# VISMET: a corpus of visual metaphors

*Investigating the feasibility of creating a digital repository of visual metaphors (still images).*

In recent years metaphor research has been attracting a wide range of scholars, interested in understanding how metaphor functions, when expressed in modalities other than the well-known verbal one (e.g. Cienki & Mueller 2008; Rohdin 2009; Eggerstsson & Forceville 2009; Müller & Cienki 2009; Zbikowski 2009; Forceville 1996, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; Philips 2003; Velasco-Sacristán & Fuertes-Olivera 2004, 2006; McQuarrie & Philips 2008; Caballero 2009; Ning Yu 2009; Urios-Aparisi 2009; El Refaie 2003, 2009; Yus 2009; Teng 2009; Schilperoord & Maes 2009; Ng, Koller 2013).

Among the various modalities of expression, still images constitute a highly productive semiotic landscape in which metaphors are deliberately realized for communicating specific messages in advertising (1), art (2), social campaigns (3), and political cartoons (4).


1)


2)


3)


4)

However, extensive and systematic analyses of this modality of expression (visual metaphors in still images) are yet to be produced. Pioneering studies have shown how visual metaphors can express both, conventional and novel conceptual metaphors, often by analyzing images belonging to different genres. Also for this reason it is still hard to compare the achieved insights, to observe recurrent patterns, to make inferences on large and balanced samples, and eventually to formulate a more comprehensive theory of visual metaphor. Last but not least, copyright issues have often constrained the authors, denying them the permission to reprint the analyzed images in academic papers, and sometimes forcing them to produce limping verbal descriptions of such images (e.g. Forceville 2006).

It is the aim of this project to investigate the actual possibility to create a repository of visual metaphors (still images) that can be accessed by academic researchers under specific regulations, for scientific and educational (non-commercial) purposes. The envisaged repository aims at fulfilling the dimensions of portability that define the reliability of well-established verbal corpora (Bird, Simons 2003). In this regard, its implementation will need to take into account the following aspects:

**Content**

The corpus will be constituted of authentic images that encompass identified visual metaphors. Such images will need to cover different genres (advertising, art, etc) as well as different typologies of visual metaphors (with/without verbal cues; with/without both, source and target domains fully represented, etc.) A taxonomy of the types of visual metaphors included in Vismet will have to be provided in advance.

**Sources**

A wide range of sources will be contacted, in order to investigate options for obtaining reprinting permissions. Among them:

- existing repositories of images used mainly in advertising (e.g. Coloribus, Adsoftheworld)
- creative agencies (from different countries all around the world)
- museums and private collections (e.g. Guggenheim, Tate gallery)
- editorial boards of newspapers and journals (e.g. New York Times, El Pais, Kurier, The Economist)
- privates (e.g. creative agents, art directors, graphic designers, digital artists, visual artists, journalists)

**Access**

We envision a first option in which users will be able to use the images of the Vismet repository for their research, but they will have to explicitly address the original owners for reprinting permissions in their articles; and a second option in which the terms of use will already detail the constrains for reprinting the images in scientific articles. Such options will have to be discussed in advance with the copyright's owners.

In general, the terms of use will enable potential users to understand any restrictions on its permissible use before they begin to use it, in order to promote the fair use of each visual resource for scientific, educational, or other non-commercial uses. On the other hand, the rights of the copyright owners will be valued and their sensitivities will be protected and clearly stated in the Terms of Use.

The corpus will be hosted on the VU server, and it will be property of the VU Metaphor Lab.

The website design, as well as the updates, will be administrated by VU University.

**Representativeness**

The exploratory nature and the limited period of time frame during which the present project will be developed might not allow to create a state-of-the-art corpus, in terms of size (amount of collected images). However, the goal

is to create a dynamic platform which can be integrated in the future with new materials. For this reason it will be crucial to provide a clear set of guidelines for the collection of images, as well as a clear annotation scheme (metadata).

In order to facilitate future data collection and annotation, during the present project we aim at covering and therefore exemplifying all the types of visual metaphor identified in the taxonomy that will be provided.

**Machine readable format**

We envision that each image will be enhanced with 3 types of annotations:

- formal metadata (author, year, place, genre)
- semantic metadata (annotation scheme provided in the taxonomy)
- tags (one-word user generated labels)

The third set of annotations will be accomplished through an ad-hoc created crowdsourcing platform, or through an existing platform (e.g. amazon mechanical turk).

**Team**

The project will be coordinated by dr. Marianna Bolognesi, under the supervision of prof. Gerard Steen. It will be embedded in the VU Metaphor Lab, and in the Network Institute, sponsored by both institutions. Therefore its implementation will benefit from the advising of the Metaphor Lab members and researchers affiliated at the Network Institute. In addition, a Research Assistant will be involved between February and May for analyzing the dataset's properties, refining and applying the annotation scheme to the collected images.

**WORK-PLAN**

| Time-frame | Activity |
| --- | --- |
| November 2013 | - Setup of the list of external sources to be contacted<br>- Setup of the cover letters' templates with a first draft of Terms of Use<br>- Starting the setup of the taxonomy<br>- Identification of specific images to be included in the corpus |
| December 2013 | - Sending first requests to the sources, testing their sensitivities.<br>- Full implementation of the taxonomy<br>- Refining the Terms of Use according to sources' feedback<br>- Identification of specific images to be included in the corpus |
| January- March 2014 | - Sending new updated requests<br>- Identification of specific images to be included in the corpus<br>- Website implementation<br>- Research Assistant's work-package (metaphors' analysis and annotation) |
| April 2014 | - Preparation of a detailed report indicating feasibility of the method, weaknesses, suggestions for future developments<br>- Research Assistant's work-package (metaphors' analysis and annotation) |