

The Battle Cry of Resistance Against Inequality and Injustice: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Mohammad Ebrahim Mansouri¹
De La Salle University Manila, Philippines

Jose Cristina M. Parina
Southern Cross University Melbourne, Australia

Abstract: This paper used the three-dimensional discursive analysis of Fairclough as a premise on the political and power ideologies involved in the images and the visual grammar of Kress and Leeuwen to unveil the representational, interactive, and compositional choices undertaken to disseminate the notion of resistance against racial inequality and injustice through the interaction of multimodality and resemiotization. It sought to identify the visual meta-functions and sub-meta-functions in the selected images of anti-racist/-injustice rallies and which of these (sub-)meta-functions re-semiotize the anti-racial movement, Black Lives Matter, into its basic elements, namely, Black Men/Women/Futures Matter or other movements. It also attempted to document how social practices are disseminated and redefined using visual grammar features in the selected images. Three out of thirty-seven chosen news images from CNN world news coverage, ordered vertically, were discussed in the paper. Results showed that the images confirm the presence of four processes: action (highest), symbolic, reactionary, and speech (lowest). It also illustrated that the hegemony of political symbolic representations is strengthened or recontextualized through religious, social (gender issues-LGBT), and ethnic (Australian aboriginal groups) orientations. Lastly, the images showed that the socio-anti-racist practice is legitimized through purging the racially discriminative symbolisms (Iconoclasm) of dominant ideology by an eligible participant. The study concluded that although the representational structures (action, reactionary, and symbolic processes), interactive patterns, and compositional systems appeared to be utilized somewhat equally, the micro-meta-function subcategories (contact, vertical/horizontal angles, modality, informational value, and salience) were distinguishing factors in meaning making and resemiotization among the selected news images.

Keywords: CDA, discourse analysis, semiotics, visual grammar.

As the world becomes increasingly multicultural, it is no surprise to witness the increased systematic practice of racial discrimination for the primary reason that “difference and diversity are often seen as obstacles to social cohesion and political stability” (Calma. 2007, p.3). However, what is bothersome for most people is how this practice is witnessed to be mostly perpetrated by law enforcers. Reports of how the lives of African Americans under cover of criminal stereotyping of a particular racial/ethnic group became more commonplace. It is

¹ Corresponding Author: PhD candidate of Applied Linguistics, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines. E-Mail: mohammadebrahim_mansouri@dlsu.edu.ph

slowly turning out to be a normal scenario. This practice has been so recurrent that people seemed to have been surprised when it was recently highlighted in one state in the United States of America (USA), one of the largest immigrant countries to date. On May 25, 2020, a horrific form of discrimination was witnessed when a man of the said descent, George Floyd, fell victim to the institutional racist practice. A video recording shows that police officers approached him due to suspicion of passing a counterfeit 20-dollar bill to the storekeeper in exchange for a pack of cigarettes. The footage shows George Floyd being restrained by exerting knee force at the back of his neck for about eight minutes (Furber et al., 2020). The unfavorable incident occurred when he experienced gasping and begging for his breath by saying several times, “I can’t breathe,” which, in a short matter of time, turned into another unjust death. The viral footage sparked a widespread rally that impacted thousands of people in the USA and worldwide. So, one could notice how real-life footages as a visual mode, whose impact unmasked the emotional escalation among the citizens and netizens of the world, have as much potential as linguistic discursive practices. Thus, how could one not think of designing or manipulating visual resources to mask ideologies or disseminate counter-ideologies in the outgrowing realm of mass media? Therefore, seeing news reports coupling images or videos with texts grow the idea of redirecting attention towards the interest of a group, whether pro or against a specific situation or to hide other issues by using different strategies, e.g., activating/passivizing the social actors (Machin & Mayr, 2013). Hence, understanding such intentional alterations would urge an appropriate direction, such as Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), in revealing the micro and macro structures.

Literature Review

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

What started as a radical deviation from “text-bound linguistic approaches to translation” (Liao, 2023, p. 48) became one of the most accepted modes in the co-construction of meaning. Similarly, living in the multidimensional era calls for the inclusion of various modes of discourses, modes, and communication modalities. Communication does not happen on a mere linguistic level per se but instead occurs as the concurrent negotiation of all the involved modes, such as visuals, sounds, texture, and gustation (Barton, 2018; Mills & Unsworth, 2017). It could also include clothes, building or object designs, a distance of light, etc. (Yang, 2016). All of these led to the role-play of non-linguistic elements in communication urging the emergence of multimodal orientation (Álvarez, 2016) to decode the intended messages, whether denoted or connoted.

Apparently, multimodality strengthens four theoretical assumptions, which could be summarized into this concept: language is just one mode in a communication process that is so vast in participating actors and agents that trying to explain the meaning from the words alone would be a discredit to the target audience. Thus, denotational messages (explicit meaning) in linguistic and non-linguistic vis-à-vis connotational meanings would complement one another or convey unsaid ideological stands. Jewitt (2009) thinks that there are four interconnected theoretical assumptions underpinning multimodality: The first is that language is part of a multimodal ensemble, and representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which have the potential to contribute equally to meaning. A multimodal ensemble is understood as realizing different communicative work. Multimodality assumes that all modes have, like language, been shaped through their cultural, historical, and social uses to realize social functions. The third is that people orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes. The fourth is that meaning of signs fashioned from multimodal semiotic resources are, like speech, social. Such a notion follows Halliday’s (1994) interpretation through which language has been deemed a system attached to re-semiotization

as the social practices unfold from context to context (Iedema, 2003). It is through this process that meaning transfers from one situation to the next as discourse changes with time. Re-semiotization is a social practice used as a strategy (Thabela, 2011) to disseminate ideologies by capitalizing on well-known cultural, political, religious, ethnic, and historical discourses creatively. It literally depends on the social actor's schema that could change discourse in the present from what it was in the past (Scollon, 2005, as cited in Christensson, 2021). So, considering the social nature of communication impels the integration of the multimodality approach with critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CDA, as it was established by Fairclough (as cited by Wang, 2014), has intended to draw on power and ideology in written discursive practices and does not contribute methodologically much to the scrutiny of multimodal modes. To this end, Kress and Leeuwen (2006) have introduced visual grammar (hereafter VG) as a breakthrough in the analysis of modalities' affordances by crafting a toolkit to be used in conjunction with the integration of CDA and multimodality theories through the gluing grounds available at the disposal of social semiotics (Wang, 2014). They have also been deemed to have pioneered the reorganization of how other related theories could improve the analysis of multimodal discourse in regard to the social semiotic approach (Yang, 2016).

Three categories represent the modality in VG, namely, high modality, middle modality, and low modality to distinguish the realness of an image, while "each modality marker is a continuum which includes two extremes: the highest modality and the lowest modality" (Yang, 2016, p. 1599). The remarkable characteristic of VG is its foundation rooted in Halliday's (1994) proposed socially based Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), through which the fundamental principle, Meta-functions, namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual processes, are incorporated with a slight change of terminologies embodying finely grained subcategories, which are concerned about the choices made by producers to achieve legitimation and purposes. SFL also adheres to the belief that modality resources underpin all expressions. In social semiotics, this might take on a different matter, as truthfulness can never be analyzed apart from modality. Moreover, MCDA would advance our understanding of how visuals and other modes in relation to texts or as stand-alone entities deliver messages under the influence of ideology and power reflected through social issues, for instance, racial inequality and injustice.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, the researchers have opted to take on Social Semiotics Theory as it bellies the notion of resources rather than the key term *codes* used by Paris school structuralist semiotics, whose foundation is on conforming to a prescribed set of rules leaving almost no rooms for creativity and context-based interpretations to deliver manifold of intentions (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004). Thus, as mentioned earlier, the Multimodal Theory and CDA, the three-dimensional discursive analysis of Fairclough that is premised on political ideologies, the approach could be brought together into a supple body of approach called MCDA to probe all the resources, be it verbal or visual, contingent on their affordances across discourses (Machin, 2013). The following diagram is an illustration of the interplay of visual grammar (an approach to decomposing the visual resources at play) and CDA:

The multi-layered discursive analysis of Fairclough originally focused on the text, which later included images in a semiotic communicative mode. Fairclough's three-dimensional approach to CDA (Fairclough, 1995), which was inspired by and premised on the SFL model of Halliday has meant to investigate the text, discourse practice, and the relationships of the two social practices as language and society constitute each other simultaneously and dialectically. However, the current model of Fairclough might not be any close to its applicability without an adapted and adopted micro-analysis of images on a visual-

analysis level. Therefore, VG’s trigonal classifications, namely, representational structures, interactive meanings, and compositional systems, demystify the process of visual analysis by disassembling the visual features (resources such as viewpoint-high/low angles) and their interrelation in composing a discourse to make a specific social effect or disseminate ideological views in conjunction with the iterative mechanism of Fairclough’s model. The diagram below depicts the conceptualized model of Wang (2014).

Figure 1

Foundational Theory: Social Semiotics

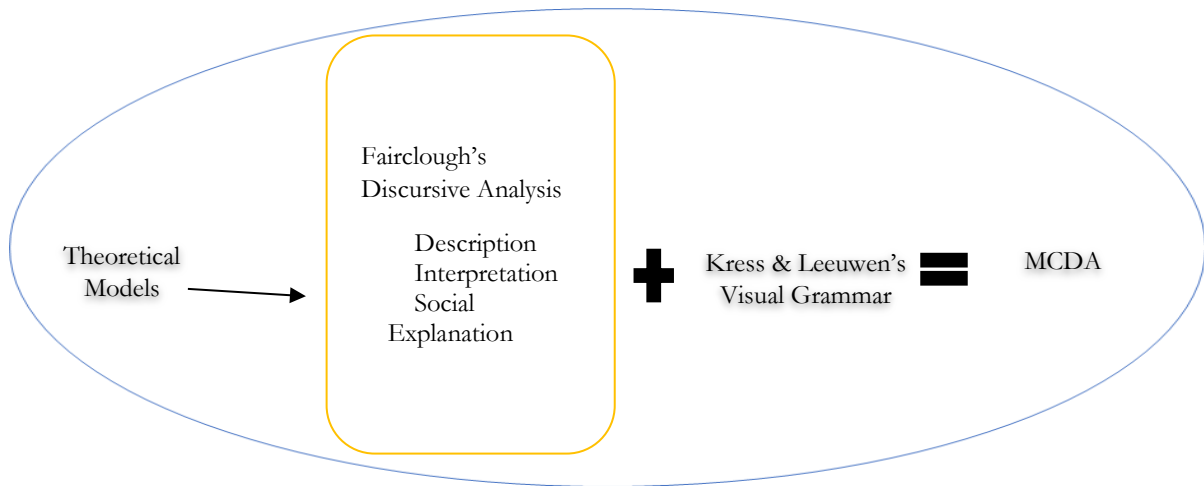
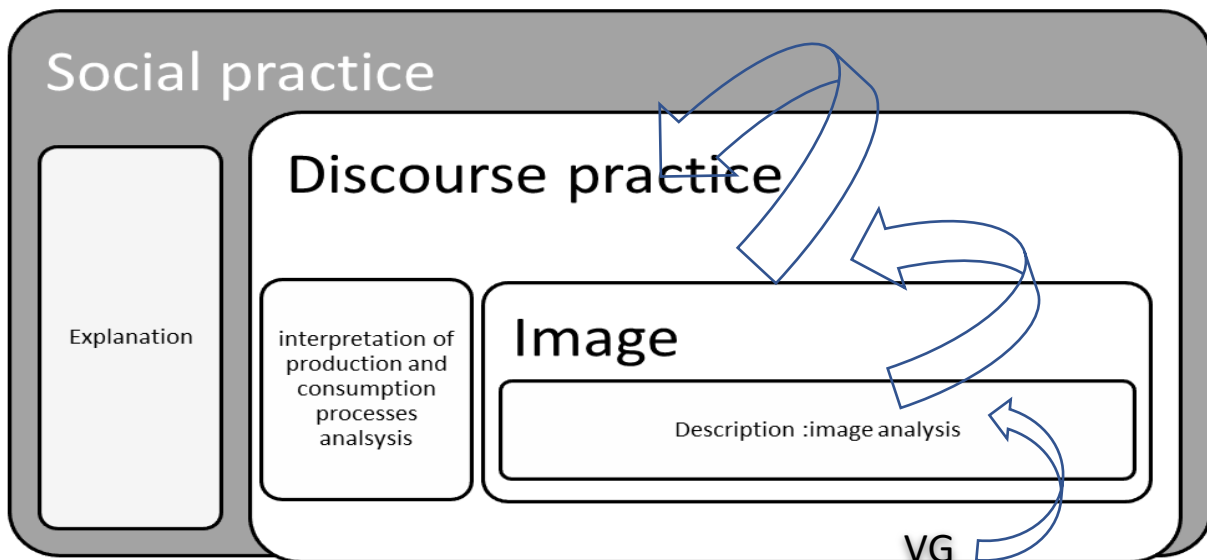


Figure 2

A Transparent Model of Visual Analysis Under MCDA



Note. Adapted from “Criticising images: Critical discourse analysis of visual semiosis in picture news,” by J. Wang, 2014, *Critical Arts*, 28(2), p. 269 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2014.906344>)

The diagram above depicts the processes that are to be fluid in the analysis of the visuals and news images. First, VG is used to deconstruct and describe the resources presented in the images in detail. Second, the order of such processes is investigated to interpret how the

elements are consolidated with one another for the production, distribution, and consumption of ideological views; and last, macro-analysis is done to explain the way the first two stages reveal the purpose of such social practices.

This study aimed to unveil the representational, interactive, and compositional choices undertaken to disseminate the notion of resistance against racial inequality and injustice triggered after the death of an African American citizen, George Floyd. Following this mishap, Black Lives Matter (BLM), a movement to eradicate the supremacy of whites over black communities, gained the power to go beyond the borders to be recontextualized across the globe (Maqbool, 2020). The anti-racist rally could be emitted through online compositional ecologies, which are easy to access (Morris, 2021). Therefore, probing how objections to racism are realized in an international context with its premises on social justice and equal rights for all races through the signification of multimodal resources would lend weight to the formation of new identities for marginalized groups (Lang, 2020). This is deemed possible through emotional manipulation in the light of ideological power, pursuing equality, which may redirect the attention and focus of BLM (resemiotization) to other groups, indigenous people, Latinos, and Asians (Kathy & Unsworth, 2018). Ergo, perceiving images based on their semiotic resources, not only on account of denotation and connotation, overshadowed by the affordances of modes leads to unraveling the reflected or hidden intentions to influence the receivers. The study thus aimed to answer the following:

Research Questions

1. Which visual macro-meta-functions and sub-meta-functions are incorporated in the selected images of anti-racist/-injustice rallies?
2. Which (sub-)meta-functions re-semiotize the anti-racial movement?
3. How are social practices disseminated using compositional features in the selected images?

Methodology

Given the multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), an extension of CDA - a qualitative approach (Mullet, 2018), is meant to critically describe, construe, and interpret the ways different modes interact to realize discourses that are called by Iedema (2003, as cited in Machin, 2013) re-semiotization, the study takes on a qualitative analytical approach.

Data Gathering

The qualitative nature of MCDA compelled the researchers to thoroughly analyze three news images that appeared on CNN world news coverage, which were ordered vertically, one after another, with a one-/two-liner description for each under the title “Protests across the globe after George Floyd’s death” which was aligned with the purpose of this study to explore re-semiotization. Three images were discussed in depth. Purposive selection of the news images was made through Google, using significant keywords such as George Floyd, Riots after the death of George Floyd, and George Floyd Riots in the USA. Upon coming across New York Times images and other sources, CNN featured the most numbers of images, which could provide more compositional elements for analysis to see more patterns and select the most relevant samples for final interpretation. Hence, the inclusion and selection of the images are decided based on the following criteria:

1. Images must appear on a local American news medium website (Catalano & Gatti, 2017). CNN coverage during the specified time was deemed as a suitable choice for this study due to bearing images around the world having potential clues for re-semiotization of the BLM movement.
2. Images should be episodically and/or thematically framed (Feezel et al., 2019). Studies have defined both kinds of framing in a general sense of attributing responsibility to an individual (episodic framing) or to a society/ government (thematic framing) (Feezel et al., 2019). And news coverages capitalize on the two to tell the story differently. According to Gross (2008, as cited in Feezel et al., 2019), episodic framing engages the audience emotionally; however, the level of emotional engagement and the direction of responsibility attribution shifts based on the angles that determine the level of contact (in-group identity, social interaction, or out-group identity). On the other hand, thematic images attributing responsibility to government/ society are decoded through the high-angle shots representing power relations, for instance, high-angle shots of protesters represent their vulnerability. Also, the depiction of vulnerability through the high-angle thematic close shot might drive the audience to empathize with the crowd. Hence, the combination of episodically and thematically sequenced pictures facilitates the description and interpretation of media coverage of a mishap and its aftermath by breaking each into its compositional parts.
3. Images must be sourced from diverse digital image providers/secondary image sources such as Getty AFP images and Associated Press Photos which have a pool of photographers around the world feeding them up-to-date images, from which news media source their images for news coverage coming from different geographical origins (Wang, 2014). Also, this criterion is to bring into the picture how an initial movement (BLM) might be re-semiotized in other parts of the world during the same time frame.
4. Images must resemble the anti-racist and/or pro-justice Rallies.
5. Images must have been dated between May 26 and June 31, 2020.

The sample data of this study are not intended to generalize but, rather, to probe the visual characteristics represented in the news images sourced from diverse resources to disseminate a specific event and communicate unsaid intentions or ideologies, e.g., socio-political, and economic matters.

Data Analysis

The raw data underwent three stages: identification, categorization, and analysis. The first two stages were covered through the visual grammar toolkit proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) to decompose the elements of the news images, which could fall into the well-established visual macro-meta-function categories such as Representational, interactive, and compositional (Wang, 2014). Thus, the identification and categorization took on a bottom-up approach using micro-meta-function categories (e.g., gaze, high/low angle, etc.) with their relevant interpretations (i.e., what high angle represents - powerful viewer) to classify them under sub-categories (e.g., Action process, contact, information value...etc.) and at large under the macro-meta-function categories. Each of the stated categories entails the following meticulously defined subcategories:

To initiate the analytical stage, Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional approach to CDA, renowned as discursive analysis, was used to maximize and exploit its ingrained theoretical yet critical notion of finding the interrelations between the micro-level analysis of images' elements and macro-socio-political structures. Considering such a mechanism in the analysis, the decomposed characteristics of images in the first phase, VG analysis, were used

to describe the elements on the micro-level. Next, the interpretational analysis took place to manifest how different elements were composed to produce news images, distribute ideologies through visuals, and show how the viewer consumes encoded ideologies in production and distribution. Therefore, the tripartite processes in visual discourse facilitate the understanding of sociopolitical practices (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), particularly in the case of the targeted social and institutional-related mishap and its aftermath (the death of a black citizen called George Floyd and the rampant dispersion of justice-seeking ideology across countries). The stepwise representation of the procedure in the analysis of the data was meant to ease the understanding of analytical processes. However, the sub-stages under CDA analytical phase occur simultaneously as it is an iterative-like process of perceiving the visual discursive practices in news images.

Table 1

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Metafunctional Framework

Representational Structure	Interactive Meanings	Compositional System
a) Action Process	a) Contact	a) Informational value:
b) Reactional Process	b) Distance	Top (ideal)
c) Speech Process	c) Attitude: Horizontal	Bottom (real)
d) Symbolic Process	angle and Vertical	Left (given)
	angle	Right (new)
	d) Modality	b) Salience

Results and Discussion

The CNN world news coverage of George Floyd's after-death protest across the globe consists of different images from major image providers or other international multimedia news providers, namely, Getty (image bank), Associated Press, Reuters, and Pacific Press (in concert with their picture alliances) cover the anti-racist and pro-justice rallies across more than 20 countries. Although pictures are merely sourced from the four mentioned non-American and American resources, these news images have been ordered vertically in sequence to set a viewpoint and context conceived by an American news medium like CNN, as words, grammar, and sentences are common in a language, so are the images; however, the way images are ordered, combined, and selected are to connote distinct interpretations and intentions. Therefore, the images taken on the official website of CNN are framed thematically and episodically (reflecting social and political issues in a larger context by not holding any individual responsible for the cause but rather the government and its beneficiaries, e.g., police officers, evident in Appendix A and D). The façade of images and their descriptive subtitles were used to become familiar with the initial theme and be a ground for further analyses guided by visual grammar and Fairclough's three-dimensional approach to CDA (mingling of the two paradigms in the light of social semiotics). Therefore, the data's VG-guided analysis is presented in the following section to describe the visual resources exploited in the selected spatial-based images.

News Image Analysis: Description

This section first provides a preliminary description of the VG terminologies to orient the readers prior to the visual description, interpretations, and social explanations of a few prominent images. The analysis of all the chosen news images takes place in two phases: (1) General pattern: manifesting characteristics exhibited by specific process(es) and (2)

interpretation and social explanation of visual resources. The reason behind such motive is the complexity of compositional analysis of visual resources due to multifariously interjected terminologies that call on iterative processing of details in conjunction with the familiarization process with cultural and social aspects incorporated (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004).

VG, as a descriptive framework proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), is meant to give an insight into what patterns surface from elements and the mechanism through which visual resources are used to foreground and background participants (things, people, events) involved in the frame. To do so, a systematic framework aided the researchers in decomposing different elements of the images in detail and categorizing them into subcategories of the three meta-functions (representational structures, interactive meanings, and compositional systems) derived from the well-known meta-functions introduced by Halliday (1994) with slight terminological changes. Hence, representational structures emerge in two ways: conceptual and narrative patterns. While narrative patterns represent participants (usually animated beings in actor and goal relationships) in relation to doing or acting upon something, the occurrence of a particular event, or the alteration of a process, the conceptual pattern is concerned with the unbounded-time state of the participants (e.g., symbolic processes). Also, the former pattern depicts the reactional process in the form of gazing towards a phenomenon and the speech process as an act of speaking or thinking clouds (e.g., comic books). Therefore, to realize the prominence of the actor in an image, a meticulous examination of the participant's relative size, color contrast, foreground and background bokeh, and emotional state is required.

In the case of the reactional process, the vector (or line direction) drawn from a participant's gaze to another participant decides, alongside with viewpoint under interactive meanings, the degree of engagement or detachment. Thus, Interactive meanings deal with the relationships of the (interactive vs. represented) participants considering factors such as Frame size, viewpoint, contact, and modality. So far, the patterns were premised on presenting and establishing relations. However, a third meta-function is the foundation of describing salience through prescribed quadrant positionings and a central focus (mediator of the four positions) to proffer informational value and turn the first two meta-functions into a whole genre of visual mode, anti-racism/- injustice rally news coverage in this case.

Visual Analysis

The initial analysis of processes across all the images showed the presence of four processes, namely, actional, symbolic, reactional, and speech; however, their distribution in the production process was found to be unequal (action process as the highest incorporated element and speech processes as the lowest) which might be due to the diversity of resources of News images. Action processes in a narrative pattern under representational structures have been represented transactionally and non-transactionally. Such representation comes into a meaningful state by factoring in the positioning of participants, angle of viewing, and frame size, which was discussed later in this section. Aside from the action processes, symbolic processes have shown orientations to politics (emblem of BLM), religion (cross), and ethnicity (aboriginal group's custom). Instances of each are represented in Figure 4 accordingly. The hegemony of political symbolic representations is strengthened or recontextualized (indicating parallel struggle of non-racially marginalized groups) through religious, social (gender issues-LGBT), and ethnic (Australian aboriginal groups) orientations by incorporating spirituality or notion of unjust marginalization in delivering the unspoken intentions visually.

The level of engagement for interpersonal relationships established between the viewer and the participant is determined through the horizontal angle, which might be strengthened by vertical angle and contact (vector from participant to the viewer). Thus, frontal angles in Figure 4, for example, engage the viewer to emotionally and mentally instantiate involvement that could be reinforced further by eye-level angle (positioning interactive and represented

participants in equal positions) to urge an action of raising against racism and injustice. On the other hand, the oblique/profile view signals the detachment of viewers as participants are objectified to be presented for the sake of reporting the situation (offering information) (all the images except frontals). As mentioned earlier, point of view triggers and, to some extent, manipulates the emotions of viewers to call for alignment. In this sense, high angles position the participants in a vulnerable stance to seek sympathy and alignment or to scale the crowd as part of narrating the event to show the great worldwide dissemination of resistance through rallying. According to Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2004), saying the opposite of what is intended would still be perfectly understood. Therefore, interpreting high angles as an inferiority stance on the end of participants would not be deemed reasonable unless the intention or ideology is factored in. In these examples, high angles scaled the crowd to showcase the power of protesters rather than their inferiority or vulnerability.

Moreover, the interplay of the processes, interactive meanings, and compositional arrangements illustrate how a particular participant is foregrounded/backgrounded, highly weighted or deemed heavier, well-color contrasted and framed (to construct contact and assume responsibility) to bring salience into attention. Thus, a close reading of images seems to be an arduous task, particularly in the case of dealing with compositionally diverse images. Therefore, for the purpose of illustrating the close ties between Fairclough's approach (1995) and Kress and Van Leeuwen's VG (2006), a few standing-out images have undergone a close reading. However, these examples are not isolated pictures, and the rest of the images could be analyzed using the same mechanics and critical approaches. The following section, under result and discussion, is intended to magnify the underlying processes encoding the ideological/intentional purposes in images.

Sample Analyses of News Images

Figure 3

Protesters Disposing of a Slave Trader Statue in Bristol Harbor



Note. From *Image of the demolished statue of Edward Colston, a slave trader of the 17th century, in Bristol Harbor on June 7* [Photograph] by B. Birchall, 2020. CNN World (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>).

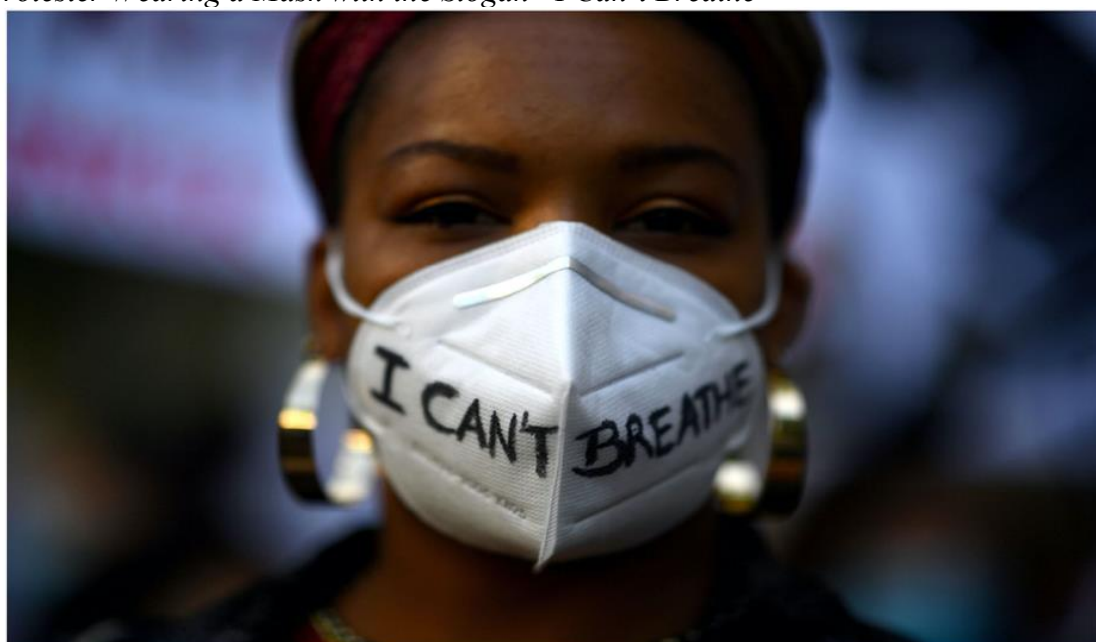
Looking closely at the image, the centralized overturned statue (salient symbol) grabs the attention of the viewer, which is meant to be commemorated by most of the society as the statue is carved for the appraisal of a public figure. However, the detached and down-positioned object harbinger the change of values. This could be suggested in the reactional process by the line direction of the black and protester's disdain gaze towards the statue and the rest of the participants' converged gazes toward this centralized object. Therefore, it is worth noting that transactional action and reactional processes engage the viewers as both are directed towards the same goal/phenomenon. Also, the unbalanced weight in the image seems to be due to the scaled crowd on the left to indicate such kind of action is legitimized by the participation of whites in concert with the main actor (black protester) in throwing the racist-symbol statue of the slave trader, Colston, in response to the emotional strike after the death of Afro-American citizen George Floyd. To this end, the socio-anti-racist practice is legitimized by purging the racially discriminative symbolisms (i.e., Iconoclasm) of the dominant ideology by an eligible participant (the oppressed). So, such unconformity to social practice has been deemed an act of resistance and protest. According to Biagetti (2022), in 2003, after an Iraqi struck the statue of Saddam Hussein with a hammer, an American marine twisted a chain around the neck of Saddam's statue and attached the other end to a tank to set the first widely broadcast iconoclasm across the United States and Britain with interjected footages of Iraqis cheering to legitimize iconoclasm as a form of liberation. He further explained that such images of vandalism turned into an iconic movement against oppression among iconoclast millennials. In line with this, the transactional action (black protestors throwing the statue - actors and Colston's statue - goal), reactional (reactor - white protestors looking at and filming the action of the black protestors and the downfall of the statue into the river - Phenomenon), and symbolic attribute (The detached Colston's statue denoting anti-racial opposition) set the stage for the acceptability of iconoclastic activity. Although the attitude pattern, in particular, the horizontal angle determined to be oblique denoting detachment on the face value, the observation of space limitation for the photographer to shoot from a frontal angle could justify the identification and categorization of the image as frontal with potential involvement of the viewer. The vertical low-angle position represented participants (protestors) in power to present the determination of the youth to rise against injustice iconically (considering iconoclasm as an iconic liberation movement). Therefore, the confluence of the action and reactional processes of the two racially distinct protestors in conjunction with symbolic attributes and other patterns resemiotizes the initial American iconoclasm movement (i.e., the democratization of a dictatorship country, namely, Iraq) into an injustice and anti-racial iconic activity accepted within the borders of chaotic-free first world countries like England.

The line direction of the mask foregrounds the slogan "I Can't Breathe" as the eye-catching yet central element, which suggests the symbolic inflictive suffocation by other means, of course, other than any sickness caused. The nucleic information in the image is the central white mask that is creatively embellished with the foregrounded slogan, written in black (color contrast - salience), coupled with a black woman to remind of a smother-like feeling to provoke the viewers. The vertical eye-level angle and the frontal position illustrate maximum engagement with the viewer to instantiate friendly/close relationships to demand actions from the viewers, as supported by Yao and Zhuo (2018), who claimed that a vertical angle demonstrates equality. Although the image is decontextualized in terms of setting/ location, the emblematic slogan, jointly with the worried-eye expression, reinforces the psychological effect for the viewer to relate and get involved. This is to say that the participant in the image at eye level humbly requests equality (Ly & Jung, 2015) and justice. Thus, such symbolic processes together with her complexion, denote the suffering from racial discrimination. Such emotional effect is incorporated in this image by episodic framing attributing responsibility to the individual with a load of emotional engagement. In addition, Figure 4 showed the presence of non-transactional action and reactional processes. When the goal (represented participant -

black woman) is presented but the actor (racial discriminators) is deleted, the lone representation is called the event. On the other hand, the vector formed by the eye-line of the represented participant (reactor) drove the viewer to a strong sense of empathy and identification (Kress & Theo Van Leeuwen, 2006). Hence, (micro-)meta-function categories of this image, such as symbolic, and non-transactional action and reactional processes - representational structures, contact (gaze - demand → asking), social distance (close shot - intimate), attitude (horizontal angle - frontal → involvement/engagement and vertical angle - eye level → equality), composition (informational value - center → nucleus and salience - foregrounded mask, with color contrast) and person communicated the analysis above to resemiotize the social practice of conformity with health protocols using mask amidst COVID-19 into an anti-racial practice disseminated by the media.

Figure 4

A Protester Wearing a Mask with the Slogan "I Can't Breathe"



Note. From *A woman wearing "I can't breathe" mask in Madrid on June 7* [Photograph] by G. Bouys, 2020. CNN World (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>).

The top-ideal position of the two signs in the image and their juxtaposition is considered to be salient in that both appeared heavier in the composition. The top-left (ideal-given) slanted sign bears the message "WE DEMAND CHANGE" with two encircled BLM emblems, one modified with an LGBT rainbow flag and the other embellished with a yellow circle in the middle of the clenched fist with a black and red background (i.e., representing Australian aboriginal flag). Looking at these symbolic signs prompts the viewer to recall social issues such as gender, racial and ethnic discrimination of groups within and without. Given that the right-leaning posture of the sign towards (a vector to ...) the top-right (ideal-new) sign bearing the message "WHERE'S THE JUSTICE 4 (for) the 432 MURDERED INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS" proffers the viewer with new information on a situation which led to the recontextualization of BLM resistance movement by using the lexical elements like "Indigenous Australians." Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2006) stated that contemporary newspapers and magazines are polarized by left-given and right-new. But the two poles are bridged by the center. In this image, an oblique angle (side angle) denotes the detachment of the viewer from the responsibility (attributed to the government/society) assumed through the


thematic framing of the crowd and bridges the two signs. The two nucleic placards are further defined by the two leftmost marginal placards bearing the slogans “NO JUSTICE  NO PEACE” and “BLACK LIVES MATTER” (words are arranged horizontally representing the colors and shape of the Australian Aboriginal flag), respectively. Karntawarra (2010) stated that the three colors of the flag, namely, black, yellow, and light red represent Australian Aboriginal people, the sun (symbol of life), and the Earth color - meaning healing and unity, respectively. The creative design in the first placard capitalized on the horizontal figure of the flag (i.e., echoing the equal sign =) to put it at par with the neglected equality for the Aboriginals. Such reading could be backed by the writing on the white placard at rightmost, “WHERE’S THE JUSTICE 4 (for)..... INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS” which reads the message on the leftmost placard, “NO JUSTICE for Aboriginal Australians is equal to NO PEACE.” Therefore, the informational value of the margins was not literally marginal as its presentation was constituted by nucleic placards and constituted the resemiotization purposes of giving new information on the rightmost face value.

Figure 5

People Participating in a March to Support BLM



Note. From Marchers at a Black Lives Matter protest in Melbourne, Australia, on June 6 [Photograph] by W. West, 2020. CNN World (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>).

Besides, the interactive relation between the viewer and the represented participants is deemed close and friendly to indirectly engage them in seeking justice for the marginalized as one, themselves, might be part of the given marginalized groups. The inclusive pronoun WE corroborates such interpretation as it elicits the spirit of unity and rapport. Along with this, the enumerated number of murdered indigenous Australians legitimizes the representation of the signs and the rally. Also, the signs' capitalized printed letters of the verbalized demands (symbolizing the expressive cry in the rally) could be backed by the high angle, which scaled the crowd to position the viewer in power (Ly & Jung, 2015) to seek change for the neglected and assumed groups with a marginalized identity, ethnicity, religion, and race. Zooming in on the image in the close-to-center placard aided the researchers in observing that the Black Lives Matter slogan has been reduced to separate slogans such as “Black Men Matter,” “Black Women Matter,” and “Black Futures Matter.” The transformation of a more collective slogan into its elements harbingers the progress of the movement to defy the social, political, sexual,

and racial struggles of each group according to the scope of struggle contingent on the time frame, i.e., a protest to demand the equal right of living moves gradually to a demand for equal rights for black men's job opportunity compared to other racial and ethnic groups and less sexual harassment for black women. The transformed BLM emblem into an LGBT symbol whose joint representation with other discursive and portraits reflect a demand for blacks' freedom of gender identification. According to Siegler (2020, as cited in Lynn, 2020), emblems and slogans aid a movement to shrink into its basic elements. In addition to those mentioned by Siegler, faceless portraits let viewers contemplate how to decode messages incorporated and connect to the marginalized. Moreover, leaving the most decisive facial features such as nose, eyes, mouth, and brows (Brown & Perrett, 1993), through which gender, age, and ethnicity are identified, prevents exclusion of any demographic group. Hence, it strengthens inclusivity and viewers' contact with the represented participants. It is worth noting that plural Futures in the BLM extended slogans could be construed as diversified experiences of the black (Look Forward to and with Black Futures Month, 2022), one of which would be gender neutrality. The analysis given is based on the image's micro-/ macro-meta-function categories.

The thematic framing of the crowd rallying as actors of a non-transactional process (by deleting the goal - government/ police/ society) under the representational structure in conjunction with the interaction patterns (contact, distance attitude, and modality) building the relationship of the viewer with the represented participants (people or things) unraveled the compositional system culminating in a whole meaning-making. The polarized image with the left-given and right-new in concert with the margins on the leftmost communicated for provided information, right-new (contact - offering information) and demanding action, left-given, (contact - demand). The contribution of the Attitude sub-categories - oblique horizontal angle (Attitude - detachment) was to detach the viewer from the responsibility attributed to the parties (government/ police) involved. Along with this, a high vertical angle conferred power to the viewer to seek change. Such power is actualized through the close shot to evoke intimate social distance between the viewer and the represented participants. Although the position of the two signs is considered polarized (information value), the zooming technique and oblique horizontal shot made them nucleic objects in the image with the aid of the two leftmost signs. So, the interconnectivity of the micro-/macro-meta-function categories (color contrast, relative size, angle, and position) created salience attracting the viewer (Kress & Theo Van Leeuwen, 2006) using multimodal features and resemiotization (creative use of a spectrum of discourses).

Conclusion

This study intended to probe the news images in a bottom-up approach considering a micro-analysis (decomposition of visual resources - through visual grammar toolkits) in close relation to macro-analysis (Iterative processing of images- through discursive analysis model of Fairclough) to find out which processes are incorporated in constructing images for a specific discourse like world coverage of George Floyd's death aftermath and its resemiotization. As part of the goal of this study, the images were selected based on their geographical and resource diversity to understand how contextualized and decontextualized images may deliver messages through their semiotic visual resources, even if they are detached in terms of time and location. Thus, this could only be done by delving into the visual patterns of the images, whose source was the Getty image bank, which proffers inexpensive images to corporations.

The findings of the study show the presence of representational structure (action, reactional, symbolic processes), interactive patterns (contact, attitude, social distance, and modality), and compositional system (information value and salience) across the selected images. Although the (macro-) meta-function categories seem to be utilized in the images somewhat equally on the surface, the images show diversity in terms of the utilization of micro-

meta-function categories (transactional vs. non-transactional action/ reactionary processes, contact, vertical/horizontal angles, informational value, and salience). Hence, resemiotization in concert with multimodality is realized distinctively at the grassroots considering the VG toolkits. In transactional actions, one could spot the activation of the actors through the visual resources that were used to bring salience or to show interconnection by drawing (a) vector(s) among participants. Such activation would result from foregrounding a participant through close-shots, color contrasts, perspective, and compositional structures or by backgrounding some details through the same strategies, which all might contribute to the construction of meaning and delivery of unsaid messages. Thus, the eligibility of the actor in doing an action upon a goal adds abstraction to the equation of decoding the ideology. In line with this, the reactional process (e.g., staring, looking) aids the perception of the viewers to be attached cognitively so as to read between the lines and presume emotional engagement (e.g., disdain gaze of the black participant towards the slave trader statue). However, one should not disregard symbolic processes through which meaning reinforcement takes place to exhibit values and background knowledge for the interactive participants. The result of this study could be used to raise media literacy awareness in educational systems, as it is evident in Figure 3 that digitization is occurring not only on the individual level but also publicly. In this regard, the up-to-the-minute spread of images across borders, with or without manipulation, call on media literacy to scrutinize images meticulously as the consumer of media productions in the 21st century.

Funding Details

There are no funding and grant-awarding bodies for this research.

Disclosure Statement

This research has not received any financial interest or benefit.

References

- Álvarez, J. (2016). Meaning making and communication in the multimodal age: Ideas for language teachers. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 18(1), 98–115. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14483/calj.v18n1.8403>
- Barton, G. (2018, December 17). Multimodal texts surround us. What are they? How can we use them in our teaching? *Australia Association for Research in Education*. <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?tag=multimodality>
- Biagetti, S. (2022, May 20). Iconoclasm of the vanities: Why we are destroying statues. *American Affairs Journal*. <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2022/05/iconoclasm-of-the-vanities-why-we-are-destroying-statues/>
- Birchall, B. (2020). Image of the demolished statue of Edward Colston, a slave trader of the 17th century, in Bristol Harbor on June 7 [Photograph]. *CNN World* <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>
- Bouys, G. (2020). A woman wearing “I can’t breathe” mask in Madrid on June 7 [Photograph]. *CNN World*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>
- Brown, E., & Perrett, D. I. (1993). What gives a face its gender? *Perception*, 22(7), 829–840. <https://doi.org/10.1068/p220829>

- Calma, T. (2007). Multiculturalism: A position paper by the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner. *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/racial_discrimination/multiculturalism/multiculturalism2007.pdf
- Catalano, T., & Gatti, L. (2017). Representing teachers as criminals in the news: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of the Atlanta schools' "Cheating Scandal." *Social Semiotics*, 27(1), 59–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2016.1145386>
- Christensson, J. (2021). Resemiotized experience in classroom interaction: A student teacher's interactional use of personal stories during teaching placement. *Multimodality & Society*, 1(4), 497–516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26349795211059095>
- Dictionary.com. (2022, February 23). *Black Futures Month*. Dictionary.com. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/historical-current-events/black-futures-month/>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Feezell, J. T., Glazier, R. A., & Boydston, A. E. (2019). Framing, identity, and responsibility: do episodic vs. thematic framing effects vary by target population? *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2019.1584751>
- Furber, M., Burch, A.D.S., & Robles, F. (2020, May 29). What happened in the chaotic moments before George Floyd died. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/us/derek-chauvin-george-floyd-worked-together.html>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed). Edward Arnold.
- Harrison, C. (2003). Visual social semiotics: Understanding how still images make meaning. *Technical Communication*, 50(1), 46–60. https://stc.uws.edu.au/popcomm/assets/week12_harrison.pdf
- Iedema, R. (2003). Multimodality, resemiotization: Extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice. *Visual Communication*, 2(1), 29–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357203002001751>
- Jewitt, C. (Ed.) (2009). *Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Karntawarra, W. (2010). Colours of Aboriginal Australia: Winparrku (My Sacred Mountain). *Colour: Design & Creativity*, 5, 1–6. https://aic-color.org/resources/Documents/jaic_v5_gallnar.pdf
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge.
- Lang, C. (2020, June 26). The Asian American response to Black Lives Matter is part of a long, complicated history. *Time*. <https://time.com/5851792/asian-americans-black-solidarity-history/>
- Liao, M. (2023) Translation as a practice of resemiotization: A case study of the Opium War Museum. *Translation Studies*, 16(1), 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2022.2103024>
- Ly, T. H., & Jung, C. K. (2015). Multimodal discourse: A visual design analysis of two advertising images. *International Journal of Contents*, 11(2). 50–56. <https://doi.org/10.5392/IJoC.2015.11.2.050>
- Lynn, S. (2020, July 21). Before Black Lives Matter: Black justice slogans, symbols dating back to the 1700s. *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/black-lives-matter-black-justice-slogans-symbols-dating/story?id=71672825>
- Machin, D. (2004). Building the world's visual language: The increasing global importance of image banks in corporate media. *Visual Communication*, 3(3), 316–336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357204045785>
- Machin, D. (2013). What is multimodal critical discourse studies? *Critical Discourse Studies*, 10(4), 347–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.813770>

- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2013). Personalising crime and crime-fighting in factual television: An analysis of social actors and transitivity in language and images. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 10(4), 356–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.813771>
- Maqbool, A. (2020, July 10). Black Lives Matter: From social media post to global movement. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53273381>
- Mills, K.A., & Unsworth, L. (2018). The multimodal construction of race: A review of critical race theory research. *Language and Education*, 32(4), 313–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2018.1434787>
- Morris, A. (2021, February 3). From civil rights to Black Lives Matter. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/from-civil-rights-to-black-lives-matter1/>
- Mullet, D. R. (2018). A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 29(2), 116–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X18758260>
- Thabela, T. (2011). *Resemiotization and discourse practices in selected television advertisements in South Africa*. [Master thesis, University of the Western Cape]. <https://core.ac.uk/reader/80556910>
- van Leeuwen, T. & Jewitt, C. (2004). Introduction. In T. Van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *The handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 1–9). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020062>
- Wang, J. (2014). Criticising images: Critical discourse analysis of visual semiosis in picture News. *Critical Arts*, 28(2), 264–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2014.906344>
- West, W. (2020). *Marchers at a Black Lives Matter protest in Melbourne, Australia, on June 6* [Photograph]. *CNN World*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>
- Yang, Y. (2016). A social semiotic approach to multimodal discourse of the badge of Xi'an Jiaotong University. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(8), 1596–1601. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0608.11>
- Yao, Y., & Zhuo, Y. (2018). A multimodal discourse analysis of the promotional video of Hangzhou. *English Language Teaching*, 11(10), 121–131. <http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n10p121>

Notes on Contributors

Mohammad Ebrahim Mansouri is a PhD candidate under the straight PhD program in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English and Applied Linguistics at De La Salle University Manila Philippines. His research interests are Cognitive Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Computational Linguistics, and Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Jose Cristina M. Parina was an Associate Professor at De La Salle University, Manila Philippines in the Department of English and Applied Linguistics. She finished her PhD in Applied Linguistics and has published scholarly works in the field of World Englishes, Sociolinguistics, Second Language Acquisition, and Stylistics.

ORCID

Mohammad Ebrahim Mansouri, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9821-6904>

Jose Cristina M. Parina, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3211-4638>