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When Blended Spaces Become Branded Spaces¹

Abstract: In this paper we use the language of Blending Theory taken from Cognitive Linguistics to provide insights into the functioning of visual discourse in unconventional advertising. We take a close look at advertisements that are based on the modification of physical entities in the urban space and show that the results of such modification can be fruitfully analyzed as a hybrid structure emerging from the blend of two input spaces. Understanding the multidirectional meaning-transfer set in motion by these hybrid structures can be important for several categories of audiences. First, makers of such ads could gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of their creative choices. The conceptual apparatus provided by this theory would allow them to follow with precision the semantic interaction between the two input spaces within the blend. Secondly, scholars interested in ethical aspects of advertising could extend the scope of their questions regarding the influence of these advertisements on the well-being of the public. Analyzing unconventional ads with the tools of Blending Theory can help highlight the moments when the meaning projected by a blend onto a physical object can conflict with its real-world meaning, derived from its basic functions in the public space. In addition, researchers could further wonder what the functioning of these hybrid structures says about the level of sophistication which characterizes nowadays audiences. The hybrid structure has a peculiar ontological and discursive status. To be able to make sense of it, people must be knowledgeable of a series of conventions which are learned through exposure to contemporary forms of public discourse.

Keywords: conceptual integration theory, unconventional advertising, visual rhetorical figures, input spaces, cognitive domains, blended spaces, persuasive discourse

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