

HAND IMAGE AS A METAPHOR AND ITS USAGE IN POSTER DESIGN

Banu İnanç Uyan Dur,

*Assistant Professor, Beykent University Faculty of Fine Arts,
Department of Graphic Design, 34396, İstanbul/Turkey*

ABSTRACT: *Metaphor is generally defined as describing a concept or an issue through another matter that is more familiar and known. The basis of metaphor is describing a fact or an object by linking to concepts of different domains of meaning, in other words conceptualizing the fact again. Metaphors help individuals in materializing and making sense of complex thought, concept and associations through mental processes. Metaphors are particularly useful in understanding and explaining a new fact and they shift the meaning of a known condition to an unknown condition. Defined as a way of thinking and seeing, metaphors are used frequently in all branches of art and design. Both in the literary domain and visual domain, metaphors are elements that strengthen the language of expression, increase and deepen emphasis rather than explaining a concept by another concept. Metaphors are also used in poster design to materialize abstract concepts and to convey the message in a more effective and comprehensible manner. Hand figure which involves plurality of references in religious, cultural and communicational context is used as metaphor in posters in many different meanings with varying content and objective. In this context, hand figure will be examined in this study over examples of its metaphoric meanings referring to many different concept and emotion like power, unity, invocation, accusation, designation, appreciation etc depending on the way of use.*

KEYWORDS: Visual metaphor, hand image as a metaphor, poster art, poster design, graphic design.

METAPHOR CONCEPT

Metaphor is derived from “Metapherein” or “Metafora” roots in Greek; “meta” means to change and “pherein” means to carry. Metaphor is generally defined as describing a concept or an issue through another matter that is more familiar and known. Metaphor is explaining or expressing a phenomenon or an object by associating it with concepts of other fields of meaning; in a way it is a re-conceptualization. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b, 5).

Metaphors, described as associating a thing to another thing, are said to be used in rhetoric, literature and for strengthening meaning visually. Nevertheless, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who are known with their works on metaphoric thought, argue that metaphors are much more than just elements that add poetry to language, and garnish rhetoric “...metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (1980b, 3).

Metaphors offer us mental models that have critical roles in the process of perceiving the world. As Saban, A., Koçbeker, B.N., and Saban, A. (2007, 123) explain: “From the standpoint of the

“cognitive theory” metaphors act as powerful mental models through which people understand their world by relating complex phenomena to something previously experienced and concrete. It is indeed this process of building linkages between two dissimilar ideas (the concrete and the abstract) or the projection of one schema (the source domain of the metaphor) onto another schema (the target domain of the metaphor) that makes a metaphor an effective cognitive device”. In other words, metaphor is the process of establishing links between a complex phenomenon and the pre-existing data on mind, towards perceiving and understanding a subject through the perspective of another.

Metaphors help the individuals to reify and make sense of complex ideas, concepts and associations through mental processes. Metaphors that are especially helpful at understanding and explaining a new phenomenon can explain an “unknown thing” with “another known thing”. For this reason, by reifying abstract concepts, they ensure that the related concept or the subject is understood without difficulty and learned more easily and permanently. For Çubukçu and Çap (2011) “Metaphor is a technique for teaching the unknown and a tool which proved its validity, for keeping in mind and remembering the learned knowledge. Metaphor is a strong mental tool that an individual can use for understanding and explaining a highly abstract, complex or theoretical phenomenon.”

VISUAL METAPHORS

Metaphors are used in every field, from science to art, from literature to design, for explaining sophisticated thoughts and for creating new meanings and patterns. Thus, metaphors are not limited to rhetoric and literary fields. Metaphors have important roles in our lives visually as well. While perceiving the world that we live in, we use our eyesight the most. For this reason, the power of the visual is much more compared to the power of words. When the power of the visual merges with metaphor, it results in a more effective outcome. For Shuell (1990, 102) “If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures! For a picture provides only a static image while a metaphor provides a conceptual framework for thinking about something”.

The thought that visual images are the same as the expressions in language is prevalent. In other words the linguistic expression and the visual image can mean the same. “In fact, visual communication can and often does refer to ‘things’ that have no verbal translation at all (Morris, 1993,196). While language is perhaps more precise in expressing some areas of meaning, other meanings may be shown more easily and more effectively in images rather than in words” (Refaie, 2003, 84). The visual metaphors present the unknown and complex with the more concrete, familiar and comprehensible. A complex abstract thought is conveyed to the audience with more familiar and catchy images. In a sense, visual metaphors by making the unimaginable imaginable and invisible visible, make the thoughts more accessible to the public.

The ability of persuasion of the visual metaphors is remarkable. “Studies of visual persuasion, (e.g. Messaris, 1997; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Scott, 1994) suggest that visual images can be a persuasive device, which are often more persuasive than verbal argumentation (also see, Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver, 2006 for a review)” (Jeong, 2008, 62). The increase in the cognitive evaluation that the viewer experiences in the processing of the message, results in the increase in the persuasiveness of the visual proposition. The visual metaphors that have indirect

expression prompt the viewer to think more actively on it. “Greater degree of mental participation required by visual argumentation may lead to a product of audiences’ own construction of meaning (Proctor et al., 2005), and because people are often more willing to adopt a proposition that they have constructed, the implicitness of visual argumentation can be a strong point of visual persuasion (Messaris, 1997, p. 167)” (Jeong, 2008, 62). In line with the level of complexity in the visual argumentations there is an increase in the cognitive activity of the audience. Conducted researches show that the level of complexity and richness of the visual metaphor that is used has a positive impact of the inclination of the audience. In other words, the level of inclination of the audience increases as much as the increase in the cognitive activity.

Visual metaphors constitute a meaning with familiar images by using our previous experience and our cultural background. Hence, the interpretation of the visual metaphors can vary according to the content and the background of the audience. In the process of perceiving and interpreting visual metaphors, it cannot be expected that all the viewers will reach the same point by following a single channel. Refaie (2003, 89) notes that “the high context dependency of many visual metaphors means that their meaning is often implicit and that they tend to be open to quite a wide range of interpretations”.

THE USAGE OF VISUAL METAPHORS IN POSTERS

Metaphor, defined as a way of thinking or seeing, is used frequently in every field of art and design. Whether they are in literary or visual field, metaphors are elements that strengthen the language of expression, boost the emphasis and bring vigor, beyond explaining a concept with another concept. The visual metaphors used in art and design works, convey ideas more effectively by making our cognitive processes work more actively. In poster design as well, visual metaphors are used for reifying abstract concepts and transmitting the message in a more effective and understandable way.

At this point, it needs to be stated that in fact many metaphors are accepted as ordinary since they are so generally used. Whether they are literal or visual, metaphors are so inside our lives that they are perceived as straight expressions “... the differentiation between a ‘literal’ image and a visual metaphor is never absolute but it will always depend on the discourse context and on the degree to which particular metaphors have become accepted as the ‘natural’, commonsensical way of representing certain meanings” (Refaie, 2003, 90). This situation overlaps with the researches about our mental processes and our way of perceiving the world being metaphorical. “...our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 454). Therefore, the frequency of the metaphoric language of expression in art and design is a natural outcome.

Attributions of meaning made to the visual metaphors used in art and design works, make the thoughts and concepts more comprehensible. The works that use visual metaphors are found more sensitive and influential. This situation leads the audience to internalize more eagerly the message, the thought or the concept. In posters as well, which are accepted as works of art and design, all these benefits of the visual metaphors are utilized.

SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF HAND

Hand is a figure that has plural references in metaphorical sense. Hand figure is one of the first figures that the human discovered and depicted. The history of the handprints found in Cueva de las Manos (Cave of Hands) in the province of Santa Cruz of South Argentina, date to 7300 BC according to carbon tests (Figure 1). Hand figures are applied as negative (stenciled) in 3 different colors, red, yellow and black the meanings of the prints could not be understood. In the next phase, in Neolithic age, hand is pictured with magical aims. The hand drawn on animal figures was expressing a spell for capturing and possessing the prey. “It is argued that internalization of hand as a sign of possession principally has begun at this age” (Ersoy, 2000, 244). Making tools, using weapons, changing the shapes of the objects, the hand is at the focus of important transformations in the history of mankind.



Figure 1. Hand paintings in Cueva de las Manos.

The hands, which are symbols of phenomena of power and possession, carry deep religious meanings as well. Hand of Fatima is used in many cultures as a defense against the evil eye, as a talisman that brings wellbeing, profusion and health. Hand of Fatima is called as ‘Hamsa hand’ among the Arabs. Hamse means five in Arabic and in many other religions, the number five symbolizes the five sacred rules of their beliefs. Hand of Fatima icon not only has a special place in Islam, it has also evolved to become regarded as sacred and respected symbol in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shamanism, Jain beliefs. Levantine Christians call it the ‘hand of Mary’, for the Virgin Mary. Jews refer to it as the ‘hand of Miriam’ in remembrance of the biblical Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron. In some culture’s the hamsa hand faces down, in others it faces up (<http://www.hamsameaning.com/>). In Mevlevi Sema Ceremony dervishes whirl with their arms open, right hands facing the sky and the left hands facing the earth. The right hand is opened upwards for accepting the benevolence of God and the left hand is turned downwards for the purpose of giving and sharing.

In Christianity, hand is the symbol of the supremacy and power of God. In Christian art, the hand that reaches out from the clouds is the existence and the power of God, the Father. “The Hand of God, or Manus Dei in Latin, also known as Dextera domini/dei, the ‘right hand of the Lord/God’, is a motif in Jewish and Christian art, especially of the Late Antique and Early Medieval periods, when depiction of Jehovah or God the Father as a full human figure was considered unacceptable. The hand, sometimes including a portion of an arm, or ending about the wrist, is used to indicate the intervention in or approval of affairs on Earth by God, and sometimes as a subject in itself” ([http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Hand_of_God_\(art\)](http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Hand_of_God_(art))).

The most famous art work about the hand of God is seen in the scene of The Creation of Adam, painted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of Sistine Chapel circa 1511 (Figure 2). At this scene, the hand of Adam being pose mirroring of the hand of God, makes reference to the mankind being the image of God.



Figure 2. Michelangelo, Detail of The Creation of Adam, Sistine Chapel, 1511.

The hand symbol is the manifestation of the internal state of the human, it is a worldly image. The hands raised upwards symbolize worshipping, praying, greeting and the inside flow of power. The hands with the palms turned outside are symbols of blessing, and divine grace. A hand put on the chest expresses the attitude of a wise person; while a hand put on the neck is the symbol of sacrifice, joined two hands is the symbol of mystical marriage. Hands reaching out, is the symbol of blessing, protecting and welcoming. While a hand inside another hand represent a promise of service, hands on top of the other palms facing upwards is the symbol of meditation and being a receiver. Hands raised up symbolize worshipping, praying, greeting and at the same time the power flowing inside. The power of expression of the hands is unlimited and they have a wide range of movements that each of them has a different sense of meaning. As they may become a tool of order, they can also mean protection, creation, blessing, strength, oath, endurance and labor.

THE USAGE OF HAND METAPHOR IN POSTERS

For ages, deep religious, cultural and social meanings are attributed to hands. The usage of hand metaphor that has plural references is seen in every period in poster design. The hand image as a metaphor makes the poster more effective and attractive by strengthening and enriching its language of expression.

The hands that have a wide range of meanings according to the movement of fingers are commonly used elements in posters. In the poster, the most apparent example of the hand pointing the viewer and that has a denunciatory meaning is certainly the “Britons (Lord Kitchener) wants YOU” poster by Alfred Leete in World War I (Figure 3). The recruitment poster of the British Army of 1914, the hand of the Ministry of War of that period H. Herbert Kitchener points the viewer and calls the British to the army. The index finger directly turned towards the viewer calls the citizens to duty with a denunciatory and imputative attitude and state that their country needs them. In 1917 James Montgomery Flagg adopted the Kitchener poster to the US (Figure 4). In the American version, this time “Uncle Sam” calls his citizens

to the US Army. In the most printed poster of history, the movement in the hand of Uncle Sam expresses an accusing, watching, scolding unpermissive parent, an authority; a possessing and punishing supreme power.

Hand is a commonly seen image in political propaganda posters. In the poster made by Lucian Bernhard for Germany in World War I, a clenched fist dressed in a medieval armor expresses the Antique German spirit (Figure 5). Gothic font is used to support the reference made to this spirit. It is said “This way to peace” as the motto. While the hand as a clenched fist makes reference to power and war, its illustration in a medieval armor makes reference to the courage of the Antique German spirit.



Figure 3. Alfred Leete, 1914.



Figure 4. James Montgomery Flagg, 1917.



Figure 5: Lucian Bernhard, 1914-1918.

The hand photomontage used by John Heartfield in his political work in 1928, dominates the whole poster (Figure 6). The text on the original poster is: “5 fingers has a hand! With these 5 grab the enemy!” This election poster was advocating the communist party in 1928 and the enemy was the Nazi Party. The hand opened on the stretch is positioned as to push the viewer to a downward position and gives the impression that it will go down with a great power and catch the enemy. Here, hand is used as a power that catches, punishes and wipes out the enemy. Also, the hands in the poster made by Frederick Henri Kay Henrion for the US Office of War in the period of World War II make reference to a punishing and annihilating power (Figure 7). The four hands that constitute the Allied Powers break up the gammadion, the symbol of Nazi Germany. For this reason, the hands in the poster carry the meanings of union and cooperation as well.



Figure 6. John Heartfield, 1928. Figure 7. Frederick Henri Kay Henrion, 1944.

As examples of hand holding a weapon that carries meanings such as war, conflict and possession of power, Saul Bass' poster titled "Exodus" (1965) and the poster made by Asela Perez for OSPAAAL titled "International Week of Solidarity with Latin America" (1970) can be mentioned (Figure 8, 9). "The Cuban government believed that revolution would occur throughout Latin America, mirroring the experience of Cuba, and the design of this poster presents a unified continent, its power represented in the clenched fist and the revolutionary spirit in the rifle, held aloft. This classic image has been reused in a number of other Cuban posters" (<http://cubanposterart.blogspot.com/>).



Figure 8. Saul Bass, 1965.



Figure 9. Asela Perez, 1970.

"Designers cannot escape the grip of the hand. As a symbol of work, there are few more descriptive images. But some hands are more equal than others. The heavy-gloved iron-worker's hand has become the archetype of this genre" (Heller & Ilic, 2001, 92). As an example of hand image that makes references to working, producing and laborer characteristics the poster by Jean Carlu, dated 1942, titled "America's answer: Production!" can be given (Figure 10). In the poster, which is one of the most famous images of the World War II, a gloved hand holding a gray wrench, turns the "o" in the word "production" shaped like a bolt. The gaining of ability of the mankind to make and to use tools with hands has an important place in the development of civilization. The basis and the future of civilization depend on the desire of the

humankind to work, produce and progress. Such supreme features are attributed to America and conveyed through the hand metaphor.



Figure 10. Jean Carlu, 1942.

In the poster design, there are frequent examples of using hands as a preventing, and blocking element. In the poster by Dal Holcomb made in the period of the World War II, dated 1942, and titled “Quiet! Loose talk can cost lives!” a hand coming from the left side closes the man’s mouth tightly (Figure 11). “The man looks surprised as a hand, coming from outside the picture is thrust over his mouth. The sleeve is visible, and is decorated with the stars and stripes, indicating that Uncle Sam is warning him to keep quiet” (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O122413/>). The hand figure in the poster symbolizes a supreme power that has the authority to restrain everything that should not be done, that hears and knows everything and that disciplines his children. In the poster of Josh Gosfield, dated 1990, titled “Censorship is un-American” the hand of Uncle Sam that comes from outside closes the man’s mouth (Figure 12). The hand used here expresses an authority that censors, that is restrictive and anti-democratic.

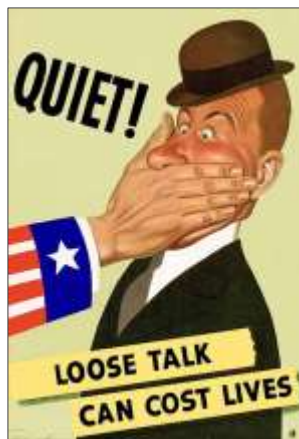


Figure 11. Dal Holcomb, 1942. Figure 12. Josh Gosfield, 1990.

Each reference made with hand to a restricting and blocking power may not be in a negative sense. For instance, in the poster themed 20th Anniversary of Khojaly Genocide designed by Banu İnanç Uyan Dur (2011), the hand closes the baby’s eyes to prevent her seeing the violence (Figure 13). The hand is black as it has witnessed the massacre. The hand being a fragile woman’s hand refers to the innocence and helplessness of the victims of the massacre. The “hand” avoids the baby seeing this inhuman and shameful massacre. The hand metaphor in this

poster refers both to the fragility of the humankind and the protective feature of the hand. Hand, having plural references, has taken its place in posters as a symbol of equality. The poster titled “We are all African” that Milton Glaser designed for the social responsibility campaign, calls people for help for Africa (Figure 14). The fingers of the hand photograph dominating the whole poster are of different races. Thus, it makes a reference that all races are traced to Africa and all humans are equal.



Figure 13. Banu İnanç Uyan Dur, 2011.



Figure 14. Milton Glaser, 2005.

CONCLUSION

Visual metaphors present the unknown and the complex with the more concrete, familiar and understandable. A complex and abstract thought is conveyed to the audience through more familiar and catchy images. In a sense, visual metaphors by making the unimaginable imaginable and invisible visible, make the thoughts more accessible to the public. The metaphors used in poster works can convey the thoughts and concepts in a more effective and persuasive way by making our cognitive processes work actively.

The hand figure that contains plural religious, cultural and emotional references is used frequently in posters. "... because there are few tools more versatile" (Heller& Ilic, 2001, 96). Hands are the limbs that we use the most, they are known to everyone. For this reason they can successfully fulfill the task of "explaining an unknown thing with a known one", which is the basis of metaphor. The power of expression of the hands is unlimited and they have a wide range of movements each of which has a different meaning. Hand is a metaphorical element that many different meaning can be attributed to according to its movement, the content of the poster, the other elements used in the poster, its position in the poster and its dimensions. The hand figure that can make references to many emotions and concepts like power, unity, togetherness, protection, invocation, accusation, indication, and appreciation, has a rich scale of meanings metaphorically.

Within the scope of this research the hand figure that strengthens visual language of expression, enhances the emphasis and brings depth is selected among the metaphors and its usage in posters is analyzed. In this regard, it is revealed how frequently hand is used as a metaphorical

element in posters. Due to the plural meanings that it can carry, it is thought that it will continue to be used commonly both in posters and other visual communication design works.

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