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UNMASKING METAPHORS IN URBAN PLANNING

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FOR A LONG TIME METAPHORS¹ were seen as a rhetorical device and more specifically as a matter of poetry. Today, however, many cognitive linguists and analysts of discourse recognize that metaphors structure our perception and understanding of reality and that we define our reality in terms of different kinds of metaphors and proceed to act on the basis of these metaphors:

When we signify things through one metaphor rather than another, we are constructing our reality in one way rather than another. Metaphors structure the way we think and the way we act, and our systems of knowledge and belief, in a pervasive and fundamental way. (Fairclough 1992:195)

Most of our metaphors have evolved in our culture over a long period, but many are imposed upon us by people in power, and people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:159–160). One of the most salient metaphors we live by is the metaphor argument is war, which is why we often talk about arguments in terms of war. Although there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle and the structure of an argument (attack, defense and counterattack) reflects this. Another salient metaphor *we live by* is the health metaphor, which is when we speak about abstract concepts in terms of body and health, therefore mapping onto these concepts some properties of animates or human beings and carrying out a kind of personification.²

But the most interesting thing is that both metaphors, the war metaphor and the health metaphor, have been related to each other for a long time. In the 19th and 20th centuries, for instance, medicine evoked military metaphors against disease to promote the idea that illness is an *enemy* to be *defeated* and to engage people in a common cause, namely, in a treatment focused on medications. Sontag (1989), for example, gathers an abundant supply of metaphors on the way we speak about illness in terms of war and shows how doctors, in their *crusade against cancer* and in order to *kill the cancer, bombard with toxic rays and chemical warfare*. And vice versa, military *operations* are seen as *hygienic*, as a means to *clean out* fortifications, and bombs are portrayed as *surgical strikes* to take out anything that can serve a military purpose (Lakoff 1991). Both metaphors, the war metaphor and the health metaphor, are still alive in our culture and have an important role in understanding complex matters such as foreign policy.

On the other hand, as Fairclough points out, disease metaphors are also used to talk about social unrest, portraying the status quo as the healthy situation and presenting other interests as attacks on the health of society as a whole. According to him:

[T]he ideological significance of disease metaphors is that they tend to take dominant interests to be the interests of society as a whole, and construe expressions of non-dominant interests (strikes, demonstrations and 'riots') as undermining (the health of) society *per se*. (1989:120)

He finally concludes that 'different metaphors imply different ways of dealing with things: one does not arrive at a negotiated settlement with cancer, though one might with an opponent argument. Cancer has to be eliminated, cut out' (*ibid*).

In recent decades the enterprise culture has spread out in both the health metaphor and the war metaphor and nowadays we talk about war and health in terms of business. The patients have turned into *clients* (Goldbloom 2003) and the war is seen as a transaction with *costs*, namely, casualties, and *gains* or well-being and security (Lakoff 1991). In our point of view, there is indeed a *hypermetaphor*, the business metaphor, invading both the metaphor of war and the health metaphor or overlapping them.

1. METAPHORS IN URBAN PLANNING.

1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. The *Plan for Restoring the Islamic Wall in Barri del Carme* (Valencia, Spain) allows us to show how the health metaphor and the business metaphor arise together and function as a powerful device of masking reality. The project, which was supposed to aim at the restoration of the Islamic Wall and the construction of some houses and public equipment, affected 200 people (40% of the population of the area) and anticipated the demolition of 16 buildings and the reuse of 17 construction sites. However, the real goal of the plan was to redevelop a residential area into a tertiary one by getting rid of the residents. The affected residents, who were neither asked nor informed of the plan while it was being drafted, gathered in associations, organized debates and round tables, launched awareness-raising campaigns for the citizens, wrote press articles and proposed an alternative plan that was sustainable and respectful towards both cultural heritage and neighborhood. Throughout the campaign they were anonymously menaced, their houses were bought and sold again three or four times by different building societies and their message was labeled as *protest song*. Eventually, in 2004, the plan was withdrawn and a new plan was put forward, which is respectful to most of the existing buildings and keeps the population. However, at the moment, the only activity that can be seen in the affected area is that of the estate agencies, who buy whole buildings, try to throw the inhabitants out through *estate mobbing* and resell these buildings for twice or three times the original purchase price.

1.2. DATA AND METHOD. In the following sections we focus on how architects and urban planners try to create realities and to mystify the impact their projects will have on the affected neighbors by means of metaphors. The data for this study consist of the urban project outlined

by the technical specialists, opinion articles from newspapers published from 2000 to 2005, round tables where architects, urban planners, archaeologists and residents have been discussing the project, and leaflets from campaigns organized by the residents' associations. These discourses are analyzed through a combination of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 1995, 2003) and conceptual metaphor theory as used in cognitive linguistics (i.e. Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Kövecses 2002, Gibbs 1994 and 1999, and Steen 1999).

Our study differs from other research on metaphor. We adopt a language-in-use approach to metaphor, where language users are an integral part of the research. We emphasize the interactional aspects of metaphors to show how conventionalized metaphors and image metaphors are processed by speakers, since some scholars have pointed to the need to distinguish degrees of familiarity in metaphors processed by speakers (cf. Giora & Fein 1996 and Low 1999).

2. THE HEALTH METAPHOR. Conceptual metaphors are grounded in, or motivated by, human experience. According to Boers (1997:49), when there are various metaphors available to conceive an abstract concept, 'the likelihood of a given source domain being used for metaphorical mapping may be enhanced when it becomes more salient in everyday experience'. The bodily source domain is one of those experiences and one circumstance in which the awareness of one's bodily functioning is enhanced is when one gets ill. In our case (the Restoration of the Islamic Wall), the health metaphor arises as a powerful device to persuade people of the advantages and disadvantages of the plan and technicians and institutional representatives use this metaphor both to defend and attack the plan. The pro-project technicians, for example, establish a doctor-patient (and therefore an expert/non expert) relationship with the affected environment to justify the urban *operation*. This way, the proposed plan is seen in example (1) as a therapeutic solution, namely, as *sanitizing* by means of *delicate urban surgery*, although it entails the demolition of several buildings and the expulsion of their inhabitants:

- (1) La reordenación supone el *saneamiento* de una zona en declive social y económico mediante una *intervención delicada de cirugía urbana* que respeta y completa la edificación existente.

'The redistribution suggests the *sanitizing* of a district in social and economic decline through the *delicate application of urban surgery* that both respects and adheres to the existing environs.' (Project. Modificación del PEPRI del Carmen en el ámbito de la muralla musulmana 2002)

The anti-project technicians also use the health metaphor, but this time to make the affected residents aware of the side effects or consequences of the *operation*, namely, the expulsion of the affected inhabitants and the redevelopment of the neighborhood into a tertiary area. For the latter, the project is seen as a matter of *major surgery* (2), and more specifically, as a *lineal metastasis* which entails *extirpation* and *amputation of urban tissue* (3):

- (2) Pero es que además yo creo que viajan poco. Mejor dicho, viajan mal. Porque no son capaces de ver y de aprender lo que sucede en el resto de Europa donde ya hace algunos años se ha abandonado casi completamente las *operaciones de cirugía mayor*, la reestructuración contundente, una forma de intervenir que no es un caso aislado y que se ha aplicado de forma contundente todavía mayor cabe en el Cabañal.

‘But, in addition, I think they travel little, or rather they travel badly. They are incapable of seeing and learning from what is happening in the rest of Europe where, some years ago, they almost completely abandoned the idea of *operations of major surgery*. That is to say, restructuring on an overwhelming scale, a widespread form of intervention that has been employed to drastic effect in the Cabañal.’ (Fernando Gaja, Anti-project, Round Table)

- (3) Que aunque no se diga, la estrategia aplicada se basa en la llamada hipótesis de la *metástasis de línea* que formuló hace tiempo ya Oriol Bohigas. Una reestructuración *traumática*, de *amputación* y *extirpación* de tejidos urbanos.

‘Although it is not acknowledged, the applied strategy is based on what is known as the *lineal metastasis* formulated in the 1950s by Oriol Bohigas, which consists of a *traumatic* restructuring, *amputation* and *extirpation* of urban *tissues*.’ (Fernando Gaja, Anti-project, Round Table)

In examples (4), (5) and (6), the same anti-project representative maps the health metaphor onto the residents, who are referred to as *patients* (4) or as *sensitive tissues* (5), but also as *clients* (6), an example of the marketization of discourse (Fairclough 1992), to which we return in section 3.

- (4) Para los urbanistas más preclaros se trata de una *operación quirúrgica* que pretende matar al *paciente*. Ese *paciente* son el centenar de familias que tendrán que ser expropiadas de sus casas y la destrucción del tejido económico y social que mantiene vivo el barrio del Carmen.

‘For the more enlightened and eminent urbanists it is about a *surgical operation* that tries to kill the *patient*. The *patient*, in this case, being the hundred families who would have their houses expropriated and would witness the destruction of the economic and social fabric that keeps the Barrio del Carmen (old town) alive.’ (Reported speech from the newspaper *Pueblo*)

- (5) Creo que es importante, cuando se actúa en un *tejido tan sensible* como este, tener siempre presente el llamado principio de precaución y la irreversibilidad de las actuaciones. Las actuaciones urbanísticas en gran medida son irreversibles.

'I believe it is important, when one is working with *such sensitive tissue*, to always be aware of what is known as the caution principle and the irreversibility of the interventions. Urban interventions are largely irreversible.' (Fernando Gaja, Anti-project, Round Table)

- (6) Los vecinos no son un elemento pasivo de las actuaciones son el *cliente*, el *cliente* de estas actuaciones.

'The neighbors are not a passive element in the interventions, they are the *client*, the *client* of the interventions.' (Fernando Gaja, Anti-project, Round Table)

Thus, groups with different interests share the health metaphor at a general level but exploit it differently at the level of detail and make citizens perceive the planned urban intervention as a necessary measure to be taken, but also as an operation that can kill the patient and the square. It depends on the metaphors used to define the plan.

3. THE BUSINESS METAPHOR. Another example of naturalized metaphor we are hardly ever aware of is the business metaphor. As Fairclough (1992: 195) points out, people are not only quite unaware of it most of the time, but they find it very difficult to escape from this metaphor in their discourse practice. It is what he calls the marketization of discourse, which also entails a marketization of thought and practice. In the Plan for Restoring the Islamic Wall, the business metaphor is above all used by the pro-project party. The authors also talk about *costs* (namely, *social costs*) (7), *good business* (8) and the *excellent balance* (9) that can result from this *operation*.

- (7) La primera conclusión es la existencia de grandes espacios desocupados en la mayoría de los centros de las manzanas, lo que permite una intervención con un menor *coste social*.

'The first impression is one of large, unoccupied spaces in most of the inner courtyards of the blocks, which permits an intervention with lower *social costs*.' (Project. Modificaciones al PEPRI del Carmen en el ámbito de la muralla musulmana, 2002)

- (8) Esto es prueba de que entendieron que hacían un *buen negocio* con ello.

'This is proof that they [the affected residents of other plans carried out in the old historic quarter] viewed this as *good business*.' (Juan Pecourt, Pro-project, Levante-EMV, 16 March 2003)

- (9) Los desplazados no han tenido perjuicio. Por tanto, un *excelente balance*.

'The displaced have not been disadvantaged; consequently an *excellent balance*.' (Juan Pecourt, Pro-project, Levante-EMV, 16 March 2003)

But the most salient business word and indeed the alleged goal of the plan is to *assign worth* to the wall. The authors don't speak about recovering or restoring the wall, since the wall is really neglected, but they refer to the *operation* in terms of worth or value, as in (10):

- (10) Se trata de retomar, de *poner en valor* esos elementos arqueológicos. Y cuando se habla de *puesta en valor* de los elementos arqueológicos quiere decir que esos elementos arqueológicos [...]. Una *puesta en valor* de la arqueología no se trata de una rehabilitación de una pieza en medio de un parque de geranios sino que hay que meterla en un contexto de lo que ha supuesto esa pieza. Nosotros con la intervención conjunta de las cuatro manzanas lo que queremos hacer es *poner valor* a la existencia física del elemento.

'It's about *re-establishing the value* of archaeological elements. And when one talks of *re-establishing value* what it means [...]. *Assigning value* to archaeology is not about the rehabilitation of a particular object and placing it in the middle of a park of geraniums, but placing it within the context that gave the original piece its meaning. Through the intervention with the four blocks, what we want to do is *assign value* to the physical existence of the element.' (César Mifsut, Pro-project, Author, Round Table)

4. INTERPRETATION: CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AND IMAGE METAPHORS. When one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another conceptual domain, we have a conceptual metaphor. These metaphors can be given by means of the formula *A is B* or *A as B* and they can be more or less conventionalized. Many of the metaphorical expressions we have talked about so far are fixed by convention and are examples of conventionalized metaphors or of what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call 'metaphors we live by'. The metaphors *operation* and *assign value* used to designate the process of rehabilitating the wall, for example, are pervasive in all sorts of language and in all kinds of discourse, not just in language but also in thought and action. Some other metaphors, however, are limited to certain registers. This is the case of the linguistic metaphor *sanitizing*, which is used in urban planning to designate the process of increasing rents by getting rid of the residents or in corporate discourse to label the process of increasing gains by getting rid of employees, for instance. Although the real goal in both cases is the wish to increase gains, the aim is seen as therapeutic solutions to a disease, in which case the process would be taken for granted.

Other metaphors like *extirpation*, *amputation*, *metastasis* and *kill the patient*, for instance, which refer to the redevelopment of the area, are extensions of what we call the health metaphor. But they are emergent metaphors, they are more creative and their use is limited to certain texts, contexts, or speakers. These emergent or active metaphors are more pragmatic, since they are highly dependent on the context and have to do with language use and users in contexts.

In addition to these cases, which are part of whole metaphorical systems, there are also novel metaphors that are not based on the conventional mapping of one conceptual system onto another, but rather on one mental image being superimposed on another by virtue

of their similar appearance. They are therefore referred to by scholars as (*one-shot*) *image metaphors*, since, in them, we bring into correspondence two rich images for a temporary purpose on a particular occasion. A popular example is when we say that a woman has an hourglass figure. This involves mapping the image of an hourglass onto the image of a woman, fitting the middle of the hourglass to her waist (Lakoff & Turner 1989:89–91). These metaphors have been described as special ad-hoc cases. They stand alone and are not involved in everyday communication. Thus, language users will presumably make sense of them using processes specifically suited to this context, since they do not belong to their conventional repertoire.

We have found in our corpus some image metaphors. The most salient and polemical one is undoubtedly the use of an ecological disaster in Galicia, namely, the use of the word *chapote* ('tar')³ to refer to the buildings leaning against the Islamic Wall, as in (11).

- (11) Esto solo se conseguirá con un cambio de imagen que se quite de encima el *chapote* de la marca desarrollista y que busque el acuerdo de lo—necesariamente—actual con un pasado que hoy apenas se adivina.

'This will only be achieved through a change of image which does away with the *tar* of the developmental brand and which looks for an agreement of the—necessarily—current with a past that can now hardly be guessed.' (Juan Pecourt, Pro-project, Levante-EMV, 12 February 2003)

Another instance of what we see as an example of image metaphor is the use of the word *song of protest* in (12) to describe the claims of the residents, and therefore highlighting the idea that they are behind the times or are against progress.

- (12) Ha habido más reacciones: aguiluchos dibujados en las paredes que acechan a los vecinos, una *falla* que critica a la Administración con resonancias de *canción de protesta* de Ana Belén, llamadas al 'No nos moverán' etc.

'There has been more reaction: drawings on the walls with hawks threatening the residents, a *falla* [papier mâché satirical figure] criticizing the administration with echoes of the *song of protest* of Ana Belén, with its calls of 'We shall not be moved'." (Juan Pecourt, Pro-project, Author, Levante-EMV, 16 February 2003).

Both metaphors are examples of what Steen (1999:94) calls degrading metaphors. But the most interesting one-shot image metaphors are those used in the urban register to hide the destruction of the urban layout. It is well known that redevelopments of neglected areas often lead to the demolition of buildings and the destruction of the urban layout by opening broader spaces. However, there is a strong regulation that forbids such destructive processes in the old town quarters, as these are the history of the city and have to be protected in order to preserve collective memory. Thus, urban planners try to avoid words such as *destruction* or *demolition*, and instead use metaphors like *esponjar* ('sponge'). Example

(13) is very interesting as the speaker, an anti-project representative, unravels these strategies of naming that aim at masking the reality.

- (13) *Que normalmente la confusión terminológica es síntoma de una confusión más grande.* Las propuestas que se han hecho en Valencia, y también en Barcelona, de donde viene el modelo, se presentan a menudo como *esponjamientos*. No lo son en absoluto. A pesar de que se ha evitado la asunción de un término que las pueda identificar y definir, creo que este tipo de actuaciones se podrían agrupar bajo la denominación de *reestructuración*.

'Normally, terminological confusion is symptomatic of a greater far-reaching confusion. The proposals for Valencia, like those for Barcelona, where they originated, are often described as *'spongings'*. But they are absolutely not. Although these operations have proved resistant to a general identification and definition, I think that these types of projects can be labeled as *restructuration*.' (Fernando Gaja, Anti-project, Round Table)

The essence of a metaphor is that by mapping one concept (the topic) onto another (the vehicle) it necessarily highlights some meanings and hides some others, since metaphors set an equation between two meanings (the meaning of the topic and that of the vehicle) that resemble each other but are not identical. Thus, by using the word *esponjar*, for instance, architects and urban planners don't give an accurate picture of the topic, since this metaphor foregrounds the idea or process of opening spaces, which is congruent with the metaphor of the sponge, but hides the destruction of the historical urban layout and the expulsion of the residents that often precedes the opening of spaces, which is not congruent with the meaning of the vehicle (the sponge). In other words, urban metaphors, like other metaphors, can hide aspects of reality, by highlighting some contents and backgrounding some others. But in the area of urban planning metaphors matter more, because they constrain our lives and can lead to dehumanized neighborhoods, to quarters without residents, mostly called tertiary areas.

5. FINAL REMARKS. If metaphors structure the way we think and the way we act, it is reasonable to assume that metaphors play a central role in the construction of social reality and therefore they can change reality, construct consensus or public opinion. However, there are some differences in the way we perceive metaphors. Conventionalized metaphors, also called *inactive* or *dead metaphors* (Goatly 1997), are commonly assumed to be natural ways of naming a reality, as they are pervasive in all sorts of discourse and all languages. However, (one-shot) image metaphors and less conventionalized metaphors are not perceived as natural ways of naming and they can lead to discursive subversion. This is the case of the innovative metaphors *protest song* and *tar* drawn upon to describe the protest actions carried out by the residents and the affected buildings respectively. These metaphorical expressions led to the reactions in (14) and (15).

- (14) Al contrari, per part de l'equip redactor a la participació veïnal se li va anomenar *cançó de protesta*, a les accions de veïns li les va ratllar d'“aldarull al carrer” i davant la defensa legítima de les llars dels ciutadans se li va denominar *finques de xapapote*, i que no mereixien ser conservades.

‘To the contrary, the editing team dismissed the neighbors’ actions as *songs of protest*, their legitimate right to defend their houses as riots, and their buildings were described as *tar*, as fit only for demolition and not worth preserving.’ (Josep Montesinos, Anti-project, affected resident, Levante-EMV, 28 February 2004)

- (15) Se ha llegado a utilizar el término ‘*chapapote*’ para definir esas construcciones posteriores, término que quiere buscar un paralelo—desde nuestro punto de vista desafortunado—en otro problema totalmente distinto.

‘The term “*tar*” has now come to be used to define those constructions to follow, a term that wants to find a parallel—from our point of view, not appropriate—with a totally different problem.’ (Press announcement from the ‘Colegio de arqueólogos’ of Valencia)

And the same happened in the case of extension metaphors such as *delicate surgery*. While the term *operation* is assumed as a natural way of naming the redevelopment of the affected area, the expression *delicate surgery* had a subversive effect and aroused a set of discursive reactions, as shown in (16), (17) and (18):

- (16) Somos conscientes de la mayor dificultad gestora, que no económica, que implica optar por la *cirugía menor* y el diálogo y compromiso de los vecinos.

‘We are aware of the major management difficulty, not of an economic kind, which implies opting for *minor surgery* and the dialogue and compromise of the neighbors.’ (Miguel Ángel Piqueras, Anti-project, Residents’ association “Amigos del Carme”, Levante-EMV, 21 February 2004).

- (17) Que aunque no se diga, la estrategia aplicada se basa en la llamada hipótesis de la *metástasis de línea* que formuló hace tiempo ya Oriol Bohigas. Una reestructuración *traumática*, de *amputación* y *extirpación* de tejidos urbanos.

‘Although it is not acknowledged, the applied strategy is based on what is known as the *lineal metastasis* formulated in the 1950s by Oriol Bohigas, which consists of a *traumatic* restructuring, *amputation* and *extirpation* of urban *tissues*.’ (Fernando Gaja, Anti-project. Round Table)

- (18) Se trata de trabajar con el *bisturí*, con el *cinzel*, y dejar para otros menesteres el *cuchillo del carnicero*

'It is about working with the *scalpel*, with the *chisel*, and leaving the *butcher's knife* for other activities.' (Jorge Palacios, Anti-project, affected resident, Levante-EMV, 30 March 2003)

Thus, instead of constructing consensus, one-shot image metaphors or less conventionalized metaphors can have a subversive effect as in poetry, where the reader does not remain indifferent to the images being mapped. On the other hand, conventionalized metaphors function as presuppositions. They are not contested and do not inspire the opponents to counterattack or show disagreement. Put in other words, subjects are more likely to process familiar metaphors directly, while less familiar metaphors are more likely to invoke the constructional or non-metaphorical meaning of the expression and therefore they can arouse discursive reactions. All in all, if one measure of their social importance is the extent to which metaphors are contested, open to struggle and transformation, we have to acknowledge that metaphors are powerful devices of constructing public opinion.

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- ² Kövecses (2002:50) points out that 'personification permits us to use knowledge about ourselves to comprehend other aspects of the world, such as time, death, natural forces, inanimate objects, etc.'
- ³ The term *chapapote* refers to the oil spill that reached the coast of Galicia (north-western portion of Spain) and caused important environmental damage to the coastline.

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