6

SHARING OF INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGMS FOR VISUALITY

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The aim of this part of the report is to describe the interpretative paradigms selected for the image analysis; that is, the model of the so-called 5W proposed by Harold Dwight Lasswell in 1948 in the famous article "The structure and function of communication in society", and the six perspectives first introduced in 1995 by Paul Martin Lester in the book *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (Lester 2011). The works of these two scholars have been the theoretical framework of the practical work of the TICASS project, with the aim to revise, verify, and discuss the interpretation of images as visual messages, and their communicative and persuasive power also in multicultural contexts.

6.1

Outline of the Lasswell frame

Harold Dwight Lasswell (1902–1978) was a leading American political scientist and communications theorist. After having completed his PhD at Chicago University (1926) and a research period in Europe, where he followed seminars by the economist Keynes, worked with the philosopher Bertrand Russell, and studied Freud and Marx, he taught political sciences at Chicago University until 1938. In 1927 he published his doctoral thesis, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, in which he analysed the propaganda techniques used by Europeans and Americans during WW1. The book is the first important essay to deliver a conceptual framework for mass communication research (Lasswell 1927). Lasswell continued to study propaganda phenomena as indispensable tools for modern democracies to structure popular mass consensus, analysing the techniques and effectiveness of the propaganda messages (Lasswell 1927; Lasswell 1930–1935).

In 1948 he obtained a full professorship at Yale Law School and, in the same year, he defined and described his linear method, publishing the seminal article "The structure and function of communication in society" in *The Communication of Ideas*, edited by L. Bryson and published by the Institute for Religious and Social Studies of New York. His well-known model of communication focuses on "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect"; that is, the 5W model.

"Who" corresponds to the communicator, the sender; that is, the person or the institution, the source that sent the message: This is the sector of research called the "control analysis" because we analyse who controls the message. "Says

What" is the content of the message that we have analysed during the content analysis: This is one of the most important investigations according to Lasswell as it focuses on the political propaganda. "To Whom" corresponds to the receiver, the addressee of the message, the object of the audience analysis. "In What Channel" is an examination of the technical medium of the message, conducting a media analysis. "With What Effect" requires an effect analysis during which the effect of the communication on the audience is scrutinised.

This linear method has been considered as strongly connected to American behaviourism, according to which a stimulus corresponds to a specific response without considering the intermediate phases of comprehension of the message between communicator and receiver and, more generally, the relationship between people. Actually, Lasswell tended to consider the population as a mass to control and convince through propaganda, and communication as political persuasion. In the effect analysis, a real analysis of the feedback is missing and the receiver of the communication is considered a passive subject (see, in contrast, the interactional model by McQuail 2010).

Even if the Lasswell method is outdated and has been bettered by other communication scientists (Jacobson 1956; McQuail 2010), his linear method has been extraordinarily effective for the first analysis of the images in the TICASS project. The application of his method has been used to produce a "Lasswell card" for each selected image; that is, a basic and simple catalogue entry of the visual message, examined as a result of different components (sender, content, medium, receiver, effect; the report with the Lasswell card of the first secondment are available online: https://ticass.eu/Main/Artykul/technologies-of-imaging-in-urban-communication-report-1-from-poland-szczecin). The interaction of these components has been investigated more deeply, also from a transcultural perspective, using the Paul Martin Lester frame.

6.2
Outline of the Lester frame

The first edition of *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* by Paul Martin Lester was published in 1995, and then republished in six other editions (the most recent being one in 2014) as a manual for students of communication and visual culture. It is still considered the only text capable of providing a wide and multiperspectival approach to the study of visual communication by using images which tell stories (Kelly 2016). The publication date is very significant: visual studies was born in the nineties; it was the decade of the pictorial turn, when many scholars, of different disciplines and not only of art history, in America and in Europe started to analyse (artistic and non-artistic) images for their value as messages or historical evidence (Elkins 2003, pp. 4–7). Influenced by the thinking of Wilson Hicks, a journalist who promoted photojournalism between the 1930s and 1950s and who was convinced that the combination of images and words would make mass communication more efficient and persuasive (Hicks 1952), Lester posits that "the most powerful, meaningful, and culturally important messages are those that combine words and pictures equally and respectfully" (Lester 2011, p. x). However,

according to Lester, whereas after the invention of movable type many grammars were drawn up to read texts and verbal messages, the extraordinary spread of cameras and the extensive use of images on TV and in newspapers have not produced any grammar of the visual world (Lester 2011, p. x). This is therefore the aim of his volume: to provide a grammar with which to read images, since those who are able to read pictures are also able to conceive and produce effective images in mass communication. The difference between effective and non-effective images is that only effective images become engraved in the observer's memory. The basic problem is thus the power of images.

In order to analyse images of various kinds, in particular non-artistic images (although various works of art are mentioned in the volume), Lester proposes six steps, six levels of analysis, which he calls "perspectives". The choice of the word is rather interesting and significant as, since the Middle Ages, "perspective" has indicated the "way of seeing"; that is, a gaze guided by the mind toward an idea (Panofsky 1991; Belting 2011). In order to give an example of his method, the analysis deals with an image (fig. 1) on a wall of a private dwelling in the district of Mnarani in Kilifi, a town on the coast of Kenya between Malindi and Mombasa. Because it is an image taken during a secondment in Kilifi, conducted for the TICASS project, the proposed example of image reading is a tangible exemplification of the connection between theory and practice held during the project.

Fig. 1. Advertisement on the wall (Mnarani – Kilifi, Kenya)

The first step is *personal perspective*. This is a superficial analysis based on a personal response, which reveals much about the person making the analysis; about their culture and their world. In this first stage, the analysis will only have been based on their personal experience. The analyst indicates whether they appreciate the picture and expresses their feelings while observing it. The picture examined could, for instance, communicate happiness (the stream of animals coming out of the house seems a merry party going toward a field or a brook) or sadness (because they could give the sense of a disturbing military march, connected to death).

The second analysis level is *historical perspective*, which is fundamental to understanding the meaning of every image on the basis of one's history. The questions that should be answered are: "When do you think the image was made? What major developments were happening in the area where the image was produced and throughout the world? Is there a specific style that the image imitates?" (Lester 2011, p. 123). In the case in hand, the image being analysed is contemporary. It was made in a peripheral district of Kilifi, that is Mnarani, the seat of the first urban settlement in the 14th century, built by Arabs; nowadays it is mainly inhabited by Muslims. The neighbourhood is made up of a main street with stonework shops and dwellings, and by many villages of huts in which peasants and breeders of small animals live. The image seems to imitate Disney's cartoon style; in particular, the animals leaving the stable remind us of certain scenes from *The Lion King*, which was set in Kenya.

Technical perspective analyses the techniques used to produce an image. The questions that should be answered are: "How was the image produced? What techniques were employed? Is the image of good quality?" (Lester 2011, p. 124). Our image was handmade using the ancient pouncing technique; in some of the figures, it is clearly possible to recognise a few marks which enabled the painter to reproduce the shapes on the basis of the cartoon used as a model. The author is a painter of brands, paid by the company producing and marketing the product; in this case, "Faida Feeds" which produces food for breeding animals. Therefore, the image was conceived neither by an artist nor by a decorator acting independently; it is the outcome of an advertising campaign promoted by a specific company. Compared to other images handcrafted by independent artists or decorators for the shops in the same neighbourhood and in Kilifi, the quality of this picture is very high.

The fourth step deals with the *ethical perspective* through which aspects related to human behaviour and emerging from the picture are brought to light, even by trying to interpret the image as the mirror of philosophical ideas (should it be possible) such as "golden rule, hedonism, golden mean, categorical imperative, utilitarianism, and veil of ignorance" (Lester 2011, p. 125). In this case, the ethical meaning of the picture is made explicit by the Swahili writing *Faida ni Yako!*, meaning "The benefit is yours!": the words and image convey the practical value of the advertising image and the idea that eating meat is correct and healthy behaviour. The animals filing happily in the picture are well fed by Faida Feeds and therefore may be eaten without any problem; or, rather, you may benefit from eating them in terms of health (as the writing implies). Another detail related to the eating habits of Kenyan coastal areas emerges from the kinds of animals depicted: a rooster, two chickens, a duck, a turkey, a sheep, a cow, and a goat; the pig is significantly missing – it is a rather controversial animal in the predominantly Muslim area, and for this reason it is prudently avoided.

The next level of analysis is *cultural perspective*, which "is closely related to the semiotics approach" and "involves identifying the symbols and metaphors used in an image and determining their meaning for a society as a whole" (Lester 2011, p. 130). The questions that should be answered are: "What is the story and the symbolism involved in the elements of the visual message? What do they say about current cultural values? What metaphors can be expressed through the work?" (Lester 2011, p. 130). The image taken into consideration does not tell

a story but symbolism is evident: a happy animal family, if fed well, can in turn feed a happy human family, who can benefit from Faida Feeds indirectly (as the writing says).

The final step is *critical perspective*, in which a particular image is transcended to read the culture that accepts or rejects the image; the "critical perspective redefines a person's initial personal perspective in terms of universal conclusions about human nature" (Lester 2011, p. 131). If by the use of a cultural perspective it is possible to understand society, then in this case it is even possible to understand human nature. The questions that should be answered are: "What do I think of this image now that I've spent so much time looking at and studying it? What lessons does it have for those who view the image?" (Lester 2011, p. 131). In the case in hand, the advertisement by Faida Feeds tells us that it is meant for a culture based on animal breeding and agriculture; at the same time, the image tells the beholder that eating meat is absolutely lawful and healthy if the animal is bred and fed healthy food.

Lester's six perspectives start from a personal analysis and, through a historical and technical examination, the image is read as a reflection of behaviours or philosophical thoughts, and then by the identification of stories, symbols, and metaphors as a reflection of the society in which it was produced.

This specific example shows how important it is to have the ability to read images in multicultural and global perspectives. The image producer (as the addressee in reading images) must consider the context in which the visual message is displayed, paying attention to the variables determined by religions and cultures.

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