EDUCATION THROUGH ADVERTISING'S METAPHORS

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Abstract

The study of brand choices based on our metaphorical interpretations can lead us to consider, in a more realistic way, the construction of individuals and today's world, as well as trades and relations that undertake a range of interconnected social processes. Eventually, the extensive process of media consumption - choosing, buying, and using - of goods, could provide us with answers to important questions, like "who are the social actors?", "what kind of rules do they follow?", or "what are their values?".

In this sense, this paper will try to discuss the important educational role of the advertising discourse. By promoting a vision of reality, advertising assumes a social responsibility also. In a way, an advertisement educates people about the product or service being advertised, but also about the values communicated through a proposed brand identity. We will focus on the metaphorical constructions that are involved in advertising communication, the social and ideological campaigns, as well as the role of the new media tools in targeting the emotional potential of the target audience.

Fallowing I. Richards's and G. Lakoff's theory that people frequently use metaphors in their daily conversations, we advances the conclusion that metaphor is an omnipresent principle in language through which advertising is connected to us. We therefore believe that the recurrent use of metaphor in advertising communication doesn't serve the purpose of generating the surprise of the consumer public anymore, but responds to an existential need for understanding reality. Furthermore, as we will try to argue, it is mainly due to this double metaphorization of the advertising discourse that it can be understood by such diverse masses, managing to bridge sociocultural gaps.

Furthermore, we will try to encourage a reconsideration of educational methods proposing the new applications of advertising's discourse as possible ways for better understanding of nowadays values and identities.

Key words: education, metaphor, advertising, culture, identity

Introduction

Did you ever wonder why children emphasis so quickly with the advertising or commercial discourse? How it is that an idea communicated through an ad is so easily accepted by an entire community? Professor Jef Richards, former chair of the Department of Advertising at the University of Texas-Austin, weighed in on advertising in these terms: "Advertising is the art and sole of capitalism. It captures a

moment of time through the lens of commerce; reflecting and affecting our lives, making us laugh and cry, while simultaneously giving traction to the engine that propels this free market economy forward into the future." Taking onto account the negative image surrounding the advertising field, we still have to see it as a real achievement of our society in terms of discourse and rhetoric. We often forget the positive role advertising has had on everyday life even if it is more than obvious how advertising and communications impacted human behaviour, through education of new ideas and new ways of perceiving reality.

Advertising communication operates by exploiting our symbolic arsenals and their metamorphosis into products, relating with the audience through a simple dual discourse. On one hand we have the economic size of the advertising message as well as its congruence with the persuasiveness for sale, and on the other hand we have the social and educational dimension of the advertising discourse that proposes lifestyles and behavioral patterns to the contemporary public (Social campaigns, value based brand identities, slogans, etc.). Lately, more and more campaigns are interested in and try to draw attention on the problems faced by individuals at different stages of their existence, attempting to provide a personalized response to question of "how to run my life"? Whether we are talking about our social issues (and this includes both socio-professional issues as well as those of gender or religion), or our personal affairs (family problems, moral or social networking profile, etc.) advertising has a pedagogical function in its discourse, suggesting socio-cultural and moral models representative for this century.

Educating through metaphors

One of the most frequently encountered topics within the theoretical debate surrounding the advertising discourse is the use of metaphor, both at the textual and especially the visual level of advertising communication. Researchers agree on the fact that metaphor is the most commonly used figure of speech within the advertising discourse. Nevertheless, I. Richardsⁱⁱ contradicts the notion that metaphor is a purely stylistic device that requires from the individuals a special rhetorical skill set. He observes that people frequently use metaphors in their daily conversations and thus advances the conclusion that "metaphor is an omnipresent principle in language". Furthermore, he argues that a metaphor is the result of the simultaneous interaction between two thoughts and that this interaction can vary from *congruence* to *dissonance*.

Is it possible to educate the masses through advertising? Apparently this discursive tool has been a manipulative ideological tool for several decades, starting nowadays to behave as a social driving force that animates our society through metaphor. We therefore believe that the recurrent use of metaphor in advertising communication doesn't anymore serve the purpose of generating the surprise of the consumer public but responds to an existential need for the alternation of realities and identification with an identity. Rules, principles and norms of conduct proposed are acting like guidelines for our society. Furthermore, as we will try to argue, it is mainly

due to this double metaphorization of the advertising discourse that it can be understood by such diverse masses, managing to bridge socio-cultural gaps.

How does a metaphor work?

By integrating metaphor in his daily communication, the individual is aware of the violation of linguistic conventions. If the use of words generally serves the purpose of interaction, transmitting meaning and receiving feedback, this is achieved through transmitting one of the meanings attributed by the dictionary. But a metaphor bypasses this convention by suggesting a hyper-reality in which the meanings are inverted. Therefore, the individual is aware of the contravention with the linguistic conventions. Take for example this slogan for the *Johnson & Johnson* band aids, "Say hello to your child's new bodyguards", accompanied by a picture of band aids decorated with cartoon characters. The violation consists in this case in a neutral deviation of meaning, culminating with changing the meaning of the word 'bodyguard'.

Starting with the research of George Lakoff, contemporary cognitive linguistic theory considers metaphor as "omnipresent in day to day life", arguing that "our ordinary conceptual system [...] is fundamentally metaphorical in its nature" iii. Consequently, literary-stylistic metaphors are only a subset of the metaphors used in day to day speech, a stylistically special case of literary works rooted though in the omnipresent metaphors of everyday's life. Lakoff considers that these metaphors can be classified into categories such as *structural* metaphors, *orientational* metaphors and *ontological* metaphors. The examples used by the author highlight the way in which a metaphor like "ARGUMENT IS WAR" can trigger a real "bombardment" on the vocabulary of those who interact.

ARGUMENT IS WAR

Your claims are indefensible.

He attacked every weak point in my argument.

His criticisms were right on target.

I demolished his argument.

I've never won an argument with him.

You disagree? Okay, shoot! If you use that strategy, he'll wipe you out.

He shot down all of my arguments

Examples of structural metaphors like "argument is war", "love is a journey", and the famous "religion is opium for the masses", are instances of day to day speech illustrating the fact that we don't just talk about certain topics in a metaphorical way but we play the part defined by the metaphor, creating an entire discourse according to its stage direction; we don't just talk about argument comparing it to war, but we act as such, integrating into our conversations (arguments) a whole set of words related to war, immersing ourselves in the world described by the war metaphor as it was real. Thus, the concept is metaphorically structured, action is metaphorically structured and, consequently, language is metaphorically structured, leading to a metaphorically structured attitude on the part of the individuals. "The essence of metaphor is under-

standing and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." Let us analyze the relationship between the terms.

(A) ARGUMENT is (B) WAR

In metaphorical structures as the one above, the first term (A) is the target domain and the second term (B) is the source domain. (A) will represent the more abstract concept, metaphorically linked to a more concrete one (B), mapping the important traits from B applicable to A, based on experience. We can therefore state that the recurrence of metaphor in advertising and the fact that it is still such a popular advertising technique is supported by two essential reasons; first of all, as we have shown and will try to illustrate further using popular slogans in advertising communication, a metaphorical familiarity with the everyday language. On the other hand, to reiterate the line of reasoning presented above, the use of metaphor in advertising communication responds to an existential need of the public for the alternation of realities in which it desires to loose and discover itself! Following this direction a corresponding advertising slogan can be attributed to each of Lakoff's examples of orientational and ontological metaphors.

Lakoff exemplifies orientational metaphors using the expression "happy is up, sad is down". With reference to the same attribute of assigning value, accenting progress and an upward movement, advertising's repertoire offers slogans as fascinating from a metaphorical perspective and accompanied by a brand attitude and vocabulary closely resembling inter-personal communication. The LG slogan for instance suggests a textual association between technological evolution (their area of activity being the production of household appliances) and an orientation towards the quality of life. With LG, "life's good".

On the other hand, Philips, another household brand, communicates the same improvement in the quality of life by exaggerating the message of progress, "Let's make things better!", and let's not forget, "Bigger is better".

For the ontological metaphors, from the examples that Lakoff offers we can note *Time is money* and *Life is a journey*. If we analyze briefly a metaphor like *time is money* we will invariably refer to time as a limit of resources, as a valuable good, operating in our explanation with metaphorical constructs. The metaphorical status of these constructs is given by our attempts to conceptualize time using our quotidian experience with money, goods and limited resources. In addition to this, for the humanbeing, such a perspective is not a necessary model of conceptualizing time, which means that metaphor is culturally linked with us and that it emerges in well established contexts, since there are cultures in which none of the above metaphors designates a reference to time. Due to the hyper-real dimension promised through its discourse, advertising is abundant in ontological metaphors. When a telecommunication company refers to the future through its own brand name that references the colour orange (the colour of well-being and tolerance) but also the solar fruit, the orange it becomes the expression for the aspiration to achieve more and the confidence in an assumed

promise: "The future is orange". On the other hand, the image of a walnut, accompanied by the slogan "Insurance is a walnut" and the comment:

"Like a precious treasure, the walnut is hidden in its shell. It forms a solid armour which protects the fruit as you would protect yourself with a helmet. We offer our clients a symbolic helmet, which protects you from the impact of incidents and unforeseen circumstances, adapted to your personal situation and insurance needs", clearly induces the feeling of metaphorization of the message. With regard to the advertising discourse, the accompanying texts indicate the different aspects mapped from the source domain (the walnut) onto the target domain (insurance). The walnut is a metaphorical representation of the company's clients, in need of protection, and the nutshell suggests the protective attitude of the company.

From the perspective of Daniel Berlyne, like an aesthetic object, any rhetorical device, such as a metaphor, offers a means to make what is known, unknown and the natural, unnatural^{iv}. The deviation is, in this case, a way to create what the researchers of the society of consumption call contextual dissonance. Thus, rhetoric dissonance could explain the way in which certain types of textual structures, metaphors for example, can produce displacements of meaning in advertising texts.

It has been concluded however that, although textual metaphors are very useful for advertising strategies, their results, difficult to quantify, may vary as far as to produce effects contrary to those predicted. To prevent this kind of outcomes, the whole context should be taken into account. It is important to recognize that a certain figurative expression may deviate to a varying extent and thus be more or less dissonant in relation to reality.

This applies corollary at two distinct levels: that of each individual in particular (especially the emergence of rhyme and metaphor, for example) and of the target audience (some dates, such as word groups or anagrams going as far as alliteration - the repetition of the same sound or group of sounds in words that succeed themselves). But, every time we compare rhetorical figures and their varying degrees of deviation we are operating with reference to the hypothetical medium associated to them.

Furthermore if the deviation is lower than a certain degree it could mean that we are no longer dealing with a rhetorical figure. This can occur, for example, in the case of metaphors which have became static or conventional (the sports car that "embraces the road" in the BMW commercials or the floor than shines from the Pronto ads) or lost their emotional impact thus falling into banality. So, because the deviation of meaning is often temporary what was once a rhetorical figure doesn't necessarily retain this status, fact proven by the many metaphors that have passed into everyday's language. The above examples, along with "the toy bodyguard" in the form of a patch, serve as a memento for the fact that the rhetorical structure resides and functions in a complex network of signs and socio-cultural meanings.

From a figurative-aesthetic perspective, rhetorical figures often lead to what Roland Barthes called "the pleasure of the text" - a reward that comes from an intelligent processing of an arrangement of signs. This arrangement, in turns, corresponds to Daniel Berlyne's argument which, based on his experimental research in the field of aesthetics, states that the dissonance (deviation) can generate the pleasant

feeling of inspiration and even profound understanding. The rewards of meaning deviation suggest thus that the figurative language of advertising, by comparison to literary language, should produce a more positive attitude; advertising texts are liked and remembered more easily.

Besides invoking metaphors, the advertising discourse seems free of any constraints, and because due to the absence of the true-false criteria, it can exaggerate with its use of subjectivity, lyricism, expressiveness, metaphors. Even if, at a discursive level we are dealing only with the text-image couple, the broad spectrum of organizational forms of the persuasive advertising discourse is based mainly on the great availability/flexibility of each component to express its contents in diverse forms. Even when the lexical level is concerned, the advertising discourse seems not to be bound by any rules. Its openness toward increasingly more varied categories of terms, its propensity towards polysemy, insinuation and reading between the lines make advertising a contemporary discourse of great originality and dynamism that can communicate its contents to a large public. Moreover, those which linguists call 'deviations from the rules of language' (meta-plastic or onomatopoeic changes of words) have come to be seen as distinctive traits of this kind of discourse. The adding of sounds (Mirindaaaaa!, Bamuchaaa!), using onomatopoeic formations (Galina Blanca, bul-bul!, Hei Psst Cichi Cichi, Kltz Pmz Aahh!), replacing sounds or mixing words (Mégalumme = Mégane + lumme! - catchphrase in the Romanian commercial for Renault Megane), are commonplace techniques for generating the advertising characteristic fervent discourse.

From a pragmatic perspective, advertising texts are more evocative than explicit; they don't communicate raw information but a meaning and rarely talk about a direct benefit. This is why children, who resonate more on meaning than on the significance of words, have a better understanding of advertising discourse and an immediate reaction to its messages. Most often the text is generated as a fusion between a benefit, an offered value and a sensory fact or promise highlighted. A slogan like "Sans parfum, la peau est muette" (Without perfume the skin is mute) creates an entire sinesteyic symbolism, especially if the text is accompanied by a visual dimension that opens the perspectives of interpretation. The accommodation with the product is facilitated once we familiarize ourselves with it on a sensory level.

Revisiting Lakoff's perspective, based on the fundamental idea that metaphors are conceptual rather than purely linguistic phenomena, it has been stated that they mustn't be and indeed are not limited to verbal expressions. Metaphors can be expressed visually through images, either static, as in the case of magazine adverts or billboards, or moving, as with commercials and movies. These expression modes can be combined with all of the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste etc.) in order to render possible the construction and interpretation of metaphors in a pictorial or even a multimodal manner.

Following Lakoff's explanation of the linguistic context created by the use of metaphor in everyday language, we might argue that advertising slogans function from a contemporary standpoint as trans-cultural metaphors. If, as we have shown, the rhetorical structure of metaphors resides and functions in a complex network of signs

and socio-cultural meanings, advertising slogans manage to convey concepts and ideas regardless of social and cultural barriers, liberalizing the meanings through the use of metaphor as a guide. We often use in our everyday language advertising slogans as metaphors to aid us in getting through an idea to our communication partners; familiar to a large audience, their integration in our interactions facilitates the understanding of the communicated contents, so much so that if we wish to express courage, we can easily achieve this by resorting to the Nike slogan - *Just do it!*.

Of image and rhetoric

Noteworthy for this discussion is the strong link between the text and the advertising image as a metaphor generator. The advertising discourse initially presents itself as an unstable, hybrid structure in which the balancing of text and images is made in an uncontrollable manner. Yet its message is understood as in a picture.

Second most influential for the consumers, though extremely visible in everyday language, the linguistic signifier emerges within the advertising discourse as several textual constructs: logo, slogan, body text, each serving the advertising discourse by simple way of the fact that any advertising argumentation begins with its visibility.

From the typography layout within the page, designed to grab the attention, to the aesthetic construction of the logo, intended to create/increase brand recall, the pragmatic characteristic of most of advertising texts is its sustainability, with the attention directed towards the visual-figurative whole. This indicates that even the construction of the advertising text abides by the outline of the visual and the visual metaphor which generates new meanings: specific typefaces for the logo and slogan, specific colors and textures for the letters, different orientation of text within the page, all of these draw attention on the importance of advertising visual rhetoric, as we will try to show.

"Whether we like it or not, each of us experiences at the present time a crack within the representation of the world and so, its reality. This is the split between action and interaction, presence and media-presence, existence and TV-existence."

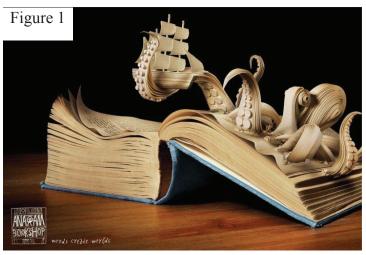
The image of an ad thus becomes the opportunity to talk about multiple realities, not in terms of copying the reality, of mimesis, but especially from the perspective of the image's ability to infer the relationships which we establish with the give world. Furthermore, theorists regard the image today as renouncing its quality of being a representation *of something*, of referencing to something clear, in favour of a more important role; today it accompanies the human existence, the world, bordering on confusion. If Baudrillard's theory of a reality coefficient directly proportional to the supply of imaginary which provides it with its specific quality is true, then we can begin to understand why the visual and iconic are becoming means of adding transparency to the world through metaphor. The relationship between the world and its images is not based on mirroring but in *identification* as hyper-reality.

Visual metaphors in advertising's discourse

Continuing the discussion on the representational nature of visual communication, we can consider the contemporary world as one of maximum accessibility and of visual signs. This means that we can educate best our public if we start from a visual level. In the advertising discourse, the social qualities and values are transmitted through cultural symbols and these latter ones as metaphors, function not by altering the meaning but attributing certain additional traits. These features make communicated ideas easy to understand for everyone. On one hand we are dealing with the *universality* of the visual message and on the other with the free individual interpretation of it. All we can know is the way in which the interaction between representation, the represented object and the receiver-subject produces.

The same premise underlies Roland Barthes'vii in his "Rhetoric of the image", where two levels of image analysis, simultaneously perceived by the human eye, are presented: *the denotative level*, which is purely "theoretical" for image analysis, as it is hard to conceive an image without connotations. When referring to the "fashion system", Barthes identifies a specific language of combinations between colours and dimensions, which provides the subject with an additional meaning through the way in which it is presented. On the other hand Barthes describes *the symbolic level*, of connotation - at which the reading of the visual image varies according to the receiver and the codes which he associates with the message. The latter, emerges at the interpretation level, where the perceptive intelligence of the subject activates according to the socio-cultural meanings. The denotative layer plays a very important part as it represents the foundation for the connotative dimension.

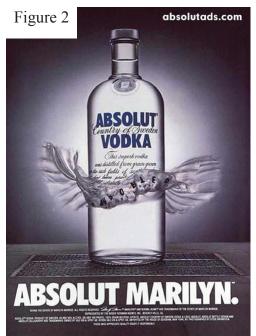
As Charles Forceville viii has shown, we designate as visual metaphor a combination of two heterogeneous visual entities that involves a change in their meaning, one through the other. From the multiplicity of metaphor types discussed by the author, we will pause to analyze *the hybrid metaphor* and *the multimodal metaphor*, as two of the most recurrent in print advertising.



movement.

The hybrid metaphor (see Figure 1) is perceived as an object or gestalt formed by two entities seen as pertaining to different domains, incompatible and unable to form a whole. Regarded by the specialists as the quintessence of visual metaphor. this hybrid depends on understanding one of the parts in terms of the other and originates, as Forceville argues, from the surrealist painting

Such visual metaphors are often present in advertising posters and prints, where the visual effect is instantaneous, their purpose being to suggest the product or a value without explicitly presenting it, to insinuate one of the product's traits or the alternative space proposed by the brand image (brand's imaginative ways of creating realities). Of importance is that the resulting metaphor creates the feeling of a coherent context, totally new, created through the simultaneous transformation of one term into the other, and so the meaning of the image becomes understandable. The example shown above in **Figure 1** (an ad to Melville's famous book *Moby Dick*) only comes to support the arguments presented.



On the other hand, in one of his later lectures (2002), Forceville discusses the *integrated metaphor* as being a construct which passes on to another by means of resemblance even without an integrating context. (**Figure 2**).

With this observation, we attach to the advertising metaphor a new dimension which we need to further explain. Theorists agree that the advertising mechanism functions on the foundation of relationship between emotions and perceptions, appealing primordial to reactions through the visual stimulus, very much alike to the way we read a photographic work. Visual stimulation has the power to associate form and content in a convincing manner. The iconic status is implicit and the images communicate meaning through the use of connotations

and the capacity to be intentional. In his work, "Visual Persuasion. The Role of Images in Advertising", Paul Messaris ix sees the absence of syntax, the combining and associative capacity not limited to causality or analogy, as one of the main traits of visual syntax in the advertising image.

Naturally, one of the necessary conditions for constructing a metaphor is a certain resemblance or similarity between the two visual concepts that generate it (the target and source concept). On the other hand, the similarity between two phenomena, regardless of the way in which it was established mustn't be seen as a sufficient condition for generating a metaphor. The famous all purpose Swiss army knife isn't a metaphor but simply a multifunctional object. Therefore, a necessity for constructing a metaphor is the ability to distinguish between the traits of the two concepts, as well as the transferability of at least one trait from the source towards the target, without distorting the message that needs to be communicated. Or, in other words, only in this way can the image of a book with tentacles be linked to the work of Herman Melville.

Considering this premise, Forceville shows that in the case of representations in which the concepts that need to be communicated are presented as moving images as

opposed to static images, the opportunity to create visual metaphors grows exponentially. This is due to the fact that with moving images (TV commercials, for example) it is nearly impossible to extract a simultaneous scene in which both elements are presented.

If in the case of print the target and the source have to be represented or suggested simultaneously, within commercials, they succeed one another, the pictorial metaphor being the sum of frames that parade in front of the audience's eyes.



With the conceptualization of such a construct, discussion opens towards the multimodal metaphor (Figure 3) which comprises in its construction text. image, movement and time a succession. Here too, the focus is on the visual, which is highlighted though by the textual, the non-verbal (given by the movement) and the passing of time.

If, at the beginning of this part we advanced the image as preceding the text in terms of the importance attributed in perceiving advertising metaphor, with the multiplication of mass-media (especially video), the text can become illuminating for the perception of advertising metaphor by the public. It offers a better understanding of the message and cleans the noise of visual ambiguity. To the same extent, a visual metaphor acts to reveal aspects concealed by the textual metaphor, accenting mainly the cultural-contextual particularity that can be deduced from the image.

Conclusion

Because of the versatility of trans-culturally comprehensible meanings, advertising metaphor becomes a genuine global handbook, interpreted with every instance of itself, within the sight of every individual engaged in perceiving its message.

"You need to have advertising in a capitalistic society. You don't need advertising in communism. But in a capitalistic society – where people are competing for the same dollar – you need to have information out there so the consumer can make a choice. That's what advertising does. It's all advertising does for our lives". (Nina DiSesa, McCann Erickson, New York). Here, for example, a mission statement of the "Make it count!" campaign part of the Element brand philosophy: *The Make it Count collection celebrates Element's deep roots, consistency and drive. It represents the importance of being graceful and approaching everything you do with depth and longevity. Leave an imprint deep enough, that it continues to make the world a better place. Make it Count.*

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Motivational statements and rules of life are increasingly emerging as campaign slogans such as "You are Volcom, do your job, recycle!", "Green works - Panasonic", "Live. Learn. Grow – Element", "Connecting people – Nokia", "Sharp Minds– Sharp", "Come alive! You're in the Pepsi generation – Pepsi", "Think different! – Apple", "The Power to Be Your Best – Apple", "Together we can do more – Orange", "Impossible is nothing – Adidas", "Nothing is too small to know, and nothing too big to attempt – Element".

More and more advertising campaigns highlight values, in fact always present in our educational norms: respect for self and of others, tolerance, pursuit of the public good, charity or eco ethics. Advertising campaigns promote healthy eating, personal hygiene, gender integration, packaging recycling or even green tourism. Relevant to its educational implication is the example of global codes of conduct recommended by advertising international committees of ethics: responsibility towards the environment, eco projects developed at the organisational level, institutional communication based on an ethical vision for environmental protection. Thus, without yet drawing a conclusion, we see as imperative for the future educational undertakings a research of the premises that have led to the transformation of advertising from an industry associated with a certain type of economy (and targeted specific social contexts), into something closely linked with the structure, organization and functioning of our society.

In a world without a stable configuration, advertising enables communication of multiple cultural identities, of belonging to a social or value based group, transforming itself into a social educational institution of diversity and multiculturalism. And this change of advertising into a societal institution doesn't refer only to its ability to mirror and contribute to a social order. Furthermore, advertising is given the role of reproducing a social order educating its public, with reference to its certain mediating quality through which cultural insertion and value assumption is possible. Advertising becomes an important tool through which future generations can be educated about "consumption of reality".

Notes

ⁱ Jef Richards, Department of Advertising, The University of Texas at Austin, "Advertising Quotes," from http://Advertising.utexas.edu/research/quotes/Q100.html on April 7, 2006.

ii Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. New York. OUP. Lecture V., pp. 89-112. p. 89. 1936 apud van Gent-Petter, Marga, *THE OMNIPRESENCE OF METAPHOR AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION PURPOSES, Analele UVT Vol. III, 2008*

iii George Lakoff, M. Johnson, Metaphors we Live by, ed. Chicago University Press, 2003 pg. 39

iv Daniel E.Berlyne, Aesthetics and Psychobiology. New York: Appleton, 1971

^v Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979

vi Paul Virilio, La Vitesse deliberation, ed. Galilée, Paris 1999 pg. 59

vii Roland Barthes, "Rhetorique de l'image", in Communications, n. 4, 1964

viii Charles Forceville, Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising,ed. Routledge 1996

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