

IMAGES VS WORDS

A STUDY FOR A VISUAL RHETORIC

Michela Rossi¹, Greta Milino²

¹Politecnico di Milano

School of Design

²University of Parma

Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Industries

michela.rossi@polimi.it

ESSAY 121/07

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

GRAPHICS

VISUAL LANGUAGES

RHETORICAL FIGURES

VISUAL RHETORIC

The universality of figurative arts underlines the expressive potential of images, while ideograms document the origin of writing in drawing, demonstrating its ability to configure itself as a language through the development of recognizable codes. The relationship between word and image results from the common ability to conform in language thanks to their complementary roles: the precision of words and the immediacy of images.

Advertising was the first to apply the communicative effectiveness of images, deepening their study with reference to the articulations of words. Verbo-visual rhetoric underlines the common intent to make the message convincing through recognizable structures such as coded figures. The par-

allel between rhetoric, art and technique of verbal language, and the construction of images goes beyond advertising, but this represents the starting point in finding new applications for this powerful union.

The effectiveness of images is the reason for the growing importance of visual communication in digital media, made accessible precisely by the development and adoption of intuitive graphic interfaces, which encourages the development of a new visual rhetoric.

This study collects the first results of an experimentation conducted in the didactic field, aimed at verifying the possibility and modalities of the visual transposition of rhetorical figures, overcoming the need for textual elements.

WORDS AND IMAGES

Digital evolution is deeply changing and influencing roles and expressions of visual communication. Images are relevant in many domains that require specific skills; like Maldonado affirmed in the Seventies, science and technology both transform the specializing process, while the most innovative disciplines demand new expertise (Maldonado, 1974).

This phenomenon also concerns the domains that seem settled, like the visual communicative one, which branched out in very different and specific applications during the past century. In this overview, digital development tends to combine these new functions into new representations free from media's restrictions, that characterized the different branches originating from the Drawing Arts. The transversal characteristic of the knowledge required to create images leads to the hybridization between different visual cultures. However, their efficiency is still linked to strategies that require scientific control over the language chosen, to achieve a specific goal for each domain. These areas of interest originate from the Drawing Art declined as Graphic Art, thanks to which is possible to organize the sign to diffuse a message quickly and highly engaging but also different and complementary with words.

A very thin line separates graphic language, which is extremely effective, and verbal language, which is responsible for delivering information and abstract concepts with great precision and accuracy.

In fact, besides ideograms, also the phonetic writing of Indo-European alphabets originates from the drawing of the mark referred to specific sounds, some of which are still recognizable¹. The act of writing remains a graphic manifestation and synthetization of the verbal language, but illustration endures as visual communication with informative purpose, thanks to its recognizability, a fundamental characteristic that allowed the circulation of information during eras when analphabetism dominated the population. Im-

ages were extremely useful, with a function of information and recall, for example, in store signs. Few cases like the representation of the goods inside the small shops found in ancient roman archeological sites, or store signs made of wood or iron in many European cities demonstrate the inseparability of words from images in the commercial domain.

For this reason, the advertising domain is considered the natural consequence of the conscious application of graphics to communication. Beginning with the economic development that interested the industry sector, this circumstance increased the interest and the research on psychological mechanisms linked to the use of images in visual communication.

From the application into graphics of *Gestalt* studies, the domain of advertisement flourished through brilliant intuition but also technical expedients regarding the project of images and their union with words. Words and images have different but complementary characteristics that stimulate precise mechanisms in order to engage and persuade the consumer. Like verbal communication can be precise and specific but assumes adequate language knowledge, figurative representation is effective in diffusing a message that is immediately recognizable, but also captivating due to the interpretability of images.

Advertising frequently uses both illustration and words in a single verbo-visual message to balance the characteristics of the two different types of communication and increase the effectiveness of the message.

The ongoing changes due to the digital transition require a review of the codes and techniques of visual communication to take advantage of the potential of images as a reference element for the experience in the 'digital dimension' parallel to the physical one.

Today new spaces are opening to digital representation thanks to a revolution of the culture of the image open to the stimuli offered by other areas. The rules of the verbo-visual rhetoric developed in the advertising field can become an important reference for communication in digital domains,

which are currently 'oriented' by images, destined to become the main interface between us and the digital expansion of reality. Digital technologies expand the possibilities of the construction of visual images with instruments and multimedia technics that can produce synesthetic stimuli that the *avant-garde* movements were looking for during the first decade of the past century. In many hybrid applications, visual languages have lost part of their specificity, but the role of images remains central and there are many cases in which they assume an autonomous role from other elements. The evolution of advertising communication itself, testify the importance of the visual channel also inside mediums that support sensorial stimuli linked to the concept of time (sound, movement) and in the development of a more complex form of communication, like the ones tied to the digital media evolution.

The creative industries that accompany the development of technology require more transversal interdisciplinary collaborations, aimed at optimizing the effectiveness of the communication mediums involved. Starting from the visual one that moves from the long tradition of Drawing, based on static and two-dimensional images capable of representing space and time, to describe the material reality and evoke the sensorial one. The same communication between individuals and institutions through digital platforms could benefit from greater design control of images. Since these tools increasingly replace the physical interlocutor in the search for information and this can only start from the research developed in the advertising field through the transposition of the principles of rhetoric, which underline the link between image and word in the common ability to visualize figures, inverting the interlocutor's margin of freedom with respect to the margin of interpretation. In fact, the mental image created by the verbal description is personal and conditioned by individual experience, just as the interpretation of images in visual communication remains open. Figures are the point of contact where verbal and visual communication meet².

The experiences developed in advertising offer useful information for the application of new techniques in other areas where graphic representation is central, such as the visualization of the architectural project, which in the past has developed its own expressive characteristics. They can have great interest in teaching through the application of engagement strategies such as those developed by gaming. The control of the rhetorical effects of the images is in fact functional to the application in visual languages of semantic structures based on the graphic transposition of what has already been codified by the *Ars Rhetorica*, about the figures that enrich the speech as real ornaments.

The research aims to define characters of the structures and figures of visual rhetoric and on an empirical verification of the expressive autonomy of the images with respect to the word, that is the possibility of constructing and recognizing similar figures to those identifiable in verbal discourse, despite the different connotation, at the service of different areas characterized by an image planning, such as cultural industries, engagement, or communication of architecture.

A necessary first step is the definition of a taxonomy for images based on the evidence of the figures used in advertising. In fact, advertising was the first applied art to codify a rhetorical use (persuasive) of images, theorizing the basis of a verbo-visual rhetoric to make unequivocal the message conveyed by the images, overcoming the margin of interpretation with respect to the word with the presence of a slogan (Barthes, 1964, p. 40). The comparison between the figures of speech with their verbo-visual reinterpretation (Rampazzo, 1998) highlights how it is possible to distinguish the salient features of the various rhetorical figures even without the verbal integration, despite a greater difficulty in recognizing similar figures for the minor definition of the drawing with respect to the word. There are many rhetorical figures in the speech and not all of them possess a graphic transposition because the word foresees subtle differences, which are difficult to render with images.

FROM WORD TO IMAGE, RHETORIC'S STRUCTURES AND TECHNICS

Rhetoric, defined as the 'art of speech', has codified the technical references for the construction of verbal communication. The canons enunciated in the classical era demonstrate a surprising modernity, which confirms their absolute validity in the field of communication. The vocabulary describes it as the 'art of speaking and writing effectively' (Treccani, n.d.). It concerns *elocutio* (adequacy of words and linguistic structures to the subject matter) and *compositio* (methods of their juxtaposition).

The birth dates back to the classical world, when in the fifth century BC. Gorgia da Lentini identifies the formal expedients of refined prose, before Aristotle studied rhetorical figures in a systematic way.

He argues that men "feel the same sensation in front of style as they do in front of foreigners [...]: one must consequently make language exotic, since men admire what is distant, and what causes wonder is pleasant" (Ret, 1404b).

Two thousand years ago Quintilian defined it as the art of "saying something known in a new way" (Bonsiepe, 1966, p. 218), focusing its effectiveness on the creativity of the speaker and since then its structures have conditioned the forms of verbal communication, from oratory to theater. Rhetoric therefore defines the techniques of verbal persuasion, teaching the artifices necessary for the convincing construction of the discourse in different situations, or in reference to what we now define the 'target' with the rigor of a codified science. Its purpose is the involvement and emotional agreement of the interlocutor, the same that after characterized the advertising communication (Polidoro, 2008) with the transfer of the rules of the word to languages derived from the visual arts, like drawing and painting. The latter has often made a rhetorical use of images, as in the use of symbolic images and allegories, or images painted in popular catechesis.

The rhetorical conviction is based on the connection of different propositions in order to lead to a common conclusion, through applying in a controlled manner recurring patterns regarding the structure of the discourse and using rhetorical figures, devices capable of stimulating the imagination with elegance (Marchese, 1978). The four fundamental qualities of classical composition are 'adequacy', 'correctness', 'clarity', and 'ornament', which is the overall elegance of the speech, and are valid in any type of communication. We find the four parts of the discourse (debut, exposure, argumentation, and peroration) in the structure of the play and in cinema, but also in the advertisement (headline, visual, copy, payoff) (Cattani, 2009) and in the succession of ways of representation of the project (sketch, relief, technical drawing, render) and in the forms of its telling (concept, references, description, image). Rhetorical figures are the verbal ornaments that make *elocutio* more effective, involving the emotional sphere together with the intellect. They stimulate the imagination, that is, the construction of mental images, intangible representations with complementary characteristics to the visual ones, but similar effects on the receiver of the communication.

Rhetoric shows that the classical world developed the first scientific approach to communication in the context of words, expanding it to the use of graphic images only at the beginning of the twentieth century, at first in an intuitive way, until studying systematically the linguistic structure of visual images (Bonsiepe, 1966). Thus, the principles of visual communication were intimately linked to graphics and advertising, and then expanded to experimental research on poetry. (Pignotti & Stefanelli, 1980, Salerno, 2014). After the war, under the influence of structuralist thought and the group of Liège, which tried to frame the problem in a logical structure (Mu Group, 1970), the school of Ulm binds Rhetoric and visual communication, configuring an autonomous discipline on a scientific basis. Here Gui Bonsiepe introduces a course in verbo-visual rhetoric and involves students in experimental applications (Bistagnino, 2018).

RHETORIC OF ADVERTISING

The persuasive purpose is the most evident common element between rhetoric and advertising graphics, which aims to convince through the mechanism of satisfaction that derives from the decoding of the visual message, often charged with provocative or amusing ideas that remain impressed in memory for their originality. According to Bonsiepe, high diversification in the field of consumption implies the need to persuade customers and therefore recourse to rhetoric. Commerce and services become the privileged field to applying the tools of classical rhetoric. Advertising communication adopts the principles of the ancient oratory art and its persuasive power but renews it by merging words and images into a single element. The pre-existing figures, already domain of prose and poetry, assume graphic form in a new language that is more incisive than the verbal one, capable of undermining the natural distrust of commercial content. Rhetorical artifices create unexpected connections that give new credibility to the product or the message because they go beyond the canonical vision, surprising the interlocutor. The visual transposition combines the immediacy of the image with the rational essence of the word, inducing the formation of playful stimuli. The cognitive effort that allows the decoding of visual ambiguity generates a sense of satisfaction that sets the message in memory (Kjeldsen, 2012). The images convey and fix the message, while the words bind or confirm its interpretation, but they can be omitted.

The first to systematically exploit the propaganda effectiveness of images were the Futurists. Their 'launchers' invented a new way of bringing products to the market, which was probably originally based more on the creative intuition of the graphic designer than on the application of a technique built on a scientific basis such as the one developed a few decades later by the school of Ulm. There, *Gestaltung* studies join structuralism, starting from the study

of linguistic structures and rhetorical figures to better understand their mechanisms.

Attempts to classify verb-visual transposition have not produced definitive results, but studies conducted between 1950 and 1970 in parallel with the linguistic research that accompanied the development of cybernetics have reawakened attention to the ancient art of rhetoric, underlining its interest in communication and providing a scientific basis for visual communication. Often the public confuses the skillful construction of the image with a pure creative genius, which exists but is supported by technique, as evidenced by the recognizability of the main rhetorical figures behind many famous commercials and advertising campaigns.

WITHOUT WORDS, RHETORIC THROUGH IMAGES

The verification of the possible visual transposition of rhetorical figures of speech started from planning of a list as complete as possible in order to recognize those that can be visually transposed in a theoretical way, then search for concrete applications, verifying the real need to recourse to verbal integration. An extensive list gathers 74 figures, some of which are presented as synonyms from recent literature³. An initial examination was carried out on published studies, which however were not always organic and sometimes not very exhaustive.

The comparison with contemporary classifications underlines the difficulty of reconciling the published thesis, always referring to a limited number of easily recognizable figures. The lack of an extended general classification, if not exhaustive, suggested selecting the figures who could theoretically support a visual transposition, without taking into account the previous classifications, surveyed only in a preliminary way, and grouping them into provisional groups, based on the type of relationship between the figure of speech and its image, that is, the mechanism of juxtaposition between the graphic representation and the mental reference.

A first selection limited the field of investigation to 55 figures theoretically recognizable even without verbal integration, reduced to 44 with the unification of figures that are too similar or synonyms. The others were excluded for the evident lack of a direct graphic sense or for the difficulty of imagining a significant difference in graphic transposition, compared to other semantically close figures⁴. Among these, sound figures represent an interesting segment that requires further study and verification. In fact, they refer to the rhythm of the word and to the metric. For this reason, it is possible to hypothesize an analogy with the rhythmic repetitiveness that can inspire the design, but the graphic results could merge and be confused with other figures.

Six groups were therefore identified comprising from 5 to 11 figures, in addition to synonyms:

1. 'repetition' (alliteration / asyndetic, consonance / assonance / isophone, replication / anadiplosis, homeoteleuton, polyptoton, enumeration, conversion, iteration, anaphora, climax, chiasmus);
2. 'association' (adnomination, quarrel / denomination, paronomasia, analogy, metaphor, parallelism, similitude, synecdoche);
3. 'identification' (*topos* / *cliché*, antonomasia, metonymy, personification, prosopopoeia, hypotyposis);
4. 'contrast' (reversal / anti-phrasing, antithesis, conciliation, oxymoron, irony, paradox);
5. 'lack' (reticence, syncope, allusion, ellipsis, euphemism);
6. 'transformation' (ipallage, anacoluthon, apostrophe, atomization / tmesis / separation, hyperbaton, hyperbola, litotes, inversion / reversion / anastrophe).

Subsequently, an experimental test on an empirical basis was carried out, proposed as an exam exercise within the curricular workshop of the 'Publishing and advertising graphics' course of the Degree in Communication and new media for the cultural industries of Dusi⁵, asking the participants to work in groups on reasoned selections of rhetorical figures already grouped according to analogies linked to semantic

characteristics and to the mechanisms of visual transposition. The concept recalls the graphical interpretations that followed the 99 Queneau's writing exercises (Queneau, 1949). The groups of figures were assigned, according to the numerical consistency, to 27 groups of students enrolled in the workshop, asking them to deepen the rhetorical figures proposed, and then look for their application in real static advertisements, analyzing the specific graphic characters of the visual transposition. Subsequently each group had to invent an advertising campaign for a real or imaginary product, entirely based on the group of figures assigned.

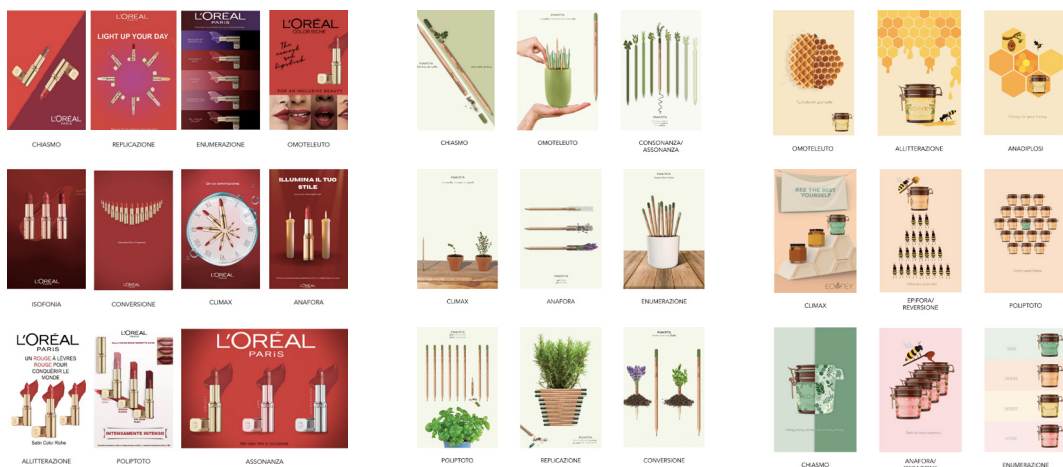
In this way it was possible to assign each group of figures at least 4 times for an expected total of about 200 analyses and as many design interpretations, with at least one answer for all the figures investigated. Even if the sampling collected is not exhaustive with respect to the topic, the work of the students made it possible to expand and verify the previous comparison of 74 advertisements collected and classified in the initial phase of the research, which were not presented to the students to avoid conditioning their work of passive (analysis) and active (graphic design) interpretation.

The purpose of the verification is to evaluate the effectiveness of the graphic representation in the possible distinction between figures with transpositions based on similar mechanisms, due to the less expressive precision compared to the contents conveyed by the word, and therefore the opportunity to maintain a second level of rhetorical articulation, uniting only the indistinguishable figures.

The group of *Repetition figures* (Figures 1a-1c) examines all the rhetorical figures of speech that operate on the repetition of elements, both verbal and visual.

These mechanisms are born from the roots of poetry and are currently used in the sphere of verbal communication, of which contemporary advertising exploits the effectiveness especially within the headline and payoff.

From the point of view of visual transposition, advertising communication applies repetition figures to the visual, yet



Figs. 1a-1c *Repetition figures*. The group brings together rhetorical figures working through the repetition of visual elements.

(1a, advertising for L'Oreal: Balasini V. M., D'Abundo G., Di Bernardo S., Foschi L., Gussoni B., Lafratta G., Livani M. C., Manicardi N., Poletti C., Tang A., Tarantino I.; 1b, advertising for Piantita: Braghieri R., Famà G., Margiotta A., Messina F., Oliva F., Proh M., Russo G., Scavini C., Venerando T.; 1c, advertising for EcoHoney: Aundino G., Calia E., Calia G., Fancello M., Jelassi S., Mihraje Y., Ricciardi S., Viti A., Woldemichael K. T., Zaprova J., a.a. 2021/22).

from the study it emerged that the specificity that characterizes and distinguishes the figures of repetition in the sphere of the word, is attenuated until it almost becomes uniform in the visual communication, precisely for the contrasting principles of precision of the word and immediacy of the image. Analyzing the sample of the campaigns carried by the students, some observations emerge: first of all, the difficulty of rendering the subtle differences that characterize the figures within the word is evident in a visual key. Although the campaigns already presented a semantically autonomous visual including repetition figures, in several cases the need arose for students to integrate the image with a headline containing repetition figures.

In fact, out of a total of 5 campaigns based on *Repetition figures*, 3 of these have an independent visual from text elements⁶.

This group of figures applied to images has a visually reinforcing function of the message. This result is in line with the expectations that were formulated with the previous study, focused on a sample of real advertising campaigns, in which the repetition figures are confirmed as reinforcing tools of a concept.

The group of *Figures of Association* includes the rhetorical figures that relate two entities belonging to distinct fields, often semantically distant, but which have a common char-

acteristic that is intended to be emphasized. This category brings together rhetorical figures widely used both in the verbal and literary sphere, as well as in the visual and figurative sphere and therefore easily recognizable.

The familiarity that the costumer reserves for figures such as metaphor or synecdoche is the consequence of a wide use of these in everyday written and spoken language, but also of a habit of enjoying them in an iconic form through advertising, art, illustrations. It is possible to consider it a phenomenon of more 'education' towards this class of rhetorical figures since they are more widespread and therefore recognizable.

Unlike other classes of figures, advertisements created with rhetorical association mechanisms demonstrate less, if any, dependence on the word, as the image is complete and autonomous in the role of message. The associations created with these figures mainly concern the morphology, shape, color, or intrinsic and abstract characteristics of the objects taken as a comparison.

The students' work shows an analogous approach to the task and consequently a homogeneous and uniform output, despite the campaigns were designed on very different product categories. The implementation criterion has led all the advertisings belonging to this category to match both the image of the product and the entity (total or partially) identifying a product feature in the visual. Thanks to the expressive power of the images and the sharing of meaning, 3 out of 4 works in this category are independent from additional text content, classifying as one of the categories in which the presence of verbal elements is reduced to essential elements such as brand and payoff.

The *Identification figures* (Figure 3) include some of the rhetorical figures used to identify, make a subject recognizable through direct comparison to behavioral and formal characteristics of well-known characters, or to recurring and familiar situations to the communication target. *Identification figures* refers to notions, characters and phenomena that belong to the culture



Figs. 2a, 2b Association figures. The group brings together rhetorical figures that relate entities from distinct and semantically distant fields, which have common characteristics. (2a, advertising for Magnum: Buftea I., Cermaglia A., Cioni S., Curia A., El Khazri O., Iezzi F. P., Restelli D., Vacondio S.; 2b, advertising for Vino Dioniso: Benedusi S., Bna A., Ferrari S., Lorenzano G., Risari K., Simonazzi L., Tirelli V., Volpe V., Zannoni J., a.a. 2021/22).

of individuals and are inserted within a message as cultural references. The process is similar to that applied by the *Association figures* (Figures 2a, 2b); the subtle difference is the sphere from which the references to which the product is linked are taken.

Although the references may vary according to the reference culture and to which the message is addressed, in the advertising field is important that the references are shared by as many individuals as possible, to make the promotional content effective and pervasive. Identification strategies have a very effective visual transposition, widely used within advertising communication to enhance the qualities of a product, and make it part of a social status.

The campaigns created by the students centered on Identification figures shows a common working and design method, based on the extrapolation of recognizable and stereotyped traits of each product, subsequently transposed

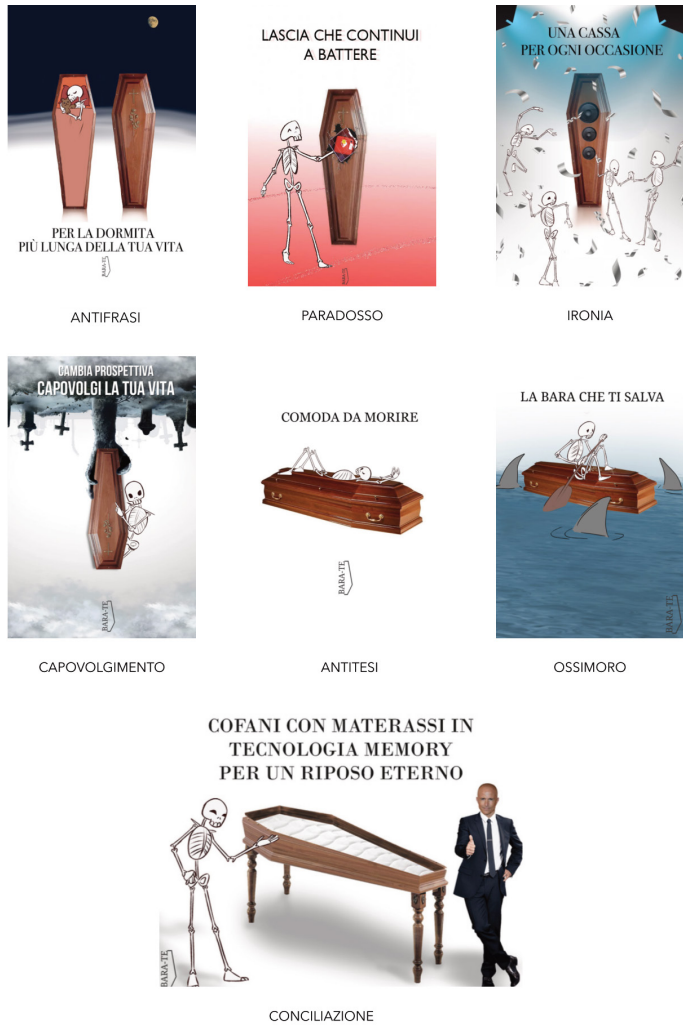
Fig. 3 Identification Figures.

The group includes rhetorical figures who identify such strong analogies as to recognize a specificity through different situations, with similar characteristics. (Fig.3, awareness advertising for safe driving: Bernini F., Fontanini S., Galli R., Ciuliano R., Minari G., Passalacqua L., - a.a. 2021/22).



into the advertisements. The work was based on extremely recognizable associations of goods with physical characteristics, celebrities, familiar situations, or sayings of the spoken language: all elements that are part within the cultural background of the average user. Through these strategies, the product fits into a broader sphere that goes beyond the invitation to purchase, but involves a series of sensations, memories and associations rooted in the personal life of the user. In this case, half of the campaigns (2 out of 4) were judged to be visually autonomous from text elements. Furthermore, the only awareness campaign of the whole sample falls into this category. The group has chosen to create an awareness campaign about the highway code and the behaviors to follow while driving, without promoting any product. In these circumstances, the sample of awareness campaigns is too small to permit to formulate shared hypotheses, however it

Fig. 4 *Contraposition figures*. The group brings together figures who convey the message through mechanisms of contrast and conflict between semantically opposite entities. (advertising for Barate: Attolini G., Bertolini E., Casali V., Fantini A., Lessman E., Tonti C., Zaccaro M., a.a. 2021/22).



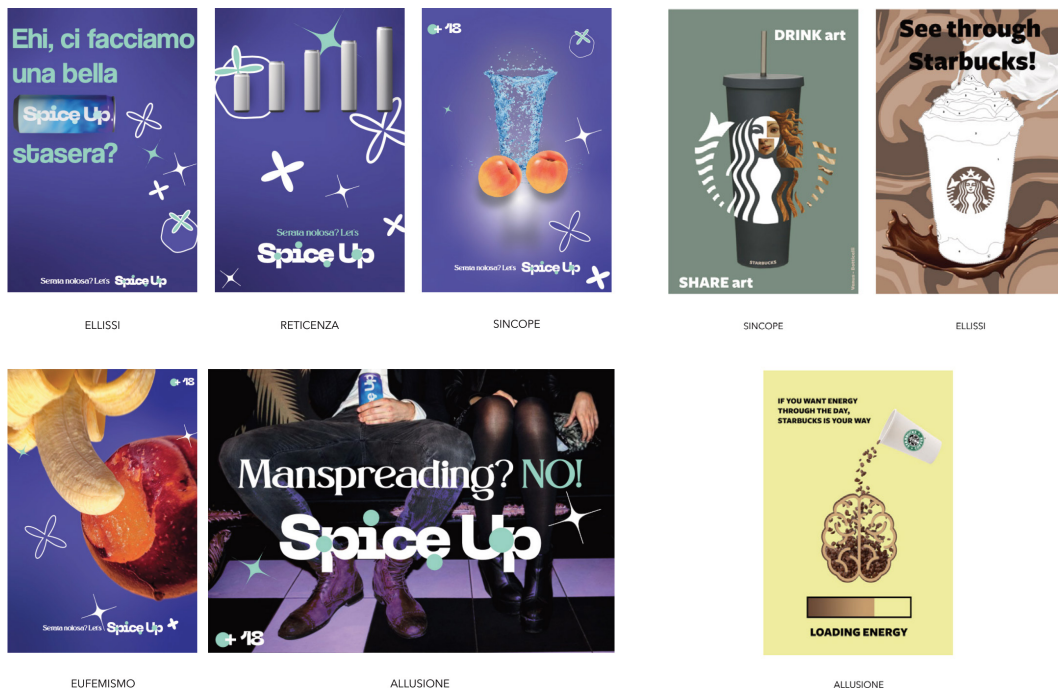
would be interesting to analyze the distribution and the role played by text and images within these non-commercial advertisements. The observation that arose from a first reflection precisely concerns the autonomy of the image from text elements, an objective that is assumed to be more difficult to achieve in cases of lack of goods to promote.

Contraposition figures (Figure 4) are rhetorical figures that use mechanisms of contrast and conflict between semantically opposed entities to convey a message.

A speech or a representation that has absurd or unusual features is much more engaging than a linear and notional communication. In fact, the visual representation that uses figures such as irony, paradox, oxymoron, appears to the user as a discrepancy to be resolved in order to understand the interplay of relationships that is hidden behind a contradictory image. This is a rather extreme case of communication, especially in the visual field, since there is a high risk of misunderstanding if the relationship is too hermetic.

With the group of opposition figures, the difficulty of the students in applying the opposition to the figurative sphere of the announcement was manifested. In general, were emerged campaigns with original headlines and texts, in line with the contrasting figures, while the visuals are lacking in contrasting elements typical of this group. Therefore, there is a common problem in conceiving and applying opposition mechanisms to images for advertising purposes. The trend recorded is that of greater creativity and irony in the text components, while the images play a representative role of the product. The contrast emerged on a conceptual rather than a representational level: the projects of the Contraposition campaigns contained excellent theoretical ideas that were not completely transposed into the visual realization, in fact only 1 group out of 4 approached the expected result of visual autonomy of the visual. The predictions were made on a previous survey, which confirmed the possibility of creating a visual with contrasting figures that was autonomous from text elements from the point of view of conveying the message.

The *Lack figures* (Figures 5a, 5b) are united by the omission of some elements with respect to the message they convey. The principle of the Lack figures is that of insinuation, in which certain aspects are mentioned and others are missing, with the aim of stimulating the user's intuition and curiosity. The category of figures is a fundamental resource for the field of advertising, which uses omission mechanisms to make advertising communication more irreverent and intriguing, involving the user in a game of hypothesis.



Figs. 5a, 5b Figures of Lack. The figures of the group are united by the omission of some elements with respect to the message they convey. (5a, advertising for SpiceUp: Baldani L., Erpetti M., Fanizza V. M. R., Kollo M. Hen Basile C., Vettoretto A.; 5b: advertising for Starbucks: Bejan O, Curcio N, Elattar Y, Galloni L., Lorane H., a.a. 2021/22).

Particularly effective is the visual transposition of the missing figures, rendered through the strategic removal of elements of the image, whose persuasive power is amplified with respect to the word. In general, the students dealing with this category of figures have shown that they have understood the role played by the Lack figures, also playing with taboo themes, with which the figures create a very powerful and effective union. However, the theme of Lack has been interpreted differently depending on the product on which the campaign was built: some have opted for a lack played purely on a visual level, others have preferred to design a campaign in which the mechanisms of insinuation are found also in the headline and in the concept of advertising and product. 2 out of 3 groups created visually autonomous and captivating campaigns using the Lack figures: one uses the allusive power of the figures to explore taboo themes, while the other declines the concept of lack for more creative and artistic purposes. These two paths lead to the hypothesis



Figs. 6a, 6b Transformation Figures. The group applies mechanisms of breaking of syntactic regularities in speech, or of the laws of physics in visual representation. (6a: advertising for Malaerba: Bellavigna G., Colazzo S., Evangelista M., Guidotti C., Leva M., Pellegrini M., Pirrone M. L., Ragni A.; 6b, advertising for Pong Beer: Colangelo F., Frosi V., Giavazzi G., Lai V., Magnolfi A., Martinelli B., Mori S., Piccioli A., a.a. 2021/22).

that Lack figures offer different ideas to work with depending on whether the subject one aspires to make is merely physical, linked to the product, or there is a more cognitive intent, in which the user is led to reflect on wider phenomena than the product in question.

The *Transformation figures* (Figures 6a, 6b) foresee mechanisms of breaking of syntactic regularities, when used in speech, or of the laws of physics if used in visual representation. In general, it is a profound detachment from the normal representation of a content, which causes a sense of incongruity in the user. The Transformation figures unleash their potential for effectiveness especially when applied to the visual sphere, since they intervene in the creation of images with elements of unusual proportions and surreal behaviors, however, their recognizability is based on the verbal text.



Fig.7 Advertising without rhetorical figures. (advertising for Gin alcohol: Grosso F., Piccirilli C., a.a. 2021/22)

This class of figures is specific in considering a new point of view on objects and phenomena, altering them through exaggeration or shrinking, dividing them into parts and then reorganizing them with new logic. In contact with these mechanisms, words and images become material to convey innovative and original messages.

In the case of this group, there is a strong preference to invest in text components that can make explicit the meaning of the visuals rendered anomalous by Transformation figures. In fact, if some Transformation figures such as hyperbole and litotes are the most common used in advertising, others, such as anacoluthon, anastrophe, hyperbaton are more complex to manage in visual transposition and decoding in absence of an explanatory text. It is noted that although most of the visuals containing Transformation figures were easily decodable and autonomous from the point of view of conveying the message, in general persists the belief that it

is necessary to add an explanatory content to guarantee its understanding. 2 out of 4 groups designed campaigns that were visually coherent with the Transformation figures, with independent visuals from explanatory text components.

CONCLUSION

The first results of the experimentation provide interesting clues. From the works, a different approach emerges in the students' response, some of whom are enrolled in the degree course of Architecture, a variable that underlined the different graphic ability in the manipulation of images for rhetorical purposes, due to their greater familiarity with drawing as an organizational matrix of space, which provides technical support for planning and allows better control of the execution.

Another relevant data for the final balance concerns the balanced distribution between students who have created a campaign inspired by an existing brand and those who preferred to create a fantasy product: the percentages report 60% of campaigns for real products and 40% for invented products; 13 and 11 campaigns out of 24 total projects respectively. Given the total freedom of choice of the campaign product, it was plausible to hypothesize a preference for products already on the market, from which extrapolate the advertising communication style and apply it to a new campaign. However, many students have expressed the desire to get involved by designing a new product that is credible both in terms of functions, in communication and positioning on the market.

As for the visual transposition of rhetorical figures, the research previously made on existing advertisements had confirmed the possibility of visual transposition for all the rhetorical figures of the 6 identified groups. The current study is a continuation and confirmation of the previous one, and thanks to the sample collected the intention is to analyze the mechanisms and methods of visual transposition that affect the design and creation of advertising

content from scratch. Investigating the possibility of visual transposition and the autonomy of the iconic component from text elements are the two main goals of the research and the mechanisms that had been hypothesized now have a concrete and scientific basis.

The observations that emerged from the analysis of the projects and from the comparison between them, confirm the previously formulated theses: in fact, all groups of figures have been successfully translated into images, most of them semantically autonomous from explanatory text contents.

However, almost all the students still chose to integrate the ad with short text elements such as slogans or headlines. This decision was interpreted as an attempt to add credibility and realism to the advertising, taking inspiration from most of the advertising content that contains short text inputs. Consequently, since all the campaigns collected contain verbal elements, within the study all those in which the text does not add value or meaning to what is expressed through images are considered 'autonomous' advertising.

Note how in 5 groups of figures out of the total of 6, the text elements inserted are redundant to the image, without adding meaning or additional explanations. However, the group in which there was a greater difficulty in making the visual semantically independent of the text was the Contraposition group, whose campaigns are rather weak in conveying the concept of contrast only through images. Advertisings based on Contraposition figures present images that do not achieve the expected contrast effect, which is why the communication of the paradoxical message is relegated to text elements, such as headlines. This result is slightly out of the previsions, since the previous research and the supporting material had shown the concrete possibility of visual transposition of Contraposition figures, as well as a remarkable effectiveness on the part of the images in conveying messages.

On the contrary, the categories that have been most successful in creating autonomous visuals in transmitting

a message have been those of Association, Identification and Lack. The first two, from the analogous mechanism, applied to different spheres of knowledge (Association is linked to a knowledge drawn from sensory experience, while Identification concerns the connection to facts or subjects that fall within the individual or collective culture), on average 3 out of 4 ads were evaluated semantically autonomous, equal to 75% of the works.

The Lack figures follow, who have produced excellent works, well made and in line with requests, visually autonomous in 2 out of 3 cases.

Although this line of research is growing with more specific theses, materials, and experiments, at each step new questions arise and new hypotheses need to be tested, suggesting that the study is far from coming to an end, but constantly offers new stimuli for in-depth analysis and parallel connections. For example, in this study we came across a prototype of an awareness campaign, of which the difference that separates it from a commercial campaign is in its purpose, but also in the communication mechanisms. From stimuli like this comes the push to further investigate other aspects that branch out from the same central theme.

NOTES

1 For example, the 's' that in many Indo-Europeans idioms stands in the shape and in the sound of the snake, or the 'm' that reminds ocean waves or the maternal breast.

2 The research presented in these pages begins with Greta Milino's graduation thesis, 'Verbo-visual rhetoric: study of the mechanisms for combining text and images within commercial advertisements with a focus on print and television, web - University of Parma, a.a. 2020/21, tutor prof. Michela Rossi.

REFERENCES

Barthes, R. (1964). Rhétorique de l'image. *Communications*, 4(4), 40-51.
 Bistagnino, E. (2018). *Il disegno nella Scuola di Ulm*. Milano, IT: FrancoAngeli.

- Bonsiepe, G. (1966). Rettorica visivo/verbale. *Marcatrè. Rivista di cultura contemporanea*, IV(22), 217-232.
- Cattani, A. (2009). *Pubblicità e Retorica*. Milano, IT: Lupetti.
- Depero, F. (1980). *Il futurismo e l'arte della pubblicità*. In *Numero unico Futurista Campari* (L. Caruso, Ed.). Firenze, IT: Spes-Salimbeni (Original work published 1931).
- Fastelli, F. (2015). Lucia Marcucci, maestra verbovisiva. *LEA - Lingue e letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente*, 4, 359-371.
- Ghiazza, S., & Napoli, M. (2007). *Le figure retoriche. Parola e immagine*. Bologna, IT: Zanichelli.
- Groupe µ (1970). *Rhétorique générale*. Paris, FR: Larousse.
- Kjeldsen, J.E. (2012). Pictorial Argumentation in Advertising: Visual Tropes and Figures as a Way of Creating Visual Argumentation. In F. H. van Eemeren & B. Garssen (Eds.), *Topical Themes in Argumentation Theory: Twenty Exploratory Studies* (pp. 239-255). Cham, CH: Springer.
- Lagerwerf, L., van Hooijdonk, C.M.J., & Korenber, A. (2012). Processing visual rhetoric in advertisements: Interpretations determined by verbal anchoring and visual structure. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44, 1836-1852.
- Maes, A.A., & Schilperoord, J. (2008). Classifying visual rhetoric: Conceptual and structural heuristics. In B.J. Phillips & E.F. McQuarrie (Eds.), *Go Figure: New Directions in Advertising Rhetoric* (pp. 227-253). New York, NY: Armonk.
- Marchese, A. (1984). *Dizionario di retorica e di stilistica*, Milano, IT: Mondadori (Original work published 1978).
- Monaldi, L. (2014). *Retoriche verbovisive. Intorno al Gruppo 70 e alla poesia visiva*. Nuova Meta. Parole e immagini, 36, 38-45.
- Mondino, M. (2014). Retorica dello spazio: il caso della street art. *Between*, IV(7), 1-22. Retrieved October 21, 2022 from <http://www.between-journal.it/>
- Pignotti, L., & Stefanelli, S. (1980). *La scrittura verbo-visiva. Le avanguardie del Novecento tra parola e immagine*. Roma, IT: L'Espresso.
- Polidoro, P. (2008). *Cos'è la semiotica visiva*. Roma, IT: Carrocci.
- Queneau, R. (1947). *Exercices de style*. Paris, FR: Gallimard.
- Rampazzo, G. (1998). *Pubblicitariamente*. Padova, IT: La Linea.
- Salerno, S. (2014). Il linguaggio pubblicitario tra persuasione e retorica. *H-ermes. Journal of Communication*, 2, 59-80. doi:10.1285/i22840753n2p59
- Treccani (n.d.). Retorica. In *Treccani*. October 21, 2022 from, from <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/retorica#:~:text=L'arte%20del%20parlare%20e,in%20modo%20ornato%20ed%20efficace>.
- van Mulken, M. (2003). Analyzing rhetorical devices in print advertisements. *DocumentDesign*, 4(2), 114-128.

Article available at

DOI: 10.6092/issn.2724-2463/15285

How to cite

as article

Rossi, M., & Milino, G. (2022). Images vs Words. A Study for a Visual Rhetoric. *img journal*, 7, 282-307.

as contribution in book

Rossi, M., & Milino, G. (2022). Images vs Words. A Study for a Visual Rhetoric. In A. Luigini, V. Menchetelli. (Eds.), *img journal 07/2022. Wordless Images* (pp. 282-307). Alghero, IT: Publica. ISBN 9788899586300



© 2022 The authors. The text of this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.