

Perspectival Framing With Pictures and Words

§1: Forms and Contents

- How do artworks in different media deploy imagination to express perspectives? What difference does the medium make to perspectival expression?
 - Logical &/or normative medium-specificity for artworks' subjects.

“Signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive...Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting [while] actions are the true subjects of poetry.” (Lessing 1766/1984, 78; cf. also Greenberg 1965)
 - Logical &/or normative medium-neutrality for artworks' effects.

“From the [“semantic”] standpoint of referring, expressing intentions and producing effects in a viewer/listener, there is no essential difference between texts and images...Language can stand in for depiction and depiction can stand in for language because communicative, expressive acts, narration, argument, description, exposition and other so-called ‘speech acts’ are not medium-specific, are not ‘proper’ to some medium or other.” (Mitchell 1994, 160).

“Metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact – but not by standing for or expressing that fact.... How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph?...Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture....Seeing as is not seeing that. Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that prompts or inspires the insight.” (Davidson 1978, 46)

§2: Perspectives and Frames

- A perspective is a disposition to interpret: a style of noticing, relating, and responding, by *parsing*, *prioritizing*, and *connecting* information in holistic, intuitive ways (Camp 2006, 2009, 2017).
 - Their effects are especially palpable in perspectival disagreements (epidemiology, policing; tenure...).
 - Perspectives are *non-propositional*, in (at least) two senses:
 - They are open-ended tools for thinking, rather than thoughts *per se* (dynamics v. statics).
 - Their deliverances are dense, degreed, and holistic rather than sparse and bitwise.
 - Explicitly entertaining or endorsing a set of thoughts is neither necessary nor sufficient for having a perspective, which requires implementation in intuitive (non-effortful) cognitive processes in a way that is partly but not entirely under voluntary control.
- Most perspectives are amorphous, inchoate, piecemeal and temporary. We often crystallize, stabilize, and communicate perspectives with *frames* (Camp 2019, Camp & Flores *fc.*).
 - Memes, mantras, metaphors; slurs, nicknames; flags, photos, paintings, artifacts; poems, stories.
 - e.g. #BlackLivesMatter; ‘wingnut’; ‘Minds are computers’; *Lolita*, *Rashomon*, *Brideshead Revisited*.
 - Frames augment interpretive agency by cultivating perspectival stability and flexibility.
 - They can coerce us into perspectives we reject; but also offer touchstones for actualizing perspectives we reflectively endorse, and for exploring perspectives that differ from our defaults.



§3: Using Form to Perform Perspective

- Semiotic systems differ in their principles of formation and interpretation.
 - *Syntactic* principles identify basic constituents plus rules for combining them.
 - *Semantic* principles map basic constituents to values.
 - *Pragmatics* interprets encoded meaning in light of broader communicative assumptions.
 - Meaning always involves a total package of syntax, semantics and pragmatics.
- Different semiotic systems employ different principles of formation & interpretation (Camp 2007, 2018).
 - Fully iconic (imagistic) systems are *analog* and *concrete*.
 - They represent many *specific* values along *dense* magnitudes (e.g. color, distance, direction), *simultaneously* & in *direct relation*, by exploiting *physical* resemblances between vehicle & content.
 - Fully discursive (propositional) systems are *sparse* and *abstract*.
 - They represent few *digital* values *piecemeal*, using *arbitrary* mappings from vehicle to content, which they combine via a *neutral, hierarchical* structure.
- These formal differences underwrite distinct representational and expressive profiles.
 - Pictures represent abstract contents only by anchoring in ‘bare bones’ contents (Kulvicki 2020).
 - Non-implicated pictorial meaning is amplified from bare contents via perceptual recognition (e.g. body, person, gender, age, identity, emotion, action). Unanchored contents are implicated.
 - Language can encode abstract contents directly, selectively, and indeterminately.
 - e.g. causal and normative relations between disparate events; quantified facts; nested attitudes.
 - But it represents concrete contents only indirectly, by ostension to a real or recalled sample; and encodes most relations separately.
 - Pictures tend to “awaken the senses” (Council of Trent 1563); stories tend to build extended structures concerning the “small movements of the inner world” (Nussbaum 1992).
 - Imagination is more likely to *fill out* pictorial meaning, and to *fill in* linguistic meaning.
 - BUT: interpretation always goes beyond what is given, through a “total imaginative experience” (Collingwood 1938).
 - Actual pictures and natural languages reside inside the iconic/discursive extrema. Artists often exploit and augment hybridity.
- These expressive differences affect a medium’s perspectival resources.
 - Artworks are frames, which inculcate perspectives via imaginative immersion using both iconic simulation (Currie 2010) and interpretive transfiguration (Danto 1981, Camp 2009, 2017).
 - Pictures exploit composition and contrast to parse, focus, and connect parts.
 - e.g. proximity, size, centering, occlusion; hue, saturation; texture.
 - This perceptual Gestalt expresses a cognitive Gestalt, which regulates attention, suggests amplified and implicated contents, and arouses affective response.
 - Literature performs perspectives by selecting, describing, and connecting abstract contents. Natural languages are shot through with perspectival mechanisms and choice points.
 - *Lexical expression*: indexical orientation (‘afar’, ‘came’/‘went’); coloring (‘sacrifice’ v. ‘slaughter’); figuration (‘the stars of heaven and sand on the seashore’);
 - *Discourse structure*: linear order; connectives (‘then’, ‘so’, ‘but’); presupposition (‘your only son’); clefting (‘behind him was a ram’);
 - *Phonaesthetics*: rhyme; rhythm; repetition (‘Here I am’; ‘So they went both of them together’).

§4: Sources of Force

- Speech doesn't just display information; it undertakes commitments to perspectively-loaded contents with a certain discourse status.
 - Encoding requires appropriately abstract syntactic and semantic principles; natural languages conventionally encode speech act force, but not all languages do: e.g. *Aufbau* v. *Begriffsschrift*.
- Pictures lack force markers; communicative intentions are signaled extra-semiotically.
 - Realist reliance on recognition generates the appearance of 'transparency': of seeming to encounter a natural trace that enables a direct encounter (Walton 1984, Lopes 1994).
- Any representation can be exploited for any perlocutionary purpose: insinuation, deception, escapism...
 - But different media distribute authority and responsibility differently among producer, product and audience. Linguistic 'force' flows through the speaker's imprimatur; imagistic 'force' through the scene's seeming presence.

§5: Economics of the Imagination

→ "A picture is worth a thousand words."

- Visual media show an abundance of concrete things as they (fictionally) are.
 - They rely heavily on experiential immersion and literal point of view to guide attention and trigger affect; and on pragmatic inference to extrapolate high-level contents, including narrative structure.
- Linguistic media tell their readers a curated selection of claims about a wide range of contents.
 - They rely heavily on iconic imagination to supply vivid images and on amplification to supply implicit relations.
- Artists navigate different paths through a given medium's expressive terrain, and trade off interest in form, direct and indirect contents, and perspective in different ways and for different rewards. The borders between media, and the terrain within them, are not fixed or hallowed. But they afford different opportunities and challenges.

Camp, Elisabeth (2019): "Imaginative Frames for Scientific Inquiry: Metaphors, Telling Facts, and Just-So Stories"

— (2018): "Why Cartography is Not Propositional"

— (2017): "Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction"

— (2009): "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments"

— (2007): "Thinking with Maps"

— (2006): "Metaphor and that Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi'"

— & Carolina Flores (fc): "'That's All You Really Are': Centering Identities and Essentialist Beliefs"

Collingwood, R. G. (1938): *The Principles of Art*

Currie, Gregory (2010): "Narration, Imitation, and Point of View"

Davidson, Donald (1978): "What Metaphors Mean"

Kulvicki, John (2020): *Modeling the Meaning of Pictures*

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1766): *Laocoön, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry*

Lopes, Dominic (1995): "Pictorial Realism"

Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994): "Ekphrasis and the Other"

Nussbaum, Martha (1992): "Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature," in *Love's Knowledge*

Walton, Kendall (1984): "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism"

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac.... On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.... And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. (Genesis (22:1-19, ESV)



Caravaggio, *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (1602)