

The puzzle of metaphor and voice in arts-based social research

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This paper provides a discussion on the utilisation of metaphor and dialogics as conceptual frameworks which can be applied to visual and literary forms of data as analytical tools and as an approach to reflection on professional practice. Drawing upon the work of writers such as Max Black, Charles Forceville, Paul Ricouer and Mikhail Bakhtin to construct an approach to this process, an example of visual and literary data is used to explore how these ideas can be illustrated in their use. The author argues that whilst metaphor and dialogics are essentially opposed conceptually, they can be used separately, alongside one another, or synthesised as a method for deepening and multiplying the possibilities for knowledge and understanding within visual and literary forms of data.

Keywords: metaphor; dialogic; image; text; language

Introduction

In my Christmas stocking, every year without fail I receive a puzzle – a steel ball trapped inside a wooden frame that I have to get out, a series of steel rings that I somehow have to separate, or a jumble of shapes that when pushed together in a certain way come to form another shape. In these puzzles, I test things out, remove things, return them and remember the steps I have taken to reach a current point, until at last a new shape emerges, or the rings separate, or the ball is liberated from its cage. And sometimes I am just lucky and the puzzle falls into place without any systematic endeavour.

What I would like to do in this paper is to explore the nature of metaphor and the nature of multi-voicedness and dialogism as separate constructs which have the potential to develop approaches to the analysis of image-based and literary data which to this point have proved a challenge to codify in social research. What I also aim to do is to push together the jumble of shapes that constitute concepts of metaphor and dialogics in the hope that they hold together and form a new object, just as my Christmas puzzle would do. My central argument to this discussion, and my point of departure in it is that whilst I believe there is real benefit to the use of arts-based research methods in the social sciences and reflective approaches to practice for the professions, the images that come to form ‘data’ cannot be viewed simply ‘as they are’ and need to be subjected to some form of systematic analysis. The application of metaphor to these forms of visual and literary forms of data can aid in assembling meaning and interpretation, but so too can an analysis of the dialogues that exist

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within them. How we understand the nature of metaphor and engage in the dialogues is critical to this process, and so perhaps is being able to distinguish the difference, either to sift out their specific nature, or indeed to formulate ways in which they can be synthesised and deepen the phenomena of what is under study. In short, this paper is not a discussion of the diverse arguments on the subject of metaphor itself and the ways in which it can be constructed in academic terms. Rather, it is to open up the utility of metaphor as a valuable tool in arts-based social research, for as Eisner (2008) suggests, arts-based research must not only be aesthetic, but have utility. This utility can be constructed through the ways in which metaphor can be conceptualised from a range of differing theories.

Metaphorical foundations: emphasis, resonance and dialogics

Paul Ricoeur (2003) identifies the work of Aristotle as significant in the development of metaphor. For Aristotle, Ricoeur notes, metaphor was made of two elements: *rhetoric* and *poetics*. In this, public oration in Syracuse is described as a ‘weapon’ in that it is effective in serving a number of purposes. Focusing firstly on rhetoric, Aristotle identifies three areas: *Inventio* (a theory of argumentation), *eleutio* (a theory of style) and *compositio* (a theory of composition) (Ricoeur, 2003). The theory of argumentation is central to rhetoric in Aristotle’s eyes, and because it has its roots in the invention of arguments and proofs is fundamentally linked to demonstrative logic. Rhetoric can be seen as a result to be the careful consideration of public speech – its intentions to influence and eulogise, which when added to eloquence create the power of persuasion.

Poetics, however, takes us down a different road. Ricoeur (2003) feels that poetry is not dependent on rhetoric. It is not oratory and its aim is not to be persuasive. It is not grounded in defence or argumentation, but in representation and meaning. Although functional, poetics is concerned with the transfer of meanings of words and has the potential to articulate ‘beingness’ through analogy. In Umberto Eco’s *Baudolino* (2003), for instance, during a conversation between Baudolino and Niketas, Baudolino states that ‘(In) Paris you will study rhetoric and you will read the poets; rhetoric is the art of saying well that which may or may not be true, and it is the duty of poets to invent beautiful falsehoods’ (p. 55). It is with these initial thoughts that Aristotle places metaphor with a foot in both of these camps, and Ricoeur (2003) suggests metaphor to have a unique structure with two functions: a theoretical function and a poetic function. Metaphors in this view are used to argue, persuade and demonstrate through analogy.

Gibbs (1999) discusses the idea that not only is a significant proportion of our language structured as metaphor, but so is much of our thinking. In editing the Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought (2008), he outlines a range of classifications as to how metaphor can be conceptualised; metaphor as mapping of thought, metaphor in language and culture, metaphor in reasoning and feeling, and metaphor in non-verbal expression. Because of the nature of these standpoints, it is inevitable that some conflict of thinking around metaphor exists between the most eminent writers in the field, and similarly to its limitations as a research method, for instance, in the field of psychotherapy (see McMullen, 2008). However, at the most rudimentary level, and for the purpose of this paper, Gibbs (1999) suggests that metaphor underpins reasoning and imagination and how we think and conceptualise our experiences. He argues that the language used for ‘normal’ contextualised knowledge and

figurative language – traditionally seen as deviant or at best ornamental – does not exist because language is inextricably linked to our cognitive and physical systems. What Gibbs (1999) appears to say is that when we break down language the figurative component to it exists clearly, even with attempts to be purely literal in our speech. Glendinning (1998) discusses this further through an analysis of Derrida.

In the previous chapter it was argued that the tendency to idealise the notion of ‘meaning’ is not something that it is possible simply or finally to bring to an end, as we might say, a recurrent logical fallacy. The ‘prejudices’ with which we are concerned here are not errors that are ‘vestigial or accidental’, ‘rather (they are) a kind of structural lure’ (Derrida, 1981, p. 33). The claim was that, while the idea of exactness does not actually play a role in the functioning of language, our language ceaselessly enjoins the ordinary speaker to presume its necessity. The philosophical urge to isolate ideal identities signified by words is, therefore ‘indestructible’ (Derrida, 1988, p. 116) and yet it ‘carries within it the destiny of its non-fulfilment’ (Derrida, 1976, p. 206). (Glendinning, 1998, p. 93)

Returning back to metaphor itself, Max Black (1998, cited in Ortony, 1998) provides some useful thoughts on the meaning of metaphor, the clarity under which metaphorical statements can make sense, and where nouns may just collide in making no sense at all. For Black, the concepts of *emphasis* and *resonance* are fundamental to a metaphorical classification. Although his work has been critiqued by writers such as Kittay (1987) in relation to his defining of the topic and vehicle of the metaphor with regard to the level of rigorous implication of language, his writing provides a good starting point in developing some ideas in how structures of metaphor can be applied to social research methodologies, and for my purposes, visual and literary sources of data.

In more detail, Black sees the use of the term *emphatic* as meaning the degree to which the producer of the word allows variation or substitution for the words used. Where there is little or no room for variation, and where the metaphor or ‘focus’ – the salient word or expression – occurs in the literal frame, the metaphorical force for the utterance itself becomes apparent. In this sense, Black (1998) suggests that there is a discrimination between *dispensable metaphors*, which offer nothing more than oratory flourishes, and *emphatic metaphors*, which are intended to provide deliberation on unstated meanings and implications. In other words, emphatic metaphors have to be meaningful in systematic ways within speech. Remember my puzzle – the random shapes that are somehow transformative when put together in the right order? There is a relationship that exists between the builder’s perceptions of these pieces and how they become ‘whole’ to the hearer, and this is based not only on a systematic ‘knowing’, but also on a ‘feeling of the way’ through that communicated.

The second area that Black (1998) identifies is that of *resonance*. In this view, the interpretive response to the metaphor will depend on the complexity and power of the metaphor-theme (the focus in question). The utterances that offer implicative elaboration (the ones that are most clearly identified by the receiver) to higher degrees are those that Black would see as resonant. A metaphor that is both markedly emphatic and resonant is therefore what Black would see as a strong metaphor, and he sets out a framework for how metaphorical statements work:

- (1) A metaphorical statement is made up of two discrete subjects, the primary subject and the secondary subject. The reference points to these are marked by the contrast between the metaphorical statement’s focus (the word(s) that are used non-literally), and the literal frame in which it sits.

- (2) The secondary subject should be regarded as a system, rather than an individual thing.
- (3) The use of the metaphor works by projecting a set of associated implications upon the primary subject that are predictable of the secondary subject. This is what Black begins to refer to as the 'implicative complex'.
- (4) The author of the metaphorical statement works through a process of selection, emphasis, suppression and organisation of the primary subject by applying it to statements that are the same structure as the secondary subject's implicative complex.
- (5) Within particular metaphorical statements, the two subjects interact through the following schema:
 - (a) The use of the primary subject causes the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties.
 - (b) It invites the hearer to construct a parallel implication-complex that fits the primary subject.
 - (c) This induces parallel changes in the secondary subject.

Although Black uses the term 'subjects' as interacting, for his theory is one of interaction, he is referring in effect to the production of outcome within the minds of the speaker and hearer – what he refers to as the shift in the speaker's meaning, and the corresponding hearer's meaning. Essentially, this refers to what they both understand by the words used on each occasion.

In terms of analysis this is important. What Black (1998) suggests at an interactive level is a fundamental schema that places metaphor at the heart of communication. The non-literal word is used to create meaning within a literal system. It has a quality that allows these meanings to move from 'hidden' to 'exposed' within the literal system, and is reliant on the interpretive qualities of both the speaker and the hearer, and on their existing understanding of the phenomena in which the metaphor is applied. Both speaker and hearer therefore need to have an appreciation of the non-literal framing of the word and the literal system in which it is placed in order for it to make sense. This is echoed in the seminal work of Ferdinand de Saussure, as discussed by Jonathon Culler (1982). In this work, Saussure proposes that each language produces a distinct set of signifiers that co-exist alongside what is signified, organising the world into concepts or categories. As an example, Culler (1982) uses the signifiers of 'Riviere' and 'Fleuve' in French, and 'river' and 'stream' in English to describe this. What separates *river* from *stream* in English is size, whereas in French a *fleuve* differs from a *riviere* not because it is larger necessarily, but because it flows into the sea. As such they are not signifiers found within English, but represent a different articulation of a conceptual plane – that of flowing water. This could be applied further in the English language for instance, whereby 'stream' can now be used as description of money allocations (i.e. budget streams) and children's academic attainment ('set' streams'). These 'arbitrary' relationships occur, as Lakoff and Johnson (2003) suggest, through a systematic network of metaphorical linguistic expressions, and it is these linguistic expressions that can give ways of seeing into the metaphorical nature of our activities.

Applying a metaphorical analytic to visual and literary sources

How these constructs can be applied is provided in the examples found below in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1. The colours of my day.

Here we come to the very heart of the puzzle itself. Above are the two elements of one phenomenon. If we look firstly at the image (Figure 1), it could be a landscape at dusk or a flag. The author of the image moves to the 'writing on' from the image itself. We are guided through the image by a piece of prose – 'My Working Day' (Figure 2) – which is not about the working day in its traditional sense, because it appears as a labour of everything but being 'at work'. Colours are reflections and metaphors themselves; the blackness is interspersed in the late afternoon with stars that evolve into yellows and pinks. So within this metaphor are other metaphors. The colours are cyclical, and the 'flag' provides us with a statement that suggests *my working day is not about my day at work, it is about what I think about, and how I feel during my working day*. How many of us can actually say that their working day consists of thoughts only to do with work? These two forms of text explore the nature of impact of our lives upon our work, and in this case the colours are intertwined with the words to create meaning and understanding;

White – Calmness
 Green – Nausea
 Black – Anxiety
 Yellow – Blissful
 Pink – Fun, Laughter
 Black – Fear

These are the works of a labour of love. The true working day appears not in the workplace at all; it is at home, in the walk to school, in the reassurance at breakfast, in the

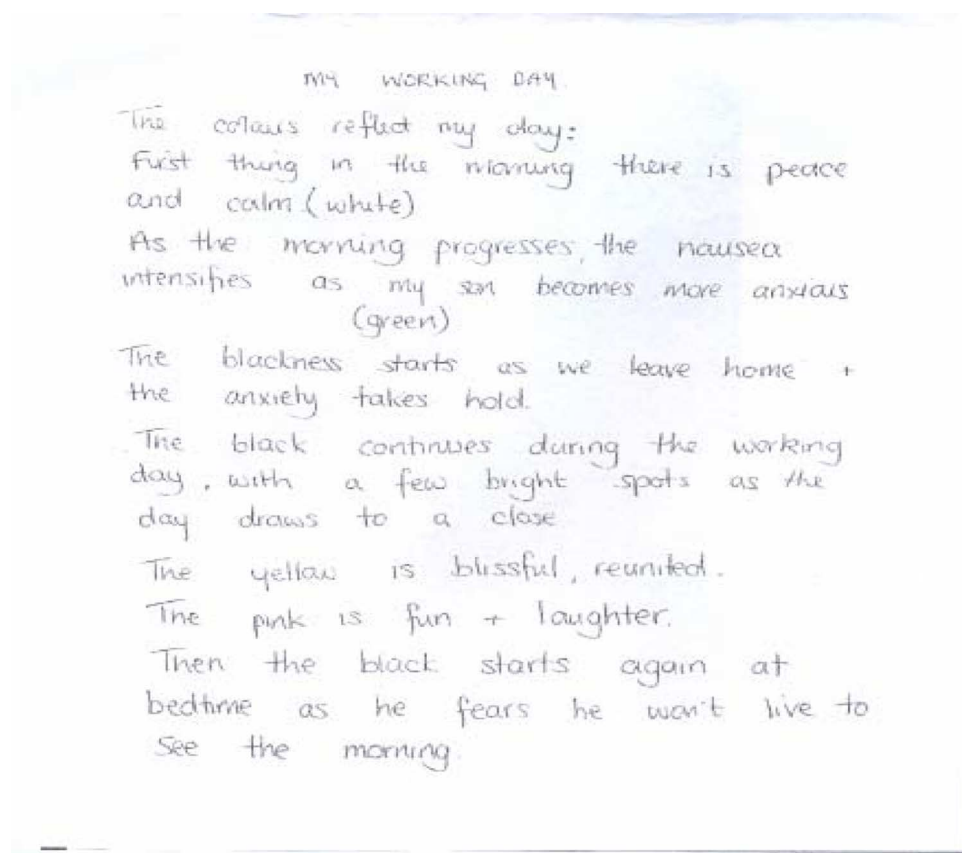


Figure 2. My landscape in text.

storytelling and laughter at bedtime and in the management of the writer's own feelings that permeate and transcend across all aspects of their being. These are not texts of work, they are texts of parenthood. The flag is a unique representation of being a parent, and perhaps more specifically, of being a mother, and further to this is the evidence of conflict between this as emotional labour and the labour of employment.

In these pieces there is a searching for a place of safety whilst writing. In becoming an image-maker and a writer, the author has created a 'zone' in which it is safe to write about the personal. Once this buffer is realised to exist, it opens the doors to other writing. The image and the narrative explored and developed in this work force us to relate to it. Not only are they *interpersonal*, but they are also *intrapersonal*, engaging us in a dynamic of movement, feeling and cognition. Seemingly unconnected at times, on closer inspection they are layered with links to and from one another. The imagery (Figure 1) forms language, communication and text, whilst the text as language (Figure 2) forms imagery. But we must remember that these are by no means fixed in stone, for, as Sartre (1996) notes, the reflected on is altered profoundly by the reflection because it is self-conscious. The images then, and that which they represent, are fleeting *once-occurrent events of Being* (Shotter & Billig, 2003, p. 322).

Forceville (2008), on a discussion of multi-modal representations and pictures as metaphor feels that if metaphors are essential to thinking, then they should not be

confined to language, but also occur in music, static and moving images, sounds, gestures, in smell and touch – and in permutations of these. He sees conceptual metaphor theory ignorance of non-verbal metaphor as problematic because it is biased towards a single means of expression – that of language. Although much of Forceville's work (1996) has been devoted to pictorial metaphor, in this instance a multi-modal approach is more appropriate. Forceville (2008) suggests multi-modal metaphors as metaphors:

in which target, source [target and source are exchanged from *primary* and *secondary subject* in Black's work], and/or mappable features are represented or suggested by at least two different sign systems (one of whom may be language) or modes of perception. (In Gibbs, 2008, p. 463, my parentheses)

He outlines four major factors which he feels play a role: Firstly, that the metaphor is apprehended differently to verbal counterparts, having an immediacy not captured in language; secondly, they cue the similarity between the target and the source of the metaphor differently to that of language; thirdly, as music or pictures, they have more cross-cultural access than verbal metaphors; finally, they have a stronger emotional appeal than verbal metaphors.

Was Figure 1 ever constructed as a flag? No, more that it was an experiment – a 'playing about' with colour on the computer. Suddenly these layers take on new meaning. They begin as the representation of Being through colour. White is calm, green nausea, black anxiety, etc. Then they become a landscape, and to extend the blackness perhaps a little further the addition of stars – yellow-gold beacons in the night, are a fitting contribution to the picture. Perhaps the inspiration for this picture comes not from colour, but from nature. In the way that night turns to day, so white turns to green and so on, returning to white and the cycle is repeated. Without the accompanying prose of Figure 2, we would see it differently – uniquely – to that seen through the eyes of its creator, or not connect with the experience they illustrate. Indeed our own 'reading' of these texts will resonate with us personally in different ways. Pierre Bayard (2007) notes that even when we have read the same books, on discussing them we may feel we have read something entirely different to the other reader, and it is the same with images and prose. Perhaps the flag in Figure 2 and its representation is a type of 'badge' or blanket. The writer wraps himself up in it, because they are inside it, living it. The colours enfold them. At times the flag may lie limp, airless, as they describe in their prose when the blackness takes hold, then at other times it may flap wildly in the breeze, the yellows and pinks invigorating, the stars moments of bliss as the end of the working day draws near.

There is no doubt that the imagery laid out in Figures 1 and 2 communicates a set of ideations and the relationships between them in the way that Forceville's (2008) factors above suggest they can. The 'flag' is functional. It sets a tone and uses devices that are familiar and associative through its use of colour and shapes. We can connect with it through these familiar associations, and from it a movement of feeling occurs. It is not a language but it communicates, and creates a 'sense' in the way that Ricoeur (2003) describes – it is not named (by word) but we know it by our experiences of feeling and contiguity. Meaning-making is then derived from it. Figure 2 supplies this through the writer's own hand, and then it is laid out before the viewer/reader who imposes their own meaning, and so a new text emerges.

Furthermore, where is it that we find emphasis and resonance within this work? Firstly, where does it sit within a literal system, and secondly, what is our degree of response to it – the way we interpret it and its implicative elaboration? For the former, we can return back to the title of the piece; ‘My Working Day’, and the original realisation that this is not a literal representation of work, more one of emotional labour. Both of the images engage us in multiple possibilities, the variations of meaning within the literal context of the working day. For the latter, we engage emotionally in our interpretation, and from it we are able once again to ‘sense’ the complexity of what is as much unsaid as said. This is the essence of its implicative elaboration.

Dialogics

Having laid out some basic principles of metaphor above, perhaps it is now useful to explore the nature of ‘the voice’ or of ‘multi-voicedness’ in visual forms of data. One way of approaching this is through Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on dialogism. A tension in the subject of dialogism is that although it was constructed by Bakhtin as a method different to the device of metaphor, for he was searching for a method to construct social science systematically through analysis of language, dialogism can itself be understood as a metaphor, and this is an area for focus. Bakhtin’s notion was that anything anybody ever says exists in response to things that have been said before and in anticipation of things that will be said in response. Therefore we never speak in a vacuum. All language is as a result dynamic, relational and of infinite re-descriptions of the world as we know it.

As a starting point to the principle of the dialogic, Nealon (2003) suggests that in order to find oneself, one must turn not inwardly to the unity found within the cogito, but outwardly to the diversity and risk of the other so that one may lose oneself in order that an adventure of appropriation occurs that can confront and conquer these new and never ending forms of otherness. In doing so, one is able to make use of the other and is able to find oneself by means of the other. The other effectively becomes a lens through which we are able to see ourselves at new and deeper levels through a social rather than individual action.

For Shotter and Billig (2003), the advocated approach is fundamentally one of uncovering the almost unnoticed events and features that exist in social practice. In this construct, it is the unfolding of the activities within which we relate to our surroundings and the responsiveness of ourselves to these features which is key rather than the idea that there is a form of ‘inner landscape’ which we come to know. It is in these fleeting, unique discursive activities that we can begin to understand how the nature of our inner selves can be expressed to each other; what Bakhtin describes as ‘the threshold’.

Gurevitch (2003) notes that Bakhtin considers the ‘threshold’ both as a turning point and as a moment of crisis. For him it is not so much a matter of looking inwardly towards the self, it is when the individual feels the pull towards the other, and where the nature of self can be expressed in that relational space. Gurevitch (2003) feels that the threshold should be regarded as actual reality, experienced and practised as a dialogical endeavour, symbolised through its characteristics of convening and dispersing, opening and closing, searching for common topics, silence and forms of speech. In essence, comparisons may be drawn between this articulation of phenomena, and that of image, where the image is seen as the concrete form of abstract themes. The threshold in this notion can be seen as having both discursive and sensory potential in

how it becomes 'live' to the 'other'. To develop this notion further, the citation from Bakhtin (1984) below provides an example of this:

Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold. And everything internal gravitates not toward self but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension filled encounter lies its entire essence. (p. 287)

For our purposes, perhaps two kinds of threshold exist; that which emerges in the construction of the visual and literary data; and that which we are confronted by when we view the data from the perspective of 'the other'. Out of this comes a suggestion that there is a plurality – a latent plurality within consciousness – which can flourish within the 'dialogic' as an impassioned play of voices. For Bakhtin this plurality within dialogics appears to be attacked at from the sociological perspective; that is that the dialogic serves as a metaphor itself upon which the intersubjectivity of a society can be viewed and explored. However, the notion of selfhood and the way it both informs and is informed by the other is not excluded from the concept. Nealon (2003) discusses this by suggesting that the dialogic offers the opportunity to understand differences and ethical commitments without the requirement to fall upon a universalising or norm-giving structure in the way that other ontological schemes are constructed. The ethical dialogue then becomes one of the social contexts rather than one of the ethical rules. As Nealon (2003) suggests 'they open up a productive horizon to rethink the social landscape of self and other in our groundless postmodern landscape' (p. 141). The suggestion is therefore that the terms of engagement in this process are found within the dialogics themselves. It is not until we are in them that the 'ground' – the ethical context – begins to emerge, and as a result this ground is not universal, but unique. A vital dialogic component then is our affective involvement in social practices and of our capacity to 'read' the specific variables that can occur in both languaged and non-languaged activities with others. Carter (2007), for instance, gives an example of this in his discussion on self-dramatisation through Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, where he suggests that both the narrator's and character's voices 'have important intratextual relationships as well as intertextual ones' (p. 198).

In dialogism, consciousness is found in otherness. Its role is one of multi-voicedness rather than one of self-centredness. However, this is not to say that the nature of multi-voicedness is not problematic in theoretical terms, for the threshold across which this dialogue occurs is built upon language, and to communicate one's intention one must have a sense of owning, or acquisition of a language that belongs to oneself. Gurevitch (2003) provides us with a statement from Bakhtin (1981) that explores this idea:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expression intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not after all out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!) but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. (Gurevitch, 2003, p. 353)

Again, we can turn to Eco's *Baudolino* (2003) to provide an illustration of this in a description of Niketas:

But Niketas was curious by nature. He loved to listen to the stories of others, and not only those concerning things unknown to him. Even things he had seen with his own

eyes, when someone recounted them to him, seemed to unfold from another point of view, as if he were standing on the top of one of those mountains in Ikons, and could see the stones as the apostles on the mountains saw them, and not as the faithful observer did from below. (Eco, 2003, p. 13)

It is here, following on from those immensely descriptive words, that there is conflict in how my puzzle can be pieced together. I have come to suggest that there is something comparable between the process of dialogism and the generation of an image in that it supports a consciousness raising experience between oneself and others. This is not, however, the way that Bakhtin (1981) appears to see the application of conscious imagery, for his focus is clearly that of a science of language, linguistics and literature. Paul de Man (2003) notes that Bakhtin made some very clear delineation between what he considered dialogism, and discourses found within poetry and prose. This separating out of multi-voicedness from multi-signedness (i.e. that poetry is semiotic, whilst dialogism is voiced) is illustrated in de Man's (2003) citing of Bakhtin (1981) on this subject:

(no) matter how one understands the interrelationship of meanings in a poetic symbol (or trope) this relationship is never of the dialogical sort; it is impossible under any conditions or at any time to imagine a trope (say a metaphor) being unfolded into the two exchanges of a dialogue, that is two meanings parcelled out between two separate voices. (de Man, 2003, p. 345)

Under what principles does Bakhtin come to this conclusion? De Man (2003) suggests that for Bakhtin the trope is an intentional structure directed towards an object and as such is a pure episteme and not a fact in language (an example of this might be 'sail ahoy', for the sail is not on the sea in isolation, it is attached to a boat). From a social science perspective, Bakhtin appears here to be positivist in how language can be classified. Poetic and prosaic tropes are therefore excluded from literary discourse and are placed within the field of epistemology in the way in which scientists aim to minimise independent and dependent variables in their experiments. In essence, de Man argues that Bakhtin's dogma on the nature of dialogism forces a situation whereby as dialogical refraction develops, he is forced to contain the frame and nature of the dialogic experience to the point where there is no room for others of any shape or degree. Polyphony within dialogue, it would appear, is legitimate, whilst polysemy within poetic voice is not. The question for me then is whether 'poetic symbols' (to use Bakhtin's term, in which I include visual and literary images) can be utilised as a dialogic principle. At this point it is useful to return to the previous images, Figures 1 and 2, to examine whether this is achievable.

In this work then, perhaps there is an unfolding of the relationship between the author of the images as a parent and as a worker, and the responses they make to being in the situation. What is revealed is an ontological conflict between these two phenomena. The images provide us with a concrete example of an inner landscape turned outwards, a risk in the process of discovery to the image maker, a dynamic of unfolding conflict as it emerges out of the unconscious. It also provides a means for us to sit on their shoulder – on the boundary of the threshold – alongside them, for in the moment it was placed in our relational space it became alive, actually lived, real. It opens up language, it pauses language and it creates a new language. It is a concrete form of abstract themes, and to paraphrase Bakhtin (1984) its essence lies in the tension filled encounter, on the boundary between their and our consciousness. Through this piece we are able to examine the issues intersubjectively. It is polyphonic

as a text, for it plays out different voices within it, the immediate voices of worker and parent, and within this a multitude of other voices through our own interplay with it. And yet the product is harmonious – a dialogic that offers us the possibility of differing perspectives and commitments within social and ethical life. It is a dialogic of the social context, and an explicitly unique example, but we connect with it and understand the relationships that are made within the voices in both their humanistic and systemic discourses. In essence we read both its languaged and non-languaged variables and co-create its plurality within our consciousness. Multi-voicedness emerges from the creation of the visual or literary image itself, and from our encounter at the threshold with the other. I don't believe that there can be static or rigid interpretations, and I have deliberately avoided a system which enables a precise analysis, because any analysis would not be precise, only a version seen through the lens of my own experiences. Perhaps also we cannot rule out serendipity in this process, for as with my Christmas puzzle sometimes we are just fortunate with what we find simply by placing things together as we test them out. Bakhtin's approach, from a linguistic perspective would involve a positivist element to this analytical process, and because written text is minimal in the images shown previously, a dialogic in Bakhtin's sense of dialogic is not achievable. However, I feel the principles of Bakhtin's ideas can lead us to an appreciation of the polyphonic qualities that exist within them, and that which can further be shared through a field of polyphonic consciousness with others. And this is perhaps a good place to depart from, if we choose, this type of data upon which to explore a reflective, or indeed reflexive analysis.

Conclusion

To return back to my metaphorical Christmas present, if a tension exists between the usage of metaphor and dialogics as separate forms of communication, then perhaps when interpreting visual and literary images we need to be making some choices about our approach. Is our approach one of examining pictorial and multi-modal metaphor through Forceville's (2008) ideas or one of examining the dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense? In other words are we searching for what is symbolic through visual and literary metaphor, or what is intersubjective in relation to its social action; and this is where a tension arises, for as social scientists or reflective practitioners we are not viewing these as purely scholarly disciplines, we are searching for application to the ontological world. The confusion arises when in engaging in the work, we do not only 'sense' the metaphor, we hear the voices and we apply new voices, for that is what we have been socialised into doing as researchers and as reflectors on our practices. In effect I believe it goes beyond scholarly activity, such as the study of metaphor or dialogic, and into an applied format. The challenge is in sifting out from the data what is metaphor and what is voice, for it is all too easy for them to become conflated into some strange hybrid of a linguistic and symbolic origin.

Finally, the images that I have presented, and the way we can work upon them suggests that we can approach them uni-dimensionally, either as metaphors or as a dialogic, but we can also approach them inter-dimensionally by utilising both of these approaches alongside one another – a kind of mixed methodology if you please, with the prospect of deepening understanding and developing theory through conjunctions of what is found. What is perhaps most important is that in doing so we establish the differing methods from the outset, and once this is done we can either define them as separate constructs found within the data, or build upon them accordingly, using what

is found to shape new constructs from them. In order to conduct this effectively, we need to create models from these concepts which provide us with a systematic foundation and allow us to follow patterns in the images themselves, rather than just to view them in the hope that something will emerge. The question for my puzzle is, having freed the ball from its structure, can we return it in some new and liberatory way where the structure has changed and new insights have emerged in its reconstruction? If models for research can be built through these approaches which are able to stand the test of rigor, then I believe it opens up the potential for infinite possibility in how crucial aspects of professional practice can be uncovered and the ways they can be seen.

Notes on contributor

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