Embodied Metaphors in Film, Television, and Video Games

Cognitive Approaches

Edited by
Kathrin Fahlenbrach

ROUTLEDGE

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'This book consolidates a promising line of research into the means by which metaphors in film and other media relate to embodiment, affect, and meaning. As such, it is an original and much-needed contribution.'

—*Carl Plantinga, Calvin College, USA*

In cognitive research, metaphors have been shown to help us imagine complex, abstract, or invisible ideas, concepts, or emotions. Contributors to this book argue that metaphors occur not only in language but in audiovisual media as well. This is all the more evident in entertainment media, which strategically 'sell' their products by addressing their viewers' immediate, reflexive understanding through pictures, sounds, and language. This volume applies conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) to film, television, and video games in order to analyze the embodied aesthetics and meanings of those moving images.

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Introduction
Embodied Metaphors in Moving Images

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1. General Scope of the Volume

In cognitive research, metaphors have been shown to act as elementary structures of human thinking and mental imagination (Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Danesi 1989; Boroditzky 2000; Boroditzky and Ramscar 2002; Gallese and Lakoff 2005). They help us to imagine complex, abstract, or invisible ideas, concepts, or emotions in terms of embodied schemata and gestalts, like exploding containers ('emotion is a container', e.g., 'bursting with joy'), paths ('life is a path', e.g., 'at the end of life'), or spatial hierarchies ('good is up—bad is down'). As "intermediary structures" in our minds (Danesi 1989), they integrate cultural knowledge with innate meanings, based on gestalt perception and image schemata. Accordingly, *conceptual metaphor theory* (abbreviated in the following as CMT) considers metaphors not just as analogies between two words or pictures on the symbolic level. Considering a more basic cognitive dimension, it is argued that metaphors are based on *conceptual mappings* as a relevant mechanism in the human mind (cf. e.g., Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Kövecses 2002) that act by projecting significant sensorial qualities of a source domain (e.g., the gestalt elements 'in-out' of the container-based concept of 'exploding') to the sensorial and mental qualities of another concept, belonging to a different experiential domain (e.g., 'anger').

Given the cognitive character of metaphorical understanding and imagination, it seems obvious that not only language (Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Kövecses 2002; Gibbs 2008) but also visual and multimodal media refer to the metaphoric schemata and mechanisms that are anchored in our minds. As Forceville (1996) and Fahlenbrach (2010) argue, this is all the more evident in entertainment media, as well as in press and advertisements, which tend to strategically 'sell' their products by addressing their viewers' immediate, reflexive understanding and their affects multimodally through pictures, sounds, and language. Drawing on conceptual metaphors should allow creators of audiovisual media products to communicate complex meanings in an embodied gestalt that their public understands in a reflexive manner.

However, whereas CMT is an established academic discourse in linguistics and semiotics, its adaption to disciplines dealing with visual, multimodal,

and audiovisual artifacts—whether visual communication studies, film studies, television studies, or game studies—is still rare. Only over the last decade has it been possible to observe a growing tendency in cognitive film and media studies to discover the potential of analyzing embodied aesthetics and meanings of moving images by applying insights from CMT to audiovisual media (e.g., Forceville 2006; Fahlenbrach 2007, 2010; Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2012, 2014). This corresponds to a rising interest in cognitive film and media theory for embodied and affective meanings in moving images (cf. Grodal 1997, 2009; Tan 1996, 2005; Plantinga 2009; Smith 2003). Accordingly, a general aim of this volume is to introduce cognitive approaches in film and media studies treating embodied metaphoric meanings in films, television, and video games. This includes the documentation of both systematic models and case studies addressing questions such as the following: What are bodily based conceptual metaphors in moving images? More concretely, what are the source and target domains for conceptual mappings created in the composition of pictures and sound? Do dominant stylistic and narrative conventions in moving images refer to conceptual metaphors? Is there such a thing as a metaphorically based poetics of cinema? In this regard also media- and genre-specific embodied metaphors in film, television, and video games will be analyzed in order to identify specific functions of metaphorically shaped styles and narratives in different areas of moving images (such as entertainment or journalism).

2. Research Background: A Short Overview

In the philosophy of language and the arts, metaphors have long been shown to be key elements to give abstract thoughts and meaning the gestalt of a concrete image (cf. Arendt 1978; Ricoeur 2003). This can be a mental image, evoked by language, or a manifest image (Mitchell 1987), worked into a painting, sculpture, or even an architectural design. Metaphors have been traditionally defined rhetoric tropes, based on analogies between signs with distinct conventional meanings.

With the rise and increase in cultural dominance of entertainment and journalistic mass media, including press photos and moving images in film and television, traditional metaphor approaches have been confronted with two general problems: first, a narrow understanding of metaphors, being conceptually restricted to 'new' and 'creative' metaphors in the arts (cf. Ricoeur 2003), wherein metaphors are used as rhetorical tools offering a new epistemic or poetic perspective to a global phenomenon. In contrast, mass media, with its dominant influence in our western cultures, tend to use idiomatic and even 'dead' metaphors (Ricoeur 2003) that are anchored within a culture. For this reason, their meanings are grasped mostly unconsciously, even reflexively, making them all the more attractive for commercial mass media.

A second, more methodological problem is that observing analogies at the level of cultural meanings is problematic when applied to photographic

pictures, presenting objects of the world 'as they are' and not 'as something else' (cf. Mitchell 1987). Following Peirce (1991), they refer to the represented world in an iconic and indexical way, not by conventionally established signs and symbols. This is linked with a certain degree of literalness and immediacy and makes it difficult to study metaphors in photographic pictures when they are primarily understood as analogues between conventionally established signs and meanings.

However, prominent works in film and media studies have offered useful approaches for identifying specific rhetorical ways of creating symbolically meaningful metaphors. Most influentially, Christian Metz (1974, 1982) considers photographic motifs and film montage as elementary building blocks of metaphoric analogies that imply both *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* relations. Thus, metaphorical analogies can be studied by identifying the *syntagmatic* analogies between the meaning of a depicted motif and that of another motif juxtaposed by the montage in a film sequence. Furthermore, Metz distinguishes *paradigmatic* analogies between the meanings of a motif and those meanings that have not been manifested in a sequence but act in viewers' imagination (e.g., via associations). In contrast to cognitive approaches, Metz understands imagination as structured by the viewers' deep psychic energies that movies strategically address in order to produce pleasure. Referring to the works of Jacques Lacan and Jean-Louis Baudry, Metz (1982) sees metaphors and metonymies related to psychologically based forms of condensation and displacement. Hence his model of metaphor (and metonymy) is framed by a critical approach to mainstream cinema, blaming it for its ideologically driven manipulation of the viewers' unconscious.

One of Metz's harshest critics, Noel Carroll,[1] presented another influential approach from a cognitive perspective. Carroll (1996) states that metaphors are based on conceptual knowledge in our minds. When referring rather loosely to CMT, he considers a restricted possibility of moving images to create metaphors in visual media by establishing conceptual relations between divergent motifs in a sequence, especially by the montage. Hence, the *homospatiality* of two different and even incommensurate concepts realized by the mise-en-scène is a key premise for Carroll to create metaphoric meanings. He argues that both the filmmaker and the viewers take such metaphoric pictures in films as explicitly non-realistic and, hence, purely figurative ones. As such they exhibit their metaphoric character and invite viewers to actively search for the conceptual relations between the divergent elements. This view is, however, close to rhetoric approaches with a rather narrow understanding of metaphors as obvious figurative tropes and symbolic forms, which produce new meanings and attract the viewers' attention in an explicit way.[2]

A third prominent account was developed by Whittock (1990), who combines traditional rhetoric categories with cognitive aspects. From a cognitive perspective he argues that the filmic image is per se structured

metaphorically: given the primordial artificiality of a movie, the selection and composition of every shot imply intentionally motivated pictures that manifest a metaphoric way of 'seeing as'. He generally assumes that semantic entities in film are primarily based on mental gestalts. Each visual and acoustic element, each picture and sound already imply a gestalt-based meaning that acquires in the audiovisual composition a more complex semantics. Against this background, metaphors are claimed by Whittock no longer as purely abstract and symbolic analogies between signifier and signified. Rather the metaphoric meaning is basically anchored on the mental gestalts of film images and perception. Thereby Whittock recognizes the relevance of embodied image schemata as a source for the construction of cinematic metaphors. However, Whittock's cognitive approach to an "imagination theory" of metaphor in film remains rather general in its basic claims. Whereas he criticizes CMT for too broad an understanding of metaphors, he proposes a typology of metaphors and other tropes in film that is based again on classical rhetorical categories such as analogy, synecdoche, juxtaposition, hyperbole, and chime (Whittock 1990, 50 ff.). Thereby he draws rather on their representational relation to their signified object than on their cognitively based concepts and gestalts. The cognitive potential of the different tropes, however, is based in his approach on cultural codes in film rather than on embodied and mental concepts.

Surely Metz, Carroll, and Whittock have developed relevant instruments for identifying metaphors as rhetoric tools, which are strategically used by filmmakers in order to realize a creative idea with a new epistemic value. Such metaphors are highly salient and visible for the viewers, addressing their knowledge as well as their willingness and competence to follow the metaphoric transfer of meaning. This is in line with a concentration on 'new' and 'innovative' metaphors in avant-garde and art-house films.[3] Although all three approaches—despite their differences—emphasize that metaphors are, in the end, realized in the viewers' minds and assume that they explicitly address knowledge and imagination, they do not sufficiently explain this embodied dimension of metaphoric meaning. The psychoanalytic approach of Metz (1974, 1982) and the cognitive approaches of Carroll (1996) and Whittock (1990) only generally presuppose imagination and mind as part of metaphorical processes, while focusing in their analytical categories on rhetoric tropes, without offering specific tools for analyzing the very cognitive, and more specifically, the embodied and affective semantics in visual and cinematic metaphors. Even by explicitly considering cognitive meaning, both Carroll's and Whittock's approaches offer a quite narrow understanding of metaphors, taking them as an explicit and rational way of meaning-making and understanding, with each referring primarily to culturally based knowledge.

This narrow understanding contrasts with current insights in film studies, dealing with movies and minds. They show us that entertaining, advertising, and journalistic media mostly seek to compose their artifacts in a way that

conveys messages and meanings in a purely affective and embodied rather than in a rational way.[4] Much has been said in recent years in cognitive film studies about strategies utilized in movies to address deep emotions in viewers (Tan 1996, 2005; Grodal 2009; Smith 2003), and how embodied, innate reflexes and attributions are stimulated by the use of visuals, sounds, movements, etc., that make film viewing an intense and lively experience (Anderson 1996; Grodal 1997; Anderson and Fisher Anderson 2005, 2007).[5]

But whereas research into the embodied meanings of moving images sometimes neglects the more complex cultural meanings, several authors in cognitive film studies currently strive for more comprehensive approaches that integrate these different dimensions (e.g., Grodal 2009; Plantinga 2009).[6]

As research in embodied metaphors shows, it can offer film and media studies a relevant tool to explain how moving images closely merge both dimensions of meaning-making and understanding. Metaphors in movies and other moving images have a much more embodied dimension than a purely conventional and rational one. There is a huge potential in the analysis of image schemata and embodied metaphorical mappings in pictures, sounds, and movements for the analysis of their embodied aesthetics, giving complex cultural meanings an audiovisual gestalt that viewers grasp immediately via their senses and their mind.

The first steps in consequently adapting CMT to the visual and audiovisual have been taken in semiotics rather than in film and media studies. One approach has been proposed by Warren Buckland (2000). He sees mental activities and the intuitive knowledge of film viewers as the basis of cinematic meanings. Thereby he considers the important role of embodied perception and experience. Referring to CMT, he presupposes that the intuitive and reflexive dimension of film perception is strongly based on mental image schemata. Most especially he regards the container-schema as a key image schema for experiencing and perceiving films. Accordingly, the container-schema structures the limits between screen and public, between the filmic world and the exterior world of the viewers, and also between on-screen and off-screen within a film (Buckland 2000, 38 ff.). Thus Buckland shows on a general scale how mental image schemata generally influence the relation between the filmic images and the viewers' interpretations and experience. However, his cognitive approach does not exceed this global perspective of film viewing. By seeking to integrate cognitive approaches with the opposed psychoanalytical theory of Metz, Buckland misses the chance to develop a clear-cut "cognitive semiotics of film". Like Whittock, he starts from basic cognitive premises and then returns to rather traditional and psychoanalytical tools when developing more specific criteria of film analysis.

A first consequently cognitive perspective and a more fine-grained application of CMT to film analysis is introduced by Charles Forceville (1996, 2006, 2008; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009), who paved the ground for the semiotic research of conceptual metaphors in visual and multimodal