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Visual Rhetoric and Framing Strategies in Advertising Word-Based Product Categories

Abstract: The power of visual elements to communicate specific meanings has been used by many specialists as an argument for seriously considering the need for a comprehensive theory of visual rhetoric. Many of them went as far as speaking about notions such as *visual literacy* or *visual grammar*. This stream of studies has undoubtedly influenced in a positive manner the depth and breadth with which visuals are approached by contemporary scholars. But it has also left many courageous claims unbacked by proof. The need for *visual literacy* for a person to grasp the meaning of images is one of these claims. Many authors use data coming from disparate research directions to define sometimes too broadly the notion of *reading* images. Reading a line as shadow or a vector as action verb does not involve the same processes that underlie the activity of reading a visual metaphor or deciphering a visual pun. The former are based largely on unconscious and automatic inferential processing, with many of the premises being held largely unconsciously, in virtue of repeated exposure to similar stimuli and their meanings in contemporary culture. The latter are based largely on conscious processing taking the form of an interpretation in which viewers use known conventions of a given area of discourse to make sense of what they see, to resolve the cognitive paradox posed by the unusual combination of elements presented on the visual level. Apart from this, understanding the meaning of an image implies the application of known conventions of the genre to which the image belongs that are not confined to visual literacy but rather to knowledge of that genre. For example, advertising literacy would help a reader make sense of the anchoring function a visual-based logo plays on a given image. Sometimes the nature, scope and meaning-transfer involved of the *reading* process are influenced mainly by the context in which the image appears (defined by genre conventions and particularities of a communicative situation). To illustrate this, we look at the reading process involved in understanding print advertisements for a word-based product category and show that much of the input variables in the inferential process of deriving their meaning are not a matter of

visual literacy, but rather require knowledge of genre conventions and general cultural competencies. The constitutive elements that give visuals the power to speak about words is also discussed in the light of a theoretical import from the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

Keywords: visual rhetoric, visual literacy, reading images, framing strategies in print advertisements, audiobook advertising, rhetorical blending, conceptual integration theory

1. "Visualspeak"– another language?

The term *visual rhetoric* brings with it the assumption that there are forms of discourse other than the word-based ones that are worthy of close inspection on the part of rhetoric scholars. Kenneth Burke is one of the main promoters of the idea that rhetoric should envisage all symbolic forms used by people in their attempt to influence others. He includes music, sculpture, painting, dance, architecture in his list of human activities that require a rhetorical approach (Burke 1966, 28).The idea of redefining the object of analysis in rhetorical studies by including forms of rhetoric other than the word-based ones was first officially discussed at the *National Conference of Rhetoric* organized by the Speech Communication Association in 1970. According to the definition that the Commission decided on, any human act, process, product or artefact that can influence the attention, perception, attitude and behaviour of the publics that come in contact with it can become a subject of rhetoric (Foss 2005, 141). Douglas Ehninger proposed a definition of rhetoric that denied the superiority of word-based discourse over other forms of expression. He stated that all acts by means of which people are trying to influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of others by using symbols in a strategic manner can be seen as rhetorical acts (Ehninger 1972, 3). All these voices shared the assumption that any artifact *speaks* to the audience that can decipher its *language* and that words are not a necessary element for this sort of communicative act to happen. The occurrence of such communicative act depends, however, on a shared system of symbols, rules and conventions between author and (envisaged) reader (Scott 1994a, 264).

In an attempt to offer an encompassing view of studies concerned with *visual rhetoric*, Sonja Foss writes that the term *visual rhetoric* refers both to the symbolic processes by means of which visual artefacts communicate and the studies that analyze these symbolic processes (Foss

2004, 304). But is there any distinctive mark that characterizes a *rhetorical approach* to visuals? The rhetorical perspective is defined by a keen interest in the connections that can be drawn between elements of a discourse and the expected audience response to that discourse. Most rhetorical studies are therefore focused on the choices made (either unconsciously or strategically) by authors of a discourse that try and/or succeed to have an effect on an envisaged audience (Scott 2008, 299). If rhetoric was classically seen as a discipline oriented towards achieving the best results in a public speech, the contemporary understanding of rhetoric is that of a perspective or set of perspectives on all human artefacts, activities and actions (Biesecker 1997, 4; Simons 2006, 154), a perspective defined precisely by this close analysis of the elements of the given discourse with an eye at the results (one is entitled to believe) they are meant to produce—or capable of producing, for that matter. Therefore, concepts such as *convention* and *interpretive community* are at the core of rhetorical studies (Fish 1980, 147-152; Scott 1994b, 474). To escape the relativistic black hole of meaning-making, stating that it is up to readers to make anything that they want out of the elements of a given discourse (for a critique of this view, see Searle 1994, 659-665), most rhetoricians are focused on unifying elements of a discourse and their (expected, desired and/or achieved) effects in a complex picture that takes into account the language of the discourse and the legitimate interpretations of those who know this language (Black 1980, 331-336, Scott 2008, 299; Bogdan 2012, 165).

In what concerns the visual, many empirically-oriented studies suggested the need for *visual literacy* in understanding properly the rhetorical function played by visual elements in many areas of discourse. Charles Larson's exploration of visuals in political campaigns (1982, 537-541), Richard Buchanan's research in the implicit messages sent to the viewers through the shape, material and style of rather trivial objects such as spoons (1989, 93-105), Martha Salazar's work with Mexican inscriptions on the national coins and banknotes (1998, 281-287), Alejandro Brizuela's investigation of book illustrations (1998, 236-252), Scott and Vargas' experiments with readers of images advertising commercial products (2007, 347-353) are only a few examples of studies that provided evidence for the power of visuals to function as communicative acts, power that goes far beyond "mere representation" (Scott and Vargas 2007, 353) and that is exerted only on those who are knowledgeable of the conventions which associate physical marks on paper with particular meanings, on the double level of denotation and

connotation. The existence of such culturally-determined conventions made authors speak about the concept of a "visual grammar" or about the activity of "reading and writing" by means of images, both referring to culturally-produced regularity in interpreting visuals (Jones and Hagen 1980, 215-220; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 20) and in understanding their rhetorical function inside a larger social, commercial or artistic discourse(Scott and Vargas 2007, 345).

The relationship between verbal and visual rhetoric has not yet received a complete treatment on the part of specialists, but many were understandably tempted to draw analogies between the mechanics of the two semiotic modes. For example, Scott and Vargas state the following:

> "Pictures in contemporary commercial communication are beginning to function in a manner analogous to a writing" (Scott and Vargas 2007, 341).

The definition of writing to which Scott and Vargas explicitly adhere is that of Boone and Mignolo: "communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks" (Boone and Mignolo 1996, 15).

The two authors emphasize the need for viewers to know the building blocks of the "visual alphabet", in order to be able to make sense of the function of an image in its context. According to the authors, these skills go far beyond object-recognition and have more to do with constant exposure to cultural and media products of our time. The two authors successfully prove, through an ingenious experimental design, that images play rhetorical functions which go way beyond mere representation and that understanding an image does not mean only recognizing the object pictured in it, but building on the context and mode of stylization to infer authorial intention and general meaning of the message. They conduct a study on youngsters reading print advertisements in which the object represented was different from the object advertised, while various forms of stylization were applied to the object represented. Readers used the image in an informed manner, drawing inferences about the brand and product features based on the style of the image and on their knowledge of genre conventions (the advertising genre).

Yet, the analogy with verbal discourse is not sufficiently explored in their study and in the end one remains with the feeling that the analogy was only introduced to make the conclusions sound a bit more spectacular than it was the case. The following quote extracted from the same article is a much more suitable description of what the authors were actually up to:

> "We are specifically continuing the argument against a copy theory of pictures, in which visual imagery is assumed to be an unproblematic reflection of reality. Instead, we see a convention-based system in which viewers and makers share certain expectations, schemata, and implicit rules" (Scott and Vargas 2007, 342).

In essence, the article is part of a life-long project of its first author (Linda Scott) to disprove the research streams that treated images as transparent stimuli whose meaning can be grasped easily by anyone who possesses an accurate sense of vision. From the simplest reading of visual lines as motion or shadow (Jones and Hagen 1980, 215) or as action verbs in visual narratives (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 46-47) and up to the most complex deciphering of the meaning of visual tropes (McQuarrie and Mick 1999, 51-53), visual language needs (in various degrees and forms that most authors are not willing to differentiate between) previous exposure to similar cognitive products, in the absence of which one is not able to *see* what seems so obvious to those immersed in that culture and acquainted with its visual codes.

Yet, analogies between verbal and visual language have their limits and authors who are exploring this topic at length each have their moments when they give in and recognize that the uncovering of specific framing strategies in each of these semiotic modes makes a richer (and safer, for that matter) area for research. This is partly because some of the visually-based messages can only awkwardly and incompletely be translated into verbal form (cf. Boone and Mignolo 1996), partly because the visual syntax is fundamentally different from the verbal one (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), partly because pictorial perception theory has some very interesting things to say about unlearned ability to recognize specific visual elements (an idea supported by reflections on the non-arbitrariness of the visual sign, a feature that does not apply to the verbal one – cf. Hochberg and Brooks 1962) and, finally, because empirical studies made it clear that the differences between their modes of action often overcome the similarities in spite of initial enthusiasm regarding the analogies that could be drawn between visual and verbal discourse (Durand 1987, 296-302; Phillips and McQuarrie 2004, 113). Kress and van Leeuwen conclude that

> "The semiotic modes of writing and visual communication each have their own quite particular means of realizing what may be quite similar semantic relations. What in language is realized by words of the category 'action verbs' is visually realized by elements that can be formally defined

> as vectors. What in language is realized by locative prepositions is visually realized by the formal characteristics that create the contrast between foreground and background. This is not to say that all the relations that can be realized linguistically can also be realized visually – or vice versa, that all the relations that can be realized visually can also be realized linguistically. Rather, a given culture has a range of general, possible relations which is not tied to expression in any particular semiotic mode, although some relations can only be realized visually and others only linguistically, or some more easily visually and others more easily linguistically" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 46).

In the end of this section, we invite the reader to take another look at the question that launched it and gave its title. Can we talk about a different language that only uses visual elements to build meanings from scratch and that works independently from verbal language? We certainly see a lot of studies analyzing with great accuracy the ability of purely visual signs to denote and connote on different levels of discourse. Constant use of particular visual signs for denoting particular actions (such as the above-mentioned *vectors* for agentic action) gives us good reasons to believe that a *visual alphabet* is at work in many of our representations. Also, predictability in the connotations that will be attached to a visual element by certain interpretive communities also supports the idea that it may be a working language that we are looking at. Indeed, most studies in visual rhetoric today look at the wide range of tools belonging to the realm of the visual that are used by authors of a given discourse in framing a specific issue. These tools cover an impressively wide area, from purely formal features such as the amount of white space used in a print advertisement (Pracejus, Olsen and O'Guinn 2006, 86-88) or the angle from which a photograph is taken (Johar, Maheswaran and Peracchio 2006, 141-144; Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 2005, 33-37), all the way to discussions regarding the specific traits of figurative and fictional discourse in the visual arena. Most of these studies are looking at discourses situated inside a given genre and provide significant support for Linda Scott's contention that the visual field is capable of supporting some of the most sophisticated forms of figuration and fantasy and it is not limited to merely pointing to objects of reality in a transparent manner. In addition, even when it represents objects *as they are*, there is a significant amount of stylization going on which attaches specific connotations to the object of the discourse and often sends precise messages about the author, about the artistic or social movement that the image is part of in a rich manner.

As far as we are concerned, we believe that many of the meanings attached to the visuals that come under scrutiny in these studies are not necessarily a proof of the existence of a *visual language* that can work autonomously, but a proof of the interaction of the visual domain with other discourses of society. *Reading* images, in our view, is understanding the meaning-making filters through which the object represented goes through, in virtue of the manner in which it is rendered visually in a given context (Grancea 2012). We do not believe that reading the image of a dog in a textbook for children that refers to animals in the courtyard requires a comparable *reading ability* to that of a dog portrayed in a car advertisement with no words attached except for the brand name. In the second case, advertising genre conventions inform the reading strategy, not visual conventions. Also, even if a dog represented with more white space around it would support that idea of class, refinement and ellegance of the advertised car more than a dog represented with little white space around it (as we may conclude from Pracejus et al 2006), still we are not convinced that it is only visual literacy involved in that reading. Rather, knowledge of the minimalist movement and previous exposure to some of its embodiments may help the reader more with arriving at the connotation that the authors of the print advertisement wanted to attach to the brand by means of this stylistic choice.

In what follows, we purport to look at the visual rhetoric of print advertisements for a category that, by definition, has no images and instead is based on the power of words alone: audiobooks. We will investigate reading strategies that these ads provoke in the mind of viewers and we will try to discover how good a job can visuals do in making a largely word-based product category appealing to a given audience. On the one hand, this is an important next step in our argumentation: illustrating our proposal that in reading an image, one needs more than *visual* literacy and that many inferences drawn by the viewer to reach an adequate interpretation of a visual have to do with knowledge of other vocabularies. On the other hand, we thought it might be exciting for both author and reader of this paper to fill a research gap in the larger talk about visuals and words. After having tried and failed to approach visuals as words, scholars turned to similarities and differences between them and then simply discussed various connections that can be drawn between them, evaluating the interaction between words, visuals and other semiotic tools in building meaning and the multiple kinds of reading strategies one needs to apply to adequately understand their rhetorical effects. But the way visuals speak about words was not

discussed yet, to the best of our knowledge. This is what we are up to in the following section.

2. Visuals *speaking* about words

Since we are interested in exploring the ability of visuals to *speak* about words, one of the first steps in our research is browsing through all sorts of word-based categories (books, newspapers and magazines, both in their printed and their digital format) that leverage the power of visual devices in their advertising. But this raises the following difficulty: there are visual features to each and every one of these product categories, such as fonts, typefaces, page layout, illustrations. All of these elements provide visual material to process (consciously or unconsciously) both to their consumers and to those who create their advertising campaigns. The use of visual elements that belong to the product itself in its advertising is obviously out of the scope of our research. If we followed this thread, we would end up analyzing visuals that partly reproduce visual features of the object of the discourse itself instead of visuals speaking about words. In this case, the point of this hermeneutical endeavour would be entirely missed. So we need a product category that would be not only based on words, but that would also lack any visual features attached to these words. This brings us to audiobooks.

Creators of audiobook print ads are facing a double challenge. One is their core mission, of making strings of words appealing to an audience by using only visual means to represent the benefits one may derive from listening to an audiobook. In addition, they need to do it in a manner that ensures distinction and relevance to the brand promise, two features that form the building-blocks of marketing communication.

Initially created for people with disabilities such as visual impairment or visual dyslexia, the usage of audiobooks spread among various other categories of audiences, especially targeting people who are too busy to spend time reading a book and who take advantage of this format to satisfy their thirst for books while coping with other tasks they must accomplish on a daily basis. Creating a distinct position for a brand in a product category as homogeneous as audiobooks may be a true challenge for marketers. Most ads in this category predictably emphasize the advantage of being able to move around, do housework or travel while cognitively processing the content of a book. Rest for your eyes, good use for your time, possibility to share the content of a book with other members of your family are the predictable benefits used in advertising

this category. Standing out in this market context is not an easy job and this puts additional pressure on the shoulders of advertisers, who need to create a difference solely by means of communication.

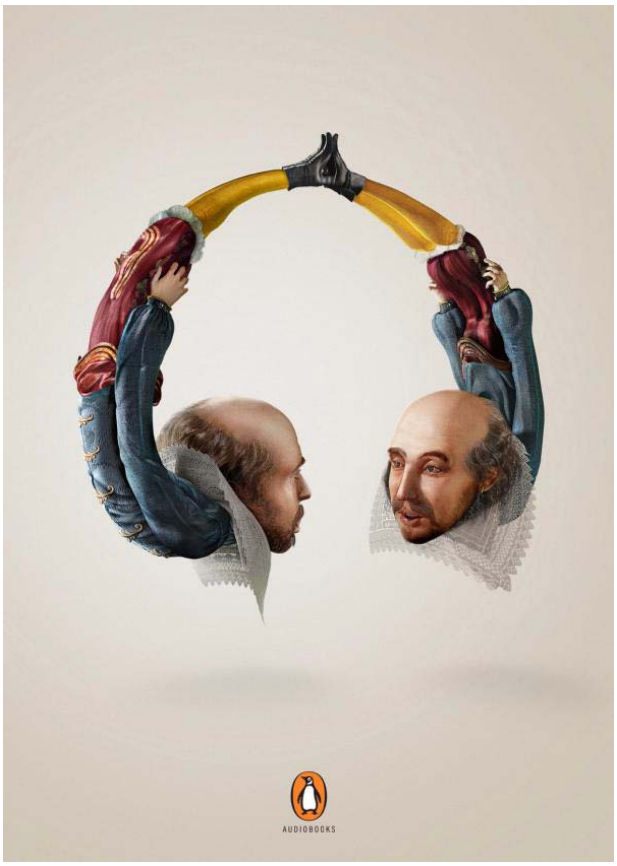

Figure 1. Shakespearian headphones. An audiobook ad sponsored by Penguin Books and signed by McCann.

The print ad in Figure 1 draws the viewer's attention by portraying Shakespeare in an awkward position. Is he looking at himself in a mirror? Then why are the details of his facial expression different in the left image and in the right one? The weirdness of the entire image is amplified by the shape of headphones which the position of his body evokes. On the plain white background, only the picture of a penguin stands out. What does he have to do with Shakespeare? The only word on this print ad is "Audiobooks", anchoring the message and providing a clue for the viewer. What we are supposed to see in fact is not Shakespeare

whispering in our ear words he wrote four hundred years ago. The white space in-between does not stand for a mirror, but it represents room for our head, holding an unspoken invitation. We are given access to this special place where we have Shakespeare himself reading his works to us. Closeness with the author in the intimate space that headphones provide is the brand promise in this print ad. The existence of a third party (the person who reads the text in a recording studio) is denied in this diegetic space. Audiobooks are framed as superior to books, from this point of view. Printed books are artefacts that imply a certain amount of distance (in time and space) between author and reader, but with audiobooks, things are different. We have the author right there - a close friend, perhaps the closest.

"Blatant lie", one might say. "Even a kid knows that the author is not the one who reads the text" (with very few exceptions of contemporary authors who accept to take part in the recording session). Yet, if we think things thoroughly, maybe this framing strategy does not involve as great a misrepresentation of audiobooks as it might seem at first sight. When falling in love with a book, what is it that fascinates us about the close dialogue we implicitly develop with its author? Is it his voice or other traits of him as a real person? Or is it his *persona*, as it emerges from the words we read? In this new light, it may be that the promise is in fact closer to being accurate that we might have initially thought. Intimacy with the author is, in this sense, ensured by this product category. Having him close is having his words delivered to us in a manner that respects the air of the text, not that of his biographical details. An implicit promise of this brand of audiobooks is that readers will be offered a top-quality reading, one that would respect the content and style of the text to the same degree that its author would. The mirror motif might be an allusion to the almost-perfect reflection of the author that the readers employed by this brand provide to the listener.

The penguin is not part of the story, as someone who is not familiar with codes of the advertising genre might have assumed. The penguin is part of the visual identity of the brand providing the audiobooks. If the word „audiobooks" would not be there, the entire job of anchoring the message would be left on this logo of Penguin Books. This would increase the openness of the message and the emotional reward for those who get it, but it would pose the risk of not being understood by everyone. Someone who is brought up in Western contemporary world would have no problem in identifying it as the name of a famous publishing house. Cultural competency is therefore necessary for an

adequate reconstruction of the meaning of this print: recognizing Shakespeare as a famous author, recognizing the penguin as the symbol of a famous publishing house, understanding differences between intradiegetic elements and extradiegetic ones (Shakespeare is inside the proposed story, but the penguin is outside of it), understanding fictional and figurative devices in communication (Shakespeare is the author of the work, yet he is the character in this creative work set up by Penguin for drawing listeners into trying their audiobooks). Someone coming from a different culture might be lacking knowledge of one or more of these codes, case in which the meaning of the image would be opaque to him. The image of a man in such an awkward position and a penguin may suggest "circus" to someone who is not acquainted with Shakespeare or Penguin Books. The image could also be misunderstood as an advertisement for people with physical disabilities that stop them from keeping a normal position of the body or mental problems such as dissociative identity disorder.

To go deeper into the processes that underlie the working of visual discourse in framing this word-based category, we will use the interpretive lens provided by Blending Theory, a theory we have fruitfully applied in previous investigations on the processes of meaning-making in visual discourse (see, for example, Grancea 2013a, 73-82 and Grancea 2013b, 80-86). Blending Theory originated in the field of Cognitive Linguistics, where it dealt with cognitive processes by means of which people build hybrid mental spaces to cope with everyday challenges, mixing elements from different cognitive domains and producing emergent cognitive entities that possess features from both input domains as well as new features (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 40-44). The authors who advanced this theory, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, envisaged especially the cognitive aspects of this unconscious process, but we believe that the data they provide about how meaning is transferred within these blended space can fruitfully inform the process of *rhetorical blending* as well.

Rhetorical blending is a term we advance to distinguish between cognitive blended spaces (created unconsciously by the mind with purposes of understanding and figuring out adequate responses in given situations) and the blended spaces created in the mind of the author of a discourse in order to shed light on certain features of the object of the discourse in an expressive manner. Expressions of hybrid mental spaces can be created both on the verbal and on the visual level. On the reception side, expressions of blended spaces usually need "unpacking" on the part

of the reader and often imply the projection of new semantic relations on its components (Grancea 2013b, 80-85). The two authors give extended descriptions of the manner in which meaning is transferred inside a blended space, depending on the type of blended space it is (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 123-132). We will draw upon their conceptual framework to clarify the functioning of visuals in *speaking* about words.

In this new light, the print ad in Figure 1 is a visual expression of a hybrid mental space. The first input domain is the world of books. The second is the domain of user experience. By means of rhetorical blending, the authors of this print picked two elements from these cognitive domains (elements that metonymically stood for each of them and at the same time were visualisable) and mixed them in a *single-scope blend*. Single-scope blends have two input spaces with different organizing frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 126-131). The organizing frame of this print is provided by the shape of the listening-devices, which metonymically stands for the user experience domain. What does this communicate about this brand? The choice of the frame to organize this brand speaks vividly about the level of consumer-centeredness that this Publishing House is committed to. The blend between these two visual elements promises a direct contact between the audience and the author of the book. But this direct contact is perfectly adapted to consumer needs. The author is there, in the headphones, at your disposal.

These images speak about the product category that is advertised, although they are not showing the product (audiobooks are purposively absent from this story), about its main benefits (private interaction with the authors you love) and about differential advantages of this brand (high-skilled reading that makes you forget about the third party who reads this text in a recording studio, consumer-centric services). All these clear messages are communicated by the visual elements that are picked for inclusion in this blend, as well as by the organizing frame of the blend, made obvious by the visual syntax of the print.

Another visual expression of a blended space is provided by the Red Pepper ad shown in Figure 2. The first similarity that strikes us is the denial of the third party, namely the person reading the text in a recording studio. In our view, this denial is equivalent to a refusal to be seen as a second-rate version of the experience one has when reading a printed book — which, truth be told, is exactly what audiobooks provide, since they are readings done by another reader for an audience.

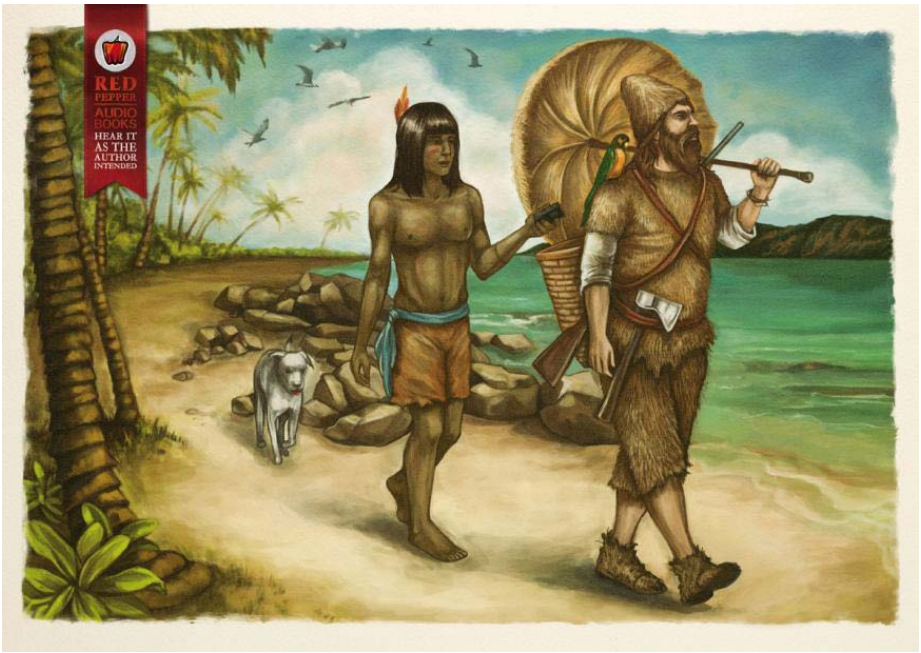

Figure 2. Friday holds a recording voice in his hand to make sure everything Robinson Crusoe says is on tape. An audiobook ad sponsored by Red Pepper (a specialised bookshop) and signed by Saatchi & Saatchi

In this case, it is not the author that is portrayed as the person one hears in the headphones, but the characters of the story themselves. We see Robinson Crusoe accompanied by his friend Friday and we recognize we have just stepped into Daniel Defoe's book. Yet, one peculiar detail does not fit it. In the hands of Friday, we see the most unusual item: a voice recorder that he points to Robinson, as if trying to make sure his words are accurately captured on tape. The text says: "Red Pepper Audio Books. Hear it as the author intended".

The first input space is obviously that of the story (this time metonymically represented by its characters, not by its author) and the second one is that of recording devices. The choice of the input spaces marks a shift in emphasis. Narrative transportation is the main brand promise in this case, not connection with the author. The author now becomes as invisible as the audio book and the person reading it. The target audience, with its listening devices, is not even suggested by the picture. Perhaps because they are already dissolved into the diegetic space. The entire technological process of producing an audiobook is

skillfully hidden behind the curtains drawn by this surprising visual blend. With one exception: the use of the voice-recorder. This second input space (the domain of recording devices) comes in to super-impose another story on the story of the book: the story of audiobook production. Characters holding the microphone for each other ensure direct connection with the characters and direct perception of the setting, with all its sensorial features. Another ad in the same campaign showed dwellers of Lilliput holding a huge microphone for Gulliver, supporting the same overarching story about how these audiobooks came into being. The blend seems to imply that the audience are not listening, they *are* there. Again, we are dealing with a single-scope network. It is the cognitive frame of the story world that organizes the blend. This supports the main promise of narrative transportation provided by these audio books. Implicit promises about qualities of the crew and conditions of production are clearly sent by this courageous brand promise.

3. Q.E.D.

By applying a Blending Theory lens to instances of visuals communicating messages about words, we see that the power of visuals to speak about words depends on the degree to which benefits provided by words can be visualised. The choice of input spaces and organizing frames in the cases analyzed was clearly guided by the main benefit that these brands of audiobooks can offer, namely an enhanced connection with the elements that form the object of user experience (author, characters, plot and setting), transposed in the world of audiobooks by means of certain visible items (headphones and voice-recorder respectively).It is worth noticing that in both blends the first input space can only function rhetorically if it is recognized as saying “author” and “diegetic space” respectively. But how does the first input space do it? By saying “Shakespeare”, not by saying “author”. Yet, its ability to say “Shakespeare” depends on the readers’ ability to recognize the Bard, which brings us back to cultural competency. Reading this visual, therefore, depends on viewers’ previous exposure to representations of this famous author. What makes the first input domain “author” visualizable is, in fact, creator’s ability to pick a representant of this category, together with reader ability to recognize him as “author”. The same goes for the recognition of Robinson and Friday as characters in Defoe’s novel.

In other words, cultural competency is needed for the adequate "unpacking" of these blends. This hopefully clarifies for the reader the basis of our main objection regarding the notion of *visual literacy*. Indeed, visuals do speak and they even speak about words, but most of the times we need more than the knowledge of visual language to understand what they say.

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