QUALITATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH

REVIEW OF MARKETING RESEARCH

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QUALITATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION: GAINING NEW INSIGHTS AND INFLUENCING FUTURE RESEARCH

Overview

Review of Marketing Research, now in its 14th volume, is a publication covering the important areas of marketing research with a more comprehensive state-of-the-art orientation. The chapters in this publication review the literature in a particular area, offer a critical commentary, develop an innovative framework, and discuss future developments, as well as present specific empirical studies. The first 13 volumes have featured some of the top researchers and scholars in our discipline who have reviewed an array of important topics. The response to the first 13 volumes has been truly gratifying and we look forward to the impact of the 14th volume with great anticipation.

Publication Mission

The purpose of this series is to provide current, comprehensive, state-of-the-art articles in review of marketing research. Wide-ranging paradigmatic or theoretical, or substantive agendas are appropriate for this publication. This includes a wide range of theoretical perspectives, paradigms, data (qualitative, survey, experimental, ethnographic, secondary, etc.), and topics related to the study and explanation of marketing-related phenomenon. We reflect an eclectic mixture of theory, data, and research methods that is indicative of a publication driven by important theoretical and substantive problems. We seek studies that make important theoretical, substantive, empirical, methodological, measurement, and modeling contributions. Any topic that fits under the broad area of "marketing research" is relevant. In short, our mission is to publish the best reviews in the discipline.

Thus, this publication bridges the gap left by current marketing research publications. Current marketing research publications such as the *Journal of Marketing Research* (USA), *International Journal of Marketing Research* (UK), and *International Journal of Research in Marketing* (Europe) publish academic articles with a major constraint on the length. In contrast, *Review of Marketing Research* can publish much longer articles that are not only theoretically

rigorous but also more expository, with a focus on implementing new marketing research concepts and procedures. This also serves to distinguish this publication from *Marketing Research* magazine published by the American Marketing Association (AMA).

Articles in *Review of Marketing Research* should address the following issues:

- Critically review the existing literature
- Summarize what we know about the subject − key findings
- Present the main theories and frameworks
- Review and give an exposition of key methodologies
- Identify the gaps in the literature
- Present empirical studies (for empirical papers only)
- Discuss emerging trends and issues
- Focus on international developments
- Suggest directions for future theory development and testing
- Recommend guidelines for implementing new procedures and concepts

Chapters in This Volume

This special issue focuses on qualitative and conceptual consumer research and the chapters represent an eclectic mix of methodological approaches and substantive issues.

Van den Bossche proposes cognitive literary criticism as a bridge between cognitive approaches to the study of persuasion, and literary traditions in consumer research. Cognitive literary theory focuses on the cognitive processes of interpretation, while keeping an eye on the aesthetic properties of the text. This attempt to marry positivist cognitive constructs to interpretivist cultural theory presents new opportunities for the study of persuasion.

Genç and Bayraktaroğlu explore the country of origin effect by following a qualitative design with in-depth analysis of consumption experiences. They find that the country of origin effect is product specific, and when it exists, it is intrinsically constituted by individual perceptions of and attitudes toward brands, countries, and experiences. It is also extrinsically constituted with socially created perceptions nurtured by media, marketplace myths, and popular culture.

Compeau examines bad credit experiences in the context of identity in order to understand the entanglement between bad credit and the deformation of identity. He employs depth interviews and hermeneutical analysis and finds that bad credit plays a critical role in reshaping identity. Identities are deformed by restricting or eliminating identity construction and maintenance through consumption. Bad credit consumes consumers' time, energy, patience, lifestyle, relationships, social connections, and more importantly, it consumes their

identity as it strongly inflects their sense of who they are. Thus, bad credit is overwhelmingly consumptive of consumers.

Brown, Friedman, and Taran examine "showrooming," a phenomenon in which shoppers use mobile devices in retail stores to check prices and other data on products that they then may buy online. They identify four distinct behavioral groups of customers and six strategies that small retailers use to address the potential problems of showrooming. They also identify a new type of reference pricing, where instead of using other products at the store as the reference prices, the consumer uses the prices of every store that sells the item on the Internet as the referents.

Kocabiyik explores how supermarketization structures consumption of poor people and its socio-cultural and moral consequences in Turkey. This study finds that not only in economic but also in social, moral, and cultural terms, these subaltern consumers cannot survive without neighborhood stores that carry a wide range of both food and non-food items in less than 100 square meters of floor space (bakkals). This research is relevant for developing useful coping strategies for poverty in confronting marketplace forces by reflecting on the grocery consumption patterns of subalterns.

Bosio, Rainer, and Stickdorn show how mobile ethnography tackles customer experience by assessing data in a holistic way in real-time. They describe the innovative implementation of technology in a mobile ethnography project in a tourist destination, including recruitment of participant, data collection, data analysis, and the derivation of insights. The mobile ethnography project yielded deep insights into the customers' journeys, in this case in a ski experience context – data that would be difficult or infeasible to come by without the technology employed here.

Hollenbeck and Patrick investigate the virtual exchanges in survivor networks and examine whether these exchanges are valued for the economic, symbolic, or expressive worth. They find that innovations in technology can aid survivorship when the exchanges are meaningful as interactions within gift systems and are valued for their expressive worth. Such exchanges are established based upon the ideal of selfless gifts where the giver expects nothing in return. Furthermore, biographical narratives are useful tools for creating an expressive environment; givers become more giving after engaging in selfless acts. Digital technologies allow global connections enabling survivors to find others with similar needs, with whom they can meet, interact with, and extend their aggregate selves.

Zolfagharian, Weisstein, and Firat probe the meanings of price to consumers, especially its deeper meanings in contrasts to the conventional economic meanings of price. They find that, in addition to its conventional meanings, price is related to how consumers perceive themselves and/or their lives in the socioeconomic order they inhabit. This implies that pricing strategies that yield greater satisfaction for consumers can be discovered, implemented, and welcomed by consumers.

Scheiben and Holthoff investigate factors affecting convenience orientation and barriers to the consumption of food and non-food convenience products. Convenience orientation comprises dimensions that have not previously been considered in marketing research. They find, in addition to the known factors of time and effort saving, consumers buy convenience products because of the flexibility they provide. Concerns for health, environment, and quality are important barriers that prevent consumers from buying and consuming convenience products. Consumer convenience orientations are likely to depend at least partly on the product category and thus, future research should explore domain-specific convenience orientation.

Braun takes a different perspective on customer experience. He explores the nature and role of presence, which is defined as the "feeling of 'being there' in the present, the here and now of a physical or virtual world." A conceptual approach is developed drawing upon the literature in marketing and communications and is used to identify the underlying components of presence and to explore how this construct relates to customer experience. His findings suggest that presence has a spatial structure with two aspects. First, the level of physicality or virtuality may affect presence. Second, the presence may change based on whether someone is perceiving stimuli in the external environment (that is present in the physical or virtual space) or are absent physically and virtually and instead reside in the internal world of dreams, thoughts, and imaginations.

Mitchell, Scheinbaum, Li, and Wang explore the phenomenon of counterfeit consumption through the in-home "purse parties" channel. Attitudes toward purse parties and counterfeit luxury products reveal five emerging themes: the distinctness of in-home consumption settings, obligatory attendance, social engagement, curiosity, and disregard for legalities of counterfeit consumption/ disdain for purse parties. The social legitimization of counterfeits is greatly enhanced by the combination of these factors.

Together these chapters demonstrate the usefulness of qualitative research leading to new insights. In disciplines such as education, it is common to initially assess interventions like curriculum changes in terms of controlled experiments and standardized before and after test measures. However, ethnographic research is needed in order to understand how such interventions impact learning styles, social aspects of learning, and teaching styles. Only with such data are the impacts of changes on processes of learning able to be assessed. It is hoped that collectively the chapters in this volume will substantially aid our efforts to understand more about both the firm and the consumer and to provide a broader arsenal of consumer research methods as well as fertile areas for future research. The *Review of Marketing Research* continues its mission of systematically analyzing and presenting accumulated knowledge in the field of marketing as well as influencing future research by identifying areas that merit the attention of researchers.

A NEW BRIDGE FROM TEXT TO MIND: COGNITIVE LITERARY APPROACHES TO ADVERTISING

Astrid Van den Bossche

ABSTRACT

Purpose − *Cognitive literary criticism is introduced as a bridge between cognitive approaches to the study of persuasion, and literary traditions in consumer research. As a successor to reader-response theory, cognitive literary theory focuses on the cognitive processes of interpretation, while keeping an eye on the aesthetic properties of the text. Paradigmatically cautious researchers might shy away from attempts to marry positivist cognitive constructs to interpretivist cultural theory, but this chapter argues that these qualms also conceal missed opportunities for the study of persuasion.*

Methodology/approach − *Insights from cognitive literary criticism are demonstrated at the hand of a LEGO ad.*

Findings − *Theory of mind and conceptual blending are crucial cognitive skills involved in the interpretation of persuasive texts.*

Originality/value − *Most research to date has kept literary and cognitive approaches to persuasion separate, black-boxing the processes of persuasion. This chapter argues for a revitalization of interest in aesthetic detail, informed by insights from cognitive science.*

 Keywords: Persuasion; advertising; cognitive literary theory; interpretation; theory of mind; conceptual blending

> Without a biocultural perspective, we cannot appreciate how deeply surprising fiction is, and how deeply natural. (Boyd, 2009, p. 3)

A keen interest in the mind's capabilities has increasingly united cognitive scientists and cultural scholars in their research agendas over the last few decades (Richardson & Steen, 2002). The opportunity for collaboration is vast (see Jackson, 2002). After all, scholars of art and literature are especially attuned to the intricacies of language, imagery, creativity, and the construction of meaning, and these areas "offer superb and illuminating examples" that are of interest to cognitive scientists as they "often make the intricacies of mental operations somewhat easier to see" (Turner, 2002, p. 18). At the same time, cognitive science has shifted its conceptualization of the human mind into "a set of highly imaginative − not logical but figural − processes," and acknowledged its embodied existence in socio-cultural contexts (Hart, 2001, p. 315).

One growing body of cognitive-cultural work in particular, termed cognitive literary criticism, has much to offer advertising and persuasion research. Spearheaded mainly by English scholars, cognitive literary theorists analyze literary fiction while informed by insights on the human cognitive apparatus. Though the literary discipline's focus has long been the variations and limits of interpretation, these scholars have begun to question how interpretation is possible at all, and how this shapes (and is shaped by) the literary progeny of the human brain. The potential of this new strand of research is provocative, and no less so for the study of advertising. It is my intention to demonstrate that by virtue of its persuasive intent, advertising is a fertile training ground for cognitive literary theory, and that advertising research stands to benefit from this new literary sensibility as well.

Naturally, such explorations come with their paradigmatic challenges, and the literature on why the marriage is both sound and germane provides a source of timely debate. But first, a brief overview of the literary tradition in advertising research and its relationship to cognition will frame this chapter in its genealogy. Picking up from where reader-response theories left off, I then introduce the cognitive literary field as currently pursued in English departments, and conclude with a commentary on its epistemic value. Finally, to demonstrate the merits of this lens, I will consider two concepts that have gained major currency with its adherents − conceptual blending and theory of mind − in relation to a LEGO advertisement. As Knudsen and Keuver noted, the purchase of toys are particularly good examples of the "second-order" brand meaning negotiations parents navigate when determining "the right" type of play for their children (2015). Recognizing that "[b]rand meaning develops from the interchange among three environments: the marketing, individual and social" (Ligas and Cotte, cited in Knudsen & Keuver, 2015, p. 173), the question posed here is how this interchange might take shape at the level of the interpretive moment. By integrating conceptual blending and theory of mind as crucial cognitive

activities at play in a close reading of the ad, I come to a more fine-grained explanation of its persuasive power.

THEORIZING TOWARD A COGNIZING READER: LITERARY APPROACHES TO ADVERTISING RESEARCH

Following the initial call for a humanistic orientation in marketing and consumer research (Hirschman, 1986; Holbrook, 1987), a handful of scholars united in the agreement that the relationship between reader and text (or in marketing speak, the ability of the consumer (the reader) to generate meaning from an ad (the text)) was not as straightforward as experimentalists would have it. As Stern once summarized, the unilateral source-message-recipient model that underwrote contemporaneous studies was simply inadequate: it oversimplified the constructed nature of the text, and overlooked the interpretive activities of the reader (1994a). The information processing model famously advanced by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) also drew similar complaints (Mick, 1986). Instead of being thought of as an "architectonic of arguments," which at the time had been the prevailing conceptualization of persuasive texts, the effectiveness of an advertisement was to be understood as issuing from "an imaginative kind of rhetoric [… and] its own internal logic" (Scott, 1991, p. 68). Such a focus implied, fundamentally, that advertising research to date had overlooked the ontological realities of persuasive communications, which could be remedied by digging deeply into literary theory and refining our understanding of rhetoric, fictionality, and discourse. Given this distinct turn to the humanities, Arnould and Thompson refer to it as pertaining to a "family of CCT studies [that] conceptualized [consumers] as interpretive agents rather than as passive dupes" (2005, p. 875). Yet given the conversation this set of studies would engage with, what set it apart from other humanistically minded works was its constant engagement with the psychological insights and methodologies that underpinned most of the research on persuasion. This brief overview will therefore be limited to the core authors of these works, and to their attempts to bridge the two domains.

If we accept Charles Peirce's contention that "cognition is a process of knowledge and meaning generation through signs," semiotics seems to be a natural candidate to fruitfully bridge this gap as a theory, method, and ethos (Mick, 1986, p. 199). Fleshing out this approach, McQuarrie and Mick focused explicitly on the use of visual rhetorical figures (1992, 1996, 1999, 2003a, 2003b), and triangulated semiotic analysis with experiments and phenomenological interviews. In so doing, the authors aspired to "mov[ing] semiotic advertising research beyond the sphere of 'mere' interpretation" (1992, p. 194), and grounding its insights in measurable and generalizable hypotheses about the way in which advertising works. The authors tied the

use of rhetorical figures − defined as "artful deviations" from expected meaning − into psychological literature on incongruence, resource-matching, and memorability (1996), as well as elaboration (1999). Demonstrating that rhetoric had an impact on classic dependent variables such as brand attitude, attitude-toward-the-ad, or message recall (1992), McQuarrie and Mick confirmed that aesthetic properties mattered.[1]

Seemingly inspired by the New Critical tradition (Scott, 1994), Stern made the same point somewhat simultaneously as she advocated the re-definition of the prevailing ad-as-speech or ad-as-word-of-mouth (1994a) to the ad-as-text (1988a). Foreshadowing future work on narrative transportation, not so distant work on response to drama (Deighton, Romer, & McQueen, 1989), and a variety of studies on advertising culture and consumption (Brown & Ponsonby-McCabe, 2014; Hirschman, Scott, & Wells, 1998; Otnes & Scott, 1996), she held that advertisements were meant to animate the objects they promoted, thus stirring emotion within the consumer just as poetry seeks to "inspire vivid dramatic experiences" (Stern, 1988a, p. 4). Such experiences were induced − but usually bracketed from analysis − by virtue of properties in the text, of which Stern studied point of view (1991), filmic form (1994b), myth (1995), allegory (1988b), personae (1988a), and poetic metrics (1999a).

Stern, McQuarrie, Mick, and proponents had thus not only introduced more refined ways of understanding the structures of a text, but had also begun a process of taxonomization to "[…link them] to empirical differences in consumer response" (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004, p. 117). Yet, as Scott soon did, the straightforwardness of such causality could be questioned: surely the necessary mental processes are too complex to warrant the "simply [posed] hypotheses that certain formal features will produce *consistent* effects," thereby implying a specific, and by no means universally accepted, theory of language (emphasis added, 1994, pp. 461−462). Indeed, both semiotics and New Criticism sprung forth from formalist and structuralist lenses that implied "a theory of signs that is axiomatically removed from the circumstances of use" (such as authorial intent and readerly reception) (Scott, 1994, p. 462), and argued for the existence of a "deep structure" hidden beneath the everyday messiness of language. In adopting this ontology, the balance seemed to have tipped too much in favor of a theory of aesthetics that neglected advertising's persuasive purpose.

In response to these difficulties, reader-response criticism was introduced in Scott's "The Bridge from Text to Mind" with the purpose of "reaching out into everyday life," to discern the context of an ad's consumption, and to re-attribute germane skills to the interpreting reader (1994, p. 462). Importantly, reader-response theory allows for a sharper distinction between interpretive "reading" and the "decoding" assumed in the traditional communication model: the production of meaning requires inferential abilities on the basis of contextual knowledge, personal experience, social convention, and empathic skill, to name but a few. As Scott acknowledges, Mick and Buhl's meaning-based model of

advertising experiences (1992), Mick's levels of comprehension (Mick, 1992), and Stern's study (1993) on feminist readings (which was later developed into including multi-cultural perspectives, 1999b) had begun to approximate such an understanding of the interpretive process, yet importantly, reader-response critics explicitly "reject[ed] overriding formal or structural systems in favor of a contextual orientation [...to] take a sociological, historical, or anthropological stance, or [...] focus on the psychology of the reader" (Scott, 1994, pp. 463–464). Reader-response's anti-formalism changed the nature of how cognition and consumer behavior could be linked back to the interpretive moment, because the linkage between a stable and isolatable form could no longer be causally hypothesized to elicit a specific response. Phillips took this approach a step further by relating back to Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory of language, and introducing the term "implicature" to highlight the meanings inferred by the audience (Phillips, 1997).

This explicit move away from formalism allows a variety of new research avenues, some of which will be touched upon here. Yet one of the biggest theoretical challenges that is unique to the study of consumption and remained unanswered was tying the interpretive moment into consumer behavior in a way that acknowledged the medium's deep embeddedness in culture and society. Or better said, the relationship between advertising and behavior had been conceptualized as rather straightforward by symbolic consumption research, and not been explored at all by literary theorists: "none [of the textual theories] examine the way material moving from one realm of culture (e.g., ritual) to another (e.g., consumption) can be transformed through textual means" (Otnes & Scott, 1996, p. 40). Otnes and Scott sought to redress this gap by suggesting that the relationship between advertising and rituals as "powerful institutions that create and modify culture" is bi-directional, that the boundaries between interpretive and ritual contexts are fluid, and that advertising itself can perform ritual functions (1996, p. 48). Yet other cultural texts will equally interact with the interpretation of advertising, and Hirschman, Scott, and Wells proceed to link the symbolism of consumption practices as depicted in television programming, to symbolism in advertising. Thereby highlighting how intertextuality underpins meaning, the authors also comment on how the genre of advertising will privilege the generation of certain kinds of meaning by careful selection of how and where the advertised good is represented, without drifting too far from the product's cultural context (Hirschman et al., 1998). The process of interpretation on the part of the consumer is, therefore, necessarily *iterative* because it implies a back-and-forth between the iconic recognition of a product in, for example, a TV show (e.g., a coffee pot in the hands of the protagonist), and "ideological/discursive knowledge" of how the product is used (e.g., the coffee pot as belonging to the kitchen and the beverage being a "gesture of hospitality" (Hirschman et al., 1998, p. 37)).

At this point, unsurprisingly, we have lost track of the role of cognition. Though received with interest, theoretical innovation in this research moment

also came to a standstill, at least in terms of tracing cognition back into inter-
pretation. (Note that McQuarrie, Mick, Stern, and Phillips did continue to
develop their strands of thought, but the challenges detailed above remained.)
Yet a discussion of the historical trajectory in literary theory would of course
be incomplete without a nod to the post-structuralist, postmodernist, decon-
structionist, and historicist studies that − as they did in the parent discipline −
followed suit after the disenchantments with New Criticism and structuralism
(Brown, Hirschman, & Maclaran, 2001; Campbell, 2010; O'Donohoe, 2001;
Scott, 1992, 1993). Although these strands of theory have tended to not concern
themselves with cognitive processes, importantly, O'Donohoe highlights three
paradoxes of the postmodern consumer that are nevertheless relevant to the
question that preoccupies us: The evolution of advertising toward becoming a
form of art to be appreciated for its own sake, as well as a vehicle of promo-
tion; the co-existence readerly enjoyment and the condemnation of their over-
saturation in the media landscape; and the co-existence of a sense of
invulnerability to advertising's persuasive intent, and insecurity in face of
potentially deceptive claims (O'Donohoe, 2001). These three paradoxes point
to the complexity that consumer cognition must navigate, and therefore also
embody.

A separate strand of work − but tying into Petty and Cacioppo's
Elaboration Likelihood Model (henceforth ELM, 1986) and Deighton et al.'s
studies on drama (1989) − followed in the early 2000s: Inspired by communica-
tions theorists Green and Brock (2000), Escalas and Stern conceptualize the
interpretive moment as a transportation of the self into the world of a narra-
tive. Such a move is crucial to advertising, because, they argue, "the transporta-
tion process leads to persuasion through reduced negative cognitive
responding, realism of experience, and strong affective responses" (Escalas &
Stern, 2003, p. 570). Consumers who respond empathetically or sympathetically
to a "good" advertising drama "completely forget their own personal existence
by sharing the feelings of the characters" (2003, p. 566), opening the way for
reduced counter-arguing (cf. Wright, 1973). Additionally, narrative self-
referencing culminates in more positive product evaluations regardless of argu-
ment strength, whereas this is only the case with analytical self-referencing
when the argument strength is high. Only when a reader actively takes a critical
distance, can the effect of narrative self-reference be moderated (Escalas, 2007).
More recently, Van Laer, Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzels reviewed the extant
literature on antecedents and consequences of such transportation and re-
emphasized its thorough-going potential for persuasion (2014).

Though this stream of research warrants fuller engagement, a brief commen-
tary will need to suffice for our purposes here. It seems that the main unan-
swered question with transportation models of literary experience is whether,
and to which extent, the experience of absorption culminates into one of com-
plete surrender and/or oblivion of the self. Yet oblivion is by no means a neces-
sary conclusion: consumers may indeed feel highly involved in a narrative and

experience concomitant psychological and physiological responses, without going into a trance-like state that negates the possibility of critical distance, assessment, evaluation, judgment, and so forth. Alternative theories in the study of fiction would suggest otherwise. First, views that acknowledge the construction of language as an intertextual, embedded, and embodied affair would stand in stark opposition to such an understanding of transportation, claiming, as they do, for meaning to be possible only in context and relation to other texts and experiences. There is no reason to believe that there is such a thing as "bracketing off" the domain of cognition that allows for interpretive meaning-making, while the rest of the reflective self is squared away. Second, cognitive and literary scholars have been putting forward the theory that humans are engaged in the "constant monitoring of what one might call the epistemic status of a particular representation" (Cave, 2016, p. 70), continuously keeping track of its provenance. Schaeffer, for example, argues that we have an ability to recognize and immerse ourselves in fiction is paired with a "decoupling" from its truth value, and our ability to do so would have evolved from the need to guard ourselves from deception; Sperber et al. call this "epistemic vigilance" (2010). In other words, it is extremely unlikely that our cognitive apparatus would have evolved to be so vulnerable to one of its main modes of thought and communication.

Overall, there has been a sustained interest in advertising research to bridge the gap between interpretive agency, and its cognitive underpinnings. Yet studies to date have had the tendency to (a) focus on response rather than the processes of meaning-making themselves; (b) universalize, formalize, or essentialize aesthetics in a way that has been repeatedly and consistently debunked by literary, cultural, and social scholarship at large; and/or (c) radicalize complex cognitive processes in the hopes of demonstrating causal relationships between aesthetic form and readerly response. Over-reliance on a formalized taxonomy of textual or visual properties may not — at least if one subscribes to a contingency theory of meaning — withstand the passing of time, while studies that did root interpretation in practice and acknowledged the importance of context, history, and material reality seemed to shelve cognition altogether. Ultimately, the state of the field begs the question of *how* it is possible that text leads to response, with attention to the nitty-gritty we have come to expect from close reading. Literary cognitive theory, perhaps because its driving force is rooted in the literary tradition, seems to face these shortcomings head-on, and might provide alternative means to bridging the cognition/aesthetics divide.

A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO COGNITIVE LITERARY CRITICISM

Though a cognitive approach to the humanities has been on the horizon since at least Williams' seminal *The Long Revolution* (1965) and is even at its "second

generation" of dedicated scholars (Abbott, 2006), it is only in the last decade that its literary incarnation has gained enough momentum to vie as a body of knowledge in its own right. At its foundation is the acknowledgment that a text is optimally constructed to engage, appeal, inform, affect, or move the reader in a variety of ways, and the acknowledgment that every reader possesses a cognitive apparatus that enables her to meaningfully interact with that text. As such, studies in cognition must be able to shed a revealing light on human culture, further the debate on the existence of human universals (e.g., for literature see Hogan, 2010), and deepen the conversation on the surprising uniqueness of aesthetic artifacts.

The purpose of introducing a cognitive angle to literary studies is not to provoke a conversion to psychologism, to reduce and force-fit culture to mental schemas, or to uncritically adopt neuroscientific claims (Jackson, 2002; Turner, 2002). Rather, it is to "add a new dimension of caution and awareness to the way [we] proceed" with research tools we possess (Bloch, 2012, p. 9), and to introduce what most other methodologies in literary inquiry lack: analysis at the level of the (human) species, which do a better job at marrying cognitive universals (if indeed they exist) with cultural and historical particulars of the texts in question (Richardson & Steen, 2002). Importantly, the best examples of cognitive criticism:

> [...address] a specific text with an awareness both of its situatedness in a given sociocultural moment and of how invariant features of embodied experience and human meaning-making activity may facilitate acculturation or provide a basis for resisting a dominant ideology or discourse. (Richardson & Steen, 2002, p. 5)

Differently put, cognitive literary analysis is concerned with how the architecture of the mind structures the creation of meaning (Hart, 2001), and thus how some universal features of the mind may underlie and even explain historical specificities. It turns the field's attention from the product of interpretation to the interpretive capacity itself − how it works, how we acquire it, and how it informs the very act of reading (Bizup & Eugene, 1994). It is effectively an extension of reader-response theory (Abbott, 2006), and can either work "upstream" (developing prototypical knowledge of literary texts as structuralists have attempted), or "downstream," attempting to establish "even if provisional[ly,...] what one might call the specific cognitive positioning of the work as a unique artefact, its place in a network of historical and cultural coordinates − history and culture being themselves, once again, a function of cognitive capacities and constraints" (Cave, 2016, p. 20).

Cognitive approaches should not, however, be seen as a school that breaks with all tradition, but rather as a lens that overlays and enriches existing rubrics such as (new) historicism, narratology, eco-criticism, and aesthetics (Zunshine, 2010). It advocates trialing foreign concepts on old subjects, with the purpose of either breathing new life into traditional ways of understanding, or challenging them (Abbott, 2006). This also means that as with any incipient field,

cognitive literary theory currently houses a variety of epistemic inflections, be they congruent or not. Indeed, Boyd's Darwinian theory of fiction (2009) may carry implications that differ radically from Spolsky's project to ground post-structuralist epistemology in a cognitive ontology (2002). In this diversity, there is certainly plenty for researchers of any conviction to explore.

Of course, paradigmatic challenges may impede such cross-fertilization, the greatest of which is the schism between post-structuralists (who believe that science, in the pursuit of a unified truth, obscures its own constructiveness) and positivists (who do not believe post-structuralism has anything meaningful to contribute in the pursuit of knowledge) (Jackson, 2002). Or, in other words, those who value singularity as a key characteristic of cultural artifacts tend to be fundamentally at odds with those who aim to formulate universal truths (Cave, 2016). Yet the first key step in the resolution of this divide, according to Cave, is to stop considering "nature" and "culture" as diametrically opposed, and recognize how each flows from the other: "the hominin brain has certainly evolved through feedback from techno-cultural activities (tool-making, for example), and, conversely, culturally acquired skills draw on the evolved flexibility of the human brain, its cognitive fluidity" (2016, p. 20). A perquisite of the cognitive turn is to disrupt this dichotomization between nature and nurture (Zunshine, 2010).

To this point, the recent interest in "embodied" cognition has opened the door for a better interface with literary study: instead of metaphorically conceiving of the mind as a machine, embodiment acknowledges "the mind's substantive indebtedness to its bodily, social, and cultural contexts" (Hart, 2001, p. 315). When embracing the insights cognitive science affords, the age-old dichotomy of relativism versus realism becomes a continuum, with various degrees of synthesizing and blending positions that do not commit fully to either extreme. Instead, drawing on Hilary Putnam's "experientialist" epistemology, Hart sees knowledge as a "state of 'understanding', [… putting] emphasis not on ultimate knowledge but on possible knowledge, the only kind of knowledge available to human beings" (2001, p. 321).

Modularity hypotheses in cognition, adds Spolsky, underpin this epistemology. Modularity theory explores how we possess different fairly insular modules to capture information in the world (e.g., sight and hearing). Although modules are not perfect by themselves, they complement each other well enough and create a system that is both flexible and resilient. Of course, this evolutionary advantage comes at the cost of occasional intermodular conflict, as well as gaps in information, but we learn to cognize with both (Spolsky, 2002). In other words, human beings are experts in cognizing with imperfect information: "[u]nderspecification and inference are constantly present as the fundamental conditions of human cognition itself" (Cave, 2016, p. 2). Spolsky further argues that these gaps are then filled with inferences from one's experiences, memories, and other contextual knowledge, explaining why a cognitive underpinning (e.g., a modular mind) does not automatically lead to cultural universality. Yet instead of completely negating the possibility of knowledge,

the plurality of meaning should be recognized as a cognitive given (Spolsky, 2002). A modular understanding of the brain is therefore not at odds with the deconstructionist post-structuralist's agenda: it is a compelling account that marries deep thought from both cognitive and post-structuralist conceptions of identity (Jackson, 2000).

These on-going debates on the epistemic soundness of a cross-disciplinary lens are worthy of attention, and no less so because consumer research itself struggles between the throes of behavioral determinism and interpretive agency. What cognitive literary criticism can add to advertising research is a reflexiveness of the medium itself, and its relationship with the reading mind. The study of cognition does not need to overlook the fine details of interpretation, and close readings do not need to ignore the constraints of cognition. To illustrate, let us ponder the constructiveness of LEGO advertisement (Fig. 1), and the cognitive abilities it draws on to become persuasively meaningful.
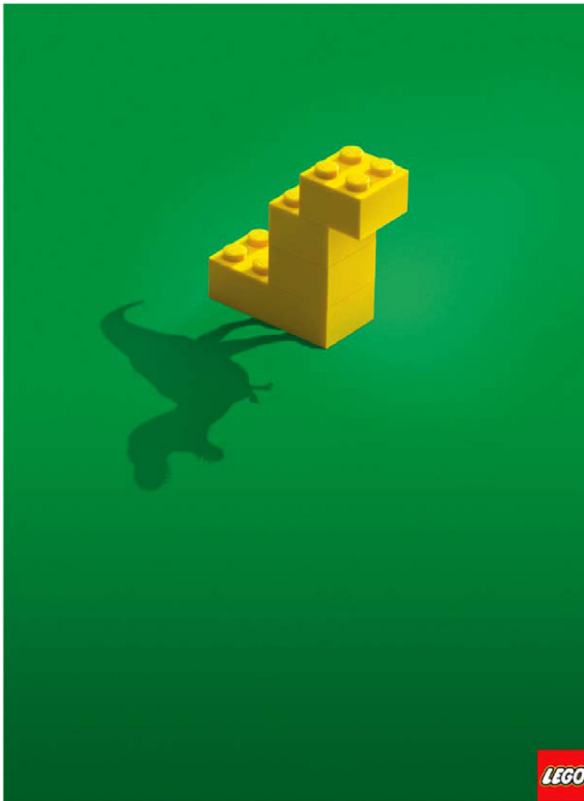

Fig. 1. LEGO Advertisement. Reprinted with permission from Brunner Inc.

BLENDING MINDS: EMERGENT MEANING THROUGH CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION

A necessary, and perhaps obvious, first step in unraveling this LEGO ad's power is − once we have established that what we are seeing is a LEGO construction casting the shadow of a dinosaur − unpacking the visual metaphor. The study of metaphors has enjoyed a rich following across academic disciplines since Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, marketing included (Nelson & Simmons, 2009; for examples of the wide variety in approaches, see Stern, 1988b; Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Yet it should not come as a surprise that given our conceptual system is so embedded in figurative thought (Nikolajeva, 2014), the underpinning cognitive movements are notoriously difficult to study, and our knowledge remains limited. The interpretation of metaphors is not necessarily reliant on linguistic or visual properties that are readily at hand (Phillips, 2003), and research has shown that one must be socialized into recognizing the visual tropes, adding a dimension of necessary historicity to their study (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; Scott & Vargas, 2007).

Fauconnier and Turner − whose works were introduced to advertising research by Joy, Sherry, and Deschenes but have otherwise seen little further elaboration (with the exception of Avis 2014; Joy, Sherry, & Deschenes, 2009) − propose that blending theory can explain how metaphors (as well as counterfactuals, framings, and categorizations) come about, and importantly, *how* we understand them to mean something. Briefly, in Turner's own words,

> conceptual blending is the mental operation of combining two mental packets of meaning − two schematic frames of knowledge or two scenarios, for example − selectively and under constraints to create a third mental packet of meaning that has new, emergent meaning. (2002, p. 10)

The novelty of this emergent meaning is important: it does not exist independently of the blend, but it is created nonetheless. This is crucial to the workings of fiction, hence the interest from cognitive literary scholarship: it allows for the generation not only of metaphor, but also of a distinct fictional space that is organized by its own logic. Turner illustrates this with Crockett Johnson's picture book *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (1955): Harold is a toddler whose purple crayon can draw anything into existence. He begins by drawing the moon, which follows him to provide moonlight on his journey. As Turner points out, the narrative blends two domains: spatial reality (i.e., a real moon), and its representation (i.e., a purple line-drawing of a moon). The blend yields its own forms of causality, which do not exist independently in either domain. This logic holds only in Harold's world, such as the ability to draw a moon into existence, and then having this moon follow Harold wherever he goes (as the real moon does). Furthermore, Harold is constrained by whatever he draws, and he can only create things that make sense within his current context: an

ocean is an ocean, and all he can do as he tries to stay afloat is draw a boat to climb into.

The emergent structure − this narrative reality − is the product of a double-scope blend, which cannot be mapped by simply tracing projections from a source domain onto a target domain (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008; Turner, 2006a). In *Harold*, neither spatial reality nor its representation straightforwardly map onto each other, but instead rely on "elaborate integration networks" that conclude into a "conceptual compression" (2006b). This sounds complicated, yet as readers, we do not find it too difficult to follow the resulting logic, but neither is it necessarily predictable, so we might delight in its unfolding. The discovery of the blended logic is the crux of the narrative, and the final pun − Harold "drew up his covers" as he goes to bed − its culmination. According to Turner, this blending ability is at the core of human imagination (2002), fostering "forbidden-fruit" integrations between inputs that should be kept separate in order to produce powerful novel conceptions (2006b).

The LEGO ad is rife with blends, and therefore relies extensively on this cognitive ability. Although it would be difficult to give a blend precedence given they form an ecosystem of meaning, perhaps a good place to start is also the most apparent visually speaking: the toy's shadow in the form of a dinosaur's silhouette. Bodies cast shadows that, at least in their contour, bear their resemblance; we know that this link is causal, as it is occasioned by the object blocking light rays from reaching the surface. Figuratively, the shadow has therefore been understood to be a special sort of representation of the object casting it, and is commonly used in art to express something about the nature of said object. Here, the LEGO blocks are implied to *be* a dinosaur. To spell out the resulting analogy, THIS TOY IS LIKE A DINOSAUR.[2]

The transformation from LEGO to dinosaur sets off a chain of metaphorical thinking. The use of just one LEGO construction, for example, is another type of metaphor that is central to advertising, the synecdoche: one toy/shadow duo represents both all of LEGO, as a set of products and as a brand. But the moment could also be read as comprising the whole of creative play. At this point, we come to a blend that is no longer strictly a metaphor, but does merge two conceptual domains (creativity and play) in the recognizable conception that play is a creative endeavor. This culminates, in the context of childhood, that TO PLAY IS TO FLOURISH. In other words, the state of childhood is linked to the concept of development as a specific kind of growth toward adulthood. The trope is common in advertising since parents often conceptualize themselves as transformational agents in their child's development (in itself metaphorical thinking, see Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). This particularly powerful metaphor spans far beyond the realm of toys: for example, the celebrated OMO/Persil's Dirt is Good campaign banks on it to sell laundry detergent (Arkwright, 2014), while Stern has singled out a reference to children's play in a coupon for dog treats (1996).

The cognitive activity within the child is occasioned by to the LEGO/ dinosaur transformation, and this connection is crucial to driving the point home. Dinosaurs are inaccessible in real life, so the power of imagination seems all the greater in conjuring up such an impossibility. Despite being a formidable creature, the dinosaur is *contained* within the child's imagination (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 for a discussion of the MIND AS CONTAINER simile). By implication, the (child's) mind is a powerful thing. And as impressive, impossible, or dangerous as a dinosaur may be, that's how simple LEGO is. Just a few blocks suffice to generate a momentous feat of the imagination: SIMPLE IS ENOUGH or SIMPLE IS GOOD. Even the ad itself is minimalistic: no tagline, no background, just LEGO blocks on LEGO-colored "white space" (cf. Pracejus, Olsen, & O'Guinn, 2006). In other words, all of imaginary creativity — of the kind we believe to be beneficial for children — has been compressed into a single moment of play facilitated by LEGO. Put otherwise, the ad gains its power by consolidating a concept of great parental concern into a single, almost instantly graspable moment: "compression brings this diffuse, complex, and otherwise impenetrable domain […] into a form that fits human understanding" (Turner, 2006b, p. 106). Ultimately, the advertisement says, LEGO is all your child needs.

We have gotten far into this close reading, but we have also taken for granted a crucial component: the source of the message. Consider the modified version of the LEGO ad (Fig. 2). "Spoken" by the WWF, the conceptual blends change drastically: there is no child, no implied development, no "benefits" to be had from the LEGO toy. Instead, because we know what the WWF stands for, we might surmise a commentary on the disappearance of species and dystopian replacement by artifice. We are spoken to as both the cause and potential remedy of the threat to the natural world. In other words, it matters greatly who speaks the message, and by implication, whom the intended audience is understood to be. Though literature on advertising sources is extensive, to this date no study has delved into the mechanics of interpretation in relationship to this knowledge.

DISSECTING LAYERS OF MEANING-MAKING: THE ROLE OF THEORY OF MIND

Theory of mind might be a crucial missing link between readerly cognition and the nuances of interpretation. Theory of mind (otherwise known as mindreading or metalizing) is the ability to explain other people's behavior by making reference to the contents of their mind — be it their beliefs, their feelings, their knowledge, or their intentions (for a quick and accessible overview, see Frith & Frith, 2005). Crucial and unique as it is to human life, at least from the perspective of a Western understanding,[3] theory of mind has benefited from a flurry of

Fig. 2.   LEGO Advertisement. Modified by author.

research in developmental psychology (Doherty, 2008), evolutionary psychology (Dunbar, 1998), cognitive neuroscience (Gallagher & Frith, 2003; Gallagher et al., 2000; Siegal & Varley, 2002; Vogeley et al., 2001), clinical psychology (Baron-Cohen, 1995), and even cognitive linguistics (de Villiers, 2007). All these studies have contributed to establishing mindreading as a cornerstone of the social mind, although it would be mistaken to assume consensus amongst researchers as to its precise workings (i.e., the reader might encounter different terms to refer to theory of mind in other texts, depending on the author's conceptualization of the skill; see Apperly, 2011). Suffice it to say that we wouldn't be able to do without mindreading.

As Wright suggested when pointing out the necessary but unexamined existence of "schemer schema" (1986), theory of mind also has clear implications for persuasion knowledge, and a handful of studies have endeavored to map the relationship. First conjectured by Moses and Baldwin (2005), McAlister

and Cornwell found that theory of mind measures were powerful predictors of persuasion knowledge variances in children (also see Lapierre, 2015 for further refinements; McAlister & Cornwell, 2009), as well as their ability to form mental representations of brands (2010). And although the persuasiveness of similar others is well-established in the literature, Faraji-Rad, Samuelson, and Warlop discovered that this effect is driven largely by theory of mind: once subjects are prevented from mentalizing while assessing someone's advice, the latter's persuasive effect diminishes (2015). Though illuminating, these findings are also as far as we have gone in considering this crucial skill in the marketing domain.

Recently, cognitive literary critics have hypothesized theory of mind as an intriguing explanation for why we read, write, and enjoy literary fiction (Leverage, Mancing, Schweickert, & William, 2011; Rifelj, 1992; Vermeule, 2011; Zunshine, 2006). For example, Zunshine (2003) and Vermeule (2010) situate the production of literature as a response to our hunger for social information, and the concomitant need to assign intentionality to others as effectively as possible, a view that falls in line with Dunbar's theories on the evolution of the social mind (1998). These theories are slowly being corroborated through innovative experiments that explore how theory of mind comes to play in the act of reading (Carney, Wlodarski, & Dunbar, 2014; Kidd & Castano, 2013).

A cognitive literary analysis of theory of mind often involves delineating the number of mental states that the reader must keep track of in order to grasp a narrative. This number is referred to as levels of inference, or more specifically, levels of intentionality. Consider this simple example from Jane Austen's *Persuasion*:

> It did not surprise, but it grieved Anne to observe that Elizabeth would not know [Wentworth]. She saw that he saw Elizabeth, that Elizabeth saw him, that there was complete internal recognition on each side; she was convinced that he was ready to be acknowledged as an acquaintance, expecting it, and she had the pain of seeing her sister turn away with unalterable coldness. (Austen, cited in Zunshine, 2007, p. 275)

As Zunshine points out, it is impossible to summarize this passage without, in the same breath, making reference to several minds thinking about each other: "Anne *realizes* (1) that Wentworth *understands* (2) that Elizabeth *pretends not to recognize* (3) that he *wants* (4) to be *acknowledged* (5) as an acquaintance" (2008, p. 145). Each number indicates an increasing level of inference. Furthermore, Vermeule contends this web of intentionality allows the reader to come to the judgment that Anne is not only dismayed by the scene, but also she *must* now realize (6) that Wentworth is still in love with her − a titillating discovery for both Anne and the reader (2011).

In other words, theory of mind is not only important to literature because the latter includes representations of the states of minds of other people, but also because the cognitive skill can literally be embodied in the text. Free

indirect discourse, for example, blurs the lines between narrative points of view, obscuring whether the thought pertains to the first or the third person, and thereby removing consciousness from its anchor. To stick to Austen, an exemplary passage in *Pride and Prejudice* spells:

> There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. *The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?* (Austen, cited in Vermeule, 2011, p. 77)

As Vermeule questions, is this the narrator speaking, or Elizabeth? To whom does this "tone of egotistical self-assertion" belong? (2011, p. 78). The passage expresses a double consciousness that resonates deeply with social awareness and judgments of value, and the reader is expected to draw out the complex social information that is so crucial to the enjoyment of Austen's world.

If different genres, stylistic devices, and rhetorical techniques can shape the way literature is understood, then I propose the same can be done with advertising. Advertising could not exist without theory of mind, because we would lack the cognitive ability to recognize the piece of text for what it is. Before laboring this point further, let us consider the LEGO ad again. In order to make sense of this ad, I argue that the reader will to cognize something akin (albeit slightly stylized to highlight mental content) to the following:

> Lego <u>intends</u> (1) to <u>persuade me</u> to buy (2) a product that we *both* <u>believe</u> (3) my child will <u>imagine</u> is a dinosaur (4), *and* <u>believe</u> this is an opportunity for development (5), so gifting this opportunity makes me a good parent in the <u>estimation of those who share this belief</u> (6).

The two first levels are specifically concerned with the act of persuasion: the knowledge that there is a speaker (LEGO) behind the ad with an intention (1) to exert mentalistic influence on (i.e., to persuade) the reader of the ad (2). The very act that LEGO is advertising at all implies LEGO believes it could be successful in this attempt. It believes it can be successful partly because it has something to say that might (eventually) be shared by the reader (3). Then comes the crux of the ad, as discussed above: the visual representation of the imagined child's mental activity (4). The implication that imaginative play is good for the child's development further requires mental inference to the effect that this belief is shared (or should be shared, according to LEGO) between the reader and the brand (5). Finally, in order to come to its full meaning, the interpretive moment pushes into the meaning of the purchase itself, suggesting the link between the toy and one's competence as a caregiver (6).

Note that I am not setting this interpretation in stone: although previous research suggests readers tend to converge on the intended meaning of an ad, they might also invoke additional inferences or variations on those implications (Phillips, 1997). For example, Knudsen and Keuver's documentation of the

LEGO "gender wars" may well surface in some readers, given that the ad could be interpreted as aimed to the imagination of boys (2015). On a structural level, also the directionality and sequentiality of this description can be called into question, as the positionality of the reader will alter the nature and significance of each implication: separating the interpretive moment out into sequential "levels" is an artifact of analysis. The point is that, as per Austen's example above, multiple minds are being tracked and embedded at once: that of LEGO, the reader, the imagined child, and the collective. The value judgment performed in (5) depends on a continued cognition of the imagined child in [4], while (6) – societal approval – could fail to convince because the message is rooted in an awareness of (1) and (2) (otherwise known as source monitoring (Zunshine, 2006)).

The ad is simplicity itself. Yet we can now appreciate the multiple cognitive actions that must occur to realize a potential meaning. Importantly, everything needs to come together for the ad to gain its power: conceptual blending and theory of mind work with each other to gain a certain momentum, as the levels of inference described above are themselves constitutive of various double-scope blends. I previously noted free indirect discourse as an example of a technique that requires and expresses a theory of mind. Yet as Turner points out in a more straight-forward example of viewpoint switching, such conceptual moves require blending and compressing several viewpoints, so we can momentarily "see" the situation "through X's eyes" (Turner, 2006a). Also here the viewer must conceptualize the mental states of several actors: if the blocks/dinosaur transformation happens in the reader's mind, then the reader is also imagining it in the playing child's mind. Because metaphorical thinking and conceptual blending require advanced cognition, the rhetoric power of development metaphor amplifies: if we imagine the child going through this process, we also imagine her as cognitively capable. The implied child is creative by virtue of her cleverness, and the ad flatters the reader who displays the same kind of intelligence.

BLENDING MINDS: A BRIDGE BETWEEN COGNITION AND CULTURE

Why do ads exist? The answer is not just to provide sellers with a channel for persuasion, nor consumers with a source of information. That would be partially accurate, but also as flat as remarking that apples provide nutrition. We are remiss if we fail to dissect the intricacy of texts that are akin to the literate, if we fail to understand the complexity and flexibility of the mind that reads it. For what is persuasion, if not a sophisticated attempt to entice the mind? Cognitive literary analysis provides an opportunity to approach advertising for

the pieces of fiction that they are, without losing sight of the cognitive constraints and flexibility demonstrated by the reader.

In the deceptively simple example of the LEGO ad above, multiple levels of embedding are at work, all of which are crucial to "getting" it. Yet theory of mind and conceptual blending are not only cognitive prerequisites to interpretation, they are in perpetual conversation with each other and end up, in a sense, constituting the message. In the interpretive moment, the reader experiences a form of what LEGO is selling: cognitive pleasure and development through play. Once we have "cracked the code," the experience is pleasurable − much like LEGO's assertion of how children will feel while playing, experiencing joy through creativity and, inevitably, development. A deep connection between pleasure and persuasion has been suggested before (Mick, 1992), but in this particular instance, cognitive pleasure converges with the persuasive case: we experience what we would like to enable a child to experience.

In light of the literary applications surveyed at the beginning of this chapter, it is not entirely certain whether I have come to a different conclusion than any of those approaches would have. That was also not the point: instead, to echo the cognitive literary ethos spelled out above, we revisit old knowledge with a new light in the hopes of cracking open the black box of interpretive processes. In doing so, we may weave together disparate strands of research while challenging the psychological hegemony, and acknowledging the cognitive intricacies of the competent and culturally savvy consumer. Finally, the potential for such an approach is not only to bridge siloed traditions in consumer research, but also to open up new avenues of thinking on old concerns such as polysemy, consumer skepticism, and general advertising literacy.

NOTES

1. A distinction might be made between textual and visual features of the rhetorical ad, although McQuarrie and Mick focused on the interplay between the two.

While a textual focus has prevailed in the theorization of advertising research, as Schroeder notes, critical visual analysis allows the researcher to "investigate the poetics and politics of images as a representational system" (2006, p. 320), in ways that survey research, for example, tends miss.

That said the theorization on the interplay between word and image is fairly nascent; the most sophisticated accounts that are relevant to our context are probably found in the study of children's picture books (cf. Nodelman, 1988). For our purposes here, I will not question the distinction but instead assume, in terms of rhetorics and the cognition involved, the overlap to be sufficient. It goes without saying that future work should spend more time on pondering the differences.

2. According to convention, metaphors will be spelled out in all caps.

3. It is important to pause here and add a note of caution for the remainder of this analysis: There is, admittedly, a debate to be had on the actual existence of a "theory of mind." Anthropologists would challenge the way in which Western research is used to understand minds in different cultural contexts, demonstrating an unreflective Euro- or

Americano-centricity in cognitive science. Reviewing the evidence from both psychological and anthropological sources, Wassmann and Funke conclude that whereas the "possibility to put oneself in the position of someone else" has a universal cognitive basis, it may not, for cultural reasons, come to expression in the same way across different communities, or even be visible at all, as is the case in some Pacific societies (2013, p. 241). The research that has been quoted here is inextricable from a Western understanding of the mind, the self, and personhood. This does not invalidate the research done to date, but it does question its universality. The analysis to come must therefore remain bounded to the appropriate context.

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