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1. INTRODUCTION

Let me say at the outset, that I think there is much profit to be had in argumentation theorists looking at visual aspects of argumentative messages and non-verbal contributions to argumentative activities. But I also think that resistance to that idea in some quarters of the field is understandable, because it is not altogether clear how we ought to be talking about the role of the visual in argumentation. I myself have written about visual aspects of argumentation, and my paper at this conference continues that interest (Jacobs, 2000; 2006; 2013). But I haven't talked about any of this as 'visual argument' or 'visual argumentation.' And that is because I share with skeptics some unease with that way of talking. Tseronis's (2013) paper goes some distance in relieving my unease. He shows that it is possible to talk in clear and insightful ways about what gets communicated by using visual materials and how that works. He certainly offers some compelling and articulate interpretations.

My unease with talking about 'visual argument' is also relieved some by Tseronis's insistence on looking at the *use* of visual materials and their form of presentation. He points us to just where we ought to be looking. We ought to be looking at the pragmatics of communication and the functions of communicative elements. Looking in this way at visual materials avoids the kind of mistakes that led semiotics into a dead end. We ought not to be looking at visual images as though there were some parallel to be found to the properties of a linguistic code. There is nothing like semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology or lexical units in the domain of visual imagery. What conventionalization and standardization there is looks much more like the conventionalization of traffic lights or the danger calls of vervet monkeys.

Looking at the level of pragmatics and talking in terms of *use* lets us see a parallel to language use—probably because the same principles of communicative rationality are at work. An emphasis on pragmatic functions promises a principled account of how visuals are used to communicate and how visuals can be used to perform the functions that they do. Now, Tseronis mentions no such principles in own his analysis (e.g., Gricean or Relevance theoretic principles of implicature: Grice, 1975; Horn, 1984; Levinson, 2000; Sperber & Wilson, 1995), but his analyses

of particular cases are generally compatible with that kind of exposition. How, exactly, to apply principles of pragmatics is not exactly obvious, but that's what makes for interesting and challenging puzzle solving. The kind of analysis that Tseronis provides also makes rather obvious the parallel between the functions of visual form and content and the functions of linguistic figures and tropes of the sort that have been central to the study of rhetorical style. I have my doubts that these are properly called *communicative* functions. At least, it is not clear to me that figures and tropes are communicative in the sense that the field of pragmatics thinks of communication—as reflexively intended, openly presented information in the sense that Grice (1989) talks about non-natural meaning or that Sperber and Wilson (1995) think about ostensive indications or that Goffman (1959) refers to information given as opposed to information given-off.

But the problem in calling this communicative is really a problem with theories of pragmatics and their general failure to come to grips with what Austin (1975) would have called the perlocutionary effects of language. This is particularly a problem when the actor strategically designs those effects. But such cases are not the fully communicative paradigm cases that pragmatics points to when discussing either speaker meaning or sentence meaning or illocutionary force. Just because a communicative act evokes meanings does not mean that the act means what it evokes. In this respect, I think Davidson (1978) is right on target in his theory of metaphor. So, by pointing to a parallel between the functions of visual materials and the functions of figures and tropes, Tseronis winds up pointing out, for me at least, that none of this is all that well understood. Simply because we have long-standing lists, categories and systems of classification doesn't mean that we have real understanding of what is classified or how what is listed works (see Fahnestock, 2011, for a recent insightful analysis). So, the direction that Tseronis takes is one where we all should look, but we should take a look with our eyes open.

2. PROBLEMS WITH VISUAL ARGUMENT

But I am still uneasy, especially with the ongoing debate that Tseronis reviews over whether or not there is something that can be properly called "visual argument." My unease is more than a niggling concern with the proper usage of terms. And it is certainly not a rearguard action meant to prevent change in the traditional contents of the analyst's toolbox or in the kinds of materials the analyst works with. Please do not take what I am about to say in that way. Pretty clearly, the visual and the non-verbal in general play an important role in the way that argumentative messages are conveyed and the way that argumentative activity is conducted. And, also pretty clearly, the standard package of concepts and models that argumentation theorists have relied on to analyze and assess arguments is ill suited to the task of addressing the visual and the non-verbal. Promoters of the study of visual aspects of argumentation are correct to claim that the visual should not be ignored. And they are correct to claim that it cannot be reduced to the linguistic without serious distortion. But, by insisting that attention be given to the visual and that it be assimilated into the study of argumentation, advocates risk forgetting what makes an argument an argument and why an academic interest in argumentation exists in

the first place. Even in the examples that Tseronis discusses, there are cases where I just can't find anything that can be properly called an argument. In the Guardian ad, for example, I am not sure what is being claimed or what, exactly, is the argument for that claim. Does the double-sided picture show that there are two sides to the issue of women in the military? Does it show that the Guardian sees two sides to the issue? If that is the claim, how is the picture different from an eye-catching illustration? If that is the argument, what does it argue for? If the arguments are verbally explicit, how exactly do the visual materials function with respect to them? If the arguments are not explicitly present in the written material, does the way that visual materials operate differ from the way that pragmatics has ordinarily discussed "context" (admittedly, too often as just a synonym for "magic")? And if the written material does not carry the weight of presenting the argument, are we sure there is an argument at all? Simply because we all are familiar with the arguments and claims and counterclaims regarding women in the military does not mean that they have been made by the ad – or even reported by the ad. Because we are familiar with them, they don't have to be.

So, why, when we talk about visual argument, do things so easily get all balled up? What is it that makes the very idea of visual arguments so controversial and the characterization of any particular visual display as a visual argument so difficult to pin down? Let me simply mention some sticky issues.

First, the terms 'argument' and 'argumentation' have ordinary language meanings, and that ought to be respected. For example, argumentation does not occur unless arguments are put forward or in some other way made a matter of active orientation. And if there is an argument in play, that means you can answer certain kinds of basic questions: What is the argument? What does that argument prove? These are not technical questions invented by academic specialists. And those questions can only be answered by articulating linguistic propositions. If you can't answer those questions, you don't have an argument. And if you don't have an argument—an argument that is at least in play somehow—then you don't have argumentation either. And if you don't have an argument in the sense of its plain language meaning, one has to ask, why call it an argument? Why not use another term that captures what you do mean? When we misdescribe visuals as arguments we lose track of both what is essential to argument and what is going on in the visuals. When language goes on holiday, no one profits.

Second, there is no such thing as visual argument—not as a contrast to verbal argument. There are visual aspects of arguments, visual cues to arguments, visual framing of arguments, uses of visual material to convey arguments, but the phrase 'visual arguments' is a misusage of language. It is a misusage based, I think, on an equivocation in the contrast between the terms visual and verbal. When we talk about verbal argument, what we mean is argument in the form of language, and that includes cases where the language itself is explicit and direct, but also where it is implicit, indirect, or implicated or otherwise enthymematic. The common, essential feature is the expression of propositions, i.e., informational content that carries a truth-value and a logical form. This is why, for example, Pragma-Dialectics defines the act of making an argument that limits the speech acts to assertives (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984; Jackson, 1985). When we refer to visual argument,

we almost always use visual in a different sense, in the sense of the medium of presentation. But that contrast is based on a category mistake. Verbal messages can be visual (think of writing, sign language) as well as auditory (spoken language) and even tactile (think of Braille). If visual is to be a proper contrast to verbal, it must be so in the sense that the visual imagery lacks some important quality of verbal signs. What might it lack? Propositional content; truth-value; logical structure; and very often the conventions or intentions that are the foundations of communicative acts. Any and all may be absent. In fact, visual images may express no information beyond themselves. Presentation is not itself communication. Drunk-tank pink may get prisoners to calm down, but painting a jail cell pink is not making an argument or claim to the effect that the prisoner should calm down. Often enough the color has such an effect, but not because the drunk in the tank takes it to communicate, "You should calm down" (cf. Alter, 2013). Not even should the drunk see that the pink paint must have been deliberately chosen or even that the painter would expect that the drunk would see so. None of this gets to the kind of meaning that is needed to construct an argument or a claim. (This, by the way, is why Davidson thinks the evocative quality of live metaphors is not part of their meaning—but should be thought of as ideas and inferences produced as effects in recipients.)

There is a third sticky issue: the normative qualities of argumentation. If good arguments have any basic function, it is the function of justifying claims. While everything that justifies a claim need not be an argument, if something is an argument at all, it is subject to this normative standard. Likewise, contributions to argumentation as an activity are legitimate if they promote proper assessment of this function. Articulating these normative properties of argument and argumentation constitutes the rationale for the academic discipline of argumentation theory. It is an empirical fact that argument is subject to this kind of evaluation. But when we turn to visual argument, we seem lost at sea. The problem is not that visual materials lack legitimacy. The problem is that, when looking at visual material, we can't yet see how to apply standards of legitimacy in a recognizable way. Take the cases presented by Tseronis. How do we even ask about the legitimacy of the way they function? Maybe principles of pragmatics can be brought into play here. But if we try to apply traditional conceptions of communicative clarity—explicitness, precision, singularity of meaning, certainty— none seems redeemable. Take the "Music is What Matters" ad discussed by Tseronis. Is the picture about why you should listen to Bob Marley's music even if you disapprove of his lifestyle (and presumably, the same for pictures of Keith Richards and Amy Winehouse)? Or is the assertion "Music is what matters" supposed to be taken as suggesting that you should listen to the music because it is good music and not because the music makes an enjoyable accompaniment to getting stoned or not because it is part of a rebellious lifestyle or not because it is part of what you do when you are a party person? Is it ambiguous? Is it vague? Does it matter? If a reader doesn't get what the WWF ad means by "It's your turn" is that a problem with the ad or is it the reader who has failed? I have no idea of how to answer such questions—but if this were a genuine argument I would know how to proceed.

Maybe all this should only drive us to keep trying, to think harder, to look deeper. As I said, these seem to be issues not just for visual imagery, but also for the pragmatics of communication generally.

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