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**DOI**

[10.1177/1470357218797994](https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357218797994)

**Publication date**

2021

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Visual Communication

**License**

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**Citation for published version (APA):**

Forceville, C., & Paling, S. (2021). The metaphorical representation of DEPRESSION in short, wordless animation films. *Visual Communication*, 20(1), 100-120.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357218797994>

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# The metaphorical representation of DEPRESSION in short, wordless animation films



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## ABSTRACT

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) claims that human beings can only understand abstract, complex phenomena by metaphorizing them in terms of concrete, more basic phenomena – and do so systematically. Unsurprisingly, therefore, expressing a state of ‘depression’ often draws on metaphors. Such metaphors, however, are not necessarily verbal in nature. In this article, the authors analyse the metaphors used to communicate DEPRESSION in nine short, wordless animation films. They conclude that these films feature two dominant metaphors: DEPRESSION IS A DARK MONSTER and DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE, proposing that these two can be understood as linked on the basis of Lakoff’s ‘duals’ theory discussed in ‘The contemporary theory of metaphor’ (1993). Finally, the authors argue that the medium of animation has affordances for presenting conceptual metaphors that are not available to language. The article will primarily benefit metaphor scholars, since the further development of CMT crucially requires that not only verbal manifestations of conceptual metaphors are examined but also visual and multimodal ones. Moreover, it needs to be established to what extent such metaphors draw on a limited set of embodied source domains, as CMT would predict. The authors hope that their findings will also be relevant to anyone with an interest in the representation of depression.

## KEYWORDS

animation film • depression • conceptual metaphor theory • location–object duals • non-verbal communication • visual metaphor

Visual Communication 2018

Vol. 20(1) 100–120

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DOI 10.1177/1470357218797994



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) starts with the assumption that ‘the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 5). Thus, metaphor need not be verbal in nature: ‘metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action, and only derivatively a matter of language’ (p. 153). Another key claim in CMT is that human beings systematically conceptualize and understand abstract, complex phenomena in terms of more basic, concrete phenomena (see Johnson, 1987). ‘Concrete’ here means perceptible via sense organs and/or experience-able via bodily interactions with the environment. The ‘thing’ to be understood (the ‘target’) is thus made comprehensible by being compared to a ‘thing’ that is seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted and/or experienced by physical actions (the ‘source’). The ubiquity of such expressions led Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 248) to postulate a ‘super’-metaphor: MIND IS BODY.

Taking seriously CMT’s claim that human beings systematically conceptualize abstract, complex targets in terms of concrete, physical sources means that metaphorical patterns should also pervade visual and multimodal discourse (for overviews, see Forceville, 2016a, 2016b). One medium that invites research into structural non-verbal metaphor is animation film (e.g. Forceville, 2013, 2017; Forceville and Jeulink, 2011).

Investigating conceptual metaphors in non-verbal media is essential for the tenability of CMT’s claim that we fundamentally *think in* and *live by* metaphors rather than just use them verbally. Only by analysing non-verbal expressions of conceptual metaphors can we be sure that metaphorizing is primarily a conceptual, not a verbal process. But examining conceptual metaphors in non-verbal discourses is important for another reason: meaning is profoundly affected by the medium in which it is conveyed, since ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan, 1964: 24, et passim). For our purposes, this entails that the conscious or subconscious creation, and the ensuing interpretation, of a conceptual metaphor in animation film will be the result of medium-specific affordances and constraints that are (possibly *systematically*) different from those in modalities such as written or spoken language, or static visuals. These differences come to the fore even more strongly if the animation films are wordless, since any conceptual metaphors in them must then be triggered by the visual mode – often supported by sound and music. Moreover, since animation does not need to respect physical laws, it has opportunities to (audio)visualize metaphors that are not so readily available to other media (see Honess Roe, 2013: 25, et passim).

In this article, we therefore examine nine short animated films from a CMT perspective to chart the way depression is presented in these films. Depression is a complex affliction, defined here as ‘an illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities for at least two weeks’

(World Health Organization, 2016–2017). Depression affects more than 300 million people worldwide (World Health Organization, 2017). Nevertheless, as multiple Mental Health Awareness initiatives attest (for instance, those launched by the American National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI] – see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Alliance\\_on\\_Mental\\_Illness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Alliance_on_Mental_Illness)), it remains a misunderstood and underestimated condition that is still a taboo in Western culture. Understanding how audio-visual media express depression metaphorically is thus useful as it will facilitate communicating about this topic. Indeed, within the field of psychotherapy, metaphors have been recognized as a tool in the communication between patient and therapist (see, for example, the ‘metaphor therapy’ developed by Kopp, 1995). This article provides insight into the types of metaphors patients may employ to explain their experience of depression.

Prior work has revealed a limited number of recurring conceptual metaphors in *verbal* discourse about depression. Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Ramos-Bossini (forthcoming), using a corpus of more than 289 million words, find the most frequently occurring metaphors to be (1) DEPRESSION IS A NATURAL AGENT (subcategories: DEPRESSION IS A STORM and DEPRESSION IS A CLOUD); (2) DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER (subcategories: DEPRESSION IS A TRAP and DEPRESSION IS A PRISON); (3) DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS (subcategories: DEPRESSION IS A SHADOW and DEPRESSION IS A VACUUM); (4) UP–DOWN schemas (subcategories: DEPRESSION IS FEELING DOWN and DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD ROAD OR PATH); and (5) DEPRESSION IS A MONSTER/BIG ANIMAL. Charteris-Black (2012) also identifies DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS, DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD ROAD OR PATH (although he labels the latter DEPRESSION IS DESCENT), DEPRESSION IS CONTAINMENT/CONSTRAINT, and in addition finds DEPRESSION IS WEIGHT/ PRESSURE. Given the CMT tenet that we conceptualize metaphorically, we would expect art animation films about depression to depend heavily on metaphor too – and indeed to depend on the same metaphors as those identified in language.

Fahlenbrach (2017) started the project of investigating conceptual metaphors of depression in films. In 10 short animation films she identifies two recurring metaphors: DEPRESSION IS BEING ENCLOSED BY RAIN and DEPRESSION IS A DARK PLACE (p. 102). Other source domains for depression she signals in three animations examined in detail are BEING DOWN; A HUGE WILD ANIMAL; A SUDDEN DECELERATION; SUDDEN LOSS OF CONTROL; A SUDDEN FALL; ENTERING A WOOD; A BURDEN; and SHRINKING. We build on her work by specifying not just the metaphors that are employed in our corpus, but also by considering some implications of the choice of source domain for understanding depression. We moreover want to pay specific attention, more so than Fahlenbrach does, to the medium’s affordances in the employment of conceptual metaphors. Finally, we propose that the use of conceptual metaphors in our case studies supports Lakoff’s (1993: 16) theory of object–location duality. Lakoff claims that humans have two ways of conceptualizing

complex states such as moods or emotions. The first conceives of the mood or emotion as an object that one can possess ('I *have* finally *found* love,' for example). In the same way, someone can *have* a depression (or *get rid* of it). The second conceives the mood or emotion as a location one can be in ('I am *in love/in a depression*'). We will argue that several of our case studies employ, shift between and even merge metaphors of both types. Our aim therefore is threefold: (1) to chart how depression is metaphorically (audio)visualized in our corpus of wordless animation films, thereby lending support to CMT by showing that metaphors do not need to depend on language; (2) to demonstrate how Lakoff's idea of 'duals' materializes in these animations; and (3) to highlight the medium-specific affordances of the animation medium for the expression of depression.

## 2. CORPUS, QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

In order to find suitable animations for our analyses, we used 'animation' and 'depression' as search terms on YouTube. Our criteria for including a film from the large number of suggestions were the following:

- (1) The film could be understood as being about 'depression' – which transpired from its title, comments by the person uploading the film (often the maker), and/or observations in comments sections;
- (2) The film had to be (virtually) wordless, so that any metaphor construed was not dependent on language;
- (3) The film was short (at most: 10'), enabling the analysis of complete films in some detail.

In the nine resulting case studies, we formulate the metaphors in the standard CMT form A IS B, as in the depression metaphor studies cited above. It should not be forgotten, however, that this is only a convenient 'shorthand' for signalling a conceptual metaphor, which necessarily fails to capture many pertinent nuances occurring in unique contexts. In light of this, some preliminary points must be made. First, the NOUN A IS NOUN B formulation suggests a misleading precision and lack of ambiguity, since other nouns or noun phrases could be chosen for the metaphor's verbalization. Secondly, the A IS B formula downplays the dynamic nature of metaphors. What matters in metaphor is that things people do to, or experience through, the source domain are mapped onto the target domain, including the emotions, attitudes and values associated with these things. It might therefore be better to replace the standard formula by A-ING IS B-ING (Forceville, 2016a: 19), for instance COPING WITH DEPRESSION IS RIDING A STORM (Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Ramos-Bossini, forthcoming); COPING WITH DEPRESSION IS COPING WITH AN ANIMAL (Fahlenbrach, 2017: 107). Thirdly, both the target and the source domain can be formulated at different levels of abstraction (Lakoff, 1987: 31–40, et

passim). In *Mental Health Awareness*, for instance we could label the source domain among others as RED BEAR, BEAR, WILD ANIMAL, or MONSTER. The key issue here is that *different verbal* formulations, while referring to the *same conceptual* metaphor, may influence the kind of mapping that is activated in a metaphor's interpretation. A fourth preliminary point is that, even though a specific metaphor may structure an entire discourse, a rich interpretation of that discourse will always require taking into consideration specific textual and stylistic features – including other, less dominant metaphors (Forceville, 2017) and metonyms (Fahlenbrach, 2017). Acknowledging this also serves as a reminder that metaphors are part of a specific context or 'scenario' (Kövecses, 2015; Musolff, 2006, 2016) that evokes potential or probable actions.

In the next section, we analyse each film, indicating the metaphor(s) identified in them and the features of the source domains that can be mapped onto the target domain. In section 5, we reflect on the patterns in this corpus with regard to the source domains and the use of animation.

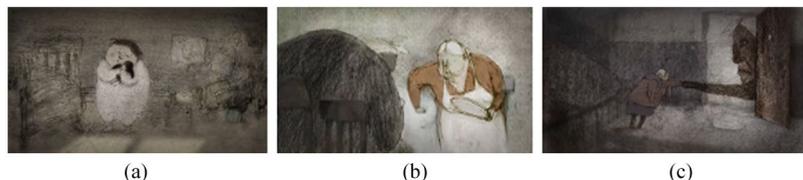
### 3. CASE STUDIES

#### The Wound (TW)

*The Wound* tells the life-story of a lonely woman and alternates between the old woman's present and past selves. As a child, she was bullied and at one point, feeling frustrated, she drew a black monster, which came alive and stayed with her throughout her life.

The relation between the monster and the woman is characterized by a tension between care and oppression. As a child, she initially hugs the monster (Figure 1a) and smuggles it to school in her schoolbag. As she grows up, the monster is always there to console her when she comes home in desolation. In the present, the now big monster is very demanding: it prods her, bangs its fist on the table, eats the sandwich from her plate and drags her into her apartment.

As the monster was born when she felt lonely, seems most present at her most desperate moments and persistently forms an obstacle to her desires and needs, we identify it as a source domain for depression: DEPRESSION IS A MONSTER. Its behaviour hints at the characteristics that can be mapped from



**Figure 1.** from *The Wound*. © Anna Budanova, 2013. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/63658207> (accessed 7 July 2018).

(a) The girl nurses the black monster like a doll or a pet; (b) The monster eats with the woman at her table; (c) The monster aggressively drags the woman into her apartment.

source to target. For instance, the little monster grows large during the woman's adult life and is thereby emphatically present all the time. Moreover, it also sometimes changes size abruptly to correspond to the woman's state of mind: when she is feeling particularly distraught, the monster grows larger and cradles her in its arms. The monster's size thus suggests changes in the severity of the depression. Significantly, fluid changes in size are facilitated by what Wells (1998: 69) calls the 'metamorphosis' quality of animation: the medium's ability to make shapes smoothly transform.

### Fallin' Floyd (FF)

The film starts with Floyd joyfully playing the trumpet outdoors. He buys an engagement ring for his love interest, but finds her with another man. Frustrated, he throws his trumpet in the river, at which point a small black creature appears next to him. At first it imploringly reaches for his hand, but then it tugs Floyd into his home. From then on, Floyd never manages to get rid of it. As the creature, born in a moment of despair, forms a continuous, persistent and unwelcome presence that hinders Floyd in his daily activities, we identify the metaphor DEPRESSION IS A MONSTER.

The monster's behaviour allows for various mappings onto the depression domain. It puts Floyd at risk (Figure 2a) and hinders him in his new job, thus suggesting the obstructive and destructive character of depression. Floyd continually attempts to free himself from the monster, but it relentlessly pursues him. Floyd gets fired and ends up in bars where other customers (searching oblivion in alcohol, drugs and sex) are accompanied by similar monsters. The more he drinks, the bigger the monster becomes (significantly, when at the end of the film Floyd recovers from his affliction, it dwindles in size). Thus, as in *TW*, the changes in the monster's proportion reflect the fluctuating severity of the depression.

Eventually Floyd visits a psychiatrist (Figure 2b). In this scene, a second metaphor comes into play. When the psychiatrist throws Floyd's engagement ring out of the window, Floyd frantically chases it into the river, where his dark companion merges with the water, engulfing Floyd completely (Figure 2c). While his movement of falling invokes the metaphor DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD



**Figure 2.** from *Fallin' Floyd*. © Albert 't Hooft and Paco Vink, 2012. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/87766904> (accessed 7 July 2018).

(a) The black creature jeopardizes Floyd's safety; (b) Floyd visits a psychiatrist. Note the safely 'contained' depressions in the cupboard; (c) Floyd falls into the black river, which merges with the black creature.

PATH/DESCENT, the way he is enclosed and encircled by the water/fluid monster also suggests DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONTAINER.

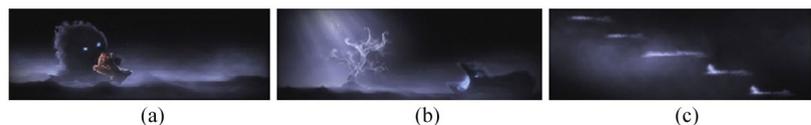
Floyd passively sinks to the bottom – perhaps hinting at a suicide attempt – until he finds his trumpet there. Resurfacing, he begins to play again and with the music the dark night lights up: in the course of the film the GOOD IS LIGHT and BAD IS DARK metaphors (Forceville and Renckens, 2013) alternate depending on Floyd’s mood.

### Tzadik

An unhappy-looking boy sits in a small boat, in a dark sea. A big dark monster with a fluid contour is sitting next to him, softly purring and hugging the boy (Figure 3a). While the boy is asleep, a mysterious bright light escapes from his body and settles on a dying tree on a close-by island. The tree magically erects itself and begins to flourish again, assuming the light’s brightness. The boy wades towards the tree, but when the monster wakes up, it angrily pursues him and after a struggle manages to bar his access to the island.

We propose that this film, too, invokes the metaphor DEPRESSION IS A MONSTER since it presents the black creature as preventing the protagonist from fulfilling his desire to reach the light (so once more the metaphor GOOD IS LIGHT is pertinent, too). The monster’s appearance is significant. Its fluid contour and blue colour (similar to that of the sea) may trigger the idea that it is unclear when/where a depression begins and ends. Moreover, its form and demeanour connote both comfort and aggression. The insubstantial form, round eyes, posture and purring sounds make it seem benign and protective at first but when the boy tries to escape, the monster grows in size, opens a big mouth with sharp teeth, roars threateningly and its eyes turn into menacing slits, all suggesting depression’s destructive nature.

Eventually, the boy succeeds in reaching the island, where the tree suddenly bathes in a beam of light and the boy flies up this beam, invoking the metaphor GOOD IS UP (Figure 3b). In the next scene, the boy is in the water again, with a miserable look on his face. Here the metaphor DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONTAINER manifests itself. Flying up the beam suggested a relocation to a ‘better place’, but instead the boy gloomily ends up in the dark sea of unhappiness. The monster, softly grumbling, seductively beckons the boy to



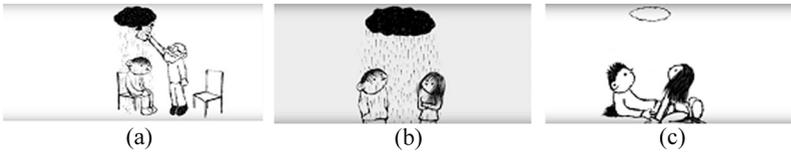
**Figure 3.** from *Tzadik*. © Oriel Berkovits, 2013. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gW1x51zezqE> (accessed 7 July 2018).

(a) The boy snuggles up to the monster in the small boat; (b) The boy (in the top left corner) flies up the bright beam, leaving the raging monster behind; (c) A zoom out reveals the repetitive nature of the scene.

join it in the boat again. The boy succumbs. The ‘camera’ then zooms out, and we see that this is one stage in a whole series of identical scenes, suggesting the endless and repetitive character of depression – although its scalar spatialization upwards may suggest a modestly positive development (Figure 3c).

### Black Cloud (BC)

In this animation without music, a young man is walking along with his hands in his pockets when a black cloud appears that begins to rain *only* on him. The actions subsequently undertaken to solve this problem – putting up an umbrella sporting the word ‘Prozac’, visiting a psychiatrist beating on it (Figure 4a) and heavy drinking – cue the metaphor DEPRESSION IS A CLOUD.



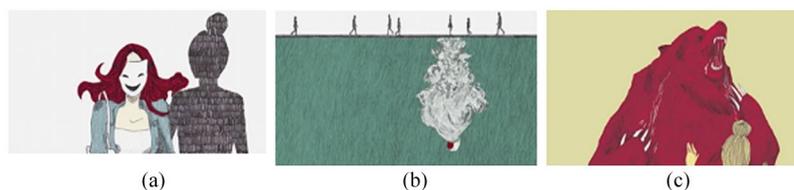
**Figure 4.** from *Black Cloud*. © Ross Hendrick, 2014. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1R0qLh61Yw> (accessed 7 July 2018).

(a) The psychiatrist tries in vain to destroy the raining black cloud; (b) The raining clouds of the man and the woman have merged; (c) After the man is recovering from being struck by lightning, the now white cloud fades away.

Unlike in the previous three case studies, the source domain in this film is not a monster. But it is also black and shares characteristics with the monsters in *TW*, *FF* and *Tzadik*. The cloud forms an unwelcome presence that continuously follows the protagonist around and seems inescapable, despite various attempts to get rid of it. Only at the very end, after the man recovers from being struck by lightning formed by the joining of his cloud with a similar cloud of a woman (Figure 4b), does the cloud turn white, shrink and disappear (Figure 4c). Instead of the rain that has been audible all along, we now hear birds chirping.

### Mental Health Awareness (MHA)

A red-haired woman in red shoes walks along a street, a friend locking arms with her. Then the friend turns into a shadow and the woman, now with a smiling mask (Figure 5a), falls through the pavement (Figure 5b). She is now without the mask, crying. The red blood on her knee connects her physical pain with emotional pain. Falling into an underground space emphasizes that the dark space is a CONTAINER which is DOWN and shows the suddenness and unpredictability of the event as well as the heroine’s lack of control. The suddenness of the onset of a depression is reinforced by the abrupt stopping of the background sound, a brief silence and the introduction of a melancholy melody (Ryuichi Sakomoto’s ‘Solitude’).



**Figure 5.** from *Mental Health Awareness*. © Eileen Kai Hing Kwan, 2012. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGulSPPOZv0> (accessed 7 July 2018). (a) The woman's mask shows she only *pretends* to enjoy herself; (b) The woman falls through the pavement into green depths; (c) The aggressive-looking red bear is stroked by the red-haired woman's friend.

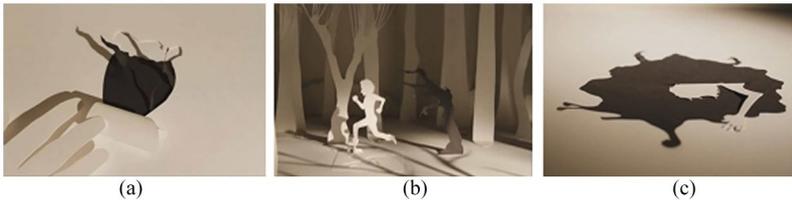
In the next scene, she is running through a dark wood. We then see, from above, a throbbing amorphous mass with the same red colour as the woman's hair, shoes and knee-wound, lying on the ground, hemmed in between poles. The underground space, the wood and the enclosed figure all support the metaphor *DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE* (Fahlenbrach, 2017: 105, who also discusses this animation, labels it *DEPRESSION IS BEING ENCLOSED IN A DARK SPACE*). The fact that this space is a wood allows for various mappings: one can get lost in woods, particularly in dark ones, and various dangers lurk there.

Rising up, the red mass turns into an aggressive-looking bear that roars and scratches itself with sharp claws, suggesting, as Fahlenbrach (2017) notes, self-mutilation. In this way, the metaphor *DEPRESSION IS A BIG AGGRESSIVE BEAR* is invoked (Fahlenbrach labels it *DEPRESSION IS AN (ENRAGED) WILD ANIMAL*, p. 105). The use of red as the only marked colour in the grey world of the film establishes the bear's resemblance to the red-haired heroine, whereas it moreover connotes blood, and hence suffering. Next we see the woman's friend calming down the bear (Figure 5c), followed by the bear-transforming-back-into-the-woman locking arms with her friend, as before. However, we still hear the melody against the background of the buzz of people chatting – hinting that her depression, although not all-encompassing any more, remains a latent presence. Moreover, we see the bustle of the crowd on the street and, within the mass of grey, some passers-by are shown to wear red masks, suggesting depression's ubiquity.

### **Acceptance – Living with Depression**

A paper-cut-out animation, *Acceptance* is accompanied by the Kate Bush song 'Running Up That Hill', performed by the band Placebo.

A woman extracts herself from the ground. A heart is seen (and heard) throbbing. In its cut-out contour, black blobs become visible and a hand pushes the semi-detached heart back into the paper again, covering the blackness underneath. The woman begins to walk through the landscape, which is transformed into a dark wood. A close-up of the heart reveals it to be almost



**Figure 6.** from *Acceptance – Living with Depression*. © Helen Macklin, 2011. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYM8LhnFI0E> (accessed 7 July 2018). (a) The woman tries in vain to cover the blackness in her heart, which starts to grow sprouts; (b) The sprouts have transformed into a tree-like shape that pursues the woman; (c) The woman manages to extract herself from the deep, dark well.

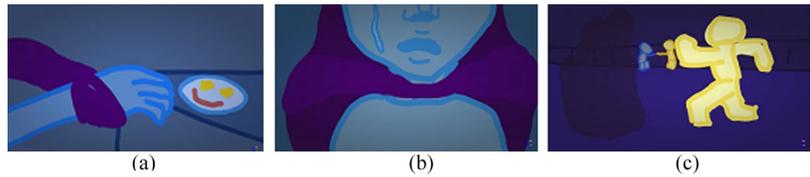
completely filling with blackness (the song lyrics here are ‘there’s a thunder in our hearts’). Moreover, it begins to grow black sprouts. This time, the woman fails to keep the blackness inside the heart (Figure 6a); it falls to the ground where it grows into a tree that towers over her and runs after her (Figure 6b). The tree’s branches seem like tentacles about to grab her and thus embody aggression and danger. We can thus once again identify DEPRESSION as a MONSTER which, as before, is black, uncontrollable, pursues the fleeing woman and poses a danger to her.

Next, the tree transforms into a well that swallows the woman. She spirals down the well, manifesting DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER. As in *MHA*, the dark underground space that encloses the protagonist emphasizes that DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD PATH, and the woman’s falling signals the suddenness and loss of control that characterizes depression.

Eventually a light begins to glow in the dark well and the woman manages to extract herself from it (Figure 6c). Her climbing out of the dark well suggests that GOOD IS UP(WARD) as well as GOOD IS LIGHT. The black shape shrinks into a medium-sized blob which runs toward the woman. She is about to crush it underneath her foot, but instead invites it onto her hand, where it transforms into a mythical animal that settles on her wrist in the form of a tattoo. The transformation of the source domain into a tattoo suggests that the depression is now under control, but also serves as a reminder of its continuously latent presence.

### Sad

Accompanied by lines from the Johnny Cash song ‘Hurt’ (in the version of Nine Inch Nails), a blue-coloured boy gets out of bed in the morning and descends the stairs to the breakfast table. He has an attached dark blue shadow which thwarts him (e.g. Figure 7a); at school, the shadow rises up behind him and seems to strangle him (Figure 7b), triggering SUFFERING DEPRESSION IS BEING SUFFOCATED; and time becomes uncheckable when the shadow spreads over a clock. We thus identify the conceptual metaphor DEPRESSION IS A SHADOW.



**Figure 7.** from *Sad*. © Andy Cepollina, 2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiUXhHtSaok> (accessed 7 July 2018).

(a) The dark blue shadow grabs the boy to prevent him from eating; (b) The shadow seems to strangle the boy, holding him from behind; (c) The boy's 'positive self' fights with the blue shadow.

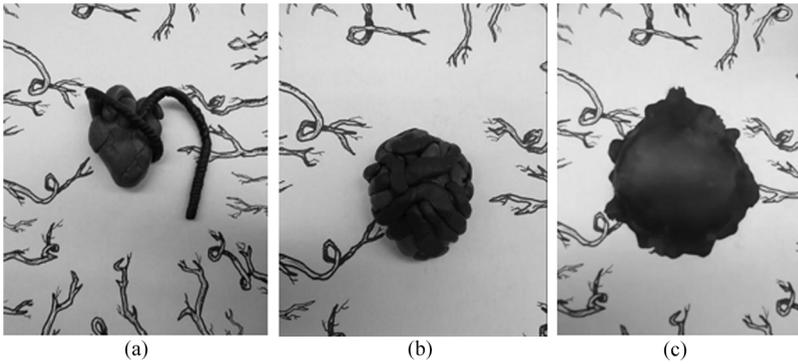
As before, the monster-like shadow hinders the protagonist's daily activities and blocks the fulfilment of his needs and desires. Moreover, through a split screen, a multiplication of images repeating the scene suggests this chain of events happens every day, stressing the enduring nature of depression.

In the final scene, the boy, looking over a bridge, watches cars pass by underneath (contemplating suicide?). He sits down dejectedly. A bright-yellow figure (his 'positive self'?) comes to shake his hand, and then engages the boy's shadow in a boxing fight, while he and his 'positive self' still shake hands in the background (Figure 7c). The contrast between the dark shadow, representing the depression, and the light 'positive self' triggers the metaphor GOOD IS LIGHT. Furthermore, the fight between the two suggests COPING WITH DEPRESSION IS ENGAGING IN A FIGHT, visualizing a mental struggle in terms of a physical one – as MIND IS BODY.

## Depression

In this stop-motion film, a black heart made of clay lies surrounded by branches that are drawn on paper, all pointing toward it (Figure 8a). We hear rather solemn, choral music with no lyrics. From the branches, black snakes (?) or ropes (?) wriggle towards the heart and wrap themselves around it (Figure 8b). The notion of confinement is thus again crucial, as the heart is literally tied up, or suffocated. If we take the heart as the conventional metonym for the person, we could formulate the metaphor as DEPRESSION IS BLACK ROPES/SNAKES or as SUFFERING DEPRESSION IS BEING IMPRISONED/SUFFOCATED. In *Depression*, then, the personified heart is harassed by black snakes or ropes that harm it with their destructive actions.

Eventually, the snakes/ropes blend with each other and in the end merge with the heart, 'absorbing' it, so that it is no longer distinguishable as such, having been transformed into a formless blob (Figure 8c). This visual transformation, enabled by the materiality of clay, suggests that the attacks of the black creatures have completely deprived the heart of its identity. The fact that the creatures are ambiguous between snakes and ropes is functional:



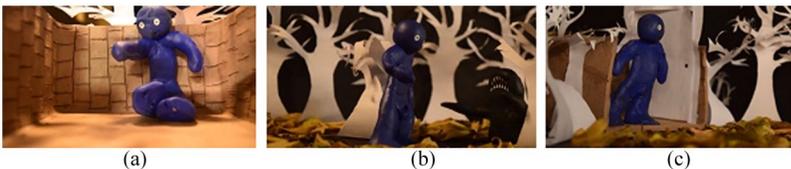
**Figure 8.** from *Depression*. © Alison Krenzer, 2014. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B\\_VU4quHJTM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_VU4quHJTM) (accessed 7 July 2018).  
 (a) Snakes/ropes approach a black heart; (b) Six snakes/ropes have wrapped themselves around the heart; (c) The snakes/ropes merge with the heart.

ropes trigger the feature ‘used to tie up’ and ‘strangle’, whereas snakes culturally evoke ‘surreptitiousness’ and ‘poisonousness’.

### Depression Animation (DA)

A blue clay figure scrambles out of some sort of enclosure (Figure 9a). He finds himself in a wood, where he is pursued by a sharp-toothed, growling black monster (Figure 9b). Wherever he runs to escape, he encounters it again. The accompanying music signals rising tension. Suddenly, he sees a white door, but it does not lead him out of the wood (Figure 9c).

We identify two metaphors in this film: DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE and DEPRESSION IS A MONSTER. Both these source domains are characterized here as being inescapable. Firstly, the monster pursues the protagonist wherever he goes, despite the protagonist’s attempts to flee. Its sharp teeth, raised paws, growling sounds and the ominous music present the monster as aggressive, stressing the harmful potential of depression. Secondly, the confinement also seems unavoidable as the protagonist, in search of a safe haven from the monster, finds itself unable to get out of the wood. Similar to the end of *Tzadik*, this emphasizes the never-ending nature of having to negotiate depression.



**Figure 9.** from *Depression Animation*. © Gemma Johnston, 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oksYru2euPI> (accessed 7 July 2018).  
 (a) A blue figure finds itself in an enclosure; (b) The figure encounters a fiercely growling black monster; (c) Going through a door, the figure finds itself still in the wood.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In this paragraph, we examine the patterns in the metaphors identified in the films in more detail and along the way refer to the metaphors signalled by Charteris-Black (2012), Fahlenbrach (2017) and Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Romos-Bossini (forthcoming).

We propose that, to show what the various metaphors have in common, we can formulate all of them in terms of the following two metaphors: DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE (OR BEING DEPRESSED IS BEING IN A DARK CONFINING SPACE) and DEPRESSION IS A DARK MONSTER (OR BEING DEPRESSED IS BEING CONFRONTED BY A DARK MONSTER). What these source domains share is 'darkness'. This is unsurprising, as humans associate 'darkness' with danger and gloominess. Charteris-Black (2012), Fahlenbrach (2017) and Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Romos-Bossini (forthcoming) all report varieties of DEPRESSION IS DOWN. Indeed, it is important to distinguish this source domain from BEING IN A DARK CONFINING SPACE (OR CONTAINER), as there is no necessary connection between low and dark spaces. That being said, embodied knowledge tells us that often low places (wells, cellars, pits) are dark simply because they tend to be shut off from (natural) light, so lowness and darkness often co-occur (see Winter, 2014). Likewise, DARK SPACE and CONFINING SPACE are two distinct source domains, but they almost always occur together in our animations, leading us to formulate one metaphor to capture both. Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Romos-Bossini's (forthcoming) identify, as we do, the MONSTER/BIG ANIMAL source domain. (We note in passing that if their DEPRESSION IS A NATURAL AGENT is generalized to DEPRESSION IS AN AGENT, the MONSTER metaphor could be understood as a subcategory of it; in both formulations [NATURAL AGENT and MONSTER], volition and agency are attributed to DEPRESSION.) These authors' and Charteris-Black's (2012) CONTAINER and DARKNESS source domains are both captured in our DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE.

In the films she analyses, Fahlenbrach (2017) also identifies DEPRESSION IS HEAVY which, to maintain consistency in the formulation of conceptual metaphors, we would rephrase as DEPRESSION IS A BURDEN/WEIGHT/PRESSURE) OR BEING DEPRESSED IS CARRYING A BURDEN/WEIGHT, which was also separately categorized by Charteris-Black (2012). An example occurs in the cellar-bar scene in *FF*, where one of the fellow drinkers carries his black creature slumped across his shoulder. In this specific situation, we would be able to accommodate this as 'burdensome' behaviour by the black monster and thus not necessitate postulating a separate metaphor – but we acknowledge that, in different contexts, the BURDEN/WEIGHT/PRESSURE domain could be used independently of the MONSTER domain.

Apart from the source domains DARK, HEAVY and DOWN (which are 'image schemas' – 'directly embodied (basic) but highly schematic representations of spatial and force-dynamic relations', Hampe, 2005: 82), Fahlenbrach

(2017: 106) proposes LACK OF CONTROL as a domain that, in its profoundly embodied nature, functions cross-culturally as a source domain for depression. Here we have some hesitations. We would agree that ‘lack of control’ is a characteristic of being depressed, or arising as a consequence of it, but we think it is misleading to say that it functions as an embodied *source domain* in DEPRESSION metaphors. For instance, in *FF*, Floyd loses control (over his bike, for example) *because of* the black creature. The monster is the source domain for depression; the loss of control the consequence of facing it. We note in passing that Abbott and Forceville (2011) discuss LOSS OF CONTROL as a complex *target* domain that, in a specific manga album, is systematically metaphorized by the embodied *source* domain LOSS OF HANDS.

We now take our two central metaphors as a starting point for reconsidering the animation films, noting how their specific narrative contexts/scenarios, as well as the affordances of their being animated, make the metaphors interact with other pertinent features.

### 5.1 Being depressed is being in a dark confining space

Most of the films analysed exploit the DARK CONFINING SPACE domain, either structurally or momentarily (*Tzadik*, *FF*, *MHA*, *Acceptance*, *DA*). Several times the dark space is specifically a wood (*Acceptance*, *MHA*, *DA*), where one can get lost and where dangers lie in wait. Even *TW* could be said to briefly cue the CONFINING SPACE domain: at the very end of the film, the monster yanks the woman into the ‘prison’ of her own apartment. Whereas it would be pushing the boundaries of the metaphor to say that *BC* predominantly manifests this metaphor, we could nonetheless argue that the black rain cloud keeps the man ‘imprisoned’ in a permanently rainy spot, like the ropes locking up the heart in *Depression*.

Any temporary or definitive solution to end the depression that the films may offer has to be compatible with the dark confining space scenario: escape the confinement and/or find light. The latter ties in with the GOOD IS LIGHT metaphor, which is invoked in *FF*, *Tzadik*, *Sad* and *Acceptance*. Notably, many confining spaces in the case studies are also DOWN, such as in *Acceptance*, *MHA* and *FF*. The road toward recovery thus involves a journey upwards, as GOOD IS UP. Whereas somebody ‘falling’ is subject to external forces, somebody undertaking a journey is actively ACHIEVING GOALS (Forceville, 2013, 2017; Forceville and Jeulink, 2011). *Tzadik* is exemplary in this respect: the hero outwits the monster (albeit temporarily), reaches the island and flies upward toward the light.

### 5.2 Being depressed is being confronted by a dark monster

The source domain DARK MONSTER appears in almost all the animations, *BC* being the exception (unless we consider the cloud, which after all ‘follows’

the hero continuously, as a somehow horrific animate creature with agency, too). We propose that the red bear in *MHA* is (relatively) 'dark' too. One of the affordances of living creatures is that they can grow and in animation they can also unproblematically shrink or change shape, as we have seen in *TW*, *FF*, *Tzadik* and *Acceptance*.

Another affordance of a living creature is its ability to act of its own accord. A recurring feature of the monsters is their pursuit of the protagonists, as in *Acceptance*, *FF*, *Sad*, *DA*, *Tzadik*, *TW* and even in *BC*. Despite the different shapes and characteristics of the source domains, they hound the fleeing or resisting protagonists, demanding excessive attention and, in doing so, constitute obstacles to their well-being. The monsters in *Tzadik*, *MHA*, *FF*, *TW*, *Acceptance* and *DA* moreover all display aggressive behaviour, undertaking potentially harmful actions against the depressed persons, such as urging them to self-mutilate (*MHA*), preventing them from eating (*TW*, *Sad*), barring them from access to good things (*Tzadik*), dragging them towards undesired places (*TW*, *FF*), or chasing them (*Acceptance*, *DA*).

This aggressive and destructive behaviour is at odds with another recurring mapping. In several films, the monster not only presents a danger and a burden but, paradoxically, is also a companion that nurses, strokes, or protects the depressed person, or at least invites or (forcefully) wants him or her to be physically close to it (*Tzadik*, *TW*, *FF*, *Acceptance*, *Sad*), exemplifying the metaphor INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL PROXIMITY. Conversely, the depressed person also behaves affectionately towards the monster, feeding it (*TW*, *FF*), hugging it and seeking comfort from it (*TW*, *Tzadik*). This is enhanced by the fact that the monsters do not always appear large and threatening, but also take the form of cute, innocent, or benign figures: the monster in *FF* is at first small, with large, childlike eyes; the one in *Tzadik* initially seems like a cuddly, protective creature; and the monster in *TW* wears a headscarf like a homely grandmother.

But the monster is mainly conceived of as an opponent interfering with the patient's desired activities. Any resolutions (temporary or permanent) to the depressed state – if offered at all – naturally must be commensurate with the personification scenario: the monster shrinks, is calmed down, tamed, disappears, or is fought (see also Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Ramos-Bossini, forthcoming).

### **5.3 The relation between DEPRESSION as DARK MONSTER and as DARK CONFINING SPACE**

As noted above, several of the films draw on *both* the central METAPHORS identified. Clearly, using both does not jeopardize comprehension. Indeed, Charteris-Black (2012: 213) concludes that such 'metaphor mixing' often helps convey the emotional intensity of depression to listeners: 'what is most important about METAPHORS of depression is that they arise from a complex

interaction of metaphor source domains.’ In this case, the two metaphors that are mixed are a privileged pair, as the two exemplify the metaphors Lakoff (1993: 225) refers to as object–location ‘duals’. The metaphor DEPRESSION IS A DARK MONSTER conceptualizes depression as a living creature that can be ‘possessed’, kept, or discarded: Floyd, for example, ‘has’ a dark monster that he tries to ‘get rid of.’ The metaphor DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE, by contrast, manifests the second type Lakoff identifies. Here the source domain refers to a location the protagonists are ‘in’ – they are enclosed in a dark well, etc.

Often both versions of the depression metaphor co-occur in the same film (*FE*, *MHA*, *Acceptance*, *DA*) – and in some cases we even see a seamless metamorphosis of one into the other: when Floyd and his monster jump into the river, the monster and the river actually *merge*; and the fluid drop-emanaing contour of the monster in *Tzadik* makes it ontologically similar to the sea-of-depression. Lakoff (1993: 16) indeed also acknowledges the possibility of the presence of both types of metaphor in one phrase. The animation medium, however, appears to afford this in a way that is different from verbal expressions. Whereas, in language, the object–location pair may be expressed in a single sentence, the two types necessarily occur sequentially. The audio-visual medium, by contrast, allows for simultaneously expressing the object–location dual. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified in *Depression*, where both DEPRESSION IS BLACK ROPES/SNAKES (emotional state as object) and DEPRESSION IS A PRISON (emotional state as location) are observable in a single screenshot.

#### **5.4 Animated DEPRESSION: medium-specific dimensions**

Some of animation’s affordances are particularly pertinent to the depression metaphors we identified. One intriguing dimension of the personification of depression enhanced by the animation medium is that in several films there is the strong suggestion that the monster is an ‘alter ego’ of the depressed person. In *TW*, it physically resembles the old woman, and their movements in the rocking chairs are rhythmically synchronized; in *Sad*, the dark-blue monster is the light-blue depressed person’s shadow; the heart and the ropes/snakes in *Depression* are both black; and in *MHA* the use of the colour red for the bear and the woman suggests that, if only momentarily, the woman *is* her depression. In *Tzadik*, the brightness emanating from the sleeping boy’s body hints that the light he later pursues symbolizes a positivity that inheres in himself – a theme that is also evoked in the ‘positive self’ off-spin in *Sad*.

Since animation need not respect the laws of gravity (or any other physical laws, for that matter) and is often hyperbolic, spectators have no problem accepting that Floyd walks on walls and that the boy in *Tzadik* flies through the air, creating multiple possibilities for the visual expression of GOOD IS UP. Furthermore, animation easily enables shape-shifting and other

forms of ‘metamorphosis’ (Wells, 1998: 69). It is thanks to this quality that the depression-monsters can swell or shrink depending on the depressed person’s mood. Moreover, shape-shifting allows for the transformation from BLACK SPACE to BLACK MONSTER at the end of *Acceptance* and the merging of the two domains in *FF*. The shape-shifting of these source domains is something that is exclusively enabled by the animation and, in this way, the medium in which the metaphor is expressed directly affects the manifestation of the metaphor and the features that can be mapped. In this case, the shape-shifting source domains invite us to map notions of unpredictability and fluidity onto the target domain.

More generally, animation (and live-action film) is excellent at ‘compressing time’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: ch. 6). Stages in the lives of the depressed persons that in reality may take weeks, months, or even years, are effortlessly and quasi-naturally conflated into mere minutes or seconds, as most clearly exemplified by the use of split screens in *Sad*. The affordances of the material used in an animation can be made productive too, as we have seen in *Depression*, where the use of clay allows for the merging of the snakes with the heart into a formless blob, interpretable as a loss of identity.

Other resources in animation (and film in general) that can be mined for meaningful effects are the sonic and musical modes (see Van Leeuwen, 1999). Calm versus agitated themes or sounds and harmonious versus disharmonious ones are often used to reflect the mood of a film’s hero(ine) at a given moment. Several of the films have the depression-monster growling. Briefly after Floyd meets his monster, it is not just its gesturing but also its helpless sounds that indicate that it wants attention, while the significant appearance of the brightness in *Tzadik* is reinforced by a new musical theme. The relief that the white door appears to offer the blue creature in *Animation Depression* is underlined by a short rhythmic beat, signalling a potential narrative development. In *MHA*, the abrupt change in the soundscape underscores the suddenness of the onset of the depression, whereas the continuing of the melody at the end implies the depression’s latent presence. In this way, the medium of non-verbal animation films discussed here affords meaning-making mechanisms not available to monomodal verbal metaphors. While the metaphor may be predominantly expressed in the visual mode, the sonic and musical modes support it and encourage additional or richer meanings.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We claim to have demonstrated that wordless animation film can express depression metaphorically just as well as verbal discourse can. More specifically, although other authors (Charteris-Black, 2012; Fahlenbrach, 2017; Tercedor Sánchez and Láinez Ramos-Bossini, forthcoming) sometimes use different verbal formulations for the various metaphors and sometimes cluster them differently, this does not change the crucial fact that our animation films

draw on the *same* underlying conceptual metaphors – thereby further substantiating CMT's claims that human beings *think* metaphorically.

In our nine films, two conceptual metaphors recur that we have labelled DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE and DEPRESSION IS A DARK MONSTER. We propose that this is a 'dual' (Lakoff, 1993): the two types depend on the complementarity of the EMOTIONAL STATE IS A LOCATION and EMOTIONAL STATE IS AN OBJECT metaphors. Each metaphor gains its meaning by its unique manifestation in a specific film, where it is combined with other metaphors as well as enriched by various stylistic and narrative features.

Furthermore, the medium of (wordless) animation creates meaning not just visually, but also sonically and musically. These modes, and their interaction, further expand the opportunities to understand DEPRESSION. For instance, the insight that the depression monsters are sometimes experienced as nurturing and protective is enhanced by the sweet or enticing sounds they occasionally emit.

Conversely, a CMT perspective helps uncover patterns in how depressed persons experience their affliction. Therapists practising metaphor therapy could use the animations discussed in this article as catalysts to encourage clients to talk about their problems by asking them to comment on the animations. On the one hand, the 'dual' theory should help the therapist attest to whether the client has a preference for OBJECT or LOCATION metaphors, which each evoke their own source domain–internal solution strategies (to *get rid of* or *control* the monster; to *escape from* the dark confining space). On the other hand, the various animations invite zooming in on different dimensions of these metaphors, which allows for more leeway in the unique, highly situated interaction between a specific therapist and a specific client (McMullen, 2008: 402). Is the depressed LOCATION dark, down, or both? Is there a pre-given trajectory out of it or does it constitute a single massive entity? Is the OBJECT a non-animate burden or a monster? Is the monster always an opponent or is it also sometimes a care-giver or consoler? Is it an external creature, a shadow, or an integral part of the depressed client? Is it to be tamed, escaped, or fought? The discussion of such issues can in turn be intensified thanks to animation-specific affordances that are not necessarily metaphoric, such as colour correspondences, transformations, 'impossible' actions, atmospheric music, sound effects and the compression of time.

Clearly, using CMT as a tool for analysing animation films will both enrich metaphor theory and help reveal patterns in animation's medium-specific resources to create narrative and argumentative meaning.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to two anonymous reviewers for thoughtful and insightful observations on earlier drafts of this article. We have moreover benefited from comments on its presentation at the 'Warsaw Multimodality Workshop and

Masterclass' (University of Warsaw, 7–9 June 2018). We also thank Elisabetta Adami for her editorial comments.

## FUNDING

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors and there is no conflict of interest.

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### **ANIMATION FILMS (ALL ACCESSED 27 JULY 2018)**

- Acceptance – Living with Depression* (2011), dir. Helen Macklin, 4'55'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYM8LhnFi0E>

- Black Cloud* (2014), dir. Ross Hendrick, 1'49'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1R0qLh61Yw>
- Depression* (2014), dir. Alison Krenzer, 1.01'. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B\\_VU4quHJTM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_VU4quHJTM)
- Depression Animation* (2016), dir. Gemma Johnston, 1'17'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oksYru2euPI>
- Fallin' Floyd* (2012), dir. Albert 't Hooft and Paco Vink, 8'50'. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/87766904>
- Mental Health Awareness* (2012), dir. Eileen Kai Hing Kwan, 2'31'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGulSPPOZv0>
- Sad* (2017), dir. Andy Cepollina, 2'08'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiUXhHtSaok>
- Tzadik* (2013), dir. Oriël Berkovits, 6'17'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gW1x51zezqE>
- The Wound* (2013), dir. Anna Budanova, 9'20'. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/63658207>

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

The key theme in the research of CHARLES FORCEVILLE (Associate Professor, Media Studies, University of Amsterdam) is the question of how visuals convey meaning. Committed to cognitivist, socio-biological and relevance-theoretic approaches, he publishes on multimodality in various genres and media (documentary film, animation, advertising, comics and cartoons). In 1996, he published *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising* (Routledge). He co-edited *Multimodal Metaphor* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), *Creativity and the Agile Mind* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2013) and *Multimodal Argumentation and Rhetoric in Media Genres* (Benjamins, 2017). A monograph with the working title 'Analyzing Visual and Multimodal Mass-Communication: A Pragmatic Model' is in preparation for Oxford University Press.

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