

Introduction to the study of the Non-Image

Felipe Lozano, National Taipei University of Technology, Taiwan
Ko-Chiu Wu, National Taipei University of Technology, Taiwan

The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Based on contemporary cultural studies, the purpose of this investigation is to develop the concept of the non-image which corresponds to the new iconography derived from the modern spaces known as non-places, an image that only exists to be read in a predetermined way and refers to an ideal activity; a multiple but “meaningless” image. Within this context the semiotic interaction of the observer, the “sight” of the user/traveler is not the same that the one in another anthropological settlement. For the moment restlessness is to say the non-image does not represent “I am”, it represents “I will be”; no more “I’m here” but not an “I’m not”, the non-image says “I would be there”. The perfect picture of what will never be. This research seeks to show paradoxical concepts and the spaces that characterize them; on one side, there are the semiotics and aesthetics of the image, including the perceptual and cognitive sense of vision. The other side contains the referent to mobility, urban planning and architecture. It is intended to see urban and graphic design as a direct reflection of social psychology and how globalized images affect the human mind through these great architectural achievements, our cities.

Keywords: Graphic Design, Urban Semiotics, Perception, Non-places.

iafor

The International Academic Forum

www.iafor.org

Introduction

Wondering where we are going because right now we don't even know where we are, What do we do now? Sometimes this question arises with particular urgency, especially in those cases where the response seems to indicate not only the immediate act to follow but also the way which we build the future. The concept presented here makes direct reference to this problem, not only because it was made under a similar question but also because it refers both to physical places as well as images, where this challenge is embodied and externalized.

Consequently, the research aims to study the symbiosis between two simultaneous areas (places and images), therefore making up a space-time situation (the traveling event). The consolidation of places and images and their very existence depends on the connections built and what each brings to the other, but it is the combination of these two states, i.e. their interaction, the real purpose of defining the Non-image.

Non-places not only have a common anthropological definition, but also can be identified by their visual content. The non-image creates a new meaning of the image as a category of study within the non-place. It is not intended to define the scope of non-image as a whole, but to do a particular approach within the generality of the concept, defining the different states and also appropriating the particular elements of this special kind of image, elaborated and designed with the purpose of communication which has a peculiar perception by the public within the non-place.

The main objective here is to demonstrate the importance of the non-places in the everyday life, but mostly as a direct beacon on social imaginary, in order to develop the Non-image concept, its perception, possible applications, structure, and relation with the traveler. The development of established concepts into new scenarios generates new lectures to be reassessed for new interpretations. It is needed to build links between anthropological studies, cultural studies, urbanism and art in order to reinforce the theory of Visual Communication.

1. The Non-place

Currently the concept of place has been transgressed, and its components abolished or supplemented; to apprehend it, it is necessary to use contemporary elements which regenerate the place providing it with new features. This continuous movement is reflected in a number of routes, crossroads and meeting points, departures and arrivals. The unstoppable movement spins the world, anthropologically speaking, our world, our culture and society. To move from one place to another, satisfy needs and complete any particular task assigned to our lives, roads, transportation, stations, markets; places that are the quantification of an area, volume and distance are all necessary.

“If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (Augé, 2008, p.63). Augé studied the subway system in Paris as a key example of his research, not only as a center of constant movement but also for the several appendices inside each station, waiting rooms, small businesses, overwhelming advertising and the variety of people from different origins gathered in a single/multiple space. Shopping centers, airports, chain hotels, transport stations,

supermarkets, etc.; spaces and moments being part of roads, paths and crossroads whose degree of relationship to the individual is ephemeral and paradoxically substantial.

The three conditions of a non-place are not set in stone and behave more as definition guidelines; The individual stories that may occur, and the daily routine of the usual workers who have the non-place as their workplace is a fact of personal and group identity. The casual encounters that users may experience inside transportation systems or waiting rooms are indeed moments of relationship. The terrorist attack with life loss unfortunately plays a role in time, pointing a place and date within history.

And still, even if no physical boundaries exist, either walls or ceilings, the non-place maintains a certain structure and continuous communication with the user. Traffic signals are all the way through the road, they complement it and define it; an elaborated system code of signs combined with tourist landmarks, commercial ads, banners, billboards, et cetera. This visual company becomes almost impossible in travel (commercial flights), sea (cruises) or railways (underground or on level), but in this case it is the same transport vehicle, ie. plane, boat or car that is the one responsible for providing the behavioral limits, fulfilling needs and providing the necessary imaginary for the traveler.

1.1. A Non-place Identity?

The non-places have special conceptual features, making them material entities of contemporary existence; these places share similarities which serve as identification elements. Non-places develop a symbolism with a very specific reading, not only about the architectural space, but also about consumerism dictating what, how and when to do what is supposed to be done. This symbolism reports the details of transactions, prices, and trends to follow while at the same time resolving traveler's most frequent questions. This representation builds the travel experience; the event itself makes the human perception different from any other normally used in personal contexts. The observation of familiar images allows enjoyment of the experience, banishing any kind of apprehension against the new. Trust is critical inside a non-place, evasion of any sort of mishap or discomfort is necessary for the traveler who strolls around the halls.

The social imaginary is condensed inside the non-place, safeguarding it and playing it through a cyclical reference, the airlines recommend chain hotels, at the lobby endorsements of shopping malls, large retail outlets, recreation parks and leisure centers which are linked to transport hubs, supermarkets and then, a steady amount of information on highways, announcements, flyers, and so on. Uninterrupted travel chronicles describing situations in non-places, photos, videos and stories happening one after another in the same scenarios all over the world. Countless amounts of images are staged through the travel experience throughout the journey; Images and information on continuous fluctuation where the message's content is repeated ad infinitum.

2. Utopian Perception

Every age of the image corresponds to a qualitative structure of the lived world. Tell me what you see, and I would tell what you live for and how do you think (Debray, 1994, p.182). Under this approach, to reach a study of the image an analysis of the time and place where this image belongs is required. "Where" is now defined by the non-place concept and "When" is the interaction produced between traveler and place, thereby shaping the experience of travel. The event requires a special point of view, taking care of the unknown or the potential dangers, searching options of choice or fate. This sight is defined by the experience perception, which builds its relationship with the environment and what is experienced. The set of images, part of this experience within the non-place, are produced and staged to complement, promote and define the journey.

Thus the elements used to fully understand the event and the gaze made during the experience come from the analysis of the perceptual process of the individual within the non-place; following this logic the symbols produced by and for the non-place and the individual are the objects of study. The individual who accesses a non-place enters into a code generator, different from any other anthropological site. The traveler is an archetype, experiencing within a place different codes and signs indicating which path to choose; instinct is replaced by a schedule, a paper or poster helping to decide how to move, ergo the possibility of a destination, a predetermined future, a prospective goal and a rewarding experience.

2.1. Perceptive Process

Today, traveling occurs within a tangle of roads, using transportation and sites that provide comfort and services which fulfill the traveler's needs. Lodging, recreation, transportation and consumption, activities and places, regardless the geographical point of destination. The experience of these non-places (tending toward the massive and collective) is juxtaposed with the particular and individual, so the reality of the trip is staked by other contexts which are not usually found in a more "familiar place", traveling inside a non-place creates a decontextualized environment for those who experience it.

A great part of our daily lives occurs in non-places. If we consider them as sites of movement or ephemeral access with a permanent "timeless", and a global presence; we can eventually notice how all these phenomena modify or even define the social construction of traveling. According to this analysis, the traveling experience is defined by five factors of simultaneous interaction in which the traveler is submerged. First, the fact of traveling presupposes mobility, a change of place or displacement also linked to a speed change preferably towards acceleration. The speed and sense of movement not only interfere with the vision process, but also with the physical state of the traveler. It is obligatory to move in the journey, in transport is more than obvious this assertion but even in a static non-place like a shopping mall or a hotel, the fact of moving is necessary, both to observe and to not interfere. Even at relaxing or waiting moments, movement is perceived as latent force. The initial architectural design and space planning assumed the potential force; the constant flow of people is possible only if they pass through the designed course.

Rarely is this movement made in absolute solitude; on the contrary, traveling is a mass experience where a person is only a single entity within a vast group of individuals becoming part of an agglomeration, the anonymity of the crowd. The traveler's perspective this time is conditioned by the absence of known individuals, while paradoxically is surrounded in the same place for hundreds or thousands of people in the same situation. Loneliness takes shape within a large group of solitude, when exploring unknown areas, is inevitably to meet heterogeneous characters who feed the notion of the Other. The traveler loses its boundaries and the absence of meaningful contexts may drive the journey experience into a culture shock.

The third factor that modifies the journey is the programmed experience, the study of the routes, movements and their speed, the containment of a large number of people in previously marked areas, as a great staging which becomes an illusion. Management experience and minimalistic interior design have made the journey a retail product, so calculated that often what is received, is an ideal of the visited place. This stage is referred in other similar areas as hyperreality or simulacrum, being these definitions approximations to a state where everything is calculated, designed, programmed and synchronized; the standardization of the experience.

Non-places have a global presence, internal transit promotes the deterritorialization of the experience, even if the place is architecturally still, this apparent immobility does not prevent images and actions from corresponding to the hazards of globalization. More and more, every resort, chain hotel and amusement park resemble each other, without distinction of geographical location in which they are located, indeed, the ideal of these places is to have an internal network of accommodation, rest, pleasure and entertainment unifying the different facilities and offering "all inclusive" and "unlimited access". What happens when after traveling a great distance, the destination point is a similar place-almost identical to the place left behind? Or otherwise, isn't possible to visit "exotic locations" within local buildings, resembling just the façade of the original ones?

A classic example of globalization is the worldwide omnipresence of Coca Cola and on this, Friedman comments, "the notion that the universal consumption of Coca-Cola unites a picturesquely but only superficially diverse world in brotherhood" (Friedman, 1992, p.658). This element prevents perceiving the difference between the identity of a place and another which is thousands of miles away, an absence of characteristic features that make any place unique; when the identity collapses the differences may only be the cost and ease of the entrance tickets.

Finally, the act of traveling in general happens almost entirely under strict surveillance, pervasive security to prevent accidents, extreme control towards suspects, and an intense concern regarding vandalism and now days, terrorism. As we watch, we are observed, this principle of social control is used while every single aspect of any journey. We look for safety and someone else looks at us closely and even suspicion. The security controls that were originally performed only at customs with international arrivals are now one element of any casual activity such as having a meal in any convenience store. The words of Foucault referring to the western penal system are still valid, but in this new scenario it is possible to expand his meaning to a wider coverage: "Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance" (Foucault, 1976, p. 217). Surveillance is on our everyday life has a common and normal fact and

the idea of a non-place without control, is the same as a tourist without a camera and/or a ticket.

Mobility, anonymity, illusion, deterritorialization and surveillance, all of which conditioning the perception process and bring signs and symbols to be decoded by the individual. It is impossible to take each piece separately dismissing the simultaneity of the event, which obviously would not exist without a passenger.

3. Civilization of the Image?

It is pretended to do an analysis of the image from the moment it is confined as an object of multiple reproduction, that means from modernity. Usually referred as a civilization of the image, our time could be wrongly enounced, yet this approach without underestimating the hegemony of vision¹ in the western world, serves as a starting point for analyzing the role of the image today.

“We are bombarded today by such a quantity of images that we can no longer distinguish direct experience from what we have seen for a few seconds on television. The memory is littered with bits and pieces of images, like a rubbish dump, and it is more and more unlikely that any one from among so many will succeed in standing out” (Calvino, 1988, p. 92). As Calvino points, unlimited reproduction and ubiquitous presence of modern image brings an element which could be counterproductive to defining the current state of the image: multiplicity.

Therefore, promptly placing the image as a communication resource within a consumer society, it would be an advertisement responsible for dictating the properties of the image, inflating hyperboles and superlatives, and always appealing to the exaggeration of cultural imaginary. When referring to advertisement, it is usually associated with the values of supply and demand, but also with mass propaganda. According to Pratkanis & Aronson (1992), propaganda is the delivery of a point of view with the ultimate aim for the receiver to accept "voluntarily" this message and believe it as if it were their own. These messages submitted continuously and tirelessly in every sphere from daily life found in the non-place a daily scenario for this action. But the abundance of commercial images in brochures, posters, stickers, flyers, transport advertising, billboards, TV spots, etc., is more and more seen with a feeling of rejection from artists, cultural movements and even vandalism. The symbols of corporate power are subverted and ridiculed because of the resentment that has led to the disappearance of spaces without ads and the absence of meaningful choices. "People resent the destruction of culture and its replacement with these mass-produced corporate logos and slogans. It represents a kind of cultural fascism" says the American labor rights activist Trim Bissell, interviewed in the book *No Logo* (Klein, p.119), when referring to cultural jamming.

However, in his complete study made about the image, Jacques Aumont (1992) concludes that effectively we still continue inside a civilization of language, even when the interference and multiplicity of image grow progressively. To Aumont, this

¹ The hegemony of vision from the 20th century does not only respond to a change in the hierarchy of senses due to the predominance of an electronic culture based on the visual media, but also in the content of what is perceived as new epistemic laws ordering levels of power, systems of desire and knowledge management (Lowe, 1983).

is a side effect within a larger phenomenon - the status change from the spiritual image to the visual image. Precisely the current images appeal to the visual and ignore the spiritual, leaving only mere reproductions without any ideological, intellectual or social role. The transcendental force of the image lessened by the very proliferation and indiscriminate capture of images; Yet, the argument goes further, in *Life and Death of Image*, Régis Debray (1994) suggests that more than a civilization of the image, ours is a civilization of the screen, as the mass media regime is not about the image itself but the idealization from the visual. What was once a written poster progressed into a fixed image and now tends to become a screen.

To discard language as communication mechanism would limit the flow of thought and identity to a kind of illiterate image, but perhaps it is the pejorative description of the image that really ignores the positive elements of cultural reinvention and creativity. The debate on the role of the image in our civilization is enough to argue continuously without a defined path, that is why it's undeniable that if someday a definition arises, it would be at least as a part of a concept, within an objective field and without generalities. There isn't a single message inside a single image for a single viewer, what is proposed here is an analysis inside a time event, for a series of images viewed by a multiplicity of people.

4. The Non-Image

Following the interaction principle (interpretation and image overlay), within a contemporary anthropological space, it is considered necessary to create a concept, which is the hypothesis of this investigation. The non-image would be the intended result from the analysis of the symbolism and identity of contemporary places.

Perception and experience consolidate the traveling event into our reality, i.e. the symbolic language of the experience that comes from the interaction between traveler and non-place is a junction bridge with the imaginary, and therefore the architectural genre allows the individual to interact within a situation and an environment, thus defining the individual behavior. Role play is necessary for the adequate inclusion of individuals within a space. For Cudicio: A representation is a kind of map in terms of which behavior is organized. This trend plays a role in the construction of representations, especially related to personal dimensions: success, happiness, life goals (Cudicio, 1992, p. 57); the individual needs social skills, personal background or community experiences to enter any kind of space, but also rules defined by the place. The non-place serves as a context for all messages transmitted, allowing an intuitive knowledge and thus letting the user to handle events such as waiting times, tours, shopping, resting areas, and others.

According to the values within the travel experience (mobility, anonymity, illusion, deterritorialization and control), traveling is heavily loaded with semantics emptied and refilled; constant change encourages the existence of a non-place and this is how the traveler perceives it. As discussed above, the interaction of these values promotes a permanent change of contexts, allowing the experience to be constantly emptied and refilled by these messages and images in which the traveler is immersed when entering a non-place.

Perception is then a game of images and these images replace the usual context of the traveler, changing it for one with mass use. If the individual's social status is regulated in these phenomena it is understood that the perceived images are also loaded by this experience, emptied of their initial content and then a new one is formed. Paradoxically this is not detrimental for the message because the message is not inherent to that particular image; it can be to any other; significance conditioning between what an image represents and the communicated message does not exist.

Therefore, the non-image concept does not refer to a virtual image. It is very real, and the application of the word virtual could only be possible in the analysis of non-image's message, image recognition does not mean non-message; what the non-image represents is a predetermined conception of reality - an assumption that "does not exist", (although what is being seen tells the viewer otherwise). It is the image of utopia, that something is allegedly attainable, yet unreasonable. Thus, it is the multiplicity of the image which fosters this inconsistency. Under the non-place is the pure multiple, the presentation of the presentation where there is not uniqueness and the image consists of multiplicities: if the message of the image is multiplied to infinity through its continuous symbolic references, the inconsistency of this multiplicity dilutes the initial image. Following this path, what is presented as multiple stops being the initial one and still contains it.

In consequence, an image that shows off its multiplicity, that lacks unity (relative to the message), representing idealized behavior patterns, mixed with the promise of possible embodiment, and which advocates a spatial directionality and/or attitudinal behavior, would be what is intended to call as non-image.

It is necessary not to confuse the non-image concept with a trendy term for ads, although the development of the concepts that are part of the non-image, are also within the consumerism critiques, is this imaginary (advertisement images) its more visible component. Brand names apparatus is only one part of the media labyrinth of the non-place and sometimes is probably the most clearly presented, especially if it has strong influence on the cultural imaginary, not specific and local but global and dispersed. Through the apparent emptiness assumption it is possible that such silence is not caused by the lack of a statement but by the multiplicity of the message. Every image that shows its message at the same time creates visual noise, thus in this case, designed noise, although not white noise, but colorful, with a well-being promise of future. Eco sees this phenomenon in the case of amusement parks: Thus, in the entertainment industry, when there is a sign it seems like there weren't, and when there isn't any, we think we perceive something (Eco, 1994, p. 76). The emptiness is confused with the multiplicity and vice versa - a true monument for a time where the hyper-icon materializes the wishes of a society, not by representation, but by desire.

The non-image is part of a symbolic code, a system where each non-image struggles to be observed. Pathways, data, messages, posters, sounds and alarms, signs, ads, precaution warnings, schedules, prices, screens... These indicators are created exclusively for the transmission of messages. Among the systems produced by and for a non-place, it's interesting to remark the role of printed material for internal use (product catalogs, maps, newspapers, airline magazines, etc.), publications aimed to entertain, inform and persuade (which does not differ from normal commercial print), but these publications have a type of internal structure that keeps promising on each

page fulfillment of wishes, possible destinations, better quality of life, freedom and so on. It is notable how regardless the airline's origin country, on board magazines bring the same source of pictures, articles and imaginary, dismissing the identity of provenance or using prejudice as a recycled mechanism of identity, nationalist clichés featuring what it's supposed to be found: the hot blood of the Caribbean, the exotic East, the hospitality of the small towns, along with others; thereby the characteristics of a region are reduced to no more than five adjectives.

5. Conclusions

The concretization concept by Roman Ingarden would be the best way to define the semiotic interaction between the traveler and the non-image, as concretization is an idea that links the perception of the image with subjective operations and the experience derived from visual contact. The viewer then accesses into personal/multiple experience within the non-place and the social environment; this involves the reconstruction of the non-image according to new values attributed by the viewer (always in relation to the semantic connections that evokes).

By employing the hyper-icon as degree of figuration, the non-image tends to make an unlimited semiosis in which, started even before entering the non-place, the experience was previously idealized, or at least suspected. Considering that the non-images are "poor" in content, they are also essentially rich in personalizing their messages. The predominance of topics like beauty, happiness, future, and youth creates a continuous reference to that utopian ideal society is eager to fulfill. High quality photoshopped pictures framed by words like stay, travel, sea, sun, space, fun, beach, future etc. are a continuous signification of personal happiness, from the private life to become part of the public realm (style, success, sex, along with others).

Debray writes: Meanwhile, the more beautiful, the more suspicious. As the image is a deficit of the being and therefore of the truth, the more seductive it is, the more evil; charms and visual spells are public hazards (1994, p.149). The non-image does not escape to the pejorative adjectives over the image, with the difference that these terms are what give it its particular form; emptying and refilling; absorb and reform, the non-image persuades while faith in the future allows it, and if not, it would find a way to make it profitable. Approaching a rhetoric analysis, the elements of the non-image are divided and formalized by an ethos (source) in this case multiple, a logos (message) ephemeral, and a pathos (emotion from the viewer) defined by the experience and the place; remembering once again the words of Debray: "The rhetoric of the image", for now, is no more than a rhetorical figure (literary). It is always said that it "remains to be done." And not without reason: impossible tasks are endless (ibid, p.53).

This project arises as a creative reinterpretation (sensible and rational) for the current state of the image, from the discovery of a specific application of design where a phenomenon begs to be investigated. But is there transformation, invention, creation or just meta-sense, more noise over the speech?

To suitably define this approach, new design theory is needed, especially in areas such as urban semiotics and visual communication; Articulated, structured, differentiated, the image acquires a richness and semantic density. The non-image is

an image that intends to communicate, but lacks of meaning and particular content, an illiterate image, although it serves as a critical point of view, it should not be taken as an opposition concept. It is not an antonym, nor a denial, much less a ban, it is a definition with particular qualities. The studied image is not just any random image, it is an image that someone designed, with something to say and a place to be. The journey, as a text, is illustrated by a complementary non-image that enhances the experience; again, denial is not a derogatory qualifier, it is an appendix, a state of the image.

References

Aumont, J. (1992). *La Imagen*. [The Image]. Barcelona: Paidós.

Augé, M. (2008). *Non-Places. An Introduction to Supermodernity*. (2nd edition). USA: Verso.

Calvino I. (1988). *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cudicio, C. (1992). *PNL y Comunicación*. [NLP & Communication]. Buenos Aires: Granica.

Debray, R. (1994). *Vida y muerte de la imagen*. [Life and death of Image]. Barcelona: Paidós.

Eco, U. (1994). *La Estrategia de la ilusión*. [Travels in Hyperreality]. Buenos Aires: Editorial Lumen.

Friedman, (1992). *The World of The World of Coca-Cola*. Communication Research, Vol. 19 No 5, October 1992, pp. 642-662

Foucault, M. (1976). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin Books.

Ingarden, R. (1985). *Selected Papers in Aesthetics*, Peter J. McCormick (ed.), München: Philosophia Verlag.

Klein, N. (1999). *No Logo*. Canada: Picador.

Lowe, D. (1983). *History of Burguois Perception*. USA: University of Chicago.

Pratkanis, A. & Aronson, E. (1994). *La era de la propaganda*. [The era of propaganda]. Barcelona: Paidós

Contact email: non.image00@gmail.com