's 'Challenging Mud' (Rodgers, 2015, April 1)

This photograph of Japanese artist Shiraga Kazuo's performance provides great illustration of semiotic multimodality: the physical man and his apparent environment are iconic signs, his marks left in the mud are indexical, while his pugnaciousness bears symbolic meaning (e.g., political resistance).

