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### Pictorial and multimodal metaphor in commercials

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CHAPTER SUMMARY Deploying metaphor is an attractive and efficient way for advertisers to make positive claims for their products, brands, or services. For a long time, metaphor studies focused almost exclusively on language, but over the past fifteen years, the concept of pictorial (or visual) metaphor has been fairly well developed, particularly in the realm of print advertising and billboards. Metaphors, however, also occur in commercials. Their occurrence in moving images is more complex than in static ones, both because the two parts of a metaphor (“target” and “source”) need not occur simultaneously and because music and sound may here also play a role in the identification and interpretation of metaphor. These factors necessitate a theoretical shift from pictorial to multimodal metaphor. This paper discusses nine case studies of commercials containing pictorial and multimodal metaphors with the aim to define, and speculate about the effects of, the various parameters that play a role in the way they can occur. The last section discusses how the effect of these parameters can be tested in empirical research.

Advertisers’ perennial task is to make positive claims for brands, products, and services, in the hope that these will induce prospective consumers to consider, buy, and use them. These claims must always be pitched in a limited space or time slot. Moreover, the message should attract attention, and ideally stick in people’s memories, for instance by being humorous, or beautiful, or intriguing. This latter requirement is particularly important given that

competition for audience attention, via an ever broadening variety of media, is fierce. One way to meet this requirement is to deploy a good metaphor.

For me, as a humanities' scholar interested in multimodal rhetoric, more specifically in its metaphorical dimensions, the omnipresence of metaphors in advertisements was in fact the reason to start concentrating on the genre of advertising in the first place: advertising provides a rich source of examples within short, complete texts, within a genre flaunting the clear-cut message "Buy me!" (Forceville 1994; 1996). Advertising is thus a goldmine for furthering the theory of pictorial and multimodal metaphor. For present purposes I will somewhat reverse priorities, and reflect on how metaphor theory can be used in both the production and analysis of advertising (in the spirit of Mick and Politi [1989], Scott [1994], Wiggin and Miller [2003], and Phillips [2003]). Moreover, I shift focus from the approach adopted in Forceville (1996) by concentrating on pictorial and multimodal metaphor in commercials rather than in print ads and billboards, discussing some of the dimensions that govern metaphorizing in *moving* images. The structure of this paper is as follows: after a brief introduction of verbal metaphor, I will define and explain the concepts of pictorial and multimodal metaphor. Subsequently, nine case studies of pictorial and multimodal metaphor in commercials will be described in order to extract pertinent parameters for the study of this trope. After a more general discussion of these parameters, the concluding section will provide a list of issues that require further theoretical and empirical investigation.

### **Metaphor: Preliminaries**

Lakoff and Johnson's "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5) captures three important aspects of this trope: (1) Metaphor involves no less and no more than two domains; (2) One of the domains pertains to the topic about which something is predicated (in line with cognitive

linguistics practice here called the “target”), while the other domain pertains to the predication (the “source”). Target and source are, in principle, irreversible; (3) A metaphor is not necessarily verbal in nature.

Construing and interpreting a phenomenon as a metaphor requires at least the following actions from recipients. They must

- (i) conclude that two phenomena which, in the given context, belong to different categories, are presented as somehow being “one” thing;
- (ii) assess which of the two phenomena is the target and which is the source. The requirement that target and source are distinguishable means that it is clear that the metaphor is “about” one of the things, not about the other thing;
- (iii) decide which facts and connotations adhering to the source domain (the sum total of which Max Black, referring to Aristotle, calls “endoxa,” Black [1979, 29]) can be mapped onto the target domain;
- (iv) make appropriate adjustments to optimize the match between target and source.

The last two requirements pertain to the interpretation of the metaphor, which boils down to determining which characteristic(s) of the source domain is/are “transferred” (the literal translation of Greek *meta-pherein*) to the target. When, as often happens in advertising, the target coincides with the product, the interpretation of the metaphor is equivalent to listing the positive qualities or associations claimed for the product. By contrast, when the target coincides with the to-be-disparaged product of competitors, interpretation amounts to searching for negative qualities that can be mapped from source to target.

For purposes of analysis, a metaphor can be verbally rendered as NOUN A IS NOUN B. (The convention to use capitals to signal the conceptual level of metaphors was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson [1980] and has been broadly adopted by cognitive linguists and by journals such as *Metaphor and Symbol*.) An important difference between the Lakoffian Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Black’s interaction theory is that the former takes

for granted that most metaphors are manifestations of underlying, conceptual metaphors (see also Lakoff and Turner [1989]), whereas Black stresses that metaphor can create ad-hoc similarity between a target and a source. It is not necessary here to resolve this difference in emphasis (although Lakoff and Turner may overstate their case, see Forceville [forthcoming a]). What matters here is that metaphors in advertising, particularly good ones, are typically *experienced* as surprising, creative couplings of target and source.

A useful concept pertaining to metaphor that Black develops is “resonance.” Black calls metaphors resonant when they “support a high degree of implicative elaboration.” (1979, 27). A metaphor is resonant, that is, if it allows for a rich array of mappings from source to target. Shakespeare’s “the world is a stage” is resonant, because it allows for many mappings (actors become people; major protagonists become people that matter, contrasting to those having non-speaking parts; a plot becomes a person’s development or destiny in life, etc.). Similarly, in the poem “Laying a lawn,” Craig Raine consistently explores the metaphor SLABS OF GRASS ARE BOOKS, and by teasing out many mappings from source to target he demonstrates the metaphor to be highly resonant (Raine 1979). Another resonant poetic metaphor is the famous one in which John Donne’s speaking persona compares himself to one leg of a pair of compasses, and the beloved lady he must leave behind when he goes on his travels to the other leg (in “Valediction: Forbidden mourning”). By contrast, imagine Maureen tells her friend Ellen that “Jodocus is an ass,” the intended mapping from “ass” to “Jodocus” being “stupidity”—no more and no less. Since not much gets mapped, the metaphor is not very resonant. The resonance of metaphors usually resides in the fact that it is the source’s internal structure, not just a series of isolated features, that is “co-mapped” to the target (Gentner and Markman [1997] discuss this phenomenon in terms of “aligned structure”). Moreover, we should not forget that metaphors are best interpreted by analyzing them in context (the rest of the poem, speech, article, picture, film, commercial), and by taking cognizance of which is the audience to be addressed. As Aristotle already pointed out, “the persuasive is persuasive to

*someone*” (Aristotle 1991, 41, emphasis added), which means among other things that the intended mappings from a metaphor’s source domain need to be commensurate with the envisaged audience’s “*endoxa*.”

It is also important to emphasize that Black delimitates “metaphor” in a precise and narrow sense. Some other authors listing and analyzing what Tversky calls “figures of depiction” (2001, 86) use the word “metaphor” in the all-inclusive sense of “trope” and thus as including rhetorical figures such as metonymy, litotes, hyperbole, meiosis and many others (e.g., Kennedy [1982]; Whittock [1990] also takes a broader view; see Forceville [1996, 53ff.] for discussion).

A last preliminary remark: The interpretive decisions involved in assessing that a metaphor is to be construed in the first place, and given that assessment, how this is to be done, are governed--like any other message--by the presumption of relevance, as developed by Sperber and Wilson (1995), which is based on the Gricean claim that “an essential feature of most human communication is the expression and recognition of intentions” (Wilson and Sperber 2004, 607; see also Clark 1996; Gibbs 1999; Tomasello 2003). What constitutes relevance is highly situation-dependent. A stimulus (here: a commercial) is used at a particular moment, in a particular place (say, The Netherlands, or North Holland, or Amsterdam; or Canada, or Saskatchewan, or Saskatoon) for a more or less specific audience (say, prospective car buyers, or children, or hedonists, or people with a lot of money to invest). In short, as Sperber and Wilson emphasize, relevance is always relevance to an individual (1995, 142; for applications of Relevance Theory to mass-communicative messages, see Forceville [1996, ch. 5; 2005a]; Yus [forthcoming]). Advertisers, whose messages are very expensive, are acutely aware of this, and try hard to be optimally relevant to the consumers they consider to constitute their target audience.

## Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphors in Commercials

Adequate uptake of a metaphor occurring in advertising requires first of all that the product or brand is recognized. Typically, the identification of the product is ensured by simply depicting it. If the product has an immediately recognizable unique design (say, the British-French Concorde airplane, or the Rietveld chair) or logo (for instance the Nike “swoosh” or Heineken beer’s red star), depiction alone may suffice for recognition. This recognition may be restricted to a certain country, region, subculture, or community, and is thus by no means necessarily universal. To aid identification, the product type and name is often conveyed verbally, via the name of the product (service, brand), as well as visually. But there is no reason why a product, service or brand should not be identified by means of a sound or a tune as well. In The Netherlands various brands (such as *Hema* supermarkets, *C-1000* supermarkets, *Nationale Nederlanden* insurance company, and *Randstad* temporal job agency) through sustained marketing campaigns associate tunes or sound effects with their brands, thus creating “audio logos” that connote the brand as uniquely as does the visual logo. And people all over the world are familiar with Microsoft’s welcoming tune on the computer. In theory, an audio logo could thus also fill the “target domain” slot of a metaphor.

The source domain of a metaphor no less than the target domain must be recognized for what it is; and moreover evoke the “right” kind of mappable features. What are the “right” kind of mappable features in an advertising metaphor? Unlike in artistic metaphors (cf. Whittock 1990; Carroll 1994; 1996; Forceville 2002; 2005b), in advertising metaphors this is always relatively clear-cut. Everything in an advertisement or commercial—including any metaphor in it—obeys one central convention of the genre: it is meant to evoke positive feelings toward the product, service, or brand promoted (Forceville 1996, 104). This assumption governs consumers’ search for mappable features in a metaphor—even though they may flippantly entertain subversive interpretations for the sheer fun of it, or as a means

to protest the ideology of consumerism in general, as happens in many Adbuster creations. But using metaphors (and other tropes) always involves the risk of subversive, against-the-grain interpretations (for examples see Forceville [1996, ch. 7]).

In Forceville (1994; 1996; 2000; 2005c) a model was developed for the analysis of pictorial metaphor in static (print and billboard) advertisements. On the basis of how target and source were represented, the following prototypes were distinguished, whereby it should be realized that in practice many specimens share features of two or more types:

(1) *Hybrid metaphor* (originally called MP1). The metaphorical identity relationship is conveyed visually by conflating target and source into a single, “impossible” gestalt. An example is found in a governmentally sponsored ad featuring the earth whose upper half is a burning candle. The ad draws upon the viewer’s knowledge that a candle’s energy is non-renewable to warn against exhausting the earth’s energy resources (Forceville 1996, figure 6.11).

(2) *Contextual metaphor* (originally called MP2). The target of the metaphor is placed in a visual context that forces or invites the viewer to evoke the identity of the source, which is itself not pictured. For instance, a beer bottle is put in a champagne cooler to elicit the metaphor BEER IS CHAMPAGNE, with “high quality” or “drunk at festive occasions” among the associations that can be mapped from source to target (Forceville 1996, figure 6.4).

(3) *Pictorial simile*. A target and a source are saliently juxtaposed. That is, both target and source are represented, the similarity between them created by one or more visual traits (color, posture, size, texture ...) they share. An example is an ad for swimwear in which a girl with a tight-fitting bathing suit is diving, apparently in midair. Next to her, a dolphin is seen diving in the same curved position, while the similarity between them is further reinforced by the fact that the dolphin’s back fin is subtly echoed in the girl’s mop of protruding wet hair. The viewer may consider the skin of the dolphin a mappable feature (“the bathing suit fits the girl as smoothly as a dolphin’s skin”), but in principle any positive *endoxa* associated with



the dolphin may be co-mapped, such as the animal's intelligence, or apparent cheerfulness (Forceville 1996, figure 6.17).

(4) *Integrated metaphor* (a type first suggested, though not so named, by Van Rompay [2005, ch. 3]). A target can be shown in a posture or position such that it conveys the source visually without (partially) representing it or suggesting it due to visual context. An example is the Philips Senseo coffee machine, which has been designed in such a way that it appears to resemble a servant or butler. The mappable feature could then be "always being at the user's disposal" or "showing respect to the user by modestly bowing" (Forceville, Hekkert, and Tan 2006, figure 4).

But non-verbal metaphors can also occur in commercials. This shift in focus to *moving* images considerably broadens the ways in which a metaphor can be presented, which include the following:

- (1) Thanks to the stylistic opportunities open to the medium of film--e.g., montage of shots, camera angles, camera movement, as well as their interactions--the repertoire of techniques by which similarity between a metaphorical target and source can be conveyed visually is increased.
- (2) Commercials do not necessarily present or suggest the metaphor's target and source simultaneously: it is possible to convey a target and source *after* one another.
- (3) Commercials need not, like static advertisements, be restricted to pictures and written language (logos being an intriguing intermediate category), but can deploy other modes of communication.

In fact, metaphors in commercials draw usually on more than one mode of communication. These modes include at least the following: (1) visuals; (2) written language; (3) spoken language; (4) non-verbal sound; (5) music. This subdivision allows for a rough twofold

distinction into monomodal and multimodal metaphors. The former are metaphors whose target and source are conveyed in the same mode; the latter are metaphors whose target and source are conveyed, entirely or partly, in different modes (for more discussion on “modes,” see Forceville [forthcoming a, b]). The verbal metaphors that until recently were the only type of metaphor systematically studied are thus monomodal metaphors, and so are purely pictorial metaphors. But outside of language, metaphorical targets and sources are often cued in more than one mode simultaneously, which makes it sometimes difficult to decide whether a metaphor is monomodal or multimodal. For instance, if a target is signaled visually, and a source is signaled visually *and* verbally, should the metaphor be labeled “monomodal” or “multimodal”? The decision is somewhat arbitrary. It seems wise to see the two as extremes on a continuum rather than as two distinct types. A metaphor, then, will be considered to belong to the monomodal (for instance, pictorial) extreme of the continuum if both target and source are cued in one mode, and one mode only (for instance, both visually). It will be classified as typically multimodal if target and source are cued entirely in two different modes (for instance, the target visually and the source verbally). In practice, however, many specimens are somewhere in between these extremes.

### **Examples of Metaphors in Commercials**

Nine commercials (unless indicated otherwise: all screened on Dutch TV, with translations by the author) will now be described and analyzed that all invite a metaphorical reading. The goal of this discussion is to pave the way for identifying pertinent dimensions governing pictorial and multimodal metaphors in this genre.

<<FIGURE 1.1 NEAR HERE>>

<<FIGURE 1.2 NEAR HERE>>

**Example 1. Brand beer: pictorial metaphor of the contextual-cum-simile type.** A man descends into a wine cellar, with bottles lying flat in racks (figure 1.1). He carefully extracts a bottle from what appears to be a wine rack. But after a few seconds it transpires that the rack was actually a horizontally lying beer crate, with the name “Brand” on it (figure 1.2). The initial misreading is reinforced by the voice-over, which praises the drink as “rich and refined. Brightly colored. Refined and with a full taste. With a fresh, slightly bitter aftertaste”--all reminiscent of “winespeak” (Caballero, Suarez-Toste, Segovia, and de Cuadra 2006). The metaphor BEER IS WINE borrows the positive associations of wine: social prestige, a quality drink, something for connoisseurs (for another Brand commercial exploiting the same metaphor, see Forceville [forthcoming c]). The metaphor in this commercial has elements both of the contextual type (the cellar-as-typical-location-to-store-wine) and the simile type (the wine bottles that are visible in the cellar, and to which the beer bottles are thus implicitly compared).

**Example 2. Guhl shampoo: pictorial metaphor of the contextual-cum-simile type.** In each of the commercials in the series, the first shot is a static medium-close ups of an attractive female model with what initially looks like an incredibly spectacular hair-do. When the camera begins to move, the viewer realizes that the “hair” was in fact a feature of the natural environment (a tree or a shrub) in which the woman was standing. The metaphor that the viewer is invited to construe is thus HAIR IS TREE/SHRUB, with “naturalness” presumably being the feature mappable from the natural phenomenon to “hair.” Given that viewers are aware that advertisers make positive claims for their products, they will infer that, in turn, the hair’s “naturalness” is aided by Guhl shampoo. The metaphor is a pictorial one inasmuch as its target and source are both rendered in the visual mode. It displays features both of the

contextual type (the tree/shrub-behind-the-woman's-head) and the simile type (the tree as the object that the hair is compared to once the camera has moved and thus shifted perspective).

<<FIGURE 2.1 NEAR HERE>>

<<FIGURE 2.2 NEAR HERE>>

*Example 3. Bavaria beer: pictorial metaphor of the contextual type.* This commercial, broadcast in the Olympic year 2004, features Gianni Romme, who at the time was a successful speed skater. A voice-over tells us that “Bavaria wants to conquer Holland this autumn with Bavaria Hooghe Bock. That’s why we invoked the help of Brabant-born speed fiend Gianni Romme. He set out to take this robust high-ferment beer to the high North.” In a sequence of shots we see Romme running a demanding race, allegedly across the country from the south in the province of Brabant to the northern-most village in the province of Frisia, Moddergat, with a bottle of Hooghe Bock Bavaria beer held high in his right hand (figures 2.1 and 2.2). It is this salient posture of Romme’s, in combination with the running, that invites a metaphorical construal, since it is strongly reminiscent of the posture of the runners that take the Olympic torch from Olympia in Greece to the location hosting the Olympic games that year, resulting in the metaphor BAVARIA BEER IS OLYMPIC TORCH. The metaphor rests on the tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the beer, too, is “needed” in the place where Romme takes it: the Northern hamlet Moddergat. The mappings to be construed thus can be any positive connotation adhering to “carrying the Olympic torch” that are translatable to qualifying Bavaria beer--ranging from “glory” or “event-launching” to “being a necessity.” The idea that all these high-minded qualifications should be seen as playfully over-the-top does not detract from their pertinence. The Bavaria beer commercial clearly belongs to the contextual type, since it is the visual context (Romme’s posture and running) that supplies the source (Olympic torch).

&lt;&lt;FIGURE 3.1 NEAR HERE&gt;&gt;

&lt;&lt;FIGURE 3.2 NEAR HERE&gt;&gt;

*Example 4. Palm beer: Pictorial metaphor of the simile type.* This beer commercial begins with a close-up of a bottle being snapped open. It is followed by a series of close-ups of the beer being poured into a glass (brown beer, white foam, flowing movements), cross-cut with and sometimes superimposed by (figure 3.1) shots of a sturdy brown horse, its white manes waving in the wind. A tune with nonsense text (“Pa-da-pa-pam”) suggestively plays on the brand’s name. The brand’s logo, a Belgian horse, is visible several times on the beer-filled glass (figure 3.2). The final voice-over says “Belgian opulence since 1947,” while this text simultaneously appears onscreen in the last shot. PALM BEER IS A BELGIAN HORSE is the metaphor that can be construed, with the Belgian horse’s healthy color and strength among the mappable features--the latter presumably translating in the target domain into alcoholic strength. The cross-cutting between beer and horse makes this a simile, although the occasional superimposition of the two provides a faint hint of the hybrid type.

&lt;&lt;FIGURE 4.1 NEAR HERE&gt;&gt;

*Example 5. Sun dishwasher powder: pictorial metaphor of the integrated-cum-contextual type.* A number of wine glasses, resembling tulips, stand in a vase-like container. Some of them “droop” (figure 4.1). GLASSES ARE TULIPS is thus the central metaphor. The voice-over informs the viewer that new Sun protects against corrosion. Since it is the use of Sun that enhances the glasses’ “health,” the implied metaphor is something like SUN IS FLOWER FERTILIZER or SUN IS SUNLIGHT. The Sun dishwasher powder metaphor required the manipulation of the glasses (they had to be suggestive of “drooping” to make them resemble tulips in need of strengthening), and hence exemplifies the integrated type, but since the

presence of the vase also helps identify the glasses as tulips, it displays an aspect of the contextual type as well.

**Example 6. Peugeot cars: pictorial metaphor of the simile type.** A silver-colored car is seen driving fast alongside a beautifully designed modern train, also silver-colored, in an otherwise empty desert landscape. The relationship between car and train is further emphasized by a shot in which we see the train mirrored in the side of the car. It is hinted that they are racing against each other. The alarms of a railroad crossing become audible. An aerial shot reveals that the road and the railway track do not run parallel but cross each other. At the railway crossing, the train has to give way to the car. A voice-over concludes: “The new Peugeot 406 Coupé ... You feel better in a Peugeot.” The latter text coincides with its written version in the very last shot, which also displays the Peugeot logo. We are invited, though not forced, to construe the metaphor PEUGEOT CAR IS TRAIN, with as possible candidates for mapping: state-of-the-art design, riding comfort--and whatever other good feelings the train evokes in the viewer. The Peugeot commercial is a straightforward example of a simile: both target and source are depicted in their entirety.

<<FIGURE 5.1 NEAR HERE>>

<<FIGURE 5.2 NEAR HERE>>

**Example 7. Aegon insurance: multimodal metaphor with visual target and verbal (written) source.** The commercial, accompanied by “heroic” music, begins by showing eight horses, apparently drawing a wagon, approaching the viewer from the distance, in a desert (the Mojave Desert, California, personal communication, Jan Driessen at Aegon). In a fast montage sequence we then see the horses in close-ups, a chain snaps, we hear whinnying, and one of the horses breaks loose and escapes from the constrictions of the eight-in-hand (figure 5.1). It shakes off its harness (figure 5.2), rears up, and enjoying its new-found liberty runs

alone in a spacious, sunlit landscape. Only in the very last shot is the audience given any verbal information, in the form of two consecutively appearing phrases: “Think Free. ... Think Aegon insurance.” Combining the visual information of the line-breaking horse with the verbal imperative to the prospective insurance-taker that he/she should not, somehow, feel constricted or imprisoned, the resulting metaphor can be verbalized as INSURANCE-TAKER IS HORSE THAT IS/BREAKS FREE. Since there is no further verbal information that steers the interpretation of the metaphor in the form of verbal anchoring or relay (Barthes 1986), it is up to the viewer to fill in the details of the metaphor. After all, the commercial does not tell us in what the “freedom” of the (prospective) Aegon client resides. Does he or she have an unusually wide-ranging choice from various types of insurance policies? Is it easy to terminate an insurance policy if it no longer satisfies the needs of the client? Or does the company more generically indicate that it sees the client as an individual, with specific needs that are catered for by considering personal circumstances rather than forcing him/her into the straitjacket of a uniform insurance policy? All of these interpretations are commensurate with the metaphor, allowing for a degree of individual variation in the potential meaning perceived by the viewer. (Sometimes, of course, other expressions of the marketing campaign--for instance in print advertisements, billboards, radio commercials--steer or reinforce certain interpretations over others.) The metaphor is truly a multimodal metaphor inasmuch as the verbal information is indispensable for cuing the metaphor’s target domain (“client”); deletion of the verbal text would altogether eliminate the metaphor. (Note that while in Forceville [1996] I discussed this as a subtype of pictorial metaphor, I now consider it a subtype of multimodal metaphor), albeit that here it is, unusually, the metaphor’s source (the horse) that is depicted, and the target (the prospective client) that is verbally cued.

***Example 8. Senseo coffee machine: Multimodal metaphor involving visual target and sonic & musical source.*** In this commercial (also discussed in Forceville [forthcoming d]; I

owe the example to Paul Victor), we first see a series of extreme close-ups of what must be some high-tech machine. We hear the familiar first notes of Steppenwolf's *Born to be Wild*, made even more famous by the opening sequence of the film *Easy Rider*, followed by the sounds of a kick-starting motorbike. A series of texts is superimposed over the images: "Designed with a vision" ... "Designed with passion" ... "Turns each moment into a sensation ... that pleases all the senses." By now we are confident that this must be a commercial for some brand of motorbike. But at the end of the commercial, we see a shot of the Senseo coffee machine, so we realize we have been tricked: the motorbike domain is to be construed as the source domain of a metaphor: COFFEE MACHINE IS MOTORBIKE. The voice-over enthuses, "Senseo, sensational cup of coffee," while the last superimposed text runs, "Three years old and already a legend--at least in the kitchen." Obviously, the metaphor in this commercial is cued both aurally and visually. With the sound switched off, we would have inferred that the close-ups portrayed a machine. Since coffee machines are literally machines, this awareness would not have triggered a metaphor. It is the combination of the pop song and the motorbike noises that evoke the source-domain of motorbiking. One transferable feature is presumably the revolutionary design of the *Easy Rider* bikes, another is the legendary status of the biker film. But the music also evokes other connotations: leading an exciting life, freedom, being-different. In Black's terminology, then, the metaphor is resonant, since it allows for many mappings. Of course not every viewer will come up with exactly the same mappings. Indeed, it is one of the strengths of this metaphor (and many others that are deployed in commercials) that it gives viewers a choice to decide which of these qualities associated with Easy-Rider motorbiking they wish to map onto making coffee with a Senseo machine.

**Example 9. Ikea lamps: multimodal metaphor involving visual target and musical + verbal (spoken) source** (see Ikea 2006). This Swedish commercial, brought to my attention by



Valerie Boswinkel, shows a desk lamp that is unplugged by a woman and thrown out with the garbage, to be replaced by a newer model. The way the old lamp is framed (its upper part is made to look like a head, its posture outside in the rain with the garbage that of a slumping human, whereas the cross-cuts between it and the new lamp, visible through the window, as well as some zooming shots, suggest a jealous point-of view) as well as lighted, contributes to personifying it. That this is what we are supposed to do is made clear by the surprising climax of this mini-narrative: a man walking past the lamp on the rainy pavement addresses the camera, saying in Scandinavian-accented English, “Many of you feel bad for this lamp. That is because you are crazy. It has no feelings. And the new one is much better.” The payoff gives the IKEA logo. The point to be made here is that whereas this could be considered as a monomodal metaphor of the pictorial variety, there is no doubt that the slow, sad piano music accompanying the film until the man begins to speak contributes to the personification of the lamp--not because lamps make such music but because we have grown accustomed to this kind of score music in numerous heart-breaking separation scenes in feature films. So although the metaphor could be called a pictorial one, I would claim that the music adds both to the alleged sense of desertion experienced by the lamp and to the speed with which viewers are aware of its personification. Such examples should remind us that although for analytical purposes it will be useful to distinguish between monomodal and multimodal metaphors as prototypes in the sense of Lakoff (1987); in fact there is a continuum between them.

### ***Ways of Creating Similarity in Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphors***

There must be a cue for the recipient of a commercial to link one thing metaphorically with something else. If target and source occur in the same mode, some sort of resemblance

between them is construed. In verbal metaphors, this is done by equating the two dissimilar phenomena via a non-literal “is” or “is like” (“Surgeons are butchers”; “Sally is a block of ice”) or by using other grammatical constructions that create identity (“The ship ploughed through the waves” can be traced back to SEA IS ACRE or SHIP IS PLOUGH; “The brook smiled,” depending on context, can be seen as a manifestation of BROOK IS PERSON or RIPPLING WATER IS SMILING). But in pictorial metaphors there is no simple equivalent to the verbal “is.” As we have seen, various forms can be deployed to make an audience aware that a metaphor is to be construed.

It has been suggested that the specific form chosen for an advertising metaphor may have consequences for consumer interpretation and response (Phillips 2003, 301). I agree, and in this section I want to speculate about this claim somewhat further, beginning with the various pictorial types and then shifting to multimodal specimens. Examples 1-6 all count as monomodal metaphors of the pictorial kind on the basis of the fact that both their targets and their sources are cued by visual means. Examples 7-9 are labeled multimodal because target and source are entirely or predominantly signaled in different modes.

### Pictorial metaphors

*Hybrid metaphor.* A hybrid metaphor cannot exist as such in the “real” world. For this reason, advertisers may find this an unattractive option for the promotion of a high-profile physical product, as it might seem to have been damaged or manipulated. Hybridization is of course a problem only when the metaphorical target coincides with the product itself. In other situations, this restriction may not apply: for instance, if an advertiser wants to degrade a competitor by means of the metaphor; or if the advertisement does not promote a product, but an idea, as in public service type of messages; or if the product has no high-profile visual qualities, such as computer software (cf. van den Boomen 2006). I note in passing that in the realm of art, there is no problem with hybrid metaphors: think of numerous science-fiction films which have a humanoid target and an animal- or machine-related source.

*Integrated metaphor.* The integrated subtype similarly “changes” the product. Since it requires the target to be bent, folded, or otherwise construed in a manner that evokes the source domain, it may appear as altered or affected, which again may be unappealing to advertisers who want to turn the product into the target of a metaphor. However, if the target of the metaphor does not represent the product itself, but something metonymically related to it, this drawback presumably does not apply. An example in Forceville (1996) that in retrospect has elements of the integrated type (a type not yet identified as such in that study) is an Air France series in which the airline company’s tickets have been folded in such a way that they appear as a deck-chair, a snowboard, and an Indian headdress, respectively (Forceville 1996, figures 6.6, 6.7, and 6.13). This is possible first of all because of the strong metonymic link between airline companies and something that is unproblematically bendable/foldable: the ticket. Unsurprisingly, the integrated type works excellently with the human body as target domain: shove your right hand under your jacket at chest height and without further ado you metaphorically are Napoleon (although you would have to wear a jacket rather than a sweater to achieve the effect); extend your arm in front of your nose and wriggle about with your hand, and there is a fair chance that people would recognize the domain ELEPHANT--which, given the right circumstances, could be the source of a metaphor.

*Contextual metaphor.* This type shares with the integrated subtype the characteristic that one of the terms (the source) is not visually represented; the difference is that the identification of the source in the contextual subtype depends on the visual context in which it has been carefully placed, while the integrated type bears in itself the “ghost” presence of the source, irrespective of visual context. In contextual metaphor the location of the target is often crucial, since it helps identify the (absent) source: without the “context” of Romme holding the Bavaria bottle over his head in precisely the way he does, the source domain OLYMPIC TORCH would not have been recognizable; if the model in the Guhl commercial did not stand precisely where she stands, we would not, or not as easily, have been able to

metaphorically equate her hairdo with the shrub or tree. Phillips and McQuarrie would rank contextual metaphors under the “replacement” variety of visual structures in advertisements, which they consider as more complex than juxtaposition (the simile metaphor is one manifestation of this structure) and fusion structures (hybrid metaphors would belong to this category) (Phillips and McQuarrie 2004, 116). The authors moreover hypothesize that complex visual structures are better liked (because they require the successful solving of a mini-puzzle) and remembered (because of the cognitive effort invested in solving the puzzle) than less complex structures.

*Simile.* Since in the simile type both target and source are visually present, there are many other ways besides location to convey or suggest visual resemblance between two phenomena, for instance by using the same color, size, posture, texture, function, drawing style, direction of movement, or framing: the simile in the Peugeot commercial draws on similar function (both car and train are means of transport), color (silver), direction of movement (they “race” parallel to each other).

### Multimodal metaphors

Contrary to a pictorial metaphor--which is a variety of monomodal metaphor--in multimodal metaphor it is not so much resemblance between target and source that triggers metaphorical construal, but the suggestion of their coreferentiality: two somehow incompatible phenomena are presented as a single entity (Carroll [1994; 1996] would call this conjunction “noncompossible”). In print advertisements and billboards the only variety is verbo-pictorial metaphor, where the usual situation is a visual target that is metaphorically transformed by a verbal, written source. We are used to verbal explanations of pictures, in the form of captions or legends, so we tend to take a piece of language accompanying the picture naturally as an explanation of, or complement to it. In commercials (as opposed to print ads and billboards, or most Internet banners), the language component can assume spoken as well as written forms. This allows for metaphorical play of the VISUAL TARGET IS VERBAL SOURCE variety

(or, less often, vice versa). In the latter case, there is often deictic information (“this,” “he,” “here”) that invites the recipient to understand the verbal information as referring to what is visually salient. But to the degree that a phenomenon can be unambiguously evoked by a specific sound or a musical theme, it could in principle cue a target or source, even singlehandedly. In practice, however, both targets and sources are often cued in one than more mode simultaneously, which makes subcategorizing multimodal metaphors more difficult than pictorial ones. But this leaves uninvalidated the central idea: metaphorical identification can be prompted by any salient manner of simultaneous cuing of the two clearly identifiable domains (for more examples as well as discussion of multimodal metaphors, see Forceville [forthcoming b, c, d]; see also Forceville [1999]).

### ***Degree of Salience of the Metaphor and of its Mappable Features***

When advertisers develop a metaphor as the key device to make a claim for a product, they will probably want to make sure that the audience recognizes the metaphor. Whittock calls salient metaphors “marked metaphors” (1990, 50) and Forceville labels them “explicitly signaled metaphors” (1999, 191-92). Indeed the very fact that often (for more examples, see Forceville [2003]) the advertiser playfully misleads the viewer by *first* showing the “thing” that turns out to be the source domain of the metaphor and *then* revealing the target domain (usually the product) strongly suggests that the advertiser alerts us to the need for metaphor construal--otherwise the salient positioning of the thing shown first would make no sense.

But advertisers do not necessarily want to make their metaphors salient; they may want to invite rather than force viewers to construe a metaphor. The juxtaposition typical of the pictorial simile variety is particularly suited to such an invitation: if the object cuing the source domain is not as such an improbable phenomenon to appear in the given context

anyway, its presence can be explained on other than metaphorical grounds (namely as a coincidental or “natural” presence not unlikely to occur in the scene under consideration), so that a metaphor can, but need not, be construed. The Peugeot car and train juxtaposition in example 6, for instance, can in principle also be understood as no more than a race between the car and the train, won by the car. And whereas here the train is very saliently and enduringly present in this commercial, the advertisers could have chosen to bestow no such emphasis on it. Car commercials often feature cars riding through beautiful or impressive scenery. When, as in a Dutch 2006 commercial for Cadillac, the car crosses a futuristically designed bridge, viewers may simply interpret, subconsciously, that bridges are likely occurrences on road journeys, but they may also construe a metaphor CAR IS FUTURISTIC BRIDGE, with “state-of-the-art design” as a mappable feature. The reason why the construal of a metaphor is not compulsory here is that the presence of the source is realistically motivated.

Of course in the case of advertising (unlike in an artistic feature film), it may be undesirable to be subtle in this respect. Note that the fewer contextual elements are pictorially present in a visual representation, the more attention is drawn to any remaining element. Consequently, a metaphor producer who wants to be subtle can “camouflage” a source domain in the pictorial context--with the risk that people will not recognize it as such. Conversely, getting rid of any potentially distracting context will highlight metaphors of the simile type. In addition, there is usually *some* cuing of similarity to enable a metaphorical interpretation: whether in color, size, posture, position, texture, positioning, or any combination of these strategies. It is to be noted, however, that even when a metaphor is saliently presented, there is often some sort of (quasi) realistic motivation for the source’s occurrence in the commercial: in the Brand beer commercial, wine bottles are indeed often kept in cellars--just as beer crates are; and in the Palm beer commercial the Belgian horse is a live-action version of the logo of the beer brand.

The metaphor is not only to be recognized as such; it is also to be interpreted, although in practice the two phases are difficult to separate. The interpretation of a metaphor pertains to the selection of one or more features in the source domain that are mapped onto the target domain. Which features a recipient deems pertinent will depend on a number of factors. The fact that the footage under consideration here belongs to the genre of advertising means that viewers aware of the genre conventions know that if the target of the metaphor is the product advertised, they are to look for positive mappable features in the source domain. Usually, the source evokes certain “endoxa” even when presented out of context, but the way the source is visually presented, accompanied by music or sounds will further strengthen these. It is up to the advertiser to determine whether the mappable connotations (strength, cuteness, beauty, speed, caution, safety, state-of-the-art design ...) are to be explicitized. Verbalizing mappable features--in a voice over, an intradiegetic monologue or dialogue, or a written and/or spoken payoff at the end of the commercial--is the most explicit way of conveying them. Such explicitness presumably reduces the risk that the metaphor is misunderstood. On the other hand the advertiser may decide that it is more challenging for viewers, or for certain groups of viewers, to abstain from such verbal explicitization, so that they have to solve the metaphorical puzzle themselves. Moreover, refraining from verbalizing mappable features gives room to individual viewers to come up with their own choice of mappable features, thus “customizing” the metaphor. Another factor that plays a role in the choice of mappable features is the knowledge about, and attitude toward, the source domain that viewers have. Knowledge of, and love for, horses may influence and refine the interpretation of the Aegon and Palm commercials discussed above. Indeed, given that animals are favorite source domains to characterize products, the like or dislike for them appears to influence appreciation of the metaphor--and hence presumably of the product (Forceville, Hilscher, and Gerald Cupchik in preparation).

## Metaphor and Other Tropes

A metaphor in a commercial may be its structuring element; that is, the central claim of a commercial about the product may hinge on the metaphor, but this is not necessarily the case. A metaphor may also be a fleeting element, used in support, or in addition, of claims made by other means. In a 2006 Dutch commercial for Miele washing machines, a blue piece of clothing twirls in a washing machine to briefly suggest it is a cloud, or a wave, with as implied mapping probably “naturalness” (of course in praise of the machine), but if this metaphor is consciously or subconsciously picked up at all, it is presumably entertained for a few seconds at most. In fact, in these latter cases, it may be argued that we are shifting from metaphor to “mere” pleasurable resemblance.

There is no reason why other tropes should not occur in advertising just as well as metaphor, but it is not at all clear that these various tropes all “behave” in the same way as metaphor in the narrow sense defined by Black (1979). As argued above, in order to ensure that the concept of metaphor does not become vacuous because of an indiscriminate application of the label to anything that appears non-literal, *and* in order to preserve the kinship of pictorial and multimodal metaphor with their far better theorized verbal sister, metaphors need be distinguished from other tropes. As in the study of verbal rhetoric (e.g., Gibbs 1993), it is crucial that different tropes, both their perceptual manifestations and their potential effects, are studied in their own right, and that both similarities and differences are conscientiously charted. The revived interest within cognitive linguistics for metonymy (Barcelona 2000; Dirven and Pörings 2002) deserves to be extended to multimodal representations as well. The characteristic difference between metaphor and metonymy is that the former presents something belonging in one domain or category in terms of something from another domain or category, whereas the latter presents something in one domain in terms of something else from the same domain; the part for the whole--synecdoche--is the



best-known variant of metonymy. Inasmuch as any advertiser must make a choice which quality or qualities to emphasize in a product (price, color, availability, design, prestige ...), metonymies reveal rhetorical strategies, and are thus worthy of consistent study. But though it is useful and helpful to be guided by tropes developed in verbal rhetoric, we must not be blinded by the limitations of this heuristic. There is no guarantee that each and every trope from classic verbal rhetoric has a pictorial or multimodal counterpart, while, conversely, it is certainly possible that there are audiovisual phenomena that deserve the name of “trope” without having an equivalent in verbal rhetoric. Work on figures of depiction--and indeed on figures in multimodal representations--outside of metaphor has still hardly been embarked on. An exception is Teng and Sun (2002), who present proposals for “pictorial oxymoron” and “pictorial grouping.” Another pertinent trope is the visual or verbo-visual pun, in which some phenomenon is both *A and B*, rather than *A in terms of B*, as in metaphor. This is a common occurrence in advertising, which often promotes products as being multifunctional. A car is both a sporty car and a family car, say, and a snack is both tasty and healthy. Abed discusses visual puns, defining them as using “one or more symbols (picture and/or text) to suggest two meanings or two different sets of associations” (1994, 46). He empirically investigates verbo-visual puns, finding that after an eight-week interval subjects significantly better remembered them than either their non-pun alternatives or the distracter items. Phillips & McQuarrie (2004) propose a typology in which one parameter is the complexity of non-literal visual structures, and the other is its richness, and present testable hypotheses for the assessment of these structures’ impact on viewers. All of the above, however, focus on visual structures in static images. The current chapter has attempted to identify pertinent parameters in one type of “figure,” metaphor, in representations that differ both in constituting *moving* images and in drawing on sound, music and spoken language as well as on visuals and written language. Theorizing in this more complex type of texts has hardly begun. A promising genre for studying pictorial and multimodal tropes is animation. Wells (1998) mentions ten “narrative

strategies” (metamorphosis, condensation, synecdoche, symbolism and metaphor, fabrication, associative relations, sound, acting and performance, choreography, and penetration), which partly overlap with what in literary studies are called tropes. They are in need, however, of far more precise definition and theorization.

Finally, to further complicate matters, more than one trope can occur in a single advertisement. Indeed, it is difficult to take the metaphor in the Bavaria commercial completely seriously, nor are we meant to do so. Arguably, the tongue-in-cheek character of this commercial could be discussed in terms of irony, or anticlimax, or hyperbole (Kennedy 1982, 594). The same holds for the personification in the Ikea example. So apparently, two tropes can coincide in a single commercial.

### **Further Research**

To conclude, I will rephrase the parameters that have been identified as playing a role in the construal of multimodal metaphors in commercials as questions. These questions may in turn lead the way to operationalization in experimental research. Since it is increasingly easy to digitalize and then manipulate pictures and moving images (with computer programs such as Photoshop and Adobe Premiere), it should be feasible to design experiments in which commercials are presented with one variable changed: Elimination of sound, music, spoken language, written language, and visuals reveal their relative importance for metaphor identification and interpretation. Moreover, manipulating modes helps clarify to what extent the metaphors are transferable from one medium to another without extensive adaptation, for instance from film to radio or print advertising--an important issue in the design of an advertising campaign.

*How are viewers alerted that a metaphor must or may be construed in the first place, i.e., how do they know that one thing (the “target”) is presented in terms of a thing from another category (the “source”)?* The identification of the metaphor requires first of all the recognition of target and source and secondly their ad hoc conjoining. Target and source can each be represented visually, sonically, musically, or verbally (in spoken or written form)--or in a combination of these modes. Their conjoining is triggered by salient similarity (in the case of pictorial or other monomodal metaphors) or by simultaneous occurrence (in the case of multimodal metaphors). An important area for further research is thus in what mode(s) a target and a source is/are cued. The use of sound or music-without-lyrics to (help) cue a source domain, for instance, is probably more subtle than the use of language, while it can no less effectively be deployed to strategically connect the commercials in a campaign straddling different media (TV and cinema advertising, radio, viral advertising on Internet).

*What general target categories can we distinguish in commercials?* We can distinguish the following situations:

- (a) a target coincides with the product advertised (Brand, Bavaria, Palm, Peugeot, and Senseo) or is metonymically related to the product advertised (the hairdo in the Guhl commercial is the target, for which the shampoo is used; the glasses in the Sun commercial, for which the dishwasher powder is used);
- (b) a target is antonymically related to the product advertised (in the Ikea commercial, the target domain does not correspond to the product promoted, the new Ikea lamp, but to the old, discarded lamp--whether a competitor's or an older Ikea model ready to be replaced).
- (c) A target is related neither to the product nor to its competitor. The metaphor in the Aegon commercial has the (prospective) client, addressed by the imperative “Think Aegon.” The Aegon commercial happens to be also the only one among the nine case studies promoting a service (insurance policies) rather than a tangible, easily

visualizable product. It may well be that metaphors promoting services may “behave” differently than those promoting products.

Future research will have to reveal if there are systematic correspondences between these categories and pictorial metaphor subtypes (contextual, hybrid, integrated, simile).

*What mode(s) is/are used to trigger features that can be mapped from source to target?* A source domain evokes facts and connotations (Aristotle’s “endoxa”), some of which are pertinent for the metaphor’s interpretation. Given commercials’ genre convention that positive connotations are mapped from source to target if the target coincides with the product (and negative ones if the target refers to a competitor’s product), the pertinent “endoxa” are necessarily positive and negative, respectively. Inasmuch as language allows for the most explicit conveying of features, it is, from the advertisers’ point of view, the most reliable mode to communicate them; but by the same token, such explicitness is probably experienced as less complex (as defined in Phillips and McQuarrie [2004]), and therefore less challenging and pleasurable than when these features are suggested via other modes: visuals, sound, music, because the latter allow viewers to solve the mini-puzzle themselves. I propose that, *ceteris paribus*, the explicitness of the source domain’s mappable features decreases as follows: language - visuals - non-verbal sound - music-without-text. A source domain verging toward the implicit extreme of the continuum will, I suspect, moreover evoke stronger emotion-related mappings.

*At what stage is the metaphor identified and interpreted?* In a discussion of verbal metaphor, Gibbs (1994, 114-18) distinguishes various stages of metaphor uptake and interpretation. This issue is no less pertinent to pictorial and multimodal metaphors. In commercials, metaphor processing ranges from milliseconds to, say, the entire period during which they are broadcast (some viewers may require repeated viewings to “get” the metaphor). One element that facilitates or impedes recognition and comprehension is the time it takes before both target and source have been recognized as such. An advertiser can tease

the viewer for instance by presenting the source before the target, making the viewer wonder what product is advertised. Among the case studies in this chapter this happens in the Aegon commercial as well as in the Brand one, and this appears to be a recurrent feature of metaphors in commercials (for more examples, see Forceville [2003, forthcoming c, forthcoming d]). The viewers' assessment what is/are the mappable feature(s) may also gradually unfold in the course of the commercial. I propose, for instance, that the viewer of the Aegon commercial identifies features of the horse such as "wild," "beautiful", and "unruly" on the basis of the visuals and the music alone. In the last shot, the verbal text and the logo not only reveal the identity of the advertiser and the nature of the target, but also capture the various visual features under the label "free." The advertiser thus ensures that viewers are given one mappable feature explicitly; but that does not need to keep them, on the basis of the visuals, from entertaining others as well (this taps into the continuum between strong and weak communication as theorized in Sperber and Wilson [1995]). Put differently, a commercial may initially convey mappable features non-verbally, ending with linguistically explicitizing one or more of these features. The Palm beer commercial provides another example: the expression "Belgian opulence" suggests that "opulence" is one of the features that is to be mapped from horse to beer. On the basis of the visuals or visuals-cum-music alone, this would not have been self-evidently clear. Similarly, the voice-over in the Brand commercial emphasizes the sensory qualities of wine (over, say, its reputation as a prestigious drink) as mappable feature.

*To what extent do pictorial/multimodal metaphors appeal to, or repel, certain (sub)cultural groups in the envisaged audience?* Since metaphor interpretation always starts with the endoxa evoked by the source domain, it is important for advertisers to ensure that they do not confuse or alienate prospective consumer groups among the audience by the choice of source domain or by the way this source domain is visually, musically, or sonically represented. Maalej (2001), for instance, points out that a Clerget shoe ad in which a man's

torso wears a shoe on the spot of the expected tie (i.e., on his chest, see Forceville [1996, figure 6.1, SHOE IS TIE]) might offend a traditional Tunisian-Arabic audience because such an audience would consider a shoe dirty, and hence not wearable on one's chest, while moreover country-dwellers might not be familiar with the concept of tie. Similarly, since observant Islamists refrain from drinking alcohol, the source domain wine is relatively unfamiliar to them, so that many, Maalej argues, would mistake a wine glass (Forceville 1996, figure 6.3, SWEETCORN SEEDS ARE WINE) for a soft-drink glass. Research focusing on reception might also focus on systematic differences between (sub)cultural groups with respect to the features mapped from source to target in a given metaphor.

The present paper has aimed at providing avenues for theorizing and testing pictorial and multimodal metaphor. Clearly, there is a still lot of work to be done, with reference to advertising as well as to other genres. Several issues touched upon in this chapter are further explored by contributions in Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (in preparation).

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Figure captions:

Figure 1.1: Brand beer. Man descending into a wine cellar (still)

Figure 1.2: Brand beer. The bottle from the "wine rack" turns out to be a beer bottle (still)

Figure 2.1: Bavaria beer. Gianni Romme cheered on by spectators (still)

Figure 2.2: Bavaria beer. Gianni Romme, passing other runners in his cross-country race (still)

Figure 3.1: Palm Beer. Glass of beer and horse superimposed (still)

Figure 3.2: Palm Beer. Glass of palm beer with horse logo (still)

Figure 4.1: Sun dishwasher powder. "Tulips" in a vase (still)

Figure 5.1: Aegon insurance. A horse breaks loose from an eight-in-hand (still)

Figure 5.2: Aegon insurance. The horse gets rid of its harness (still)