

From *Media* to *Mediums of Expression*. Visual Art Communication and Meaning from Fine Arts to Advertising

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Abstract: In nowadays' explosion of technologies and mediums of communication, there is a recurrence of the pattern of dissemination of the message and of its formative mechanics of meaning, manifested especially in the field of contemporary visual arts and advertising. A comparative analysis of these visual structures of communication could reveal the nature of the interference between the advertising message's subject and theme, and the peculiarities of the meaning specific to the artistic mediums appropriated by the contemporary advertising - namely, the *mediums of expression*. Targeting the unconventional forms of advertising, as well as the constantly changing relationship of advertising with the technological environments, we will analyze the relationship between the specific expression of the traditional fine arts (graphics, painting, engraving), the contemporary visual arts (such as graphic design, photography, video, or performance), and the characteristics of the message and its meaning in advertising (as expressed in printing, television, or internet). We want to emphasize the importance of these particularities of the visual arts mediums in crafting the communication message, as each of these mediums of expression imposes its expressive mark to the advertising process, decisively influencing the creation of meaning.

Keywords: visual communication, visual art, painting, advertising, mediums of expression, meaning

From art to advertising

This paper will approach the context and the conditions of the image in today's contemporary visual culture. While analyzing the mediums of expression and revealing the solution of creating the meaning within a visual structure, we will rely on the concept of medium hybridization¹, defined and established in the recent media culture as a type of media convergence resulting in combined expressive-mediums. We can also consider the semiotic dissociation between *connotation* and *denotation* as defined by

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¹ McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. UK: Routledge, 1964.

Roland Barthes, since it also clarifies the distinction between art and advertising's main meaning-production structures, with reference to the relation between image and text and the functions of the latter². While advertising is being clearly oriented toward the representation and clarity of denotation, the art brings a widened range of significance meanings brought by the denotation relations around it³. In this regard, we recall the understanding of the expressive tensions within a visual structure, as defined by Mihai Tarași, namely the *structural* vs. *relational* dissociation, relevant tools for understanding the relations between subject and representation, and between role and function of the visual within a visual structure.⁴ By evaluating these principles and their echoes in the selected case studies, we can understand how the meaning itself is generated in relation with the image, in either art or advertising.

We will offer a different approach of the idea of medium, as a visual communication medium, and privilege the use of it in advertising (which is also considered an artistic medium by itself).⁵ In this approach, we'll extract and evaluate the meaning of an advertising construction, as it comes from the main structural visual which is composing it, but not from the point of view of its subject of representation which usually generates the meaning, but from the perspective of main intrinsic structural medium particularities. Instead of interpreting an image representation to discover and conclude the meaning, let's step back and try to evaluate the image from the very perspective of its own medium (of production, of dissemination, of lecturing, etc.) For instance, a painting will always have its own expressiveness, no matter the subject which is represented. The stroke, the colors, the texture offer a unique expressivity to the artwork, which is equally-if not, more relevant, in the construction of the meaning. The same applies for photography, with its own realism and grayness, and so on. Without insisting on the forms of the modern and contemporary art (since this is not the subject of this paper), it is important to specify that in many regards, the art and the advertising developed a deep structural connection, exchanging mediums, particularities, practices of production or ways of delivering meaning to their audiences.

The boundaries between art and advertising were heavily challenged by the entire modern and postmodern art critique, once the marketing strategies emphasized the critical relation between the need to advertise and the economical result⁶. Barry Hoffman states the differences between these

² Barthes, Roland. *Rhetoric of the image*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1985. p.28.

³ Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies*. London: Sage Publications, 2003. p. 68-69.

⁴ Tarași, Mihai. *Sens și expresie în arta contemporană*. Iași: Artes, 2006. p. 37.

⁵ Bogart, Michele H. *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

⁶ Gheorghe, Cătălin. *Condiția Critică*. Iași: Institutul European, 2010. p. 60. The author remarked that in the process of evaluating an artistic expression medium, one can ascertain a prevalence of the economic or sociological criteria over the aesthetic ones.

two (communication) mediums: “Art is high. Advertising is low. (...) Art is defined by the truth of the insight it expresses. Advertising expresses the insight of truisms. Art is disturbingly honest. Advertising is only as honest as it has to be, and occasionally less. Art is eternal. Advertising is ephemeral.”⁷ While touching different features that can differentiate the two, Hoffman raises the question of the meaning-producing strategy which, again – and not surprisingly, is the same for both mediums, since they are both operating with the same resources, logic, relation and constitutive visual elements. The only real difference is the context of dissemination (time, area, and target audience) and, consequently, the specific implementation procedure.⁸

The goal of this paper is to explore the relation between some of the forms of contemporary advertising and the (appropriated) artistic mediums, while exploring the specific expressivities and the dedicated language elements. Moreover, another purpose is to follow the way in which the advertising meaning is influenced by the specific of the artistic medium which is being used within a visual (advertising) construction. These being said, let’s clarify the perspective, the framework of this paper, then we will exemplify this approach with some relevant case studies, for a better understanding of the topic.

The Medium of Expression

In this paper’s perspective, a *medium of expression* is a communication medium which follows the logic, the meaning pattern and the functionalities of an artistic medium. In other words, the idea of medium of expression reflects the artistic particularities of a communication medium, while considering the expressive specificities of it. At this point, we will use the advertising medium example as a support of this analysis - specifically those forms of (visual) advertising which are appropriating the artistic mediums, along with their specific syntax and elements of expression, relations and meaning-producing mechanism, and – finally – the expressive specificity which escapes modern and scientific approach in terms of quantifiable value.

These mediums can be *artistically-native mediums* (traditional or modern), where the expressivity is given by the art-factuality of the final artwork (such as painting, graphics, sculpture, etc.); they can also be *technological-driven mediums*, which are appropriated by the artists, to the point where they are rather known as "artistic mediums", and not technological anymore (photography, cinematography, video, even the digital environments of the internet or virtual realities, augmented or not). We can

⁷ Hoffman, Barry. *The Fine Art of Advertising*. NY: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2002. p. 6.

⁸ Tarași, Mihai. *Sens și expresie în arta contemporană*. Iași: Artes, 2006. p. 185.

also consider the *conceptual mediums*, purely discursive, or the ones defined as strategies, where the outcome is rather discursive than art-factual (most of the artistic mediums, such as performance, happening, action, instruction, discretely appropriated by advertising in its continuously inter-changing process of redefining the contemporary image-understanding paradigm). Within all this realm of examples, there are some major constants and typologies of this approach of evaluating the meaning, based on the expressivity we deduct from the previously mentioned *mediums of expression*. Let us define and exemplify each one of them, for a better overview of this inductive method of analysis.

A – The auctorial mark

B – Working with technological expressivities of the medium

C – The realism of representation as a tool of expression

D – Using the interactivity

The Auctorial Mark

In the traditional artistic mediums, the main expressivity of the artwork is provided by the artist's own stylistic signature, a very formal trademark tributary to the main medium of production, such as either a color or stroke in painting, a specific framing or focusing in photography, handling the line or the shape in graphics, and so on. These marks of expression, specific to the painting or engraving, become the main support of meaning in some advertising ads, where the use of art medium emphasizes the direction of meaning and its very mechanics of creating significance.

A first example is the Absolut Art campaign, one of the most successful ads series in the last decades and the longest-running campaign in the history of advertising⁹. The creative and non-conventional TBWA agency¹⁰ started the campaign in 1981, with a first ad simply titled “Absolut Perfection”, establishing the concept of wrapping visual and verbal elements of expression around simple, bold and striking imagery, genially driven by various visual artists who were invited to create ads for the Swedish vodka brand.¹¹ The campaign artworks included Andy Warhol's painting in 1985¹², followed by other main figures of the postmodern and contemporary art in

⁹ Hoffman, Barry. *The Fine Art of Advertising*. NY: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2002. p. 112-119.

¹⁰ Clearly stating on their website home page that “We are not a traditional ad agency network”, TBWA defines itself nowadays as the “The Disruption® Company” providing “The Cultural Engine for 21st Century Business”; <https://tbwa.com/> (online resource, accessed 28.02.2020).

¹¹ The Absolut Company. Absolut . 01 01, 2019. <https://www.absolut.com/en/> (accessed 03.04.2020).

¹² “Absolut Warhol” image online source: <http://www.graphicart-news.com/absolutposter-design/#.V47rDaIsZxx> (accessed 28.02.2020).

America and Europe, such as Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, Ed Ruscha, David Levinthal, Robert Indiana, Douglas Gordon, Alexander Kosolapov, Mariko Ohta, Wim Delvoye, Mirosław Balka, Nam June Paik, Pierre and Gilles, and others. In the next few years, the Absolut Art campaign included more than 1,500 variations of the ad created for the brand, reaching the status and the prestige of a global company. Although it provided a clear status or quality of entertainment to both the artistic works, and to the commercial posters, the campaign proved that the marriage between art and advertising couldn't be better illustrated.¹³ With the transfer of cultural capital occurring in both directions, it provided prestige and artistic notoriety for the vodka brand, and brought legitimacy and market opportunities for visual artists who accepted Absolut's invitation to collaborate. The Absolut Vodka campaign is a relevant example of the way each artistic medium brings its own expressivity to a wider visual construction - such as an advertising poster - while preserving the author's style and personal mark, related to the medium: painting, drawing, photography, art installation, sculpture, etc. In this regard, the transfer of capital is also conserving the artist's reputation and auctorial mark, as each of the ads they created was named according to the author: "Absolut Warhol", "Absolut Balka", "Absolut Indiana" etc.

We can find examples of using representation mediums for specific subjects in Romanian advertising as well, such as the National Anti-Drugs Agency posters campaigns, realized by Mercury 360 agency, targeting Romanian youth. In this case, the subject of the imagery depicts the daily requisite from the urban youth's life, marionettes dancing (the campaign titled „Nu lăsa drogurile să-ți trăiască viața” [Don't leave drugs live your life]¹⁴ with the posters "OOH I", "OOH II" and "OOH III"), or an altered perception of things, where dangerous things can be easily misinterpreted because of the drugs („Changes in perception" campaign with "Razor", "Knife" and "Dog" posters¹⁵)¹⁶. Both campaigns are using hand illustration for the imagery medium, and not photography, thus bringing a sense of "not being real" in these illustrations, precisely because the imagery is not photographic. Concerning the meaning-producing process, the hand-drawing gives it a more intimate approach, a representation which asks for time and

¹³ Gibbons, Joan. *Art and advertising*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

¹⁴ OOH posters images online source:

<https://www.iqads.ro/cautare?q=Agentia+Nationala+Antidrog++Antidrog+OOH> (accessed 29.02.2020).

¹⁵ "Changes in perception" campaign images online sources: "Razor" poster

<https://www.iqads.ro/creatie/8121/agentia-nationala-antidrog-razor-blade>, "Knife"

poster <https://www.iqads.ro/creatie/8122/agentia-nationala-antidrog-knife>, and "Dog" poster

<https://www.iqads.ro/creatie/8123/agentia-nationala-antidrog-dog> (accessed 27.02.2020).

¹⁶ Mercury 360 Bucharest. *Ads that work*. 01 01, 2020. <http://mercury360.ro> (accessed 03.04.2020).

attention to look, identify, realize, understand, deduct and make assumptions. All these could be easily ignored by a photographic representation, so the agency's choice of using the hand-illustration medium is perfectly adequate to the ad generated meaning.

An important aspect of the authorial expressiveness is due to the Renaissance-imagistic nature of the images reminiscent of Leonardo Da Vinci's artistic and anatomical drawings, both as expressiveness of the drawing line and as the appearance and texture of the paper on which these drawings are executed¹⁷. It is another example in which connoted meanings can be added to the initial meanings, by associating them with iconic images from art history (and, in this regard, both National Anti-Drugs Agency posters campaigns qualify for this imagery relation). From a visual perspective, this procedure of associating a very specific visual appeal, deeply rooted in the cultural consciousness of the modern period, is specific to advertising and is meant to add value to artistic construction. We can find this in so many other examples of contemporary advertising, which are appealing to visual resources related to iconographical themes from the painting medium, such as the "Bad time stories" poster ads campaign, created for the Marie Curie Hospital in Bucharest, "Pentru unii, copilăria este o bătălie" [For some, childhood is a battle] posters for Concordia, or the „FDBS – Donează o lucrare (Arta poate salva vieți)” [Donate and artwork (Art can save lives)] images, where we recognize artworks, styles or visual themes of some famous painters, such as Alphonse Mucha, Marc Chagall, Leonardo da Vinci, or Eugène Delacroix¹⁸.

In terms of semiotic mechanics, there are several constants which are contributing to the process of meaning creation, in both the above-mentioned Absolut and NAD campaigns. On one hand, we highlight the *denotative* features (such as the representation of the subject, which acts as a generic frame to contextualize the sense of meaning), and on the other hand, we notice the *connotative* relations developed by the expressivity of the involved artistic medium: the realism of photography, the sensibility of painting, the accuracy of drawing. This widened field of connotative directions, specific to the art communication, becomes the main channel of significance, prioritized by its very own expressive nature. "Absolut Art" and "National Anti-Drugs" Agency campaigns also emphasize different solutions where either the artist-author reputation and legitimacy, or a visual formal mark specific to the artistic medium becomes a main requisite in (and for) the process of creating meaning. However, in these cases, a more consistent feature to be considered

¹⁷ Isaacson, Walter. Leonardo da Vinci: The Nature of the Human Body. 10 30, 2017. <https://medium.com/s/leonardo-da-vinci/the-nature-of-the-human-body-e7b27b494051> (accessed 09. 14. 2020).

¹⁸ Soreanu, Catalin. Artă și Publicitate. Medii de expresie în publicitatea contemporană. Iași: Artes, 2018. p. 116-122.

for this process is, in fact, the technological expressivity of the medium, the formal characteristic of the structure which is truly specific to each artistic medium.

Working with Technological Expressivities of the Medium

The concept of image expressivities, although difficult to grasp in terms of scientific (and quantifiable) precision, offers the perspective of a technological characteristic which transcends the visual expressivity and becomes an important artistic asset. It can be exemplified in almost any medium whose physical/visual mark is dominant, but we are going to use the print/printing medium as an example, and the artistic appropriated medium of it - which is the engraving medium.¹⁹ Let us exemplify with a specific feature of the high-relief engraving, able to generate compact surfaces, popularized in the beginning of the century by the Impressionism and the Art Nouveau painters such as Henri de Toulouse Lautrec and Alphonse Mucha, while European art was also under the influence of the Japanese printed stamps (exceptionally carved and colored wood engravings). Considering the colors, the texture, and the compactness of the surface, these printed decorative surfaces' expressivities were tributary to the printed medium. They also became the trademark of a particular graphic style associated with the early communist ideology (see the Russian constructivism or the European propaganda posters) and, late in time, specific to the visual esthetics of most of the imagery generated in the Eastern Europe's countries advertising. In certain cases of contemporary advertising, using this visual configuration is done precisely because it recalls the nostalgia of a specific time in the past.

The Romanian "DERO SURF" product packaging (which is an important part of the advertising process and of the marketing campaign) was part of a rebranding campaign done in 2007, in order to celebrate the 40 years of tradition on the Romanian market, titled "Best Years" (Parfumul Anilor Cei Mai Frumôși)"²⁰, and realized by the Engines agency for Unilever Romania²¹, the current producer of DERO (the name itself is an abbreviation from "Detergent ROMania").²² In our case and topic, it illustrates the use of a

¹⁹ To be more specific, we are not going to refer to the vast printing techniques area generated by the Renaissance metal engravings, Gutenberg printing, lithography techniques and by the most ads from the early age of printed advertising in 20th century.

²⁰ DERO packaging images online source: <https://www.iqads.ro/cautare?q=DERO+-+Best+Years&t=ads> (accessed 28.02.2020).

²¹ Unilever. Despre Dero. 03 04, 2020.

http://www.dero.ro/articol/detalii/1074816/despre_dero (accessed 03.04.2020).

²² Revista-Piata.ro. BRANDURI 100 ani: DERO trăiește și gândește ROMÂNEȘTE. 05 16, 2019. <https://www.revista-piata.ro/fmcg/branduri-pentru-100-de-ani/item/14598-branduri-100-ani-dero-traieste-si-gandeste-romaneste> (accessed 03.04.2020).

graphical expressivity which is (or, in fact, it was) specific to the lack of printing conditions in the early-communist years. Therefore, it included fewer colors, the use of colored papers as a background of the print, with graphics based on compact surfaces, lack of gradients, and block-typed textual information. These technological conditions created a graphic trend which subconsciously continued the previously mentioned printed-medium specific of the East-European imagery, yet combined with a Pop-Art touch that echoes the artistic development of the central Europe and America continents. In nowadays' campaign, the DERO packaging includes such graphical compositions and structures precisely to evoke (through image memory) the nostalgic past of communist times before 1989²³, with the reproduction of some popular musicians figures of that generation on each package (such as Aura Urziceanu, Anda Călugăreanu, Dan Spătaru, Corina Chiriac and Cornel Constantiniu). As the main target for the campaign was the 50+ aged population, it is easy to understand the use of this existing collective memory of the communist times' imagery as the trigger for a nostalgic-based commercial decision.

The same logic applies for another example that we have – the Radio Guerilla posters, a Romanian radio station with a particular branding, based on the revolutionary-styled imagery and logos. In this case, the graphical style of a technological imprint medium is used to illustrate different musical sessions events, in a marketing campaign militating against *playback* – hence both the iconography of the fighter/warrior characters from different movies, and the simulation of the stencils/graffiti, mediums of expression with a strong underground and alternative cultural emphasis. The posters campaign was designed by the Propaganda agency back in 2006, for “Guerrillive VS. Playback” events of Radio Guerilla²⁴ (depicting images with cinematography heroes such as Rambo, Bruce Lee or Maximus from „Gladiator”, in a two-color wall-textured composition with bold title texts over the image). Again, the use of the medium brings a major contribution to the central meaning of the posters.

In these few examples, the medium's intrinsic expressivity becomes the main leading generator of meaning, being the most important visual asset of the advertising construction. In the process of communication, understanding the structure of these ads is dependent on the previously accumulated culture of the reader/lector, as a capital actor or instance of the communication process specific to advertising. Thus, the *structural*

²³ Some of the (older) population in Romania is still nostalgic about the late communist period which is considered to be better from an economic and social point of view than the current regime of democracy (IRES - Institutul Român pentru Evaluare și Strategie 2010) (accessed 28.02.2020).

²⁴ “Guerrillive VS. Playback” images online sources:

<http://www.iqads.ro/creatie/6809/guerrillive-maximus>,

<http://www.iqads.ro/creatie/6811/guerrillive-rambo> (accessed 28.02.2020).

perception of the visual ensemble, accepted in the terms defined by such personal cultural histories, is capable of generating *relational* tensions that generate additional, connotative meanings²⁵. The graphical treatment, the association of visual elements, the sequence of reception or reading, they all contribute to the creation of a visual-artistic anteriority of perception (structural), which acts as a catalyst for aggregating the final meaning and significance of the advertising product. Among these, the representational realism, as an important tool of expression, becomes the key asset of the technologic image-recording mediums, able to operate with human perception and understanding of memories, and to act as a decision pendulum between structural and relational specificities of an advertising construction.

The Realism of Representation as a Tool of Expression

The third constant we can identify in today's advertising is the realism of representation, used as a tool of expression in different image-producing and image-recording mediums. Obviously, we speak about photography, cinematography and video, but also about the new digital realities where the outcome is already challenging the human perception of space, volume²⁶, movement and realism²⁷. The quality of being a copy of reality²⁸, as offered by the photography medium, is always doubled by the expression of the medium, based on the specific elements of visual language: focus, aperture, time, focal, framing, film sensibility etc.

In printed advertising, the photography became the main expression medium, as soon as the color photography offered a reliable alternative to the hand-illustration painting²⁹. Nowadays, creative advertising based on photography is everywhere. I took the liberty to exemplify this feature with several ads from Romania, where we (Romanians) have a strong evocative visual memory tradition, cleverly speculated for the ROM chocolate brand³⁰, in the campaign "ROM. Senzații tari din 1964" [ROM. Strong sensations since 1964], realized in 2005 by one of the biggest advertising agencies in

²⁵ Tarași, Mihai. *Sens și expresie în arta contemporană*. Iași: Artes, 2006. p. 37.

²⁶ German, Lavinia. "The relation between "seeing" and "being seen": a diachronic perspective on photographic view." *Comunicarea interpersonală. Artă și educația ca mijloace de comunicare*. Iași: Ars Longa, 2018. p. 187-193.

²⁷ Barthes, Roland. *The Photographic Message*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1977. p. 194-210.

²⁸ In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between a real footage, for instance, and a computer simulated one, considering the recent 3D modelling and animation technologies, the scanning and the face-mapping rendering solutions (Volpicelli 2015).

²⁹ Gibbons, Joan. *Art and advertising*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

³⁰ Fera, Rae Ann. *How A Candy Bar Wrapper Ignited Romanian Pride And Won McCann Two Grand Prix*. 06 21, 2011. <https://www.fastcompany.com/1761932/how-candy-bar-wrapper-ignited-romanian-pride-and-won-mccann-two-grand-prix> (accessed 03. 04. 2020).

Romania³¹. Playing the word ROM between the abbreviation for ROMania and the flavor of rum for the product, the few posters campaign are using the photography as a main visual resource medium. Not only the subject depicts the concept of "being invited to experience some almost-forgotten treatments" (people, requisite, environment), but the imagery itself comes with a graphic treatment adequate to sustaining this central idea. The pictures (photos) used in ROM's posters campaign are monochrome or sepia-tanned, the contrast and the lighting replicates the old film photography, and the graphical treatment of the text (font, color, position) reminds of the communist time posters.

From this national-cultural identity perspective, there are plenty of examples in Romanian advertising where working with imagery reveals the never-ending capabilities of a medium whose main expression comes from the capacity of evoking realities, no matter if these are historical realities, fictional or cinematic referential realities, as in the following example. The posters for the „DaKINO” Film Festival in Bucharest are using the photography's quality of establishing memory connections with iconic images from the recent visual culture (memorable scenes from the movies “Lord of the Rings”, “Basic Instinct” and “Titanic”). The three posters are reconstructing these images, but with the twist of a potential alternative film direction (the same movies, but with different directors), where the directorial genius and authenticity become the quality alternative to the Hollywood mass-production of movies. The posters campaign was created by a Romanian advertising agency³² in the campaign “Movies According To...” for Dakino Film Festival in 2006.³³ We are not going to dive into the hermeneutics of the subject and representation of these images (which can reveal never-ending conclusions due to the constant shift of the referential analytic frame), but rather point the fact that, in this case, the documentary or reconstructive function of photography is being used in order to emulate the expressivity of the referent image medium (which, in this case, is a cinematography film). Specific constructive visual elements are used in each case (framing, lightning, coloring) in order to match the original film scenes, thus proving the versatility of the photography medium (used here, obviously, as a resource in an advertising construction).³⁴ Undoubtedly, we

³¹ McCann Erickson Romania. McCann Erickson Romania. 2020. <http://www.mccann.ro> (accessed 03.01.2020).

³² MullenLowe Romania. Our Work. 2020. <https://romania.mullenlowe.com> (accessed 03.02.2020).

³³ Toma, Irina. Lowe & Partners proiecteaza DaKINO. 11 24, 2005.

<http://www.adplayers.ro/articol/-11/Lowe-Partners-proiecteaza-DaKINO-416.html> (accessed 02.16.2020).

³⁴ German, Lavinia. "The relation between "seeing" and "being seen": a diachronic perspective on photographic view." *Comunicarea interpersonală. Arta și educația ca mijloace de comunicare*. Iași: Ars Longa, 2018. p. 187-193.

notice the evocative pictoriality of the images, specific to the aesthetics of the Renaissance (yet classical, and even modern) painting tradition, which influenced, in fact, the first manifestations of photography in terms of composition and atmosphere.

For the filmic cinematic constructions which are appealing to the same expressivity, we need to look no further than recent Romanian TV campaigns for the sculpture "Cumînțenia Pământului" of Constantin Brâncuși³⁵, or the Roșia Montana commercials (with well-known actors such as Maia Morgenstern, or Dragoș Bucur in the central roles³⁶), all created by Papaya Advertising in Bucharest, Romania. Each of these commercials present consistent cinematic stories with a metaphorical meaning, willing to raise the public awareness about two major (and emblematic, nowadays) topics of Romanian society: the acquisition by the Romanian government of Brâncuși's sculpture masterpiece, and the environmental movement to save and protect the gold-exploitation area in Roșia Montana. From a medium formal point of view, both cinematic constructions feature a black-and-white imagery, with a wide dynamic range of tonal values (the Brâncuși campaign, titled "Cumînțenia Pământului – Ultimul tren" [The last train]) or high contrasts (in the case of Roșia Montana's commercials), specific cinematic language elements such as traveling camera, framing, wide angles or close-views, panoramic image ratio, everything drawn from the expressive specificities of the filmic medium, in order to add a sense of tradition, sufferance, gravity, or hope, to the main message of the commercials. This is an accurate example of our main topic - how the medium itself can add meaning to the image, regardless of the subject of representation.

From the perspective of the perception and reception of the advertising product, the new media and especially those coming from applications of digital technologies, introduce the concept of interactivity, a feature prefigured in the world of art both at the level of the manifestation forms (some forms of happening or performance where the receiver is effectively involved in the artistic act), as well as at the theoretical level, the involvement of the receiver and the interpretation attributed by him being the key points in crafting the artistic message or the meaning and significance in advertising.³⁷

³⁵ "Cumînțenia Pământului – Ultimul Tren" [The last train] video online source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOaYngN8-Ec> (accessed 28.02.2020).

³⁶ "Rosia Montana" commercial online source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22O9J8PRK-Y> (accessed 28.02.2020).

³⁷ Fidler, Roger. *Mediamorphosis – Să înțelegem noile media*. Cluj: Idea Design & Print, 2004.

Using the Interactivity

The last constant we mention here is the use of interactivity, a human touch brought to the artistic practices appropriated by advertising. In recent years, various creative agencies used the potential of major interactive formulas which are involving the audience, in either having it participate and collaborate to specific actions, or to spectate at various live cinematic activities triggered by the public, intentionally or accidentally involved in these activities. The “Contrexperience” commercial created for Contrex company features large installations with people being invited to work out on fitness bicycles installed on a public square, only to discover that this action generates electricity which illuminates the front of a building and animates a masculine silhouette, while everything turns to be an invitation to health, movement and calories burning (revealing the advertised product, which is mineral water). The commercial was created by the French agency Marcel, back in 2011, for European market³⁸.

Another example is the video commercial “We know drama”, created by the Duval Guillaume agency for TNT and distributed in Belgium, in 2012.³⁹ The commercial depicts a scene in a public square, where the public is invited to push a red button installed on a pedestal. The trigger starts a series of immediate events which include actors, figurants, cars, chasings, shots, a clear depict of the scenery specific to the action movies, with everything happening in seconds, around the stupefied audience. At the end, a huge mesh unfolds on the side building with the slogan “bring drama to your life” and the TNT logo. Some other examples are the Carlsberg commercials series⁴⁰ created again by the same reputed Duval Guillaume advertising agency, “Carlsberg - Friends Test” released in March 2013, where some (presumably random) people are involved in different scenarios, meticulously arranged by a professionals team, documented with hidden cameras, where their loyalty, generosity or friendship are being tested in limit situations. In the end, all these concept-values are being associated with the brand, adding valuable capital to the surrounding commercial ethos. In 2013, some other brands are also experimenting with interactive scenarios topic assumed as advertising pieces, while addressing a range of values associated with the brand’s core, such as Heineken, who simulated a “possible worst job interview ever”⁴¹ with subjects being asked to perform strange

³⁸ “Contrexperience” video online source: <https://vimeo.com/92831830> (accessed 28.02.2020).

³⁹ “We know drama” video online source: <http://www.duvalguillaume.com/tnt-we-know-drama> (accessed 27.02.2020).

⁴⁰ “Carlsberg - Friends Test” video online source: <http://www.duvalguillaume.com/carlsberg-puts-friends-to-the-test/> (accessed 24.02.2020).

⁴¹ “Heineken - The Candidate” video online source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gT-Fb4-fzqI> (accessed 24.02.2020)

requirements⁴², and Nivea company who subjected its consumers to a stress test, tricking them to think they were wanted by police⁴³ (in a complicated media scenario while having them waiting in line at the airport).⁴⁴

The relation between interactivity and the meaning mechanic⁴⁵ is relevant in one other example, namely the advertisement created for an iPad application for an event of the Montreal Catholic Church, where the gestures dedicated to unlock the computer screens sensitive to touch, becomes a digital surrogate of the Christian blessing, emphasizing the concern of the Canadian Catholic Church toward the new communication media of the contemporary society⁴⁶.

In these advertising constructions, the notions of performative, collaborative and benevolent implication from the audience are replicating the practices of artistic postmodernity, where artists such as Andy Warhol, Marina Abramović, Dan Perjovschi or Santiago Sierra pushed the boundaries of art expression, exploring new practices and creative formulas.⁴⁷ Also, in each of the examples above, there is a sense of happening, of action which is deliberately left to the randomness. In addition, the presence or the implication of the audience is required, and the public becomes part of the advertising process.

Conclusive notes

Through the content of this paper, we have explored some of the visual communication structures which we title *mediums of expression*, and their relation with the message and its formative mechanics of meaning, manifested especially in the field of contemporary visual arts and advertising. We clearly targeted the expression of the contemporary visual arts mediums (such as graphic design, painting, photography, video, or performance), and the characteristics of the message and its meaning in advertising (sub)mediums (as expressed in printing, television, or internet). Emphasizing

⁴² Allchin, Josie. Case study: Heineken – The Candidate. 04. 17. 2013.

<https://www.marketingweek.com/case-study-heineken-the-candidate/> (accessed 02. 28. 2020).

⁴³ “NIVEA - Stress Test” video online source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izS9I04Frr8> (accessed 26.01.2020).

⁴⁴ PRmoment. Nivea Germany puts the public under a stress test... 02 21, 2013.

<https://www.prmoment.com/good-and-bad-pr/nivea-germany-puts-the-public-under-a-stress-test-and-coral-offers-a-free-b> (accessed 03 04, 2020).

⁴⁵ Soreanu, Catalin. "The Sacred In Contemporary Advertising." Edited by Codrina-Laura Ioniță, Puiu Ioniță and Brîndușa Grigoriu. ANASTASIS - Research in Medieval Culture and Art (Artes) 3, no. 1 (2016): 149-158.

⁴⁶ Catholic Church of Montreal. A blessing from God on the Internet. 04 18, 2013.
<http://diocesemontreal.org> (accessed 03. 07. 2016).

⁴⁷ Oprea, Marina. Let's talk performance art. 05 23, 2018. <https://revistaarta.ro/en/lets-talk-performance-art/> (accessed 02. 27. 2020).

the importance of these particularities of the visual arts mediums in crafting the communication message is a key asset of the study, as each of these mediums of expression imposes its expressive mark to the advertising process, decisively influencing the creation of meaning.⁴⁸

A first conclusion that can be drawn is that the medium of expression, as we accept it in this paper, has a significant contribution to the creation of the meaning in any advertising product (ad, commercial, package, or brand). The outcome can be investigated from the perspective of the denotation function, specific to the advertising field, widened with the use of the connotation function which reveals additional directions of lecture, as the very genuine mark of art practices assimilated within the advertising field. The second conclusion comes from the understanding of the way the (final or total) meaning is produced and used, and addresses the nature of visual expressive elements and their *syntactic* (constitutive signs and visual elements), *semantic* (the relation between these elements) and *pragmatic* structure (using the image within a specific visual culture). The meaning of the advertising product is the result of a negotiated hierarchy of significance, which varies depending on the contextual and referential frame of analysis.

While addressing our cultural and structural understanding patterns, the mechanic of the medium of the expression's meaning is the major vehicle of significance in art and advertising. At this point, providing (only) a glimpse of this approach of analyzing the mediums of expression as triggers of meaning opens more opportunities to study the visual communication principles within artistic mediums, especially if they are part of an advertising process (or product). While bringing their own expressive specificities to any visual construction, the mediums of artistic expression also enlarge our ways of understanding the formulas of visual perception, in both art and advertising artifacts. Considering the fundamental specific characteristics of the medium widens our options of evaluating the meaning of an artifact, with the mediums expressiveness being a key element of the meaning production process.

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⁴⁸ Soreanu, Catalin. *Artă și Publicitate. Medii de expresie în publicitatea contemporană*. Iași: Artes, 2018. p. 48-50.

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