

Multilingualism and intellectual property: Visual holophrastic discourse and the commodity/sign

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Signs of the times. Rosemary Coombe (1998) has pointed out recently that our lives and therefore our day-to-day ordinary discourses are penetrated through and through with the use of what she calls the “commodity/sign.” I write this on a Dell[®], which is running on a Pentium[®] II processor using Windows[®] 98. Dell[®] is a legal trademark and both Pentium[®] and Windows[®] are registered words but oddly enough not II or 98, or at least not just yet. The February 1999 issue of *Harper’s* tells us that the numerical sequence 01-01-00[®] has been registered as a trade name and cannot be used in commercial products without permission of, and no doubt payment of licensing fees to, the owner. The joke went around on the Internet a couple of years ago that Bill Gates had registered the digits ‘0’ and ‘1’ as that was the semiotic basis for the codes on which his—and our—computers run.

As Coombe has noted, our discourses are saturated with the logos, brand names, shop signs, and other registered properties of the worldwide commercial and commodified economy. “Pass me a Kleenex[®]”; “Is your computer IBM[®] or Apple[®] format?” What I am interested in here is not the question of how these commodity/signs bring with them into our daily discourses the formative legal structures of our society, though that is an issue I think of central significance. Rather, I am interested in the way in which these commodity/signs are restructuring our very notion of what language is and how it works.

In the short space I have here I can only hope to illustrate my point, not argue it with very solid evidence. I start with a variety of photos of shop signs taken here and there around the world. With nothing but the photos to work with it might be rather difficult to locate most of the signs within a national/linguistic/cultural space. While the English “Apollo Electronics” is found in Los Angeles and Spanish “Iberia” is found in Barcelona, the English “ABC” labels a building in Tokyo, the French “Collage” is a business in Stockholm, and the mixed code “LIQUOR SHOP Marumata” is a business in Japan.

One cannot very easily associate the national languages, English, French, Italian, and the like with the country of display. In my study I found that the English “Trend Corner” is in Zürich, the mixed French/English “La Ferme Fondue

Room” (without accent markers) is in Montreux, and I don’t really know what language to say “Alaska” is in. While it has lost its Aleut heritage for all but a few linguists, it appears in a sign displayed in Liège.

In still other cases “Underwood” is where it belongs, in London, and “dal Marinaio” might be acceptable in Rome—I don’t actually know. “Question” is in Yokohama, “Sport” is in Germany, “deco d’or” is also in Germany. Perhaps the truly transnational “Mobby” could not be any place but Shinjuku, Tokyo, and “SEARS” is okay in Honolulu. “Douglas” and “Chorizo,” however, do not signal either an English-speaking country or a Spanish-speaking one, as they are both in Germany.

These examples are themselves found in an interesting transnational and multilingual space. They appear in a book titled *Marks—Logos*, first published by Graphic-sha Publishing Company in Tokyo (1993) and republished in China in 1995. The book describes itself in the only extended text it gives on page 4 where it says,

This book is a collection of photos of marks and logos found in different streets in the world, and is intended to serve as a design source to refer to by those who wish to make a successful sign or facade of a shop or office in an area or street whose environment is becoming increasingly comfortable.

The book covers about 1,200 cuts of cubic and plane signboards which mainly use letters and marks, facades of buildings having such signboards, and also road or public facility signs which may be applied to shops or offices, by classifying them according to style, theme, and so on. Types of business and name of location where photos were taken are also added as data.

It is recommended to refer to the book when planning or designing a sign or shop.

It is requested that you inform us of any interesting sign found in the street. We would like to refer to it when editing the next book. Either a sign recommended by yourself or any other is acceptable.

While the book consists, as it says, of 1,200 glossy photos of logos and signs, many or perhaps most of which are protected by copyright in their home legal jurisdictions, the book itself shows no indication of having secured permission for glossy reproduction. In fact, as the text above suggests, the entire purpose of the book is to facilitate possibly illegal reproduction of these signs for those who would like to make their streets “increasingly comfortable.”

We would probably all agree that these are examples of contemporary multilingualism. But naming these signs by such national languages this way deeply obscures the problem. I would argue that “Collage” is no longer a French word, at least not when it is displayed as the name of a fashion boutique in Stockholm. Likewise “Douglas,” “chorizo,” “deco d’or,” “Sears,” and “Mobby” have been wrenched free of their linguistic and cultural history and recontextualized within a transnational discourse of the commercial enterprise. I have purified my examples here a good bit as well, but perhaps I should not have done that, because in many cases in this same book and in the world around us we have simultaneous multilingualism. That is, we have French simultaneously together with Japanese, English with German, Chinese with Italian.

The argument I want to develop here, then, is that there is a deep prejudice that runs through our understanding of multilingualism. The prejudice is toward taking “language” to mean one of the world’s mostly national (at least originally) named languages—English, German, French, Chinese, Japanese, Italian. I will argue that instances of multilingualism such as the signs and logos just mentioned make the idea of national languages difficult to maintain, at least in the transnational discourses of the production and sale of commodities.

I also want to argue that it is probably more important to think about the corporate ownership of these utterances than it is to try to identify their national or historical provenience. And that will lead to the corollary argument that in such highly commodified discourses there are very important new players—the corporations who own these commodity signs (Coombe 1998) and the nation states that authorize their use through copyright and patent protection. In other words, I want to argue that it is probably more important that SONY® belongs to the Sony Corporation than it is to identify which language SONY® is a word in.

That, of course, will lead to my conclusion: that there is a certain kind of discourse that I have termed “*visual holophrastic discourse*,” which amounts to company signs, logos, slogans, trademarks, and all the rest of the commodity/sign apparatus of our contemporary globalized world. This visual holophrastic discourse seems to be setting up shop by defining new language uses, new concepts of what language is, and ultimately what it means to be multilingual as the world makes the turn into the third millennium.

What is multilingualism these days? Is “SONY” a word in English, Japanese, Dutch, or whatever other language is the home language of the product user? What about “NOKIA?” For some years the Finnish company was quite happy to have people believe that their Finnish name was really Japanese as the company thought that might give them a bit of technological edge over their clearly Scandinavian rival “Ericsson.”

In a way the sort of question I am raising here is a relatively “new” problem, a problem caused by the nationalizing of language and political life—one might

say the nationalizing of political life through language—during this “modern” period of the nation state. Some years ago Ivan Illich (1981) pointed out that not only did Spain expel the Moors in the prototype ethnic cleansing in 1492, and not only did they push Columbus off from European shores to go discover what he would label the “redskins” that same year, but Queen Isabella entertained a proposal from Ilio Antonio de Nebrija to accept his dictionary and grammar of what he called “Castillano” as the official language of Spain as the way to consolidate the political purity of the nation.

Anderson (1991) attributes the development of the nation state to the forces of print capitalism during this same period and, like Billig (1995), argues that an essential aspect of the control and consolidation of the nation state has been the production of the idea of matching up particular languages and particular nation states, preferably in a way that the name of the state and the name of the language are the same or similar: England/English, Spain/Spanish, Italy/Italian, Germany/German, France/French, Japan/Japanese, and China/Chinese. Of course, America or the United States have had trouble in this regard in having to make do with a language named after the old colonial nation that seems to be an embarrassment to this day.

The sort of multilingualism we have come to talk about in not only our general public discourses but also in linguistics, applied linguistics, education, and a number of other academic discourses is largely this modernist, nationalist sort of multilingualism that is continually being mixed together with national politics and even very rough notions of national cultures. I follow both Anderson and Billig in taking it that this equation is not the natural state of language in the world; it is relatively new—even in the oldest of the modern nations it does not date back more than five centuries, and in some such as Italy it is really quite recent, and that it is an idea that directly or indirectly is implicated in the production of political entities and power relationships.

If we do take that point of view, however, what might “multilingualism” mean if we challenge the essentially modernist/nationalist ideology embedded in contemporary notions of language? I would think the most productive reimagining of language we are undertaking in the present period was stimulated by the writings of Bakhtin, but I would also like to remember that there is much in Bakhtin for which Sapir would have found much empathy (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995). Gee, Fairclough, and many others of our contemporaries who are engaged in the reimagining of language point to polyvocality, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity of practice as the key organizing themes (Gee 1999; Fairclough 1992; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). Rather than seeing *a language* as a count noun indicating a large, structured semiotic system with relatively clear boundaries between it and other such systems, these scholars see *language* as a mass noun like mud, air, or whisky for that matter, which freely flows through spaces.

From this point of view the phenomenon of interest is what Bakhtin called “social languages” rather than national languages as the relevant category of interest. These social languages, or what Gee has called “discourses,” Foucault and Fairclough have called “orders of discourse” or “discursive formations” might be thought of as the containers that have scooped up mixtures, bits, and pieces of *language* to accomplish particular agendas, to produce particular group memberships and identities, and to do the work of producing social practice in communities of practice. What is crucial in talking about the social language or discourse of medicine, for example, is not whether the doctor is speaking in English, German, or Japanese so much as that he or she is speaking within a framing social language of medicine.

Following this out, then, I would argue that if there is a problem of multilingualism, it is not that people speak or fail to speak multiple national languages. It is that the discourses and social practices of a particular social language—medicine, law, heavy equipment operation, sports training, vegetable selling—are interdiscursively interpenetrated with other social languages. The social languages of medicine, for example, become interpenetrated with the social languages of business. As medical professionals shift from trying to develop the “most effective treatment” to the “most cost-effective treatment,” we observe the interpenetration of social practices of the treatment of illness by the social practices of cost effectiveness (Musson and Cohen 1996). I would argue that this sort of interdiscursivity among the social languages of our life worlds is of more central theoretical and more crucial social urgency than identifying whether the relevant diagnoses are conducted in English or German, French, or Japanese. I would also want to push this a bit further and say that, in fact, to address the question of the commodification of our life worlds by globalizing business and governmental enterprises, the reification of languages as national, countable entities serves the function of distraction from these more crucial contemporary social issues.

What is intellectual property? For my purposes there are two areas of intellectual property that are of interest to us as people who study language, the ownership of texts, about which I will only say a little, and the ownership of commodity/signs. There is much more to intellectual property than this, of course. When the United States engages in negotiations with China on questions of intellectual property, the primary concern is not with whether Chinese scholars are giving proper citations in their academic papers. Their concerns tend to focus on computer software, Hollywood movies, and brand-named commercial products, although the list of categories can be quite long and usually includes such items as television and video, film, music, software, CD-ROMs, books, trademarks, new plant species, and integrated circuits.

I am interested, first of all, in ownership of text—citation and attribution. This is because much of our concept of intellectual property was formed around

the problem of protecting literary works and so continues to bear the stamp of what might well be outmoded concerns. But also I am concerned with ownership of text in the form of practices for citation and attribution, or to use Fairclough's (1992) term, which I prefer, "discourse representation," because other research I have done shows that the practices for discourse representation vary across social languages as the domain of their operation, not from language to language. I will return to this issue shortly.

I am also interested in commodity/signs (Coombe 1998), both because the rapidly strengthening centrality of commodity/signs in our day-to-day discourses is bringing about major changes in the ways we understand language and because we can see in the use of commodity/signs the intrusion into our daily discourses the power of the corporate owner to shape these discourses far beyond the expected realms of retail sales of consumer products.

Polyvocality, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and ownership of text. To take up the first point for a moment, the first development of copyright law in the form of the Statute of Anne in 1710 was aimed not at protecting authors against the theft of their works so much as it was aimed at protecting publishers in London against authors the likes of John Milton. It was feared that he and others might take their *Paradise Losts* up to Scotland, where the feared pirate printers were, and have competing versions printed that were similar enough to the original to undercut the sales of the London publishers (Patterson 1968).

My point here is not to focus on the history of copyright and patent law, but to call attention to the fact that among academics there is a certain kind of contemporary historical reconstruction going on that assumes that the point of copyright is to protect the wordings of individual authors from uncited use by others. This tends to be what we teach our students and what we are so concerned about if they don't seem to be getting it. Elsewhere we have argued that we tend to confound several essentially separable issues. We tend to use the legal issue of copyright to give rhetorical force to what are really ethical or moral issues of plagiarism (Scollon in press). And these issues, both legal and moral, are to a considerable extent covers for what amounts to power positioning. We use moral injunctions against plagiarism and legal threats to position "ourselves" on a moral high ground, particularly in respect to non-academics and to academics who are located outside some inner circle of correct behavior.

At this juncture in talking about plagiarism it is always amusing to point out that there are serious inconsistencies in our academic behavior. Stanford University, like most of our universities, has a booklet for students on the evils of plagiarism. This booklet was itself plagiarized lock, stock, and barrel by the University of Oregon according to Mallon (1989).

In a post-Bakhtinian world we have become acutely aware of the high degrees of intertextuality, polyvocality, and interdiscursivity among, within, and

across texts. What is most surprising about the Oregon plagiarism is the genuine lack of surprise. Of course, handbooks, memos, university documents—both internal and external—will be shot through with boilerplate text taken from whatever source is handy. In this we begin to see the relatively narrow scope of our outrage over plagiarism.

In another research project I found that if we compare academic writing, writing in journalism, and writing in advertisements, we find that these three quite distinct communities of practice are distinguished from each other among other ways by their practices for discourse representation (Scollon forthcoming). Academic citation practices use a relatively wide variety of means of discourse representation from direct and indirect quotation to paraphrase, presupposition, and negation. Although there is much variation across academic disciplines, with historians using the highest levels of direct quotation and psychologists almost never directly quoting, throughout the broad community of practice there is a stance taken by the writing author or authors that they are placing themselves within an ongoing discourse as one of a group of conversationalists. Key issues for the academic are the personal integrity and believability of his or her utterances, which are indicated to a great extent through careful acknowledgment of the sources of borrowed texts.

This positioning of the academic within a dialogic or conversational discourse through discourse representation I found to be very different from the positioning of the journalist in relationship to the texts he or she represents. Journalistic discourse uses a very limited number of means of discourse representation by comparison with academic writing. Direct and indirect quotation are the most frequent means of bringing the utterances of others into the journalistic text. More important to my concern here is the positioning of the journalist outside of the discourses he or she represents. Journalists position themselves outside of and behind the public discourses of newsmakers, politicians, accident victims, and entertainers about whom they write and whom they cite. They position themselves as orchestrators and commentators, not as central participants in the discourse.

Perhaps it is this positioning that leads journalists to take what would in academic circles be considered cavalier approaches to the citation of others. As Bell (1991) has pointed out, most journalistic texts are highly complex weavings of voices of others which are authored, edited, and re-authored normally so many times that it would be virtually impossible to identify the author of the text which appears in print. Nevertheless, a very large number of these texts appear under the single byline of an authoring journalist. Academic students who produced texts using journalistic practices of multiple appropriation of sources with minimal citation on the one hand and with rewriting of “direct quotations” on the other would be dismissed for unethical conduct.

Advertisers form yet a third community of practice in which the author of the texts we see stands entirely out of the picture. We virtually never see the author of

advertising copy, nor could we guess who he or she might be. The voices in advertisements may often be attributed to known or at least knowable real persons, and yet the texts attributed to them are clearly written as copy by the advertiser who remains, like the Wizard, behind a curtain animating the whole show. More often, of course, the texts of advertising are fictions, little dramas, and narratives mixed together with slogans, brand names, and logos in a weave in which it is virtually impossible to make any connection at all between the authorial work of real persons and the fictional entities presented to us in the advertisements.

Taken from this point of view, I argue that these three communities of practice—academics, journalists, and advertisers—speak among each other and to us as audiences in three highly distinctive ways. These three discourses or social languages (Gee 1999) differ from each other in significant linguistic practices as greatly as do the historically named languages English, Chinese, and Japanese. Or to put it conversely, academics writing in English, Chinese, and Japanese are more *like* each other in their social language or academic discourse; journalists in England, Japan, and Italy are more *like* each other in their positioning of themselves in respect to newsmakers; and advertisers in Canada, France, and Malaysia are more *like* each other in their cavalier use of text and their characteristic obscuring of the ownership of those texts than are all the people who speak and write English, or Japanese, or Chinese, or German.

Perhaps not only from the point of view of intellectual property but certainly from that point of view, the relevant domain for the analysis of linguistic practice is the social language of a community of practice—academics, journalists, advertisers, lawyers, doctors, and so forth—not the historically grounded language of the nation state or of the cultural or ethnic group.

The ownership of the commodity/sign brings national and corporate power into common discourses. My second interest in intellectual property is in the commodity/sign. As I have indicated above, the commodity/sign has come to be a central form of intellectual property in the global commodified economy of fast food restaurants, electronics goods, and fashion. Recently in England I was told of a restaurant which is being enjoined by Kentucky Fried Chicken against the use of their name: “Ken’s Tuck-in Fried Chicken.” I am personally on the side of Ken.

When legal jurisdictions give ownership rights to corporate or individual owners to the control of commodity/signs—logos, brand names, and slogans, but also styles, appearances, and images—they produce a systematic distortion of normal processes of discourse within which one appropriates words and ideas to shape them anew. As Coombe (1998: 26) puts it, “[t]he law legitimizes new sources of cultural authority by giving the owners of intellectual property priority in struggles to fix social meaning.”

The crucial issue here is that the tools of our common discourses are the words, phrases, ideas, and images of our linguistic and discursive commons.

While they may be historically charged with meanings and negotiated in social interactions, we use the semiotic means available to us—the language, the words, the gestures, and styles—to create our own being within our life worlds as well as to contest or struggle against disadvantageous positionings. What happens when the semiotic means of our day-to-day communication are protected by intellectual property is that new forces come into play that go far beyond the Gricean maxims of being relevant and meaningful in our social interactions. Again, as Coombe (1998: 51) puts it, “Intellectual property laws, by prohibiting the reproduction of vital cultural texts, disable us from subjecting those texts to critical scrutiny and transformative appropriation. Because these texts are constitutive of the cultural milieu in which we live, constructing many of the social salient realities we recognize, their status as exclusive properties that cannot be reproduced without consent and compensation operates to constrain communication within, through, and about the media that surround us.”

In sum, my interests in intellectual property and multilingualism stem from two areas of concern. In the first place, I argue that the ownership of text and the indication of the ownership of these texts through citation and attribution is not governed by any universal legal or moral principles. Instead, I argue that practices for citation and attribution vary across communities of practices, even within what must be called the same language group if we take “language” to mean the modernist concept of named, national language—English, Japanese, German. In the second place, I argue that a particularly postmodern form of semiotics—the commodity/sign—is rapidly moving to occupy center stage in contemporary discourse, and because these commodity/signs are owned intellectual properties, this development amounts to a significant reconstitution of at least one important field of discourse. Taken together, these two issues force us to reconsider what “multilingualism” might mean in the globalized, transnational semiotic spaces within which many of us move.

From infant holophrasis to postmodernist corporate holophrasis. I have played with a lot of terms to try to characterize the sort of discourse in which I have an interest here. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) are interested in multimodal discourses as part of their critical social semiotics, and there is much of what I am interested in that is multimodal—involving text, image, and sound. But for my interest in brand names, logos, shop signs, and the like, there is something almost nondiscursive about the ways in which meanings are coded. I thought for a while I might call it nonsyntactic discourse, as that would capture the observation that, on the whole, the signs with which I began and in which I am interested appear largely as single words or short phrases.

That thought recalled for me the interest in children’s language for which the term “holophrastic” language was coined some decades ago. What is captured with the term holophrastic is the notion that a single utterance carries a full prag-

matic load without the complex syntactic niceties of the language that develops later. “Share” can be read as holophrastic for saying “Give some of that to me,” in contrast to “some,” which is read by the caregivers as the child saying “I will give some of that to you” (Scollon 1976). Central to the idea of holophrastic language in children’s discourse is the necessity for caregivers and others to engage in sometimes rather imaginative acts of interpretation. Very little is specified in the holophrase; much depends on the goodwill, interest, and engaged personal involvement of the interpreter, normally the mother or other caregiver in the data most commonly reported.

A crucial difference, however, between the “share” and “some” of the one-year-old child and the “Collage,” “chorizo,” “trend corner,” and “Mobby” signs with which I began is that the child’s utterances are oral—literacy is not yet a possibility—and strongly contextualized in the ongoing social interactions between the child and caregivers. But the signs in which I have an interest are visual semiotic displays in which shape, color, fonts, and design are as important as the words used and the contextualization is that of the “increasingly comfortable streets” of commercial discourse.

To capture what I would like to talk about, I will use the term “visual holophrastic discourse.” That is, it is the many moments in contemporary commodified social life when utterances in the form of signs, logos, brand names, and the like are displayed as holophrastic utterances given to be engaged in interpretatively by the personal interest of the consumer. Visual holophrastic discourse is, I would argue, one of the central forms of contemporary multilingualism. What language, after all, is “SONY®” in?

Visual holophrastic discourse is a complex matter, so for the moment I only want to suggest a few quite salient properties that I would hope would not be taken as anything like a definitive or exhaustive analysis. Visual holophrastic discourse is:

Multimoda—the linguistic elements from words to slogan phrases appear in distinctive and invariable fonts, colors, semiotic orientations to other texts and images. Often they also carry a superordinate symbol such as ® or ™ to indicate their legal status.

Disarticulated from national language of origin—one finds French signs in Japan, Italian signs in Hong Kong, English in Norway, or Spanish in Germany. In many cases it seems that it is *distance from* a national origin that gives power to visual holophrastic discourse, not *location within* a national environment.

Made-up orthographies—the word “clean” in *Kleenex*®, like many other examples of visual holophrastic discourses, stands out by its distortion of standard phonologies or at least spelling practices.

Nonsyntactic—it is impossible to argue that a holophrase represents any unique syntactic process of deletion. SONY® cannot be asserted to be derived from “Buy a SONY® product” or “This is a SONY®.”

Nonpragmatic—in like manner, it is impossible to argue that a holophrase represents any unique pragmatic function such as an imperative to buy.

Minimally discursive—consequently, such commercial holophrases are minimally discursive in that there are only tenuous contextualization cues or indicators of cohesion within the broader texts of “comfortable streets” or labeled products. This is not to say that there is no semiotic structure of interpretation, only that the processes of interpretation are as yet very little understood through traditional formal analysis.

Simultaneously multilingua—in many cases the multilingualism that occurs within visual holophrastic discourse is simultaneous. We see French and Japanese, German and English, Chinese and Italian within the same sign, not as a code-switched sequence as has been studied within other forms of linear discourse.

Owned property—finally, these holophrases are to a great extent owned properties. Everything in the holophrase including its characteristic coloration, font, and design are protected.

Contemporary multilingualism stands largely outside of contemporary linguistic analysis. I conclude by saying that when we consider the implications of intellectual property for discourse analysis, at least two themes need to be understood. First, the main domains of linguistic analysis must be discourses or social languages—those of academics, journalism, advertising, law, medicine, education, and so on—not the language derived from the historical modern nation states. Second, visual holophrastic discourse is a domain of language use that is rapidly growing and yet remains largely outside of our common theories, methodologies, and domains of interest in both the study of language and the teaching of language.

To bring this to ground a bit, I can’t prove it, but my own first experiences outside the sphere of my native language would suggest that the ability to work out which of the signs shows the way to the toilet in a foreign city is a more urgent need for the traveling would-be multilingual than the correct translation of “culture” into Chinese or even than the most idiomatic way to respond to “Good morning, how are you?”

On a somewhat more elevated plane, if we come to the issue with a concern for linguistic analysis, even if that interest is in real world applications, we find that many of the issues raised here tend to be sidestepped in contemporary linguistic and discursive analysis. On the question of citation and attribution, we tend to excessively simplify the matter by trying to say things like, “[i]n English we use a verb of saying such as ‘said,’ followed by a comma, a quotation mark

and then the cited bit of text exactly as it was originally written or spoken followed by a closing quotation mark.” My data show that this hardly ever happens in this way in English, and if we just look across the way into other social languages, we see that journalists are doing very different things—as are advertisers within their domain. Worse, of course, is that our students are likely to have read a great deal more advertising copy and journalistic text than they ever will read academic text.

If we look at the visual holophrastic discourse that surrounds our every trip to the supermarket or to a restaurant or, for that matter, decorates our homes and the objects we use from moment to moment to live our lives, we find ourselves somewhat theoretically bankrupt in trying to talk about it. What *do* we do with a form of language that is multimodal, disarticulated from the nation of origin, which appears in made-up orthographies, with language that is both nonsyntactic and non-pragmatic, that is minimally discursive and cohesive, simultaneously multilingual (if I can borrow back that term for a moment), and which is owned by corporate interests who can bring legal action against us for misusing it?

What does it mean to a sociolinguist with an interest in visual holophrastic discourse that much of this discourse consists of owned intellectual properties? Perhaps ultimately for me the most important issue is that the study of this highly significant discursive phenomenon remains an analytical backwater. This is quite simply an outcome of the difficulty of making reference to these properties within our own academic discourses. I have written about visual holophrastic discourse in this paper. In the oral version given at the Georgetown Round Table I somewhat cavalierly used scanned images of pages of a book that on the copyright pages says:

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

I have made printed overhead transparencies from the images residing electronically in my computer. All of this is in violation of the law. The guidelines for submission for publication say that nothing can appear for which permission has not been secured. This means that in the printed version of this paper I had to do one of two things: (1) secure permission to use the images and pay the licensing fees or (2) substitute textual descriptions for the images. From a rhetorical point of view, my argument is most likely substantially limited by the pallid textual descriptions of vivid color images used herein.

The analysis of visual holophrastic discourse requires work with visual images recorded in photographs and in some cases scanned into electronic format. The presentation of this sort of analysis is sapped by the complexity of securing permissions for use, and barred in most cases by the prohibitive cost of licensed

use. Yet once again linguistic and discursive analysis retreats into the alphabetic textual production of alphabetic textual analyses couched in monolingual strings of national languages. My own problem in this text exemplifies the tremendous significance in contemporary of the ownership of the commodity/signs of contemporary discourse.

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