Applied the semiotic theory of syntagm/paradigm on analyzing the creative principles of some cases of Modern and Post-modern trademark design

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摘 要

識別系統堪稱是平面設計中理性主義的代表，而做為識別系統設計的核心——商標，在國際字法風格為基礎的基礎下，主導了五○年代以後識別符號的設計表現；但是，自八○年代起，識別設計在維持其自成一格、嚴謹而權威的範圍中，仍出現了明顯的變化，尤其在解構主義於視覺傳達設計界取得發言地位的今天，商標設計師處於市場上視覺時尚的誘力，與傳統訓練的束縛之間，難免出現依循與判斷上的困惑，此一困惑尤其表現於「創意」的判別上。

商標——與其說是符號，不如稱之為符碼，因為他多為數個符號依一定的語法組織而成。本文以對國際字法風格的理解，分別以七○年代與九○年代格外具備理性與解構特質的商標為例，透過符號學的理論，借用語言學家索緒爾有關系譜軸與比鄰軸的分析法，檢視商標符碼中各符號的選擇模式、組織語法與外型的形成原理，從中尋求「創意」的界定方式，一探不同時代的商標設計，分別在當時主流思想理性主義與解構主義的架構下，如何從事創意表現。本文再通過案例的交叉分析，比較兩者的歧異性，一探此一歧異性的理論依據。

(關鍵詞: 商標、符號、系譜軸、比鄰軸、現代主義、解構主義)
ABSTRACT

Corporate Identity System could be named as the representative of rationalism in graphic design. As the core of identity system design, trademark design had been strongly shaped by International Typography Style since 1950s. After 1980s, identity design had revealed obvious changes in its self-contained, restrained and authoritative kingdom.

Especially nowadays, while deconstructivism plays the spokesman in visual communication design, trademark designers trained in the traditional ways have to face market-oriented lures in the current identity design. These trademark designers inevitably lose trails in the judgement of what "creativity" is.

Trademarks would be seen as codes rather than as marks, for they were composed of signs under certain context. This essay, with the understanding of International Typography Style, aims at the 1970-90s' trademarks with rationalistic and deconstructivistic characters. Through the theoretical structure of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure's analytical methodology of paradigm and syntax, we would scrutinize the mode of selection of signs, syntax and the principles of shaping in the trademarks "codes", and look for the ways to define "what the creativity is" in trademark-design. We would also survey the difference of trademark-design in different times under their own rationalistic and deconstructivistic structures, and understand how designers proceed their creativity. In this essay, we will do cross-analysis of practical cases, compare their differences and build up the theoretical bases for these differences.

(KEY WORDS: Trademark, Sign, Paradigm, Syntagm, Modernism, Deconstruction)

視覺傳達設計系
1. Introduction

Man was a symbol maker long before he was a tool maker. (1) Thereafter, human beings mark their right of fortune and increase the right of owning the fortune by themselves. This accelerates the development of identity design. Especially after the mid 19th century, graphic design was played as a profession and trademarks started to have the patent protection. And then, the trademark design was passed to the hand of professional people. During this hundred years, along with several design movements come and go, the performance of identity design also follow the rhythm. Till the early 20th century, Modernism had erected its own flag on the land of design profession, the system design theory and practical development of identity design started its own business.

The development of corporate identity design was strongly influenced by the modernistic International Typography Style (Swiss Design); Which is based on the theory "Less is more" developed by Mies Van der Rohe. The influence is quite obvious in the flagship part of identity design-trademark design. After 1950s, this influence became the main international design style. The trademark design in this Modernism era showed similar aesthetic expression and identity function and this style dominated the following identity design training and operation. But, the graphic design profession in 1980s began to accept the concept from Post-Modernism. While most identity design books in the market are still showing the design principle of International Style, there appears some identity design which do not follow the design principle of Modernism. To these non-Modernism design works, the question of how shall we make our assessment of its creativity is very interesting; and this question is often raised among me and my students. Therefore, I decide to discuss further of this design phenomena.

For the limited pages of this essay, I am going to do the following:

a) Consider only the graphic performance of trademark design in identity design, and discuss the creative design thinking in its graphic manipulations.

b) Since color scheme is another major issue in trademark design and is usually considered only after the formation of the shape of trademark, so it would not be discussed in order to simplify the comparison.

c) The assessment would be based on the system theory of Modernism and
analysis methodology of Semiotics. Then we are looking for the possibility of theorizing the creative design thinking in those non-Modernism works through the comparison of difference within the Post-Modernism thoughts. In this essay, we take "graphic marks" as the sample of assessment. Because the taxonomy of trademark is so huge that I could not do that much discussion in these limited pages. (According to Per Mollerup, 1997, graphic marks include letter marks and picture marks.)(2)

2. The Semiotic application of Trademark

The father of American Semiotics, Pierce, C.S., thought that the meaning of a sign is that, to certain people, in certain circumstances and condition, a sign represents something. It expresses to someone, that is, to create a same sign in one’s mind or even a more delicate sign. The sign created in one’s mind could be seen as the interpretation of the first sign seen. The "thing" that this sign represents is the "referred". (3). If we express this in the shape of triangle as the figure-1, we find in this diagram, sign refers to something else- the object, and what appears to the viewer’s mind is called interpretant. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure showed the similar theoretical structure. He thought that: "Sign is a physical object with a meaning." And sign is composed of "signifier" and "signified". Signifier is the image of sign, is the mark on the paper and could be sensed by human beings. Signified is the referring psychological concept of sign. This psychological concept could be divided into three modes of meaning: denotation, signification and connotation, (4) as figure-2 shown. Code is a well organized system of signs. (5) Under this concept, we could say that the trademark is a code composed of several "signifiers" to express the complicated "signified".

Trademark = code = sign1 + sign2 + ⋯⋯

"A trademark can have a value in its own right, and that value adds to the value of a company, a product or service. Identification, descriptions and the creation of value are some of the functions of a trademark." (6) Therefore, the pioneer of identity design, Vignelli, posed that to be effective, a corporate identity should be the expression of an attitude of integrity. As the core of identity system, trademark, naturally is needed to integrate the physical essence of an institute and its spiritual value. Through the visualization technique of graphic designer, the signifier which can be identified by target audience and the signified which can be memorized are
formed.

Saussure thought that there are two ways of composing the codes. The first way is "paradigm", which is a set of signs that is composed from a chosen sign. For example: the four letters of NASA are picked from the 26 English letters, and that is paradigm. The rocket shape of "A" (see figure-3) is another paradigm-composing the concept of different shapes of rockets. The second way of Saussure's thought is "syntagmatic". "Syntagm" is the message conveyer of the chosen signs from paradigms. "NASA" is a set of chosen letters and also the combination of chosen shapes. Therefore, all the messages are involved with "selection" and "combination".

(7)

If we take the concept of paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic combination to do the analysis work of the following six trademarks as the figure-3 shown. The first trademark is the classical work of Modernism. The second and third trademarks also show the similar way of expression. But from the fourth to sixth trademarks we have the different view. If we see these works in syntagmatic way, we could divide the paradigm into two categories from the identity function of trademarks: 1) Business content (the physical description); 2) Business spirit (creative concept). And under these two categories, we have different paradigms. The whole set of paradigms creates the institution value for client, and this value shall be able to allow the target audience sense that while reading the syntagmatic relationship.

Take the first trademark "NASA" as example, the choices of paradigm could be divided into the following categories: a). institution content. b).institution spirit (management strategy and so on). And under each paradigm, we could find several paradigmatic subcategories. In order to build up the meaning of trademarks (the codes), the conceptual elements of "b" shall be accomplished by the visualization of "a"; that is: a+b=code (trademark). But the visual forms need those subcategories (a1, a2, a3... as shown in figure-3) to compose the wholeness. According to the Gestalt principle: a>a1+a2+a3..., the other weight of a1+a2+a3... is realized in "b".

3. The rigid discipline of Modernism

The development of identity design originates in western countries, the way of speculation is full of logocentric influence. The hierarchical way of logic thinking in the identity design speaks of its philosophic origin. Its modern design technique is
highly influenced by International Typographic Style, which is a direct descendants of the Bauhaus. The Swiss style has a rather systematic, functional design approach based on a less is more philosophy. (8) Grid is their fundamental tool to organize graphic elements. The grid divides upon available surface into a number of proportional subdivisions serving the needs of the work in hand and provides a visual structure on which the design can be based. The grid makes it possible to bring all the elements of design... into a formal relationship to each other. That is to say, the grid system is a means of introducing order into a design. (9) It can give the overall design a sense of cohesion and continuity that has a distinctive unifying effect. (10)

Identity design takes the unified form to minimize the arrangement of all the visual elements. In one way, it can strengthen the effect of memorization and recognition. In the other way, it could eliminate the visual noise in identity. No matter in the design philosophy or expression techniques, the core of identity design - trademark, is the condensed version of this design language. From the NASA trademark (1), we could see that on the image paradigm designers chose the sign with similar forms. And these two graphic signs are chosen according to the institution spirit paradigm; that is, the choice is the rocket shape of high-tech, futuristic sense and the characteristic of aggressive exploring. Through the organizing simplification, they embedded the rocket shape into the letters “NASA” and showed its wholeness. We see no useless or extra elements, even the line width of letters are unified with same line quality and then achieved mission in unified visuality and the least visual noise. This way of expression is also seen in the trademark (2), the Baltimore Aquarium, and the trademark (3), Garuda Indonesian Airlines.

In the trademarks of Baltimore Aquarium, we see the paradigms in the image part composing a1: fish, b2: water and c3: circle. In order to infuse the conceptual paradigm of b1: abundance b2: interesting..., designers showed graphic application of simplification and repetition. The interesting ground-figure reverse of water and fish would have the simplified effect from the unified shape. Repetition enriches the visual effect of synatgm though, the consistent extension and shape diminish the viewer’s deciphering obstacle and time and do not increase the complexity of final image. In the end, it was limited in a circle, became the visual focus and enhanced the wholeness of trademark. The same thought happened on the Indonesia Airlines
trademark design. Though this trademark is of single picture paradigm, the creativity is shown on the realization of "less is more" too. Taking the abstract sign representing the spiritual value into the image, "b1: convenience and express" showed itself in the form of tilted parallel lines. "b2: safety" takes the image of bird as the metaphor, and so expresses the denotation (Garuda) and connotation of the message: safety. It used the lines with similar quality and the least angle (three different angles) to reveal. All these design thinking are diminishing the visual noise to the least and project the best effect.

If we read through Saussure's triangle analysis diagram, signified and signifier are cultural products. Obviously, signifier would be changed along with the change of language. (11) In the eyes of Saussure, different culture has its own signification of language, the international style in Modernism suggests that the boundary of divorcing cultures would be broken under the geometric language. From the three cases discussed above, we could see that designers wish to diminish the cultural boundary of viewers and to get closer to the signified. In the organization of syntagm of trademark, designers take off the subsidiary meaning of the recognized objects, distinguish the contextual meaning to loose the bond of signifier and the signified. Because of the loose connection, the images are recognized as visual pun. Therefore, we could have a model to analyze the relationship. (figure-4) Through this model, we might find that there is no sequential order in reading the Modernism trademarks. Contrarily, all the intention is trying to combine signs and make it a full visual entity. Images can reveal several messages in denotation and connotation; that is, to optimize the fullest communicative effect in the simplest form. This job is where designers perform their best creativity, and visual pun is one of the most important effect in graphic expression.* (12) That's what Paul Rand said that a good trademark should be able to simplify complex concepts into accessible, memorable images. But a successful trademark needs to be uniqueness, in less than falling into cliche visual pun or convention. A identity designer still needs to work on the uniqueness of simplified solution to assure the originality.

Trademark(1)  Trademark(2)  Trademark(3)
4. The game of Post-Modernism

Modernistic trademark design is obviously challenged by a case in 1992; that is NASA chief Daniel S. Golden decided to replace its modernist mark which was one of the few graphic triumphs of the Nixon Administration's Federal Design Program with old figurative trademark of 1959. (13) As we see the 4. old NASA trademark, 5. TNT Music Group and 6. MTV trademark, we could analyze image paradigm and conceptual paradigm from syntagm. In the analysis of image paradigm, we can easily separate different signifiers like in No:4 trademark there are signifiers like a1: earth, a2: rocket, a3: orbit, and a4: name... and so on. But on the organization of syntagm, we find two obviously different points:

A). There is no stern modernistic discipline, but the traditional way of layering to create the images. There is no more emphasis put on the relationship in signifiers. If we observe in No:5 and 6 trademarks, we could find that these non-modernistic design are speaking direct language- the paradigm elements they choose have strong narrative attributes, in order to connect directly the traditional denotation and connotation. For Golden, the older logo (4) represented optimistic days of glory for the space program, an era before the space shuttle disaster. "The can-do spirit of the past is alive and well. The magic is back." (14) The past was defined by those familiar and practical paradigms.

B). They keep the right of the sequential solution, and allow the viewers to decode the meaning by themselves. The visual solution does not have the sequence, but the power of solution is still dominated by human visual experience. That is to say, we couldn't neglect the other signs, on which construct their contextual meaning. Here, the characteristic of text has its function as Jacques Derrida proposed that reading philosophy can be like reading literature. In this deciphering process people are relieved from their expectation to the truth, and bypass the mission of rational operation, achieve the "pleasure of text". (15)

As Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller mentioned in Design Writing Research (16): "Post-structuralism provided a critical avenue into Post-Modernism, posing an alternative to the period's nostalgic returns to figurative painting and neo-classical architecture. Post-structuralism challenges the traditional opposition between seeing and reading by treating the surface as both theoretical context and sensual form, as
both text and texture." The dissertation of Post-structuralism opposes western logocentrism. In Post-structuralism, the loudest Post-structuralist, Jacques Derrida, thought that western culture are obscured by logos and develop into a sort of logocentrism. In logocentrism, people thought that in universe there is an eternal being - logos, which unifies the universe. Logos is the rhythm of universe, and the way to recognize this rhythm. Modernistic identity theory takes delicate codes as the main core to integrate and decipher all the applied design related to the codes, and oppose all the design expression which blurs the focus of identity. This theory could be the reflection of the conservative western logocentrism. Though what Derrida objects of logocentrism is about the oppressed writing in language, he actually challenges the traditional dialectic idea of logocentrism, and attacks the fixed meaning of any signs. In the No:5 TNT trademark, we see that designer does not intend to dominate the formation of codes in consistent design elements, but take different shapes of gestures, spiral, notes and so on, from divorcing paradigms. They take these elements and assemble them in the way of Post-Modernism literature or art would do - collage. Therefore, the form of organizing is not limited by the guide line "Less Is More". These Post-Modernism-era designers boldly choose concrete, complex images for collage, they take advantage of the narrative characteristic and familiarity to raise the attention and take off viewers' attendance of the encompassing experience. For example, they take the opposing side in the expression thinking, like the nostalgia palm and the geometric spiral, to compose a mark. Utilizing the difference of concrete and abstract side of certain signs to create the visual pleasant on contrast and the lively touch.

MTV trademark shows the similar mode. We can, again, take Saussier's triangle analysis diagram to illustrate the relationship as figure-5. Under this mode, the whole syntagm extend outwardly in loose format, and stress no certain integrity outline. Because each signs have strong connection to each other, so the independent relationship is more important. But the trivial and concrete aspects of images increase the importance of contrast. This contrast is what "Less Is More" and system theory oppose, but the way to create uniqueness. Besides, the interchange capability of image elements is therefore, increasing. Take TNT trademark as example, the change of hand shape and note will not influence its identity, and the integral aesthetic could be controlled in certain extent. The letter shape of MTV could be
changed for visual pleasant, and this enhance the space of performance of the TV director and audiences' interest. And what is more is these design style create open gate for design interactivity and a much dynamic further application. All these are not to be achieved by conservative modernistic design. Surely that these design elements are derived from the previous paradigm in case of losing the identity track. And the choice of paradigm strongly influences the views' deciphering. Therefore, if designers select different signs aiming at different targeting audiences within the business scope, a flexible and attractive identity can be expected.

Derrida in his <Civilization, Science and Mythology: Structure, Sign and Game> mentioned the deconstructed reading, he thought that traditional reading tries to do objective interpretation, stresses the communication of readers and authors and authors' intention would influence readers' reading and interpretation. The deconstructed reading allows more readers' stance in the action of reading, and the author is dead. Readers have more freedom of interpretation, the game-like reading replaces traditional objective reading. (17)

From the very beginning, the making of an Institution identity is done through the intense arrangement of design strategy and then is resorted to visual design as the final goal of communication. Corporate identity expresses "how you wish the viewers to look at your image". Therefore, the proportion of traditional reading is very high. If allow viewers or readers to have their own interpretation, the corporate identity is difficult to communicate and control. From the practical side - the market, we see no one work is obviously off the boundary or influence of logocentrism and achieve what Derrida declared of the deconstructed reading. Even identity design is not possible to be in Derrida's utopia, trademark design is out of the speech. So, to the best, we might called these Post-Modernism-era identity products an "Open style Trademark Design" compared to Modernistic conservative trademark design. We could imagine that, the operation of trademark design must exist in a certain social environment and cultural group. The dissertation of Post-Modernism is not only the theory but the reflection of social phenomena. Those open style identity design in this Post-Modernism-era are trying to adapt the change of environment and target audience, then would do something more appropriate. Both text and texture are needed in thinking of the signified in order to provide the suggestion of shape adjustment and different solution. The ways to enforce direct reading of this
functionality, the changability of signs and the visual pleasant in contrast forms would be the creative points of "Open style Trademark Design" in this Post-Modernism-era.

Trademark(4)  Trademark(5)  Trademark(6)

5. Conclusion:

View from the discussion above, we know that in the trademark design thinking the modernistic designers would purposely integrate all the possible signs of one institution into a most unified, simplest and concise one. From Saussier's view point of coed analysis, designers would visualize all the conceptual paradigm signs in image paradigm without considering the amount of image paradigm. Designers would try to do a totally different trademarks from the others through shaping and the uniform quality of drawing, and would try to integrate the design with syntagm in the simplest structure. They would make the syntagtic code close to a independent sign but with more than one implicit meaning, to a single or multi-dimensional visual pun. This creativity is further development from Mies Vander Rohe's thought "Less Is More", and also the reflection of the pursuing of international economic development and homogeneity aesthetic after 1950s. In facing the changing international climate of 1980s-90s, the sub-cultural groups became the main stream in consumption society. In opposing the domination of western rational thinking to be the only force of social evolution, trademark design meets the different and divorcing market needs. And there shows the different main stream performance from modernistic works. In the examples, we see that designers with deconstructed thinking would not take International Typography Style as the only bible. The goal in the organization of syntagm would not be "less is more", and these designers would like to keep the originality of paradigm sign element or the difference of shape quality in the choice of paradigm to compose the layering visual pleasant. In this operation, through the interchange of various signs in one paradigm, designers
could achieve more prosperous expression and that would be one advantage point in facing different circumstances and audience. In this way, a trademark would show different life in different circumstances or through different audience. By the fixed way of syntagtic organization, maintaining certain identity functionality, there is the open design style which is different from modernistic creative performance. All are the results that designers strive in the changing international market, in meeting clients' needs and in the competition of pursuing creative design performance.
Reference


(2) Per Mollerup, Marks of Excellence-The history and taxonomy of trademarks, London: Phaidon Press, pp.102, 1997


(4) Shou-hwong Ho, Introduction to Semiotics, Bufalo Publications, pp.109, 1995


(12) *note: Some trademarks compose less elements in image paradigm, sometimes only one, and are hard to catch the surface characteristic of visual pun. However, if we borrow lines or shapes to introduce conceptual paradigm to image paradigm and also regard them as visual pun, then we could say this operation is the most creative characteristic of Modernistic trademark design.


(14) Glen E. Swanson, Quest, NASA in-house publication, summer, pp.26-30, 1992

(15) Ta-chuan Young, Post Structuralism, Youngchi Publications, pp.169-170, 1996


(17) Ta-chuan Young, Deconstruction, Youngchi Publications, pp.83, 1994
Figure

1) NASA
   a1. name          b1. hi-tech
   a2. rocket        b2. exploring
                    b3. futuristite

2) a1. fish         b1. abundance
   a2. water         b2. interesting
   a3. circle        b3. education

3) a1. bird         b1. convenience and express
                    b2. safety

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*note1: The trademarks above are
*note2: The paradigm b "Business spirit" refers to their web sites.
figure-5