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Painting Exposition and Throwing Persuasion: Art Metaphors as Communication Theory

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. . . the conduit metaphor is leading us down a technological and social blind alley. That blind alley is mass communications systems coupled with mass neglect of the internal, human systems responsible for nine-tenths of the work in communicating.

We think we are ‘capturing ideas in words,’ and funneling them out to the greatest public in the history of the world.

But if there are no ideas ‘within’ this endless flood of words, then all we are doing is replaying the myth of Babel—centering it, this time, around a broadcasting tower (Reddy, 310).

Metaphors guide perception of, thought about, and action toward phenomena of human existence, including various practices and forms of communication. The writings of prominent scholars both illustrate and assert this fact (Aristotle, 1954, 1991; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Black, 1962; Bruns, 1987; Burke, 1962, 1978; Carlston, 1987; Carey, 1989; Fromm, 1956; Lakoff, 1987, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Ortony, 1979; Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Reddy, 1979; Ricoeur, 1975). One of the most popular and pervasive metaphors of communication is the conduit metaphor.

The conduit metaphor, and the transmission models it informs, remain the dominant perspective-shaping metaphor of communication despite scholarly attempts to complicate matters. In 1979, Reddy critiqued the conduit metaphor and offered an alternative to it, but his alternative was a complex “toolmakers paradigm” that had little impact in the wider discourses about com-

munication. Borrowing from Reddy (1979), Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also discussed and critiqued the conduit metaphor of communication, but offered no alternative to it. In 1989, Carey offered both a critique of the transmission view of communication and an alternative view, “communication as ritual,” but this alternative was presented as a complementary—supplemental to the transmission view of communication and unable to stand alone. While these and other discussions have contributed to a more complex understanding of communication in academic circles, they have done little to challenge the widespread appeal and explanatory power of the conduit metaphor and related models and views of human communication. This essay offers two viable artistic metaphors of communication as alternatives: “exposition is painting” and “persuasion is throwing.”

The metaphors “exposition is painting” and “persuasion is throwing” are not simply fanciful uses of speech—they are avenues to understanding experiences and concepts of everyday life. As Lakoff and Johnson argue, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). Because the concepts we live by govern our thought, actions, perceptions, and relations, our conceptual system “plays a central role in defining our everyday realities” (3).

New metaphors, as well as conventional metaphors have the power to define reality (157). “Though questions of truth do arise for new metaphors,” Lakoff and Johnson assert, “the more important questions are those of appropriate action. In most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it (158). Because people in various contexts of power may impose their metaphors on others, they may shape the way others make sense of their experiences and their world (157). Because powerful people get to impose their metaphors of communication, they are in a position to shape understandings of communication in more or less responsible ways. This is especially true of those who theorize, talk about, write about, and teach communication.

Metaphors and Models

Scholars throughout the ages have asserted the creative-logical power of metaphors and models, and their significance in sense making. In early conceptualizations of rhetoric, Aristotle (1991) illustrates the profound effect of metaphor as a trope of speech and poetry and how, compared to other rhetorical methods and tropes, “[m]etaphor most brings about learning” (Kennedy, 243-244). Many subsequent discussions of metaphor have reflected Aristotle’s primarily stylistic perspective, but others have offered more complex and foundational explanations. In *Models and Metaphors* (1962), for example, Max Black attempts to clarify the ontological character of philosophical inferences from grammar. His interaction view of metaphor is an extension of I. A. Richards’ (1936) formulation, which he describes thus: “our thoughts [about the two terms featured in a metaphor] are ‘active together’ and ‘interact’ to produce a meaning that is a resultant of that interaction” (38). Black’s extension of this understanding recognizes the possibility of creating new (not simply conventional) metaphors, and the possibility that metaphors themselves are affected by the instances of their use.

In his chapter “Models and Archetypes,” Black (1962) relates metaphors to models. Cautioning against simple comparisons of metaphor to brief statements and of models to allegory or fable, Black writes,

Use of theoretical models resembles the use of metaphors in requiring analogical transfer

of a vocabulary. Metaphor and model-making reveal new relationships; both are attempts to pour new content into old bottles. But a metaphor operates largely with *commonplace* implications. You need only proverbial knowledge, as it were, to have your metaphor understood; but the maker of a scientific model must have prior control of a well-knit scientific theory if he is to do more than hang an attractive picture on an algebraic formula. Systematic complexity of the source of the model and capacity for analogical development are of the essence. (238-239)

In other words, while metaphors and models have much in common, their difference is a matter of sophistication: metaphors are more familiar, commonplace, and proverbial, while models are more specialized, complex, and theoretical. As Toulmin (1953) put it:

a great virtue of a good model is that it does suggest further questions, taking us beyond the phenomena from which we began, and tempts us to formulate hypotheses which turn out to be experimentally fertile . . . Certainly this is the suggestiveness, and systematic deployability, that makes a good model something more than a simple metaphor. (38-39)

Despite this difference in sophistication between metaphors and models, however, basic analogies or “root metaphors” often underlie theories upon which models are constructed (Pepper, 1942, 91-92). When a root metaphor operates as a foundation to a model, its structural characteristics become basic concepts of explanation and description for the model. This is why we often find simple, common metaphors corresponding to more complex, sophisticated theoretical models.

Kenneth Burke (1962) explains the part metaphors play in how people make sense of complex processes and phenomena by showing how the literal or realistic application of metaphor “brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this” in the form of perspective (503). The result of the relationship between metaphor and perspective is “incongruity,” because the seeing of something in terms of something else involves a ‘carrying-over’ of a term from one realm into another [non-identical realm]” (504). Ricoeur’s *The*

Rule of Metaphor (1975) offers an extended discussion of understandings of metaphor throughout history and in rhetoric, poetics, linguistics, and philosophy. The theme of his analysis is that “metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality” (7). This, Ricoeur argues, is accomplished not by concepts or contexts, but by the humanly invented verb “to be” which can at the same time signify in a metaphor both “is not” and “is like.”

The significance of metaphor is not only asserted in scholarship, but is reflected in the ways thoughtful people have gone about trying to understand and explain complex processes. In *The Art of Loving* (1956), for example, Erich Fromm follows out the metaphor “love is an art” in both theory and practice. In *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969), Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner consider and discard numerous metaphors of teaching (e.g., teaching is gardening, teaching is weight training) before settling on the metaphor “teaching is meaning-making.” In *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know that Liberals Don’t* (1996), George Lakoff analyzes the language of politics to discover metaphors of family-based morality (e.g., conservative is strict father morality, liberal is nurturant parent morality) and implications of these metaphors for political practice.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have observed, “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (3). As humans who live in a complex world, we often use conventional metaphors to guide our understandings without conscious awareness of that we are doing so (4). We also use newly designed metaphors to make sense of familiar phenomena (and new phenomena) in new and different ways. In either case, metaphors help us “understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another” (5).

Usually, the second term/concept in a metaphor is more grounded in physical or cultural experience than the first, offering a more concrete means by which to understand the first. The second term/concept also highlights and hides various aspects of the first. For example, in the metaphor “life is a journey,” something quite complex, “life,” is being metaphorically related to something simpler, or at least more directly experienced and more easily understood: “a journey.” We know that

journeys involve travel through time and space (journeys highlight travel, time, and space). We know they often involve choices along pathways and obstacles and rewards (journeys highlight choices, pathways, obstacles, and rewards). We also know that others may come and go and that we will gather experiences along the way (journeys highlight other travelers and varied experiences). This is different from, say, the metaphor “life is a gift” where such things as gift-givers, gratitude, and value are emphasized. Because we have concrete cultural and physical experiences of journeys (the second part of the metaphor), we can use journeys to make sense of life (the more complex first part of the metaphor).

In what follows, I turn to the phenomenon of communication itself. First, I discuss the virtues and vices of dominant communication models and metaphors. Then I consider some prominent alternative models and metaphors, and why they have failed to challenge more dominant understandings. Finally, I present two metaphors of communication to the reader for consideration. Each metaphor regards a different genre of communication (one pertains to exposition, the other persuasion) but both are relevant to various forms of communication (e.g., spoken, written). Compared to other options, these metaphors offer a more complete alternative to the conduit metaphor for two main reasons. First, these metaphors and the broader “communication is art” metaphor they entail, highlight the human, artistic complexities of process (action) over the simplifica-

tion of product (stuff). And second, these metaphors highlight qualities of transmission in much the same way as the conduit metaphor. Consequently, they are capable of replacing (rather than simply supplementing or complicating) the dominant conduit metaphor.

The Transmission Models and the Conduit Metaphor

Human communication is difficult to describe. Situated in various social and historical contexts, particular to individual persons, and infinitely complex, our speech and writing practices defy adequate description and explanation. Not surprisingly, attempts to conceptualize communication processes are fraught with difficulty. Probably the most familiar attempt to make sense of communication is the transmission model (otherwise known as the SMCR model, the speaking model, the communication model, the transaction model, etc.). The transmission model, or variations of it, can be found in many introductory communication textbooks and most speech textbooks (e.g., Bovee, 2003; Brydon & Scott, 2003; Hamilton, 2003; Koch, 2004; Lucas, 2001; Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth & Harter, 2003; Snellow, 2003; Tubbs & Moss, 2003; Tuman & Fraleigh, 2003; Verderber & Verderber, 2003).

The SMCR version of the transmission model of communication describes the process of communication as *sending*. Specifically, a Sender sends a Message through a Channel to a Receiver or Audience (who may also be a Sender). Communication is accomplished in a particular Context (or Situation) despite Noise (both

internal and external) and it often elicits Feedback. This popular, dominant, and widespread depiction of communication grows out of human experience with material reality and has significant explanatory strength. Like other depictions, it is a result of our tendency to make sense of unbounded phenomena by describing them in more concrete and bounded terms.

Related versions of the transmission model often include components (key terms) of the SMCR model. Some include the terms “encoding,” “decoding,” and “symbols” and further highlight “information transfer” as the essence of the process at hand (see Brydon & Scott, 2003, Hamilton, 2003; Snellow, 2003). Some older versions of the model deemed unsatisfactory include the linear model (outdated because of it flows in only one direction), and the interactive model, a two-way, turn-taking depiction of information transfer (see Snellow, 2003). A more recent version of the transmission model is the transactional model (see Brydon & Scott, 2003; Snellow, 2003; Tuman & Fraleigh, 2003). In this model, sending and receiving is described as a simultaneous exchange occurring between two or more people.

Transmission models of communication have their roots in religion and the transportation of information through space for the purposes of control (Carey, 1989). Borrowing terms from information processing of telecommunications technologies, the models adequately explain the sharing of simple, generic, and widely agreed-upon information and reflect, to some degree, the practice of quotation and the translation of expressions from one language to another. The models are implicit in many studies of public address and other qualitative communication scholarship and are even more common in, if not essential to, social scientific communication research.

Unfortunately, however, by reducing complex, time-sensitive, situated, and potentially reality-building processes into simple deliveries of information “stuff,” transmission models have the tendency to contribute to the chaos of modern culture (Carey, 1989, 34). As Reddy (1979) puts it, we have come to hold the mistaken view that “the more signals we can create, and the more signals we can preserve, the more ideas we ‘transfer’ and ‘store.’ We neglect the crucial ability to

reconstruct thought patterns . . . and this ability founders” (310). In schools, for example, standardized testing and assessment emphasizing “subject matter” give teachers incentive to teach “facts” rather than skills in reading, listening, writing, logic, and critical thinking. The prevalence of free-floating information “stuff” on TV and the on internet gives people a sense that information is a thing easily obtained by searching through all the “stuff” out there.

Even without TV, the internet, and the public school system, transmission models have problems because they imply that if people could just say things the “right way” (encode ideas correctly, overcome noise), others would understand them. They also suggest that simply understanding other people is all that is required to reach agreement or solve problems arising between them. Such notions pose obvious difficulties for conceptualizing intercultural and political communication where values and interests are often at stake and in competition and may change in the process of deliberation.

Also troubling is how, in transmission models, successful communication is understood of as reception, but it is unclear how capacities of reception grow and develop. Furthermore, the tendency of transmission models to bracket aesthetic or “incidental” aspects of communication undermines nuances of interaction. In this way, rhyme becomes superficial, oxymoron becomes contradiction, and sarcasm becomes hostility. Incentives to clarity and simplicity take precedence over other viable (artful, esoteric, witty, idiosyncratic, experimental) tactics of communication.

This excerpt illustrates how the transmission model reduces good communication to clear and unambiguous communication, sacrificing artful, comedic, or other uses of intentional contradiction in the interest of effective information transfer:

. . . no two people encode a message in quite the same way. What’s important is that you encode your message in a way that allows your audience to grasp your meaning . . . if your words and body language conflict, an audience is more likely to believe your body language and thus may receive a message you didn’t intend to send. To avoid confusion, effective speakers carefully coordinate their words and behavior. (Bovee 9)

In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) Lakoff and Johnson critique transmission models of communication by identifying them as entailments of the conduit metaphor. Referring to Reddy (1979), they show how, according to the conduit metaphor, words are seen as containers of meanings and minds are seen as containers of words. Communication occurs when words carry (or transmit) meanings along a conduit (by means of a medium such as speech or text) from one mind to another. Lakoff and Johnson show the flaws with this way of understanding communication by offering examples where context is necessary for understanding and where words mean different things to different people (1980, 12).

While Lakoff and Johnson effectively point out the weaknesses of the conduit metaphor and the way it implies the transmission of information, they do not offer an alternative to it. Instead, they describe human communication as systematic metaphorical relations, both creative and logical, grounded in bodily experience and cultural tradition. Their goal in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) is not to support existing metaphors or invent new ones, but to draw attention to a variety of popular metaphors and to describe and illustrate the complex metaphorical nature (“imaginative rationality”) of language.

Some Existing Alternatives

In *Communication as Culture* (1989), James Carey describes a ritual view of communication to draw attention to aspects of communication overlooked by more popular and pervasive understandings. This alternative view of is also a kind of conduit metaphor, but the direction of flow is centrifugal. Carey’s ritual view of communication highlights “sharing,” “participation,” “association,” “fellowship,” and “the possession of a common faith” (18). The emphasis of “communication is ritual” on commonness, communion, and community is directed toward shared beliefs and the maintenance of society in time rather than imparting information and the extension of messages in space (18).

While Carey tries to articulate, recuperate and privilege a ritual view of communication, he casts it as a counterpart to the transmission view. “A ritual view,” writes Carey, “does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change. It merely

contends that one cannot understand these processes aright except insofar as they are cast within an essentially ritualistic view of communication and social order” (21–22). However, because Carey’s alternative view does not stand by itself and is overshadowed by the dominance of the transmission model, it remains a supplemental idea—a necessary “other” to the main understanding of communication.

Similarly, at the 2002 National Communication Association Convention, a panel sponsored by the Rhetorical and Communication Theory Division attempted to complicate dominant understandings of communication (described in introductory comments as springing from the conduit metaphor and various transmission models). As part of a panel titled “What We Take Communication to be: Alternative Theoretical Conceptions and their Consequences,” invited scholars took turns articulating views of communication from various perspectives. One of the scholars discussed the ritual view. Other perspectives/views discussed were embodiment, ritual, practice, failure, translation, witnessing, dissemination, and transcendence.

In their presentations, panelists often slid back and forth between definition and metaphor (“communication *is* X” vs. “communication *as* X”) and expressed little concern about the distinction. The playful, shotgun approach to theorizing was criticized by some audience members who desired a more comprehensive treatment of the subject (more discussion of differences between definition and metaphor) and/or a more inclusive list of views (e.g., “communication *is/as* power”). Like Carey’s ritual view of communication, the views presented on the panel were partial (each its own “minority” view) and appeared more so because of the number of perspectives offered. Consequently, while the panel provoked thoughts amongst the scholars present, the various and varied options offered by this coalition of panelists did little to successfully challenge dominant transmission models and/or the conduit metaphor.

Exposition is Painting

In order to make sense of the metaphor “exposition is painting” it is important to explore the second and more familiar concept/term of the pair and how it might shape understandings of the first. In most instances,

painting is an art, though some kinds of painting are more decorative than other kinds. A person might paint a house in order to protect and beautify it, or paint a canvas in an effort to create an aesthetically pleasing artifact worth of display. The examples of painting offered here are drawn from the latter sort, but anyone familiar with the intricacies of architectural or industrial painting could find counterparts in those practices consistent with the metaphor at issue.

Painting is a process (not simply a product) done by a person (or people). This means successful painting requires time-related know-how: knowing when to do what and knowing how long to allow for various stages of the process. In order to paint, painters make use of media (e.g., the paint itself and any additives) and tools (e.g., brushes, palette knives). They also use methods and techniques (e.g., layering to create texture and painting straight from the tube), rules or maxims of painting (e.g., lay in larger areas of color first), and any native or acquired talents of their own. Because some paintings are judged as better or worse than other paintings, the methods and techniques of those who paint “better” work has been studied, approximated, and taught. This is what makes painting a social practice and a cultural practice. It is also what makes painting an art and not simply a knack or instinctive talent.

There are too many methods and techniques of good painting to list, but a few are offered here to suggest what the metaphor “exposition is painting” highlights and what it can contribute to an understanding of

expository speech and writing. In general, a good painting begins with the preparation of the painting surface so that it will accept paint and other media as desired. If realism is an aim, it is wise to start with thin and light media (or underpainting), and move toward thick and heavy media only after the layout and direction of the painting is established. Also, it makes sense to paint large, vague areas of shape and color first, only later bringing the painting into focus with smaller details and accents. If aims lean towards expression and impact, it helps to make full use of the tools, media, methods, and techniques available.

In any case, good painting requires consideration of elements such as balance, contrast, line, movement, shape, scale, perspective, and color and how these elements relate to each other in the painting as it unfolds and as they might function in the finished product. For example, more seasoned painters know that bright and more highly saturated (truer) hues (colors) come forward and appear larger to the eye while darker and less saturated colors (those mixed with white, black, or colors that muddy) tend to recede from view. They also know that different brushes work better for different effects, that shadows usually have purple in them, that distortion is sometimes beneficial, and that objects often appear to have colors of objects nearby in them (and paints should be mixed to account for this visual effect).

Relating components of painting to exposition shows how the one concept (painting) can help people make sense of the other concept (exposition) in useful ways. Like painting, exposition is an art that may be more or less decorative. The purposes of exposition may be simply to get important information across to a reader, or the aim may also be to describe a scene, set an emotional tone, and/or build community. Also like painting, exposition is a process done by people who need to manage their time wisely (know what to do when). In order to speak or write, writers make use of the medium of language (e.g., words—the speaker or writer's own, as well as citations from others), tools (e.g., pen and paper, computer software), and methods and techniques (e.g., figures of speech, organizational schemes, modeling the sentence structures of others). Speakers and writers also make use of rules or maxims

of writing (e.g., define unfamiliar terms, don't introduce too many characters or ideas at once), and any native or acquired talents of their own. Because some speeches and writings are judged better than others, methods and techniques of those who speak and write "better" have been studied, approximated, and taught as an art.

Good exposition is a complex process but it is similar in many ways to good painting. In general, good work begins well before pen touches paper or fingers touch a keyboard. First, familiarity with the writing medium is needed (e.g., developing a wide vocabulary, knowing how to cite sources, learning how to use software). If realism is an aim, it is wise to start with a rough sketch or an outline to structure the material offered to the reader. Once subsections of the exposition are envisioned, and the larger structures of writing established, smaller elements can be developed more fully. If aims lean towards expression and impact, it helps to make ample use of available writing tools, media, methods, and techniques (e.g., use of a writer's journal, a wide vocabulary, figures of speech and tropes, creative or idiosyncratic organization, modeling the writing style of others). In all cases, however, the art of writing consists in knowing when and how to appropriately use these various elements.

Good exposition requires consideration of elements such as balance, contrast, order, temporality, logic, clarity, pace, scene-building, narration, person, development of scene and character, and how these elements relate to each other in the writing as it unfolds and as they might function in the finished product. For example, more seasoned speakers and writers know that it helps to start with a definition of important terms and that different words and expressions are appropriate to different audiences. They also know that readers often read what they think instead of what is there (and adjustments for this need to be made), and that transitions are often helpful between sections of speech or text.

The metaphor "exposition is painting" is useful, but partial. As Lakoff and Johnson explain, "the very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another . . . will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept" (10). If the concepts of "exposition" and "painting" were the same, there would be no value in understanding the former in terms of the latter. Because they are different, "exposition is painting"

necessarily highlights some aspects of exposition and hides others.

One obvious difficulty with the "exposition is painting" metaphor is the differences between the media of painting (e.g., paint, water, and oil) and the media of communication (e.g., words and images). While it may be possible to mix or buy new colors to add to a palette, there is only a finite range of possible colors that painters can use. This is not true of language media. The possibility of creating new words and using these words in new and different ways is a kind of media magic that no other art can claim.

Another difficulty with the "exposition is painting" metaphor is the difference between the eye and the ear. Components of the visual environment (e.g., color and line) differ from those of oral and written composition (e.g., pitch and word choice). Because each practice has its own aesthetic, the aesthetics of painting would not simply translate to those of exposition. Also, the holistic and near-instantaneous way visuals are received (seen) is different from the temporally stretched-out way oral/written texts are received (heard/read). There is, however, some comparison between oral/written texts and more complex visual art that has enough going on in it to generate thought across time.

Compared to the conduit metaphor, however, the metaphor "exposition is painting" shows significant strengths. It highlights artistic and creative aspects of communication without "hiding" the possibilities of information transfer (ideas and words, like visions and images, can

be shared). As an entailment of the broader metaphor “communication is an art,” which humanizes matters and makes room for comparison with concrete artistic experience, “exposition is painting” is evocative enough to generate multiple comparisons that seem to ring true with experience. Unlike the transmission model, the metaphor “exposition is painting” does not privilege receivers (viewers of paintings), but neither does it discount them from the communication process. The metaphor also suggests how communicators may change as a consequence of the process of exposition (just as painters may learn from other artists and from their own efforts and just as viewers of paintings may be affected by what they see).

Highlighting process in addition to product, the metaphor “exposition is painting” draws attention to activities (process-verbs) as well as objects (stuff-nouns). Thus, media, tools, methods, techniques, maxims, and talent appear as systematic and integrated facets of expository communication rather than as discrete elements. This contrasts with the conduit metaphor and its often troubled distinctions between sender, message, and channel (e.g., is the sender’s *body* part of the sender? part of the channel? part of both?). Despite its limitations, the “exposition is painting” metaphor corrects weaknesses of the conduit metaphor. Its strengths recommend it as a useful alternative for those who theorize, teach, and practice communication.

Persuasion is Throwing

The conceptualization of persuasive communication can be traced

back to the ancient Greeks and their theorization of rhetoric. For Socrates, Plato, and others who preferred dialectic and philosophical inquiry, rhetoric was a less praiseworthy sort of communication, one that sought shortcuts to knowledge, swayed the uneducated, and could be used to make the weaker argument appear the stronger. For Aristotle, however, “rhetoric” had no necessarily negative connotation, in itself. Instead, the power of language to transform its hearers was recognized as simply “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (36). This power could be used by the just or the unjust, for good or ill, in any context where political speech might occur.

More recently, events in World War II and the proliferation of mass media have inspired scholarship regarding negative powers of persuasive language: the way words and images inspire hate, justify evil, and move audiences to act against their own interests and towards the interests of others (e.g., corporations, governments, ideologies). Much of this scholarship marks a return to more negative understandings of rhetoric, persuasion, and even the more traditionally neutral term “argument.”

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrate, the conceptual metaphor “argument is war” is reflected in everyday English language expressions including “your claims are indefensible . . . He attacked every weak point in my argument . . . His criticisms were right on target . . . He shot down all of my arguments” (4). Lakoff and Johnson show how the metaphor “argument is war” is not simply a linguistic figure, but a way of understanding that is profoundly woven into the culture. “[It] structure[s] (at least in part) what we do and how we understand what we are doing when we argue” (5). As a consequence, other possible understandings of argument that might be generated by different but related metaphors (e.g., argument is wrestling) are overshadowed.

Many understandings of persuasion are similarly limited. Metaphors such as “persuasion is trickery” and “persuasion is seduction” most closely attend to negative consequences of persuasion. These and related metaphors are effective at highlighting some of the dangers of persuasion, but they hide many of the ways in which persuasion can be characterized by good intentions and

good outcomes (e.g., good statesmanship, good parenting practices, honest and thoughtful wooing). The metaphor “persuasion is throwing” is offered as a way to bring the Aristotelian recognition of power and moral neutrality back to the understanding of persuasion.

In order to make sense of the metaphor “persuasion is throwing” it is important to explore the second and more familiar concept/term of the pair and how it might shape understandings of the first. Like painting, throwing pottery is an art, and it is perhaps a more demanding basic skill to attain because proper sensitivity and timing are crucial, and mistakes with the clay are often final. Vessels thrown can range from simple and functional to complex and decorative, but the process of creating the basic forms upon which other techniques may be practiced is much the same. For those who prefer to work without a wheel, the metaphor “persuasion is potmaking” might be preferable. In this case, throwing still involves clay, but pots are “built up” by hand.

Throwing is a process done by a person. This means successful throwing, like successful painting, requires time-related know-how. The components of throwing pots include media (e.g., the clay, water), tools (e.g., hands, sponge), methods and techniques (e.g., use of calipers for measurement), rules or maxims of throwing (gradually decrease pressure on the clay as you progress), and any native or acquired talents of the potter. Because some throwing is judged better, methods and techniques of those who throw “better” work has been studied, approximated, and taught as an art.

Many methods and techniques of good pottery throwing exist. A few are offered here to suggest what the metaphor “persuasion is throwing” highlights and what it can contribute to an understanding of persuasive speech and writing. In general, a potter begins with the selection and preparation of the clay. A workable amount of clay is wedged (kneaded) until it is ready (otherwise the clay may lose its integrity later in the process). Then the clay is shaped into a cone or ball and firmly adhered to the surface of the wheel. The next task of throwing is to center the clay. This involves bringing the wheel to a high speed, repeatedly bathing the clay in fresh water to reduce friction, and compressing the clay firmly, by hand, with well-braced force.

When the clay is centered, a form is opened by pushing into the middle of the mound with fingers or thumb. The sides of the resulting low bowl or volcano shape can then be worked upwards. This is done with the strategic exertion of pressure on either side of the wall of the vessel, pulling clay up slowly from the base of the vessel to the top. Because different clays have different characteristics of resilience and plasticity, practice with a wide variety of clays and familiarity with the clay at hand helps the potter know how to proceed. As the form grows, the speed of the wheel should be reduced to cut back on the effects of centrifugal force. The height of the form should be established first, then specifics of its curvature articulated. The final step of throwing is removing the form from the wheel, which is easier if the base of the form is scored. A string or wire, water, and pot-lifters make this process easier.

Relating components of throwing to persuasion shows how the one concept helps make sense of the other. Like throwing, persuasion is an art that may be more or less effective, well executed, and/or beautiful. The purposes of persuasion may be a change in attitude or action, but there is always a change involved. Also like throwing, persuasion is a temporally sensitive process. Persuaders need to choreograph their performances, saying the right kinds of things at the right times.

Like expository speakers and writers, persuaders make use of the medium of language. The difference is persuaders think of audiences as a kind of medium to be manipulated to their persuasive ends. Persuasion involves tools of speech and writing (e.g., words, images) and methods and techniques of persuasion (e.g., emotional appeals, the use of expert testimony). Persuaders also make use of rules or maxims of persuasion (e.g., speak to audience needs and interests, ask early for more than is ultimately desired), and any native or acquired talents of their own.

Persuading is a complex process but similar in many ways to throwing pots. In general, persuaders need to know the extent of and/or have faith in their own persuasive skills. Good persuaders begin by attending to the audience. Persuaders may choose better (e.g., more receptive, more intelligent, more manageable) audience members from a larger pool. They may prepare audiences for persuasive messages with other techniques of

manipulation, but only to the degree that the integrity of audience members is maintained (otherwise, problems may develop later). In any case, persuaders try early on to connect (identify) with the audience and/or to make a good impression (establish ethos). Without this contact, other manipulations will prove difficult if not impossible.

Enabled by connections established at the outset, persuaders need to minimize friction while preparing audiences to follow their lead. Audiences should be coaxed towards change in ways that do not compromise or overextend their capacity for flexibility (otherwise persuasion becomes coercion, force, or torture). Often this requires repeated efforts in the same direction, patience, qualification of claims, and sensitivity to audience responses in the moment. As audiences come closer to approximating the perspectives of persuaders, they require less argumentative pressure and are in a better position to adopt details of the change of attitude or action recommended. Once audience members are persuaded to think or act differently, ties between persuaders and audience members may be cut, but separation is not always simple and newly formed attitudes can still collapse or suffer damage.

Like “exposition is painting,” the metaphor “persuasion is throwing” is useful but partial. It necessarily highlights some aspects of persuasion while hiding others. An obvious difficulty with this metaphor is that audiences of persuasion are compared to clay, a medium that is complex, plastic, and somewhat resistant to manipulation, but lacking its own volition. From this perspective, the persuader creates not simply messages, but the audience itself—changed into a new form through strategic manipulation. As a result, the contribution of the audience to the process of persuasion is hidden.

Still, compared to “argument is war,” “persuasion is trickery,” and “persuasion is seduction,” the metaphor “persuasion is throwing” is useful. Like “exposition is painting,” “persuasion is throwing” is related to the larger metaphor “communication is an art,” and highlights the artistic, creative, and potentially positive aspects of persuaders and persuasive communication. Because it likens audience members to clay, it highlights the malleable quality of humans—their vulnerability and fragility—

and the corresponding responsibility of action required of persuaders in order to bring about good/beautiful results. The metaphor “persuasion is throwing” also highlights the temporal nature of persuasion (see Leff, 1986), as well as how persuasion may be assessed as more or less successful, good, or beautiful depending on the people/society/culture who judge it.

The metaphor “persuasion is throwing” does well when compared to the conduit metaphor because it reflects the fact of transmission. It also suggests how communicators learn how to persuade (just as potters learn from other artists and from their own successes and failures) and how audiences may be changed as a consequence of the process of persuasion. Like the metaphor “exposition is painting,” “persuasion is throwing” highlights process in addition to product, and integration in addition to discrete elements. Despite its limitations, the strengths of the “persuasion is throwing” metaphor recommend it as a useful alternative metaphor for understanding communication.

Conclusion

No one metaphor can adequately tackle the complex phenomenon that is human communication. Yet people in positions of relative power such as teachers of speech and writing, theorists of language and communication, political and social leaders, and parents of young children, are in positions where they may impose metaphors of human communication on others. Wittingly or unwittingly, the metaphors they suggest in language, embody in practice, and extrapolate into models or paradigms, help shape understandings of human communication that we all live by. They also highlight some qualities of communication while hiding others.

“A metaphor in a political or economic system, by virtue of what it hides, can lead to human degradation” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 236). This may very well be true of the conduit metaphor. While the conduit metaphor and the transmission models of communication it supports may be adequate for understanding some basic communication processes and simple information transfer, they are not adequate for understanding and accounting for other aspects of communication.

For these and other reasons, “painting is exposition” and “throwing is persuasion” should be considered viable

alternatives to the conduit metaphor. While an immediate paradigm shift is unlikely, benefits could result if powerful individuals were to start living by these artistic and humanistic metaphors, sharing them with their students, using them to guide their research, and theorizing them into new models and paradigms. As avenues to understanding concepts that govern thought and action in everyday life, they provide fruitful perspectives from which to approach not only processes and components, but nuances and wonders of human communication.

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