

SEMIOTIC CHANGE: A PILOT STUDY ON TEXT-IMAGE RESOURCES IN MODERN AND (POST)MODERN ADS

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this paper is to investigate possible changes in the use of text-image resources by comparing TIME magazine ads from 1929 and 2009, according to two different SFL analytical perspectives (information value, framing). The preliminary results point at a scenario where semiotic change has taken place in terms of finer-grained details, such as an expansion of the image territory and a tendency towards connection between text and image. The paper also offers an attempt at interpreting these results on the light of some of the key themes on the modern/(post)modern debate.

KEYWORDS: semiotic change; text-image resources; information value; framing; modern/(post)modern debate.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo é investigar possíveis mudanças no uso de recursos de texto-imagem a partir da comparação de propagandas da revista TIME de 1929 e 2009, com base em duas perspectivas analíticas oriundas da LSF (valor da informação e moldura). Os resultados preliminares apontam para um cenário onde a mudança semiótica acontece em termos de pequenos detalhes, tais como a expansão do território da imagem e a tendência a conexão entre texto e imagem. O artigo também oferece uma tentativa de interpretação destes resultados sob a ótica de alguns dos principais temas do debate moderno/(pós)moderno.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: mudança semiótica; recursos texto-imagem; valor da informação; moldura; debate moderno/(pós)moderno..

0. Introduction

The last thirty or forty years have been usually seen as a period of fundamental change in the "Western semiotic landscape", as Kress and

Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006:16-44) have put it. One of the main characteristics of this change has been the increasing prominence of visual resources in communication in general, and, consequently, a reevaluation of the former dominant role of verbal resources (Dondis, 1991:12; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006:23; Mitchell, 1994:11-12; Unsworth, 2001:9). That is, in the last three or four decades, the relation between text and image has shown signs of profound change. This whole scenario, however, is only part of a more encompassing and complex one. The change in the Western semiotic landscape is, in fact, related to broader social, cultural and economic changes that have taken place in the recent modern social historical condition. Although there is still lack of academic consensus whether these changes have indeed given birth to a new era or not (hence the use of the term *(post)modern* throughout this paper); it is usually established that, after the 1950's or 1960's (Jameson, 2002:27), meaningful discontinuities have taken place in the way the modern world was structured, and the "pictorial turn" (Mitchell, 1994:41) seems to be regarded as one of the many evidences of these discontinuities in a new (post)modern scenario.

In this paper, our objective is to look at one of these instances of semiotic change more closely. The general research question guiding this attempt is: what has changed in terms of text-image resources when comparing modern and (post)modern ads? More specifically, in this paper, we compare text-image resources in sixteen one-page ads from a TIME magazine issue (US edition) dated January 1929 and ten one-page ads from a TIME magazine issue (US edition) dated January 2009¹. The idea is to look into possible changes in the use of text-image resources from two different perspectives: 1) information value (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005): the informational value attributed to text and image according to their arrangement on the multimodal page design; and 2) framing (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005): the extent to which text and image are represented as connected or disconnected elements on the multimodal page design. These two analytical perspectives are relevant in the sense that they look into the two most basic ways in which text-image relations may be studied. Their theoretical foundations are more fully discussed in the section that follows, along with visual examples taken from the data collected.

Still regarding the objective of this paper, it is important to clarify that its main academic purpose is to function as part of a pilot study for a doctoral dissertation, which will also involve the analysis of one-page ads published in another TIME magazine issue (US edition) from 1969.

¹ The difference in the number of ads is due to the actual total number of one-page ads present in each magazine issue.

Therefore, in the present paper, we just deal with a limited sample of twenty-six ads, from the two extreme points of our modern / (post)modern data and with only two analytical perspectives. The idea is that this preliminary study may bring about some important insights in order to better guide the doctoral investigation. These insights are discussed by the end of the paper.

In what follows, the overall organisation of this work has been divided into three main parts. First, a brief discussion of the theoretical framework supporting this investigation and of the methodology derived from it. Second, the presentation of the results of the pilot study itself, subdivided into the two different analytical perspectives previously pointed out. And, finally, the conclusion section, which attempts at interpreting the results derived from the analyses undertaken, and at identifying possible insights for the larger doctoral investigation.

As our last words in this introduction, we just would like to make two points. The first one regards the diachronic orientation of this study. Despite the increasing number of studies which have addressed the recent changes in text-image relations, most of them do not focus on change over a large span of time. In the last two international conferences in the area of multimodality² held in 2008 (Multimodality and Learning – London; and 4th International Conference on Multimodality – Singapore), for instance, the great majority of the studies presented could be classified as synchronic ones. Hodge and Kress (1988:35), however, in their classical publication, *Social Semiotics*, wisely remind us that any semiotic project committed to accounting for such crucial phenomena as change, process, crisis and revolution in the smaller and larger scale needs to develop a comprehensive theory of the diachronic. It is, therefore, to a better understanding of the diachronic dimension that this paper attempts to make some contribution.

The second point concerns our choice of working with ads and, more specifically, with ads published in TIME magazine (US edition). Firstly, our choice is greatly motivated by the fact that many scholars, from multimodality and social theory, for instance, regard texts from the media, especially from print-media, such as newspapers, magazines and publicity materials, as one of the main sites for detecting changes involving the pictorial turn and the (post)modern condition (Fairclough, 1995:60; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999:77; Kress, 2003:21, 163; Iedema, 2003:38; Bauman, 2007:1-5). Secondly, from their origin, ads have usually been “actual conjunctions of words and images” (Mitchell,

² Multimodality is the analytical direction in Discourse Analysis, which sprung mainly from the work of O’Toole (1994) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), in the mid to late 80’s (Iedema, 2003:30-32).

1994:90), which makes the data quite suitable for the kind of investigation we wish to pursue. Thirdly, printed ads are more or less self-contained units, which allows for the analysis of a larger number of samples across time. Lastly, the more specific choice for TIME magazine (US edition) ads is motivated mainly by two facts. One is that it has been regularly published since 1923, which gives us a broad span of time³ to work with. And, second, it is a large well-known American US publication. This is important because it guarantees that TIME is an attractive publication to many different types of advertisers. In fact, according to their online media kit⁴, TIME nowadays offers to advertisers a national audience of around 20 million readers. Also, in terms of (post)modern changes, the United States of America, due to its enormous economic growth after the Second World War, is one of the key countries in this context, if not the most relevant one.

1. Theoretical framework and methodology

The analysis of text-image relations demands a common theoretical framework and methodology to the two different types of semiotic resources involved. As Barthes (1977:16) has already observed, in multimodal structures, although text and image realise one single message, their units are heterogeneous: text is made of words, whereas image is made of lines, surfaces, shades and forms, for instance. One theoretical framework which has been quite successful in addressing the analysis of both texts and images, and even of other semiotic modes, is systemic-functional semiotics, which has sprung from the work of the British linguist Halliday (1985, 2004). In this paper, the two analytical perspectives, information value and framing, derive from systemic-functional linguistics, as it is explained in the following subsection.

1.1. Information value and framing

Information value and framing are two systems conceptualised by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) in their *Grammar of Visual Design (GVD)*, which is an extrapolation of Halliday's (1985, 2004) work to the domain of the visual semiotic mode. Both information value and framing are part of an even broader system, composition, which organises verbal and visual information into a single, united message.

³ Unfortunately, the oldest issue that we could get hold of is from 1929.

⁴ www.time.com/time/mediakit/1/us/timemagazine/index.html

Information value, as previously presented, has to do with informational values attributed to text and image according to their distribution on the page of the ad. That is, left side, right side, top, bottom, centre and margins have distinct informational values. There are basically three possible distributions of text and image in an ad: 1) top-bottom; 2) left-right; and 3) centre-margins. In the case of the first, the top area is usually associated with "what might be" or the "ideal", whereas the bottom area is usually interpreted as "what is", the "real" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006:186). Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006: 187) also state that, ideologically speaking, the ideal always plays a leading role, whereas the real plays a subservient role. In Figure 1, for instance, the Studebaker ad (TIME 1929) presents the image of a car and a couple as being the ideal, leading element, and the text as being the real, subservient element, in a clear top-bottom distribution. In the case of a left-right distribution, the left side is taken as a familiar point of departure for the message, what is already "given". In contrast, the right is the side where "what is not yet known" is presented, the "new" piece of information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006:179). In Figure 2, for instance, the Texaco ad (TIME 1929) presents the text as "given", and the main image of the three people interacting along with a small information box as "new". Finally, in the case of centre-margins, the centre is considered to be the place for the most important piece of information, "the nucleus of information"; while information on the margins is seen as "contextualizing information" (Unsworth, 2001:108). The centre-margins distribution occurs only once in the data for this pilot study. Figure 3 shows the BOSE headphone ad (TIME 2009), where the image of a headphone and a heading are the "nucleus of information" and pieces of text, as well as some secondary images, are the contextualizing information.

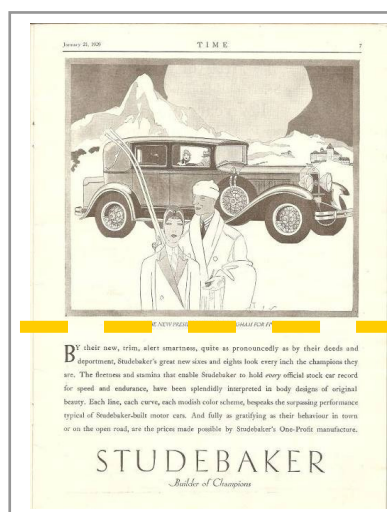


FIGURE 1 - Top-bottom distribution in the Studebaker ad.
 Also example of disconnection, segregation without overlap.
 From TIME, January 21, 1929:7.



FIGURE 2 - Left-right distribution in the Texaco ad.
 Also example of disconnection, segregation with overlap.
 From TIME, January 21, 1929, back cover.



FIGURE 3 - Centre-margins distribution in the Bose Headphones ad.
 Also example of separation.
 From TIME, 12 January, 2009, inside back cover.

In relation to framing, the question is whether text and image are represented as connected or disconnected elements on the multimodal page design, as it was explained before. Framing is in fact a matter of degree and, in the case of magazine ads, it has already been described, in very general lines, by Van Leeuwen (2005:6-14) under two main headings: 1) disconnection, and 2) connection. In the case of disconnection there are three possibilities. The first one is *segregation without overlap*. That is, when text and image occupy entirely different territories and this indicates that they should be seen as belonging to different orders. In this case, neither text nor image breaks through the opposite territory. Figure 1, the Studebaker ad (TIME 1929) discussed previously, is an example of segregation without overlap. There are no words in the top area (the image territory) and there are no images in the bottom area (the text territory). Also the thick line around the image reinforces segregation between the two semiotic resources. Second, it is possible to have *segregation with overlap*. This occurs when text and image occupy different territories but somehow a part of an image or a piece of a text, for instance, a heading, invades the opposite territory. Figure 2, the Texaco ad (TIME 1929) presented previously, is an example of segregation with overlap. Notice that the right side of the ad, the image territory, is invaded not only by part of the main text but also by verbal information that comes in a box. The third and last possibility is *separation*, which occurs when text and image are separated by empty space, and this suggests that they should be seen as similar in some respects and different in others. Figure 3, the BOSE headphones ad (TIME 2009), previously presented, is an example of separation. The image of the headphone is separated from the texts and the secondary images only by empty space.

Now, in the case of connection, when text and image do occupy the same territory, there are two possibilities. One is *pictorial integration*, that is, when image is integrated in a predominately textual space; and, the second is *textual integration*, when text is integrated in a predominately pictorial space, for instance, by being superimposed on an image. Figure 4, the BOSE Music System ad (TIME 2009), is an example of pictorial integration. The two images in this ad are integrated in the body of a traditional running text. Figure 5, the HP ad (TIME 2009), is an example of textual integration. Notice that the white text at the bottom of the page is superimposed on the reflection projected by the laptop.



FIGURE 4. Connection and pictorial integration in the Bose Music System ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009:29.

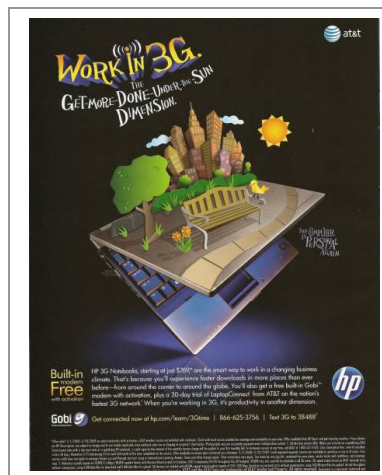


FIGURE 5. Connection and textual integration in the HP ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009, inside front cover.

In terms of methodology for the analysis of both information value and framing, it consists of the classification of each of the twenty-six ads according to the three types of information value and the five categories of framing, and their subsequent quantification. The general results for these two analytical perspectives are presented, and more thoroughly discussed, in the next section.

2. Pilot Study – text-image resources in modern and (post)modern ads

The organisation of the findings concerning information value and framing analysis follows two sequential steps. First, we present the overall results for the two data groups in regards to each analytical perspective. Second, we illustrate the results with a couple of examples from the data groups. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, giving more than one example from each data group would make this paper too lengthy.

2.1. Information value analysis

In terms of information value, there is a clear dominance of top-bottom distribution of text and image in both the 1929 ads and the 2009 ads. In the case of the first, top-bottom is present in 87.50% of the ads, while in the case of the second, it is present in 90% of them. As Table 1 shows, compared to the other two types of information value, left-right (1929: 9.38%, 2009: 0%) and centre-margins (1929: 3.12%, 2009: 10%), top-bottom distribution is a constant feature in the data as a whole.

Information value analysis	TIME 1929 (16 ads)	TIME 2009 (10 ads)
Top-bottom	87.50%	90%
Left-right	9.38%	0%
Centre-margins	3.12%	10%

TABLE 1 - Information value analysis results: percentage of top-bottom, left-right and centre-margins distribution in the two data groups.

In all these top-bottom occurrences, it is interesting to point out that, in both data groups, main images have always come in top leading position, while texts have come in bottom positions. Besides Figure 1 (Studebaker ad – TIME 1929), Figure 4 (Bose Music System ad – TIME 2009) and Figure 5 (HP ad – TIME 2009), previously presented, Figure 6 (Standard Plumbing Fixtures ad - TIME 1929) and Figure 7 (LIFE ad - TIME 2009) are two other examples of top-bottom distribution in the data analysed.



FIGURE 6 - Top-bottom distribution in the Standard Plumbing Fixtures ad.
From TIME, January 21,1929, inside front cover.



FIGURE 7 - Top-bottom distribution in the LIFE ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009, p. 50.

Some change in this scenario, however, can be noticed if top-bottom distribution is looked into with more detail. That is, when the size of top areas is compared to the size of bottom areas, then it is possible to state that there is quite a significant concentration of bigger

tops in the 2009 ads (66.66%). That is, while in the 1929 data group most ads present a balance between top and bottom areas or a very small difference between the two, in the 2009 data group top areas tend to be relatively bigger. Compare, for instance, the pair of ads previously presented in Figure 6 (Standard Plumbing Fixtures ad – TIME 1929) and Figure 7 (LIFE ad – TIME 2009). It is possible to observe that the top area in Figure 7 is almost three times bigger than the bottom area, whereas in Figure 6 they tend to be quite proportional. Besides the HP ad (TIME 1929) previously shown in Figure 5, two other examples of bigger tops in the 2009 data group are the CISCO ad (TIME 2009) and the Nissan ad (TIME 2009) presented in Figure 8 and Figure 9, respectively. As it occurred with all previous examples, notice that the main image comes at the top, in leading role, while the text continues to appear mainly at the bottom.

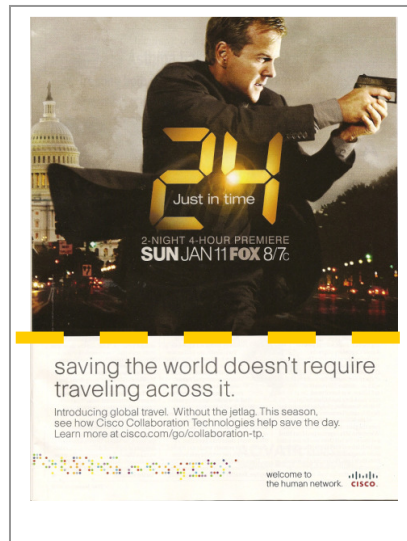


FIGURE 8 - Bigger top in the CISCO ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009:3.

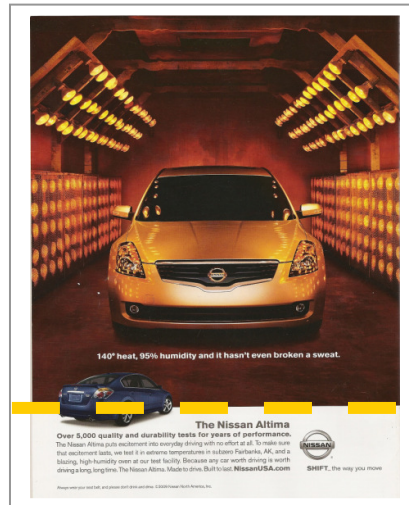


FIGURE 9 - Bigger top in the Nissan ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009, back cover.

Relating these results to the matter of possible changes in the use of text-image resources, it is possible to state that the leading role of images, initially observed in the 1929 ads, seems to be not only sustained but also reinforced in the 2009 data group due to a concentration of bigger tops. In other words, although both data groups share a dominance of top-bottom distribution with images always on leading position, the increase on the top area, the image territory, may signal an emphasis on the leading role of images in the 2009 data group.

A last interesting point is that there has been a considerable change in the size of the two magazine issues. The 1929 TIME issue measures 29.5 cm X 21.5 cm, while the 2009 TIME issue measures 26.5 cm X 20.1 cm. This piece of information is semiotically relevant because there seems to be a move from a more rectangular shape towards a more slightly squared shape. Visually speaking, rectangles seem to stress much more the opposition between top and bottom than squares can possibly do. Thus, despite the fact that top-bottom is kept as the main type of distribution in the 2009 data group, it could be argued that it is not as oppositional as in the 1929 data group because of the change in the shape of the magazine format.

2.2. Framing analysis

Moving on to framing analysis, change becomes more immediately visible in this case. The results show quite a solid move from disconnection between text and image in the 1929 ads to a more balanced situation between disconnection and connection in the 2009 ads. In terms of numbers, 93.75% of the ads in 1929 present disconnection, while, in the 2009 ads, there is almost an even split between disconnection (60%) and connection (40%). Table 2 shows the results for both data groups. Examples of disconnection in the 1929 data are Figure 1 (Studebaker ad), Figure 2 (Texaco ad) and Figure 6 (Standard Plumbing Fixtures ad); examples of disconnection in the 2009 data are Figure 3 (BOSE Headphones ad), Figure 7 (LIFE ad), Figure 8 (CISCO ad) and Figure 9 (Nissan ad); and examples of connection in the 2009 data are Figure 4 (BOSE Music System ad) and Figure 5 (HP ad).

Framing analysis	TIME 1929 (16 ads)	TIME 2009 (10 ads)
Disconnection	93.75%	60%
Connection	6.25%	40%

TABLE 2 - Framing analysis results: percentage of disconnection and connection in the two data groups.

Going into more detail in regards to the types of disconnection and connection in the two data groups, the results show a dominance of segregation with overlap for both periods (1929: 56.25%, 2009: 40%) and an increase of pictorial and textual integration in the 2009 data (2009: 20% and 20%, respectively). Table 3 brings the 5 types of framing and the percentage for both data groups.

Framing analysis	Subdivisions	TIME 1929 (16 ads)	TIME 2009 (10 ads)
Disconnection	Segregation with overlap	56.25%	40%
	Segregation without overlap	6.25%	0%
	Separation	31.25%	20%
Connection	Pictorial integration	6.25%	20%
	Textual integration	0%	20%

TABLE 3 - Framing analysis results: percentage of the 5 types of framing in the two data groups.

Examples of segregation with overlap in the 1929 data group are, for instance, Figure 2 (Texaco ad) and Figure 6 (the Standard Plumbing Fixtures ad), and in the 2009 data group, some examples are Figure 7 (LIFE ad), Figure 8 (CISCO ad) and Figure 9 (Nissan ad). More examples of segregation with overlap in the two data groups are the Canadian Pacific ad (TIME 1929) presented in Figure 10 and the Rosetta Stone ad (TIME 2009) presented in Figure 11. Notice that in the case of Figure 10, a heading appears at the top in the image territory, while drawings of small ships invade the bottom text territory. In Figure 11, there is a split of the top image territory between a photo and some text, while the bottom text territory is invaded by both an image of a Rosetta Stone box and a laptop.



FIGURE 10 - Segregation with overlap in the Canadian Pacific ad.
From TIME, January 21, 1929:33.



FIGURE 11 - Segregation with overlap in the Rosetta Stone ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009:46.

Pictorial integration and textual integration are present, respectively, in Figure 4 (BOSE Music System ad – TIME 2009) and Figure 5 (HP ad – TIME 2009), previously discussed. Other examples of pictorial and textual integration in the 2009 data are the Drug-Free America ad (TIME 2009) presented in Figure 12 and the Auto-Owners ad (TIME 2009) presented in Figure 13. In the case of Figure 12, the image of a teenager holding a book and looking at the viewers is integrated in the body of a traditional running text. In the case of Figure 13 a piece of text is superimposed on the greyish background of an image. Thus, Figure 12 is an example of pictorial integration and Figure 13 is an example of textual integration.



FIGURE 12 - Pictorial integration in the Drug-Free America ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009:37.



FIGURE 13 - Textual integration in the Auto-Owners ad.
From TIME, January 12, 2009:9.

Again relating these results to the matter of change in the use of text-image resources, it is possible to observe a tendency towards more integration between the two types of resource in the 2009 data group. This finding echoes, to a certain extent, Martinec and Salway's (2005:337) comparison between the blurring of social boundaries in the (post)modern scenario and the blurring of boundaries between text and image in the semiotic landscape. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that, due to the dominance of segregation *with overlap* in both

periods, text and image have never belonged to *entirely* different orders. Somehow frames between the two resources have always been porous in the ads of the present data.

To sum up the findings for these two analytical perspectives, one can state that: 1) there is a predominance of top-bottom distribution in the two data groups, with image always in the leading role; 2) there is a reinforcement of the image leading role in the 2009 data group due to a concentration of bigger tops (image territory); 3) there is a dominance of segregation *with overlap* in both data groups; and 4) there is a tendency towards more integration between text and image (connection) in the 2009 data group.

3. Conclusion: what has changed?

Answering the general research question guiding this paper, what has changed in terms of text-image resources when comparing modern and (post)modern ads?, we believe that the most appropriate answer, based on the results of the analyses presented, would be that change has taken place in terms of fine-grained details. The main characteristics of the 1929 data, such as top-bottom distribution, image in leading role and dominance of segregation with overlap (disconnection) are all present in the 2009 data. The only instances of change occurred, as we hope that it has become clear in the last section, in regards to the fine-grained details of the two analytical perspectives applied. That is, only when the size of top and bottom areas was compared and the subdivisions of disconnection and connection were taken into consideration that changes could be perceived between the two data groups. And, these changes seemed to indicate much more a confirmation and/or an intensification of latent 1929 features than a rupture with the former broader structure. Therefore, the concentration of bigger tops and the increase of pictorial and textual integration in the 2009 data do not seem to go against the leading role of images and the porosity of frames (dominance of segregation with overlap) that already existed in the 1929 data.

In general terms, these findings may be interpreted as congruent with the position of some social theorists such as Jameson (2002), Bauman (2000) and Giddens (1990), who claim that the so called (post)modernity is only a new phase within modernity itself. As already pointed out in the introduction, these scholars do not believe that changes in the recent modern social historical condition have been deep enough to give birth to a new era. The findings previously discussed, therefore, seem to validate such position, since they do not point at a

rupture in the broader text-image structure of the ads, but rather to an intensification of this very same structure.

Another interesting point in regards to the findings in this paper is that they seem to reinforce the (post)modern idea that the category of time is being replaced by the category of space. That is, the increase in the top areas (image territory) in the 2009 data group could be seen as an increase of space as opposed to time. According to Kress (2003:2), while the verbal semiotic mode is governed by the logics of time and sequence, the visual semiotic mode is governed by the logics of space and simultaneity. Therefore, the increase in the image territory and the consequent reduction of the text⁵ territory may be understood as a possible sign of the (post)modern replacement of time by space.

Still a last interesting possible interpretation is related to Lyotard's (2004) well-known (post)modern observation of the fall of metanarratives, that is, the contemporary loss of faith in the possibility of a man-made single order legitimated by universal and absolute truths, such as old political ideologies (democracy, communism, socialism and conservatism) or interpretative theories of the last two centuries (Marxism, positivism, phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis and the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and education) (Denzin, 1991: 36). Such lack of an established order may be related to the increasing number of different frames in the 2009 data group. While in the 1929 ads, the predominance of disconnection (93.75% - Table 2), seemed to create a steady pattern in the bonding of text and image. In the 2009 ads, the tendency towards connection (40% - Table 2), which brings up two other possible ways of bonding text-image, seems to break free from a previous expected pattern/order.

These three possible interpretations that we have just briefly discussed are only tentative answers to explain the results of this pilot study. Nevertheless, they bring two important insights for our doctoral investigation. First, there is the need to confront the results here observed with the analysis of ads from, at least, another magazine issue. More specifically, and as pointed out before, we have selected an issue from 1969 which would correspond to the centre of the eighty-year gap between the 1929 issue and the 2009 issue. Second, and following our former tentative interpretations, most of our work now should be directed to better figuring out how these analytical findings may be interpreted within the modern/(post)modern debate.

In a nutshell, this pilot study has been both an attempt to look at an instance of semiotic change more closely and to bring important

⁵ Here we just want to make clear that our comparison is in terms of the size of text and image territories, not in terms of the number of images and words.

insights for a doctoral investigation. It has pointed out that change in the use of text-image resources in modern and (post)modern ads has taken place in terms of finer-grained details which, in fact, do not represent a rupture with a former structure but an intensification of latent features. In this sense, these results are congruent with the position of some social theorists who regard (post)modernity as a new phase within modernity itself. It also points out at the possibility of interpreting the expansion of the top territory, the image territory, as a symptom of the (post)modern replacement of time by space, and the increasing variety of frames in the 2009 data group as an expression of the lack of a (post)modern established order. Finally, this pilot study has also made clear the need to further validate the features observed in the analyses carried out and to better reflect on their relation to context of a modern/(post)modern transition. Its contribution, as stated before, lies on the attempt to better understand the diachronic dimension. In a time when school curricula and literacy practices are being redesigned in response to a changing semiotic landscape, questions like *what has changed?*, *to what extent has it changed?*, *in what context has it changed?*, and *what might these changes mean?* have become crucial.

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