

# Cultured Meat or Frankenfood? Toward an Expanded Account of the Education-Persuasion Tension Intrinsic to Conceptual Integration

Shon Shum<sup>1</sup> and Jamin Pelkey<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>York University, Toronto; <sup>2</sup>Ryerson University, Toronto  
shumshon@yorku.ca; jpelkey@ryerson.ca

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Conceptual blending enables the compression of complex information to “human scale” (Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 312) via the construction of novel analogies between cognitive input spaces that are otherwise distinct. Alternatively, blend constructions can be used “to provoke a particular normative *feeling* rather than to facilitate value-neutral apprehension” (Slingerland 2005: 580–581, emphasis in the original). These two functions of blending can be summed up as education (“human scale” compression) and persuasion (normative “somatic marking”). Although the literature features many case studies in which both would seem to be equally implicated (see e.g., Oakley & Pascual 2017), a deliberate, expanded account of the ways in which the two function both in tandem and in tension is called for. This paper addresses that gap with a focus on the communication of science and the ontological status of emerging technologies. We argue that a focal analysis of the education-persuasion dynamic at work in the emergence of novel blends in this domain not only stands to enrich the theory of conceptual blending but also stands to contribute to better practices in science communication. We test this hypothesis by exploring both the verbal and visual techno-rhetoric of an emerging technology known as “cultured meat”: the nascent laboratory production of edible muscle tissue from cell cultures, motivated in response to entangled ecological crises such as global warming and factory farming.

Known by its blend-savvy detractors as “frankenfood”, cultured meat stands little chance of mass appeal without the construction and propagation of equally powerful novel analogies and moral visions (Ferrari & Lösch 2017, Schwarz-Plaschg 2018). To gauge the status of potential progress in this regard, we use methods of qualitative content analysis (systematic identification of manifest and latent content and their categorization) to code three recent mass-media video presentations for conceptual blends involving two general types of mental spaces: production technologies and edible products, noting in the process, via critical and structural discourse analyses, the various ways in which either persuasive or dissuasive educational strategies are in play and the various ways in which the presumably value-neutral goals of science education function in tandem and in tension with the personal-affective goals of normative persuasion. Muscle cells are framed as “exercise junkies”, for example, wanting “to contract even in a petri dish”: In this blend, cellular biology is integrated with weightlifting, aiding the presenter to explain cultured meat production while simultaneously persuading viewers to grant the naturalness of muscle cell contractions in a petri dish. Following a presentation of our findings, including the identification of three key neologisms or overarching blends, we conclude that an expanded account of the roles played by both somatic marking and human-scale compression in conceptual blending is called for. In the end, high-stakes novel blends must be negotiated intersubjectively if they are to succeed in overcoming attitudes such as fear and revulsion toward represented objects. The imaginative experience of living within the blend is, in such cases, just as much about establishing trust and extending agency as it is about typical normative appeals to desire-based motivations such as the avoidance of sanctions or the need for self-validation (Yanovitzky et al. 2006: 2). And, while still necessary, this involves more than the manageable compression of bewildering complexity.

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