ISSA Proceedings 2010 – Preface

The Seventh Conference of the *International Society for the Study of Argumentation* (ISSA), held in Amsterdam from 29 June to 2 July 2010, drew again more submissions for presentations than any ISSA Conference before. After a strict selection procedure, exactly 300 scholars were invited to present their papers at the Conference. In addition, the Conference attracted some 200 interested colleagues and students who just wanted to attend the presentations and take part in the discussions. All in all, 500 people interested in argumentation assembled in Amsterdam to present papers and exchange views.

The 2010 ISSA Conference was, like previous ones, an international meeting place for argumentation scholars from a great variety of academic backgrounds and traditions, representing a wide range of academic disciplines and approaches: (speech) communication, logic (formal and informal), rhetoric (classical and modern), philosophy, linguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, law, political science, psychology, education, religious studies, and artificial intelligence. Besides papers on argument schemes, classical argumentation theory, critical responses to argumentation, deep disagreement, ethos and pathos, fallacies, the history of argumentation theory, interpersonal argumentation, logic and reason, practical argumentation, premise acceptability, rationality and reasonableness, *topoi*, the Toulmin model, visual argumentation, and argumentation in a cross-cultural perspective, papers were presented on argumentation in controversy, debate, education, science and the media, on argumentation in a financial, historical, legal, literary, medical, political and religious context, and on argumentation and computation, definition, epistemology, ethics, linguistics, persuasion, political philosophy, pragmatics, social psychology, stylistics, and the Internet. In the opinion of the editors, the Proceedings of the Seventh ISSA Conference reflect the current richness of the discipline.

Two thirds of the papers presented at the Conference are included in these Proceedings. Some of the papers presented at the Conference were not offered for publication in the Proceedings, some of the papers were not accepted after a meticulous review procedure while others were withdrawn. The editors decided

to publish only those papers that met their standards of quality. Some papers have been considerably revised on the basis of the reviewers' comments.

The Proceedings of the Conference are again published by Sic Sat, this time only in a CD ROM version. For the reader's convenience, in the Proceedings the papers are arranged in the alphabetical order of the authors' surnames.

The four ISSA board members, Frans H. van Eemeren, Bart Garssen, David Godden and Gordon Mitchell served as editors of the Proceedings. The editors were greatly helped by the systematic peer reviewing of all papers by other participants in the ISSA conference (at least two reviewers for each paper). Their evaluations and constructive suggestions have enhanced the quality of the Proceedings, and the editors are grateful to all of them. In addition, we received invaluable assistance in preparing the Proceedings from our research assistants and research master's students Lester van der Pluijm and Jacky Visser. We thank both of them very much for their help in getting the manuscripts ready for publication. Last but not least, we would like to thank our publisher Auke van der Berg for the production of these Proceedings.

For their financial support of the conference, the editors would like to express their gratitude to the Dutch-Belgian Speech Communication Association (VIOT), the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), the City of Amsterdam, Springer Academic Publishers, John Benjamins Publishers, the International Learned Institute for Argumentation Studies (ILIAS), and the Sciential International Centre for Scholarship in Argumentation Theory (Sic Sat).

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ISSA Proceedings 2010 – "War With Words": I.A. Richards' Attack On Argument
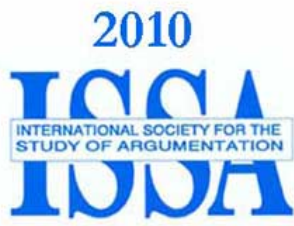
In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) I. A. Richards proposed to revive "an old subject" that had "sunk so low" that it perhaps should be simply dismissed to "limbo" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 3). In Richards' view rhetoric's sorry condition was a result of the flaws of the "old rhetoric" which he says began with Aristotle and ended with Richard Whately in the nineteenth century (Richards 1936/1965, p. 4). The "old rhetoric" was "an offspring of dispute" that "developed as the rationale of pleadings and persuadings; it was the theory of the battle of words and has always been itself dominated by the combative impulse" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 24). Whately's Elements of Rhetoric (1828) represents the inadequacies of the old rhetoric because it offers nothing more than a "collection of prudential Rules about the best sorts of things to say in various argumentative situations" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 8).

Richards' rejection of traditional rhetoric and his promise to revive the subject made The Philosophy of Rhetoric one of the foundational documents of the "New Rhetoric" of the twentieth century. Thus it is important to examine the assumptions of Richards' indictment of rhetoric and consider if he is correct that it is no more than a "war with words" (Richards, 1955, p. 52). And even if Richards' historical analysis is accurate, it does not necessarily follow that a disputational model must be abandoned if rhetoric is to prosper in our own times. Richards' identification of argumentation as rhetoric's chief disability has had significant implications for the direction of both rhetoric and argumentation. I will argue that Richards' program to remove argument from rhetoric would, if followed fully, eviscerate rhetoric by stripping away stripping away much of the most fully developed and articulated aspects of rhetorical theory and practice. Moreover, Richards' self-proclaimed "microscopic" view of rhetoric means that The Philosophy of Rhetoric has little to contribute to the development of rhetoric, or argumentation, in the twenty-first century.

1. Richards' Indictment of the Old Rhetoric

Richards finds very little in the old rhetoric that is agreeable. From its very beginnings in antiquity, "from Gorgias onward too much in the literature of rhetoric has been sales-talk selling-sales talk; and for good reasons we are more interested today in defensives against than in aids to eloquent persuasion" (1955, p. 166). Persuasion is suspect, primarily because persuasion proceeds by argumentation and Richards genuinely abhors augmentative and disputative

situations. "A controversy," claims Richards, "is normally an exploitation of a systematic set of misunderstandings for war-like purposes" (1936/1965, p. 39). Again and again when discussing disputation and debate, Richards resorts to martial metaphors: disputation is a "battle," rhetoric is "combat," argument is "ordonnance" (1936/1965, p. 8). Richards is correct that rhetoricians, especially the ancients, often describe rhetoric as a combative activity. Thus in De inventione Cicero says that "the man who equips himself with the weapons of eloquence, not to be able to attack the welfare of his country but to defend it, he, I think, will be a citizen most helpful and most devoted both to his own interests and those of his community" (p. 5). Cicero sees rhetoric as a conflict but one born, not from confusion or querulousness, but rather from civic responsibility. Richards, in contrast, does not recognize that in some disputes the disputants might understand each other very well and nevertheless be compelled to argue about matters of principle and policy. Thus Richards almost invariably describes traditional rhetoric in terms of bellicosity and never of rationality. Indeed, rhetoric has been "narrowed" and "blinded" by "that preoccupation, that debaters' interest" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 24).

Perhaps no treatise reflects "that debaters' interest" more than Richard Whately's, Elements of Rhetoric, which Richards identifies as the last of the "old rhetorics." A glance at the full title of this book may help explain why Richards chose it to exemplify the rhetorical system he would replace: The Elements of Rhetoric: Comprising an Analysis of the Laws of Moral Evidence and of Persuasion, with Rules for Argumentative Composition and Elocution. Whately proposes "to treat of 'Argumentative Composition,' generally and exclusively; considering Rhetoric (in conformity with the very just and philosophical view of Aristotle) as an offshoot of Logic" (1828/1963, p. 4). Therefore, "the finding of suitable ARGUMENTS to prove a given point, and the skilful arrangement of them, may be considered as the immediate and proper province of Rhetoric, and of that alone" (p. 39).

In emphasizing the discovery and disposition of arguments as the only exclusive duty of rhetoric Whately is atypical, if not unique, among early nineteenth century rhetorics. And I believe it is this emphasis on argument that led Richards to identify The Elements of Rhetoric as the final chapter in the history of rhetoric. Richards has an obvious aversion to argument and, not surprisingly, he has an equally low regard for logic. In Speculative Instruments Richards complains about "the innumerable cogwheels of logic" (1955, p. 147). And logic, like rhetoric, was

a product of "scholastic drudgery" (1955, p. 169). Thus Whately, who also wrote Elements of Logic as a companion to his Elements of Rhetoric, is doubly damned.

Yet Richards' analysis that the preoccupation with argumentation, most apparent in Whately, caused the collapse of traditional rhetoric differs dramatically from many other observers who interpret the history of rhetoric quite differently. As I have demonstrated in "Splendor and Misery: Semiotics and the End of Rhetoric," critics writing from a semiotic perspective argue that rhetoric's demise results from an obsession, not with argument, but rather with style. Thus writers like Barthes, Genette, Todorov, and Ricoeur see rhetoric's neglect of argument and invention in favor of the elocution and the figures the cause of its decline (2006, pp. 305-11). In other words, these semioticians interpret rhetoric's history in a way that is virtually the opposite of Richards' analysis. Historical accuracy almost certainly is to be found between these two opposing positions. From its inception rhetoric has been dominated by a tension between argument and invention, on the one hand, and style and elocution, on the other. At various times in rhetoric's long history, one or the other, invention or elocution, may have seemingly achieved dominance, but the achievement has inevitably been transient at best. Thus Richards' account of the old rhetoric is a result of a highly selective reading of historical texts.

But even if Richards' analysis of the causes of rhetoric's demise is flawed, does this mean that his conclusion, that Whately's Elements of Rhetoric really represents the end of the "old rhetoric," is equally mistaken? Richards implies that nothing of note had happened in rhetoric from Whately's Elements of Rhetoric in 1828 until the publication of his own Philosophy of Rhetoric in 1936. But here too Richards' view of rhetoric's history does not quite tell the whole story. A great deal did happen in rhetoric in the 100 years between Whately and Richards. A key term search for books about rhetoric published between 1828 and 1936 in the "Worldcat" online library catalog returns 2,579 titles. Forest Houlette's Nineteenth Century Rhetoric: An Enumerative Bibliography, covering a slightly different period, the years 1800 to 1920, catalogues 2,546 entries. While bibliographic records do not tell the complete story, the publication of some 2500 books suggests that the "old rhetoric" was not quite as moribund as Richards claims. Richards' dismissal of nineteenth-century rhetoric was shared by many early twentieth-century writers on the subject. As Linda Ferreira-Buckley notes, "historians of rhetoric once claimed there was little 'rhetoric' in the nineteenth

century worth studying, but our understanding of nineteenth-century theory and practice has benefitted recently from scholarly attention demonstrating that the period boasts many different 'rhetorics'" (p. 468). A recent survey of research confirms Ferreira-Buckley's conclusion that that contemporary scholars increasingly find the nineteenth century a rich period in the history of rhetoric (Gaillet, 2010). While Richards' account of the "old rhetoric" is myopic, he probably is correct to claim that in the preceding 100 years no one had proposed a role for rhetoric quite like the one he had in mind.

2. Richards' Proposal for a New Rhetoric
In the beginning of The Philosophy of Rhetoric, Richards proposes that rhetoric "should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (1936/1965, p. 3). "A revived Rhetoric or study of verbal understanding and misunderstanding," he says, "must itself undertake its own inquiry into the modes of meaning – not only, as with the old Rhetoric, on a macroscopic scale, discussing the effects of different disposals of large parts of a discourse – but also on a microscopic scale by using theorems about the structure of the fundamental conjectural units of meaning…" (1936/1965, p. 23). Those "units of meaning," we are quickly informed, are simply words. Therefore, "a persistent, systematic, detailed inquiry into how words work that will take the place of the discredited subject which goes by the name of Rhetoric" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 23). Rhetoric, then, is no longer a study of persuasion, nor of argument, nor perhaps even of style, but a study of the meaning of words.
Meaning, says Richards, is determined almost entirely by context. "Most generally," he says, context "is a name for a whole cluster of events that recur together" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 34). The meaning of individual words derive from what he calls their "delegated efficacy:" from a particular context "one item – typically a word – takes over the duties of parts which can then be omitted from the recurrence…. When this abridgement happens, what the sign or word – the item with these delegated powers – means is the missing part of the context" (Richards 1936/1965, p.34). Understanding this "context theory of meaning," Richards claims, will help humans avoid misunderstandings (1936/1965, p. 38).
In Richards' estimation the "old rhetoric" failed to recognize the "context theory of meaning." Rather, it perpetuated "a chief cause of misunderstanding" that Richards labels the "Proper Meaning Superstition": the assumption that each individual word has only one acceptable meaning (1936/1965, p. 11). Thus he also calls this misconception the "One and Only One True Meaning Superstition."

Richards sees this "superstition" as rampant in the rhetorics that preceded his. As a major offender he cites George Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric (1776). This is a surprising choice because Richards generally praises Campbell and he takes Campbell's title for his own Philosophy of Rhetoric 160 years later. Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, says Richards, "is otherwise an excellent book in many respects" (1936/1965, p. 51). His identification of Campbell as a chief proponent of the "proper meaning superstition" becomes even more surprising when you begin to look for evidence of this belief in Campbell's work. I can find nothing in Campbell that suggests he believes every word possesses one and only one meaning. Campbell does discuss usage in detail, but he is certainly not dogmatic about proper use. Indeed, when Richards cites an example of this "superstition" he quotes, not from Campbell, but rather from a book he identifies as a Manual of Rhetoric (1936/1965, p. 54). Richards is referring to a Manual of Rhetoric and Composition, an introductory textbook published in 1907 and thus a work very different from Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric. Even Richards seems to recognize that he has perhaps overstated the perniciousness of this superstition. He concedes that the doctrine of proper usage "can be interpreted in several ways which make it true and innocuous" (1936/1965, p. 54).

3. Metaphor and the Figures
For Richards, nothing illustrates the difficulties of proper meanings and the contextual interdependence or "interinanimation" of words more than metaphor. He devotes the final one third of The Philosophy of Rhetoric to an analysis of metaphor and it is this analysis for which the book is best known. His goal is to "put the theory of metaphor in a more important place than it has enjoyed in traditional Rhetoric" (1936/1965, p. 95). "Throughout the history of Rhetoric," he argues, "metaphor has been treated as a sort of happy extra trick with words.... In brief, a grace or ornament or added power of language, not its constitutive form" (1936/1965, p. 90). Metaphor, says Richards, "is the omnipresent principle of language" (1936/1965, p. 92). Metaphor illustrates his "context theory of meaning" because "fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts. Thought is metaphoric..." (Richards 1936/1965, p. 94 [italics original]).

With his treatment of metaphor Richards is addressing a concern that had occupied rhetoric from its very beginnings. And Richards is correct that rhetoricians had often treated metaphor and other tropes and figures of speech as

something that could be added to non-figurative language in order to enhance a writer's style. However, simply because metaphor could be employed as a stylistic device does not necessarily mean that rhetoricians regarded metaphor as exclusively additive. Campbell, in the other Philosophy of Rhetoric, observes that certain tropes "have a closer connection with the thought than with the expression" and thus should not be viewed as an aspect of style (p. 293). Metaphor, however, has an "intimate" connection with both style and thought and may "therefore be considered under either head" (p. 294).

Metaphor, of course, was only one of many figures of speech that occupied traditional rhetoric. Richards is aware of this but seems ambivalent about figures other than metaphor. In Speculative Instruments he admits that "some sort of systematic study of at least some of the devices of language so painstakingly labeled and arranged by these logicians, rhetoricians, and figurists may still be what education chiefly lacks" (Richards, 1955, p. 163). Yet a few pages later in the same book, referring to the multiplicity of figures often found in traditional rhetorics, he confesses "we fear codification in these matters and with good reason" (p. 165). In the end, Richards is content to focus on metaphor as the fundamental figure of thought and language.

4. Poetry

Although The Philosophy of Rhetoric is about prose, Richards' interest seems to be as much about poetry as it is prose. Richards had been led to a study of meaning by observing the difficulty his students had with interpreting poetry. And poetry, far more than rhetoric, would remain an interest throughout his life. Richards defines poetry as discourse in which words "are free to move as they please" (1955, p. 150). Richards favors poetry in part because the fluidity of meaning makes argument almost impossible: "If the meanings of words are free to move about, then there can be no pinning an opponent down, no convicting him of self-contradiction, no catching him out shifting his ground; indeed none of the rules of that amusing old game will hold. The comedy of argument and its practical purposes alike depend upon a convention of constancy in meaning" (1955, p.149).

While Richards is discussing poetry in this passage, he believes that meaning in prose is also highly unstable: "in most prose, and more than we ordinarily suppose, the opening words have to wait for those that follow to settle what they shall mean – if indeed that ever gets settled" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 50).

Ultimately, says Richards, "the world of poetry has in no sense any different reality from the rest of the world and it has no special laws and no other-worldly peculiarities. It is made up of experiences of exactly the same kind as those that come down to us in other ways" (1929, p. 78). For Richards, then, the inconstancy of meaning makes traditional approaches to argument futile. Yet he offers no real alternative to the disputation he so despises. He seems to believe that if meanings are communicated and interpreted as effectively as possible fundamental differences can somehow be resolved.

5. Richards' "Design"
While The Philosophy of Rhetoric examines meaning and metaphor it does not, with any specificity, explain how his "new rhetoric" will remedy misunderstanding. He recognizes this limitation when he admits early in the book that "what follows is unavoidably abstract and general in the extreme" (Richards 1936/1965, p. 26). While he does not regard The Philosophy of Rhetoric as the proper place to present a pragmatic program, Richards would devote much of his career to offer what he believed to be practical solutions to the problems of misunderstanding. This approach is evident, for example, in one of his last books, Design for Escape (1968). This book offers a "design" to "escape" from many of the problems of the modern world. But Richards had been offerings such designs for decades.

Of these various "designs for escape" probably none occupied Richards more than "Basic English." Richards was convinced that understandings among peoples could never fully be achieved without a universal language and that the language most suitable to this role was English. However, to become a medium of international understanding would require a language that could be learned readily by anyone. Thus Basic English, a simplified version of English, was developed by Richards and his colleagues. As he explains in Basic English and its Uses (1943) "Basic English is English made simply by limiting the number of its words to 850, and by cutting down the rules for using them to the smallest number necessary for the clear statement of ideas" (p. 23). Richards and others promoted "Basic" and "translated" various works into that language. Yet despite Richards' efforts over several decades Basic English never became the international medium of communication that he had intended.

A rather different, and less grandiose, effort to minimize misunderstanding was Richards' development of "specialized quotation marks." Like conventional

quotation marks, these consist of words or phrases surrounded by superscripted symbols. These "quotation marks" (later labeled "metasemantic markers") are intended to give the reader additional information about the text they surround. These were introduced in How to Read a Page: A Course in Efficient Reading with an Introduction to a Hundred Great Words (1942) which includes a key to the seven marks used in that book. The following are examples, together with Richards' explanations, of the marks presented in that work *(see: illustration)*:

"w......w indicates the word – merely as the word in general – is being talked about. The marks are equivalent to 'the word.' E. g., wtablew may mean an article of furniture or a list. !......! indicates surprise or derision, a Good Heavens! What-a-way-to-talk! attitude. It should be read !shriek! if we have occasion to read it aloud. nb......nb indicates that how the word is understood is a turning point in the discussion, and usually that it may easily be read in more than one way or with an inadequate perception of its importance. The sign is short for Nota Bene (p.68)."

Richards would continue to use these marks in most of the books he wrote after How to Read a Page. Whether the marks minimized misunderstanding in the way Richards hoped is debatable. Although the specialized quotation marks may give a more precise understanding of how Richards is using a word, the marks also may require the reader to turn to the key to recall the meaning of each mark. Richards seems to believe that the establishment of "designs" like a universal language and an improved system of quotation marks misunderstandings would be minimized sufficiently that the unpleasantness of argument might be avoided altogether.

6. Conclusion

What, then, has been the legacy of Richards' "new rhetoric" in the nearly seventy five years since the publication of The Philosophy of Rhetoric? Although Richards' has influenced the development of literary criticism, his direct influence on rhetoric, I believe, has been neither considerable nor constructive. Certainly very few have heeded Richards' call to make rhetoric a study of "how words work" on a microscopic level. But Richards' concern that rhetoric is too divisive, too confrontational, and too argumentative to be beneficial surely appealed to those already suspicious of the art of persuasion. As I have observed in "Modern Rhetoric and the End of Argument" the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw efforts to separate argumentation from its traditional place within

rhetoric. Richards' attack on the "old rhetoric" would have reinforced the movement already underway to divorce argumentation from rhetoric.

Following Richards the twentieth century saw attempt to formulate a view of rhetoric that was less combative, less agonistic. But these efforts, like those of Richards, have proven difficult to achieve. No one can oppose efforts to find better ways to resolve conflicts. But what has happened, I believe, is that much rhetoric has simply abandoned the study of argumentation altogether, rather than confront the messiness of debate. This has had the effect of restricting rhetoric's traditional scope in much late twentieth-century writing about rhetoric. But the ancient Protagorean model has proven remarkably persistent, because the need to make decisions between two competing views of the world in courts, legislatures, elections, and all manner of human affairs has not abated. Even Richards recognizes the difficulty of abandoning the study of argument altogether: "In the old Rhetoric, of course, there is much that a new rhetoric finds useful – and much besides which may be advantageous until man changes his nature, debates and disputes, incites, tricks, bullies, and cajoles his fellows less" (1936/1965,p. 24). Despite I. A. Richards very considerably efforts, we human beings have not much changed our nature and so we continue to debate and dispute with considerable enthusiasm.

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ISSA Proceedings 2010 – The Probable And The Problem

1. Introductory remarks

1.1. Questioning the axiomatic principles is no more a contradiction in terms.

Modern philosophers of science, Albert Einstein among them, established the relative status of foundational propositions of any paradigm. In spite of paradigmatic relativity, axiomatic principles do not lose their constitutive role**[i]**.

The progressive axiomatization of sciences and the constitution of theoretical paradigms in many fields of research entitle us to adopt this method for the analysis of doxa – the domain we are interested in. *"Doxa, though it is the general word for* 'belief'*, tends to carry with it the hidden, but sometimes operative*

implication, that the belief in question is an assessment of something", says Crombie (1963, pp. 33-34).

*1.2. The intention of speaking about paradigmatic structure of doxa was explicitly manifested by Gianni Vattimo (1993, pp. 90-108)***[ii]** *and probably by many other philosophers.* Consequently, it is not necessary to supply more proofs in supporting our theoretical position. It is important to emphasize that, from our point of view, the paradigmatic analysis of doxa is rather a method than a theory, part of the interlocutors' critical device. The formal criteria of a theoretical paradigm – coherence, concision, and exhaustiveness, as expressed by Thomas Kuhn (1976), represent the points where the cooperative and rational principles of doxastic argumentation can be critically examined, intuitively by interlocutors, explicitly by theoreticians.

Being an *"assessment of something"*, doxa is dominated by axiology.

We define an axiological paradigm the multitude of empirically axiological propositions (judgments of value, practical decisions, norms, orders, etc.) that can be reduced to a doxa concept. The basic meaning is crystallized in the form of a general definition which grounds the respective ensemble of propositions in a coherent, concise, and exhaustive way. Paradigmatic analysis of doxa refers to traditionally formulated doxastic categories.

2. Premises

Before developing our commentary about the axiomatic principle of doxastic paradigms, some aspects should be clarified:

2.1. Any argumentative process is placed in the horizon of an interrogation.

Going back to Aristotle, we shall find in his Topica, the first support of the thesis enunciated above: "Une prémisse dialectique est la mise sous forme interrogative d'une idée admise par tous les hommes" (I, 10; 1932, p.14).**[iii]** The deliberative attitude and the controversial scenario of logoi and antilogoi have their roots in interrogation. "Denn Zweifel kann nur bestehen, wo eine Frage besteht; eine Frage, nur wo eine Antwort besteht, und diese nur, wo etwas gesagt werden kann" says L.Wittgenstein (1960, p. 82). Interrogative logic**[iv]** supplies the explanation of the intrinsic relationship between question and answer. The main target of the interrogative logic is to transfer the conditions of truth pertinent to the question, to the respective answer, making from both members – the question & reply – a unique issue.

2.2. Doxastic dialectics is the exclusive procedure that can establish the

fundaments of axiology.

Doxastic dialectics controls the logic of belief. It is generally accepted, though in not sufficiently rigorous terms, that doxastic dialectics can be defined as being an exchange of opinions. Given the *Principle of Uncertainty***[v]** that governs the subjectively inflected soft rationality of doxa – says the traditional doctrine – the cognitive autonomy of doxa is limited. Instead of minimizing the heuristic power of doxastic dialectics, unfavorably considered a preliminary step to episteme, we have tried – in another of our studies (Amel, 1999), to prove the cognitive autonomy of the doxa in the field of axiology: judgments of value, cultural judgments, practical judgments, etc. Certainly we cannot speak about axiological episteme, but we can affirm the reflective target of axiology. Doxastic thinking can be referred to what Kant defines as reflecting judgment: "Ist aber nur das Besondere gegeben, wozu sie das Allgemeine finden soll, so ist die Urteilskraft bloß reflektierend." (Kant, 1924 Einl & IV, p. 15 XXVI).

2.3. Doxastic dialectics belongs to the cognitive field of probable.

Aristotle, who has a double approach to logic, opposed to the logic of science the logic of contingent, which in our days can be equated with the modal logic: "Le discours selon la science appartient à l'enseignement, et il est impossible de l'employer ici, où les preuves et les discours doivent nécessairement en passer par les notions communes." (1932, p. 74/1355a). Médéric Dufour, translator of Aristotle's book, makes an explicit commentary of Aristotle's double approach of logic: "Quant il eut découvert le syllogisme, Aristote comprit qu'à côté du syllogisme scientifique dont prémisses et, par suite, conclusions sont nécessaires, il fallait admettre, pour la Dialectique et la Rhétorique, un syllogisme plus contingent et plus souple, à prémisses et à conclusion probables." (1932, pp. 13-14).

The logic of belief was defined by Hintikka as follows: "There is no reason why what is believed should be true." (1962, p. 5). Hintikka's definition consolidates the conclusions regarding the probable character of doxa.

Even if we acknowledge for the doxastic field contingent roots of rationality, and, consequently, even if doxastic dialectics intermingles dialectical with rhetorical arguments**[vi]**, the axiological target of beliefs cannot be reached without criteria of decidability.

2.4. Doxastic dialectics (axiologically oriented) opens conditions for an alternative truth, semantically constituted, and not analytically proved.

Trying to define the nature of 'doxastic truth', called by us (1999) the persuasive truth, the thing we discovered was that such a truth is more profoundly uncertain than can be proved with analytical logic. 'The alternative truth', subjectively and rhetorically involved, actually represents the axiological meaning of the disputed issue. While truth is matched to things by adequatio intellectus ad rem, as Plato-Socrates required, meaning represents a noetic content developed in consciousness through sense-giving acts. Due to the subjective 'reality' of meaning, the thesis of reasonableness of contrary statements can be judged in Protagoras' terms: man is the measure of all things.

3. Doxastic dialectics and loci communes
Given the considerations presented above and the known fact concerning doxastic instability due to its 'probable' nature, in this study we shall focus our attention on the mechanism of decidability in the axiologically oriented doxastic field.

The task is procedural: We find it profitable to follow dialectical steps, in order to establish to what extent axiological arguments claim a justification principle. At the first step of our analysis, we shall pass the test of adaequatio intellectus (argumentum) ad locos communes, particularly, we shall question the relevance of 'common notions', those definitions of doxa which are taken for granted in axiological argumentation. Aristotle, in two of his books, Topica and Rhetoric, interested in finding methods for practical judgments, emphasized the cognitive function of loci communes. For him, loci communes represent patterns of a specific type of syllogism, a shortened syllogism, named enthymema, which is based on probable premises (Topica, I, 1). The premises on which practical judgment is based are part of a fund of common notions, and, consequently, enthymema refers to that shared knowledge in an implicit way. Aristotle was the first who uncovered the mechanism of pragmatic rationality. From our point of view, adaequatio intellectus (argumentum) ad locos communes supplies a normative test, deprived of basic evidence. Hoping to reach a higher degree of rationality in the same field, we shall pass to a second step and begin to question the axiomatic power of 'common notions'**[vii]**.

Collective mentality is expressed in an ensemble of 'common notions' which compose the doxastic code. Frequently, people, in their judgments of value, ignore the common code, and make judgments following rather personal codes. And even if in every day practice people proceed spontaneously in conformity with the natural need of having clear codes of communication, it is less known that doxastic dialectics is a procedure by which men establish the 'measure' for

doxa.

In which terms can we actually speak about the measure of doxa? Can we find justification principles in virtue of which a doxastic proposition could be considered suitable to ground a certain axiological paradigm? From dialectical point of view, questioning the axiomatic power of 'common notions' means to raise a problem-type question. Given the subjective involvement of doxa, the dialectical process of establishing the measure of doxa extends in consciousness the reason of meaning inquiries.

By "justification principle" we do not understand a reasonable proof of relevance, but the transcendental reason for which an axiological definition could be taken for granted.

4. Doxastic dialectics and the cognitive process

A specification is necessary. In our opinion, doxastic dialectics represents in itself the mechanism of decidability. The interlocutors, by their argumentations, judge the rationality of their beliefs critically. The mechanism of decidability is activated by each intervention. The theoretical role we assume is to emphasize whether the doxastic mechanism of decidability reveals a justification principle, and to name it. While questioning both the subjective and rhetorical involvement of doxa, we have in view the meaning- oriented feature of doxa.

The analysis of doxastic argumentation is usually reduced to the examination of pro & con opinions, with respect to a 'probable' axiological truth. However, it is impossible to imagine a specific argumentation without acknowledging the cognitive fundaments of argumentation in general. In an extended sense, in an implicit or explicit way, doxastic argumentation is a procedure of reasonable justification, but placed within a hermeneutical frame. During a true doxastic debate, the heuristic gain is obtained by each arguer by meaning inquiry. Instead of being reductive, meaning stages compose a creative process, at the end of which the intelligible object of doxa is deepened in the arguers' consciousness.

4.1. A comprehensive view of doxa presents many possibilities of arranging meaningful relationships.

The probable nature of the doxastic field engenders paradigmatic conflicts and disputes, by means of which human culture extends its dynamic image.

In conflicts and disputes, the interrogative spirit notifies paradigmatic anomalies or paradigmatic irrelevances, manifested in several ways. Because of many reasons, the irrelevance is due to the difficulty to refer a particular case to an

axiomatic basis. In these cases, the critical position questions the relevance of the axiomatic principle: whether its definition is sufficiently coherent, concise or comprehensive. Problems inside a paradigm lead to a problem-type question.

A problem-type question engenders a problematic judgment. Problematic judgments are reflections within the field of the probable**[viii]**. Here we present some examples:

4.1.1. Paradigmatic anomaly: The riddle of Judaism.
'The problem' was exposed by the Israeli philosopher Yirmiyahu Yovel (1998, pp. 21; 24). In order to avoid any misunderstanding, we shall quote a passage from the text where the 'riddle' is explained in terms of a paradigmatic anomaly: " said his early biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, one . Hegel was a Christian thinker, but very heterodox. He placed Lutheran Christianity at the height of the world Spirit, yet as a philosopher, he negated it dialectically. ... In Christian eyes, which Hegel secularized but never abandoned, Judaism's transformation into Christianity is one of the major events in the history of salvation. This is the moment when the redeemer appears on the historical stage and is rejected by his own people. Thereby the Jews depose themselves from their divine mission in favor of Christianity, which absorbs their message while negating its flaws and raising it to a higher, more universal level. Hegel internalized the pattern of this Christian metaphor. He even made it a model of his concept of Aufhebung, a concept which means that something is negated but not annihilated; rather, its essential content is preserved and raised to a higher level of expression. For the mature Hegel, this is a basic pattern of reality and history. Every cultural form makes some genuine contribution to the world Spirit, after which it is sublated (aufgehoben) and disappears from the historical scene. Yet the Jews continued to survive long after their raison d'être had disappeared – indeed, after they no longer had a genuine history in Hegel's sense, but existed merely as the corpse of their extinguished essence. But how could it be that Judaism evaded the fate (and defied the model) of which it was itself the prime example?"

In the last sentence, Y.Yovel resumes Hegel's philosophical paradigm with respect to which Judaism appears as an anomaly, an "enigma". We call the question raised by Israeli philosopher: "But how could it be that Judaism evaded the fate (and defied the model) of which it was itself the prime example?" a problem-type question.

4.1.2. Paradigmatic break (paradigm refutation): New premises of reception.

(2) "Reality should be applied not penetrated" (Klaus Honnef, 1988, p. 76).
When contemporary aesthetics theorizes the abolition of the prejudice 'art in itself', the intention is to reduce the metaphysical dimension of art. The classical paradigm of contemplative art is refuted. The artist does no more say that the whole reality is invested with revealing power, but reality should be applied not penetrated. By mixing art with reality the real change which is at stake is the 'distance' the receiver does no more take vis-à-vis the object of art. The idea of artistic convention is extended in such a way that it implies a performative premise. The receiver becomes an active participation to a 'possible world', where the points of reference are no more those of usual life. Modern exhibitions are rather like an imaginary itinerary or like a scenario that should be performed while entering it.

4.1.3. Paradigmatic crisis: Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?
In feeble times, when Gods are dead, what should a poet do? Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit? That's the question, raised by Friedrich Hölderlin in the Elegy Brod und Wein. Disconcerted, unable to synchronize his poetic credo with the weakness of the time he lives in:
(3) Aber Freund! Wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter,
Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.

Hölderlin feels that a change of poetical vision is necessary:
(4) Aber sie (die Dichter) sind, sagst du, wie des Weingotts heilige Priester,
Welche von Land zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht.

Heidegger, in one of his philosophical essays, the title of which was inspired by Hölderlin's question: Wozu Dichter? displays a large commentary about the moment of poetical turn, announced by Hölderlin. It is easy to translate Heidegger's remarks into our terms: die dürftige Zeit is the moment of a new poetic perception of sacredness, the moment of transfer from one paradigm into another: the poetry of sublimity, illuminated by the presence of Gods, becomes anachronistic in dürftiger Zeit; visionary poets, finding themselves in deep night, going after die Spur der entflohenen Götter, discover the mysterious force which comes from the Abgrund (abyss) up: Die Dichter zogen in heiliger Nacht. In Heidegger's opinion, who dedicated this essay to Rilke's death anniversary, this is the new poetic paradigm, the poetry of Being. Rilke is the best representative of the new poetic vision, he, the poet of Being, took further Hölderlin's message.

There are an infinite number of similar examples of various kinds explicitly or implicitly questioning the foundation of value definition.

The grounding thesis of arguments is interrogated. The problem-type question opens an argumentative debate on grounding level, and the meaning of the grounding proposition is reevaluated. That is the reason we call the problem-type question a heuristic question.

4.2. Generally speaking, in every day life the most difficult problem is to include correctly a particular case into a paradigm.

Such an enterprise requires fine meaning analysis and power of discernment. Irrelevance of particular cases, with respect to a general proposition, demands explanation regarding the common sense. The rationality of the problem-raising process is judged with hermeneutical means. The process of finding meaning pertinence reshapes the entire cognitive scenario dominated by a specific doxa and consolidates the beliefs, in each interlocutor's understanding, by sense-giving acts. The three paradigmatic criteria – coherence, concision, and exhaustiveness – become stages of the meaning synthesis inside the subjective consciousness. As meaning is assumed in a differentiated way by each one, doxastic pluralism is a legitimate doxastic premise.

The premise of doxastic pluralism can induce a wrong conclusion, namely that doxastic indecidability is inherent and, consequently, doxastic dialectics never reaches an end. G.H.Gadamer was the supporter of the philosophy of an unlimited dialogue, but, like us, on hermeneutical reasons, and not due to logical shortcomings. For each arguer it is extremely difficult to coordinate the justification procedure with semantic tools, because the process of meaning assimilation is endless. During doxastic dialectics, the role of the arguer who questions the axiomatic principle is actually not to contradict, but to notice possible associative links within conceptual meanings. By raising a certain problem, both interlocutors cooperate in increasing the meaning of basic concepts.

The dialectical procedure of doxa has constitutive finality. The fundamental question of our study, namely the question regarding criteria of decidability within doxastic dialectics, directs the inquiry towards the problem of an original synthesis which represents the subjects' transcendental constitution. That means: when the axiomatic relevance of a particular concept is proved, its meaning is 'objectified' in consciousness under the form of a MORAL OBJECT. The moral

object becomes the posteriori referent of doxa**[ix]**. A moral object points to a criteria of Transcendence by which the Subjective Dimension of doxa reaches categorical justification.

By 'moral objects', man gives the measure of things, but he simultaneously establishes for himself a moral measure.

5. Conclusion

While in truth-oriented dialectics the justification principle is expressed by the law of tertium not datur, in meaning-oriented dialectics the justification principle has subjective dimension. Heidegger empasizes the grounding role of subjectivity: "Die Subjektivität ist die wesenhafte Gesetzlichkeit der Gründe, welche die Möglichkeit eines Gegenstandes zu reichen kann." (1957, p.137) Given the premise that doxastic dialectics is meaning-oriented, the referent of doxa has a semantic nature. Its axiomatic power is established by self-reflective proof. Doxastic thinking discovers its own ratio (= measure) in an original synthesis.

The cognitive force of the dilemmatic moment challenges the interlocutors' understanding, by giving them the chance to justify the meaning relevance of their inquiry. Doxastic dialectics engenders cognitive intervals between belief, doxa and opinion – respectively, between belief a noetic act, through which the idea of value is posited in consciousness, doxa the conceptual representation of the idea of value in reason, and opinion the discursive form of belief. When the justification inquiry is settled, the unity of the three levels is reconstituted under the dominance of a MORAL OBJECT.

The rational procedure of questioning axiological axioms cannot ignore pragmatic criteria: normative and situational. From the normative point of view, a problem-type question becomes relevant in confrontation with the common mentality. The normative test is relative, because common mentality is dependent upon a historically given moment (upon Zeitgeist). In spite of the heuristic target of a problem-type question, its opportunity is measured by rhetorical pertinence. There are moments when certain debates are fresh and hot, and moments when they remain irrelevant, in spite of their rational motivation.

In an interview, Gerard Philipe was asked about the reason he was chosen to play a certain type of character (which means the recognition, from the part of the player, of his belonging to a certain paradigm).

(5) "This is a pertinent question", was Gerard Philipe's answer, "but an impertinent one", he added.

NOTES

i In modern mathematical and logical theories, an axiom ceased to be defined as a proposition the truth of which is evident; instead, an axiom is defined in virtue of a paradigmatic condition. We call an axiom a concept, a proposition or a general definition which are able to impose laws of coherence within a system.

ii Gianni Vattimo, in one of his essays, The Structure of Artistic Revolutions (a chapter in Vattimo`s book, 1993), asks himself a similar question to ours: To what extent is it possible to build a discourse, about arts development, analogous to that proposed by Thomas Kuhn in his book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions? Vattimo admits that, with respect to arts, such a task is more difficult, but at the same time, much easier (see p.91).

iii See further: "Une problème dialectique est une question dont l'enjeu peut être soit l'alternative pratique d'un choix et d'un rejet, soit l'acquisition d'une vérité et d'une connaissance, une question qui soit telle, soit en elle-même, soit à titre d'instrument permettant de résoudre une question distincte d'elle-même, dans l'un et l'autre de ce genre." (T, I,11; 1967, p. 16).

iv See details about erothetic logic – another name for the interrogative logic (gr. erothema means 'question') – in G. Grecu (ed.), 1982.

v M. Billig (1982) develops the theory of soft rationality (fluid thinking, as he calls it) in argumentation. Well trained in Judaic hermeneutics and antique rhetoric, M. Billig, who is a socio-linguist, emphasizes the role of rhetoric in thinking and appeals to Quintilianus' Principle of Uncertainty, in this sense: "we can never capture the infinite variants of human affair in a finite system of psychological laws" (1989, p. 62).

vi We refer to Aristotle's definition of dialectic and peirastic arguments (1932, 1940). Dialectic argument – the argument the premises of which are probable and shared by everybody, invoked with the intention to prove its validity. Peirastic argument – the argument the premises of which are probable, invoked with the intention of persuading the interlocutor to accept it.

vii During the history of rhetoric, the concept of loci communes was mistaken for the common notions on which practical judgment is based. Later, loci communes, translated by common places, acquired a depreciative connotation, that of cliché, banality. A better equivalent of what Aristotle calls common notion is the concept of common sense, which preserves the idea that practical judgments have rational basis. New Rhetoric emphasizes the importance to rehabilitate the original meaning of loci communes, in order to rehabilitate Rhetoric itself. See, in Ch. Perelman & L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1968), remarks concerning the definition of loci

commununes as store of arguments.

viii Aristotle's definitions of both dialectic and rhetorical arguments (1932, 1940) match the way we define the problematic judgment: problematic judgment refers to what is possible, neither to what is necessary (apodictic judgment), nor to something what is real (assertorical judgment).

ix For more explanation, see R. Amel, 1999 and 2009.

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ISSA Proceedings 2010 – Polemical Discourse On The Net: "Flames" In Argumentation

Studies in CMC have investigated the phenomenon of *"flame"* and *"flaming"*, understood as aggressive and hostile interactions via email and online discussions. While borrowed from popular discourse, the notion has been the object of various inquiries in communication studies and social psychology, raising questions such as its exact definition, its exclusive or non-exclusive belonging to online communication, its

socio-psychological sources and its functions in virtual interactions. In this paper, unlike most of the scientific literature rooted in the social sciences, I will adopt a broad argumentative approach to flaming, analyzing it as a discursive and argumentative phenomenon pertaining to polemical discourse. I will borrow my case study from a specific online genre: talkbacks and, more specifically, ordinary citizens' debates concerning public affairs in electronic newspapers.

I will first devote a short section to the notion of flaming in the social sciences in order to see how it can be translated into the field of argumentation. I will then try to integrate it into a coherent theory of polemical discourse in general, and of online controversy in particular.

1. The contribution of the social sciences

Flaming has generally been viewed as an uninhibited and deregulated verbal behavior including swearing, insults and profanity, which would tend to appear more often electronically than in FTF (face-to-face) interactions. Studies on CMC have been mostly preoccupied by the damage caused to human relations by interactions on the Net. The causes of flaming have been attributed either to lack of social cues supposed to favor disregard of accepted norms of behavior; or to a specific computing subculture allowing for unconventional and irreverent verbal behavior. The persistent assumption that flames are specific to online communication has been severely challenged by later research. Lea et al. (1992, pp. 108-9), among others, argue on an experimental basis that "the putative association between flaming, uninhibited behavior and CMC is unproven". O'Sullivan & Flanagin (2003, p. 71) "situate flaming within the context of problematic interactions online and offline", rather than seeing it as a characteristic of virtual space. Thus research in the social sciences does not confirm that inflammatory remarks in verbal interaction are either exclusive to, or even more frequent on, the Net. The phenomenon in virtual interactions does however have features to be explored in their specificity.

Let us start with a question of definition. It has frequently been remarked upon that flaming is a rather vague notion that needs further specification. While "uninhibited behavior" remains a general phrase, it does, however, point to lack of restraint and to the transgression of social norms of interaction. But in order to better circumscribe the notion, it seems necessary to relate this lack of restraint to hostility. In Kayany's view (1998, pp. 1137-8), "flame can be defined as an uninhibited expression of hostility, such as swearing, calling names, ridiculing,

and hurling insults towards another person, his/her character, religion, race, intelligence, and physical or mental ability".

Does it mean that any outburst of verbal violence online constitutes in itself a flame? It is important, in this domain, to distinguish between mere use of profanity, and hostile reactions stemming out of a conflict and contributing to its escalation. Indeed, uninhibited behavior, namely, breaking ordinary norms of verbal conduct, can result in uncontrolled and purposeless verbal violence; it can thus be viewed as a mere transgression of norms pointing to a problematic interaction (O'Sullivan & Flanagin 2003, p. 85). However, a phrasing such as "the tendency to react more critically and with greater hostility over this medium leading to an escalation of conflict" (Rice & Steinfeld 1990) has the advantage of emphasizing hostility as expressed in an agonic discussion where dissent prevails. It allows for distinguishing between gratuitous use of profanity, or verbal violence per se, and the frequent use of flaming in a situation of agonistic exchange.

The intrinsic polemical nature of flaming is supported by the results of an experimental research conducted by Thompsen & Foulger (1996), where the nature of flame has been determined through a five-stage model consisting of (1) Divergence of opinions (2) Disagreement (direct reference to opposing positions and discussion) (3) Tension (attacks and counter-arguments) (4) Antagonism (attacks upon the opposing participant and ad hominem to undermine his credibility) (5) Profane antagonism (engaging in overtly hostile, belligerent behavior "while often ignoring the original issue of divergence" (pp. 228-9). In an experiment led along these lines on the perception of flaming, it turned out that the latter occurs only at stage 4, in messages showing antagonism, with a small but substantial effect of profanity (stage 5). "Based on these results", the authors conclude, "we suggest that a message is perceived as a flame when it expresses antagonism toward another participant" (p. 238).

Now, in a debate on a public issue, venting emotions and expressing aggressiveness are part of conflict management. In other words, flaming participates in the violent confrontations of antagonistic views that build up political controversy. In opposition to the theories that exclusively attribute flaming to the nature of the medium, Kayany (1998, p. 1137) attributes flaming in Newsgroups, defined as a "meeting place for people who share similar cultures and geographic origins, but are scattered in different parts of the world", to a political, cultural and religious context. It entails that flaming appears as the expression of social and political conflicts exterior to the Net, and is not a direct

result of the medium. The cultural, socio-economical, and political tensions that characterize a given society account for the passionate expressions of dissent to be found in the virtual space. In this perspective, online debates have much to tell about the divisions and antagonisms that make up our democratic societies. At the same time, these conflicts are dealt with in a particular way in the semi-public space of the talkbacks, and it is important to analyze the modalities of their management in the framework of virtual communities in order to better understand the specificity of the latter and the function of online interactions.

This leads us to the question of normative behavior in the psycho-sociological perspective. According to Thompsen, "a 'true flame' is a message in which the creator/sender intentionally violates interactional norms and is perceived as violating those norms by the receiver as well as by a third-party observer" (Thompsen 1993, p. 85). The speaker has to intentionally and consciously break the rules; the receiver (and the observer) has to interpret her verbal behavior as a deliberate violation. The main point here is that aggressiveness, attacks on the addressee, and verbal violence are perceived as behaviors breaking the rules of civility. The idea that flaming is a non-normative and harmful behavior is rejected by other scholars such as Lea et al.; they propose "an alternative explanation that views instances of flaming as normative behavior that takes place within a social context that is pre-defined or communicated via the medium" (Lea et al. 1992, p. 109). In other words, flaming occurs when "a social group becomes salient that includes uninhibited behavior among its norms" (p. 107). Even if the explanation in terms of wishful belonging to a group favoring uninhibited behavior may look somewhat unsatisfactory, it sheds light on the possibility that flames could result from a use of verbal violence fulfilling social functions. In this perspective, they are not mere transgressions but part of interactional routines (be it unconventional and irreverent routines) in given groups.

2. Flaming in a discursive and argumentative perspective
How can we make sense of the insights developed by the social sciences in argumentation theory? One possible move would be to examine flaming in terms of fallacies. It is obvious that outbursts of feelings like anger or indignation, and contemptuous dismissal of the other's point of view, cannot but distort rational arguments leading from premises to a conclusion, and break the pragma-dialectical rules for critical discussion**[i]**. The analyst would thus be committed to condemning the phenomenon or to finding ways of avoiding it. We rather suggest

to analyze the occurrences of flaming in talkbacks and to investigate how it actually works in online political discussions. Suspension of judgment, and effort at accurate description of the data in terms of discourse, will precede any critical consideration.

As a starting point, and drawing on the elements provided by our short review of the literature in the social sciences, we will link flaming in electronic discussions on public affairs to controversy, and view it in an argumentative perspective. Instead of seeing it as an uninhibited behavior, thus emphasizing socio-psychological and behavioral aspects, we will define flaming in socio-discursive terms by relating it to polemical discourse. As an integral part of polemics, it is understood as a discourse – in this case, an online interaction – consisting in a strong confrontation of antagonistic stances, where each speaker aims at discrediting her opponent in the eyes of a third party and often uses various forms of verbal violence in her attacks (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980). It refers to a peculiar way of conflict management in the framework of online controversies, where it appears as discrete verbal outbursts in the unfolding of an otherwise non-violent discussion. Thus redefined in the framework of polemical discourse, flames will be spotted and analyzed in two French newspapers' talkbacks, the electronic version of the leftist Libération, on the one hand, and of Le Figaro, a right-wing paper, on the other hand. They present many heated debates on the government bill concerning the reform of the legal retirement age and the huge demonstrations organized by the unions on June 24, 2010.

In these talkbacks, flames seem quite normative: they are frequent, predictable (they follow tacit rules) and do not disrupt the flow of the online exchange. It is important to emphasize the conditions of these electronic interactions: the participants freely elect a particular website, choose the topic and the specific article they want to react to, and can withdraw at any moment. It follows that recurrent engagement in passionate and violent controversy is not only the effect of a free choice; it also looks like one of the benefits offered by talkbacks on public issues. No doubt, flaming is, by definition, a transgression of politeness rules – there is no flaming if the post is not intended and received as an aggressive attack on an adversary, thus violating the norms of polite interaction and the ethics of discussion, or the rules of rational debate. However, it appears that this practice does not make it deviant and unbearable in CMC, nor does it seem to undermine the willingness of the participants to engage in online debate. It rather appears as a routine partaking in the talkback's agonistic exchange of

views.

Let us first emphasize that the discursive elements of this routine are related to argumentation in two different ways.

– They use arguments**[ii]**

– They rely upon arguments circulating in the global social discourse (or interdiscourse) without reformulating them

At the same time, they make use of insults or profanity and punctuate exchanges of antagonistic views with verbal violence.

2.1. The use of arguments

(a) the rule of justice

The attack upon the demonstrators, often turning into an attack upon civil servants (the "fonctionnaires"), is based on the rule of justice (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969): the same privileges should be granted to all French citizens, who are equal by definition – namely, to the public and the private sector:

please explain to me why state employees, secretaries, office clerks, administrative directors, demonstrate against retirement at age 62, whereas a worker in the assembly line, a metalworker, a worker building houses or roads, all suffering from atmospheric conditions, or the awful heat caused by combustion of materials, furnaces, exposure to chemical substances, cannot retire at 55? Militaries and policemen are entitled to retire after 15 years of activity!!!! Where is justice? Some retire as fresh as a daisy, while others have no time to take any advantage of it [...]

Le 24/06/2010 à 23:10 (Figaro)

(b) the ethotic argument

Concerning the much criticized approval of the government bill on the legal retirement age by Rocard, the elderly former PS Prime Minister, we find ironic refutations of his incompetence based on his prior ethos and reputation:

msoke (21)

Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil

Freedom of expression on the left wing is great

Yes, you are absolutely right, having been deputy, Minister of Economy gives him no legitimacy whatsoever to talk about public finances

Thursday June 24, 12h42[...]

[...]

Jeudi 24 juin à 12h42
Signaler au modérateurRépondre

globule007 (244)

BA in the Humanities, Political Sciences, ENA, inspector of Finances, deputy, Minister, Prime Minister …
Indeed, he is a beginner but he learns fast doesn't he?

(c) Use of dichotomies
mailimailo (2121) (reacting to Prime Minister Fillon's discourse on June 25, on the government's determination to pursue the reform made indispensable by demographic problems)
Démographi-cons!
I can't believe my ears! […]
Who are they laughing at?
When we know that the financing of retirement is a matter of political choice!
Actually, it is quite simple.
Who is paying?????
Kapital and/or work!!!
Friday, June 25, 16h40

2.2. Flames based on argumentation circulating in the interdiscourse
As a rule, the protest relies upon shared arguments that are widely circulated in the current social discourse. Repeated again and again in the public sphere, a given reasoning becomes self-evident: it underlies the discourse even when erased from the actual utterance. Sometimes, it is formulated by some of the internet users in the debate, while the same arguments remain implicit in other posts. This is the case in these two examples of criticism on Rocard's position, relying on the idea that postponing the legal retirement age severely affects the workers' rights and welfare while sparing the riches, thus contradicting the Socialist Party's ideology and mission:
tothony (65)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
ATTENTION
I think that even the socialists who are in favor of postponing the legal retirement age cannot support the government's bill. Because the reform is based only on that, without any other resources… People on wages are the only ones to suffer.

To put taxes on bonuses, stock options, banks, is no utopia. It is practical. In this case, to put finance at the service of our pensions. But the government does not demand anything of the rich anymore… Thus it is the government that mistakes its enemy. This postponing of the legal age cannot be supported today by a leftist, since everything relies on that.
Thursday, June 24 juin, 11h47

marsouin55 (512)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
Two-faced bastard
Rocard what a hazard
What's it got to do with him this sir let him go back to his kitchen garden and leave ideas to those still able to think… not like him who is seriously going astray by supporting a right wing politics: everything for the rich, nothing for the poor!

The argument developed by participants such as Tothony provides Marsouin with a basis on which his vehement protest is built. He hints at it without caring to repeat it. Since the argumentative schemes that justify the outcry widely circulate, the indignation and the outrage expressed by posts that do not develop arguments appear to be grounded in a tacit rather than absent rationale.

2.3. Forms of electronic flames in the argument-based posts
Whether built on explicit arguments or grounded in an implicit, underlying reasoning formulated elsewhere, the posts that emphasize common emotions give way to flames. They consist of blunt attacks expressed by various means: arguments ad hominem, insults, irony and sarcasm, use of profanity, etc. In certain contexts, some of them are quite predictable. Thus, Thomine (1087) notices about Rocard on Libé:

Without reading the comments
From the honorable libé internet users, I can bet we will find the following qualifiers:
Sold out, senile, traitor, how much did you get,
In short, nothing but vehement commentaries

Indeed, internet users make sarcastic remarks about Rocard's being senile and thus demonstrating by his own example the necessity of early retirement. Arguments ad hominem describe him as a "raving" old man (il "déraille," meaning

both that he has left the right track, namely, the way of the left, and lost his reason). Rocard is also presented as a disguised right-wing politician:

(6) gasgas (275)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
Well done Rocard !!!
The very day of the big demonstration against the bill on retirement, Rocard gets out of the woods saying that the Socialist party makes a mistake on this file. In other words: Sakozy and his Minister Woerth are right. We are waiting for Rocard to join the present government. It would be logical
[...] Thursday June 24, 11h53

In their attacks ad hominem, the posts are insulting in tone:

roger34 (2210)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
Rocard
A guy that never had any use whatsoever! To the scrap yard, fatty!!
Thursday, June 24, 16h02

The following exchange shows not only the use of profanity, but also its acceptance as a rule of the game:
dupognon (224)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
rocard connard (Rocard idiot)

Really he makes me sick this agonizing disgustingly servile guy already with the carbone tax then he says amen to all that Sarkozy wants. Is true than when you are gaga the soup is easier to swallow. He is the traitor
Thursday June 24, 20h30
Signaler au modérateurRépondre

sherazad (2950)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
dupognon
Nice rhymes, it's true what you say
Thursday June 24, 20h27

Inflammatory remarks are also directed against groups, such as civil servants (in

Le Figaro's posts):
dany HL Le Figaro Thurday June 24, 11h57
The civil servants' unions are ready to block the whole economy of France by going on strike, thus sacrificing the livelihood of millions of their fellow citizens to force them into further supporting their pensions. They want, by their egoism and lack of civic responsibility, to go on benefiting from the privileges they have obtained during decades. They have in the same way blocked the whole country by national strikes at the end of 1995 in October 2007. And none of the governments had the guts to set up the rest of the Frenchmen, namely the majority of the population, against these egoistic civil servants belonging to the trade unions and their ideology of depending on the State and exploiting it, those civil servants who live at our expenses for decades.
25/06/2010, 01h49

3. The roles of flaming in the making of a virtual community
It thus appears that flames are not only attacks upon the addressee: on the Net, they are often aimed at a third person or a group that becomes a privileged target. Such a practice of acerb and aggressive criticism greatly contributes to consolidate the virtual community by uniting it against a common enemy. It reinforces the internet users in their convictions and integrates them in a group where they join forces to attack a common target, but also to share hopes and instigate collective action. The discredited opponent (the Sarkozy government, state employees, Rocard, etc.) is completely evicted from the dialogue, so that no negotiation with him is possible. In the talkbacks examined in online papers such as Libération and Le Figaro, we find a strong tendency on the part of the internet users to create and support a community of protest.
A second form of flaming consists in interactions between internet users. I have shown elsewhere (Amossy 2010b) that the framework of the medium and the genre (talkbacks) encourages a blend of political debate pertaining to the public sphere, and of personal quarrel resulting from the Net's "conversationalisation" (Fairclough's notion [1992] pointing to the tendency of dealing with public affairs like in a private conversation). Some interactions sound like uninhibited exchanges between people familiar with each other (which is also made possible by the fact that the internet users have an interactional history on the Net):
sterne (5831)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
rocard

Hey look a socialist who is less an a...hole than the others... to be noticed ... it's getting more and more rare...
Thursday June 24, 12h03

vaderetro (479)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
Sterne
Hey, look, the house reactionary is still there... ?
Good luck for the future, because it will get harder and harder for people like you
Thursday June 24, 12h09

darkside92 (121)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
Is this all you've got to answer? To call people reactionary? You don't have anything better? It shows the depth of your analysis as well as the tolerance you exhibit!!!
Thursday June 24, 12h13

vaderetro (479)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
darkside...
Aie aie
Be careful you are going to cause an explosion!
Between us to say that those who call all the socialists idiots are assholes does not seem excessive...
Have a good day!
Thursday June 24, 12h24

The metadiscourse points to the nature and relevance of flames. Whereas Darkside blames the lack of argumentation inherent to the use of insults (a refusal to bring a valid refutation) and the lack of openness to dialogue (a refusal to take into account the opinion of others), vaderetro justifies the violence of the expression both because it is a reaction to a shameful insult directed at a respectable political party, and because it addresses an internet user who is herself recurring to flaming. But the main point here is that when participants direct flames at each other, they create an atmosphere of mutual hostility where everyone is invited to fight the addressee and (verbally) knock her out. Instead of a reinforcement of friendly relationships, we find a deepening of tensions and an

escalation of conflicts rooted in the previous socio-political positions of the internet users. It thus appears that rude and unpleasant confrontation is part of the talkback routine and paradoxically contributes to the making of the virtual community.

In this respect, two elements have to be here emphasized. The first is that the exacerbation of agonistic confrontation between internet users plays a role in the construction of a united group whose members can find comfort in their common fight and encourage each other. This is what happens in the following posts of internet users who attack an attempt at justifying Rocard, and unite in a common fight:

urion (255)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil

AT LAST a true socialist!!
Rocard shows once more the road to what should be a modern Socialist party. Thanks Mister Rocard and bravo. The simpletons who are of course going to throw their stupid posts will scream but as they are uneducated idiots it does not matter. Other PS personalities who do not dare yet talk like Mr Rocard will do it and it is a chance for our country. Once again bravo and thanks Mr. Rocard
Thursday June 24, 11h50

zythum (6657)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
urion

Well at last a true socialist … of the right wing
Greetings from the simpletons
Thursday June 24, 11h50

vaderetro (479)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil
urion
At last a true socialist who defends the rights of 10% of the French who are in possession of 50% of the financial patrimony… (Thursday, June 24, 11h59)

chat_roux (260)
Inscrit Libé +Suivre cet internaute | Profil

Don't agree!

A modern Socialist Party should demand for a retirement at age 95, a cancellation of paid holidays, 95 hours a week paid as 25, death penalty for the unemployed and the return of slavery. All the rest is but an old-fashioned stand
Thursday June 24, 12h19

This brings us to the second point. It appears that the virtual community is by no means homogenous (even though the internet users are readers of papers known as "left wing" and "right wing"). It is composed of citizens who share the same national space but sometimes deeply disagree on fundamental issues. Talkbacks in the electronic press give them the possibility to "meet" opponents with whom they might not have the opportunity to freely discuss in real life. In the virtual space, they can confront people who represent other stances and defend other interests. It provides them with an imaginary agora – though of a very special kind. Stripped of their social authority by the use of pseudonyms, the participants are like masks voicing free and discordant opinions in a carnivalesque forum, in Bakhtin's sense: in a space devoid of consecrated truth, ideas are endlessly tested and contested in an irreverent form. In this public place where the virtual forum both duplicates and modifies the real ones, arguments pro and contra are voiced, conflicts are expressed through both rational and highly emotional channels, divisions between social and political groups are made conspicuous to all the parties involved. Talkbacks thus allow for the constitution of virtual communities that are dominated by the tensions and conflicts tearing apart society as a whole. The choice to belong to such a virtual community, and the desire to remain part of it despite its brutal verbal confrontations, demonstrate the importance of a space where polemical exchanges can thrive. Although, but perhaps also because, they circulate well-known arguments and repetitive oppositions, the posts participate in the dynamics of the democratic sphere where political issues are part of the citizen's life. As an engaged citizen, the internet user needs to find a locus for discussion, confirmation, examination of other points of views, but also confrontation with those who do not think like her and which whom she has, however, to co-exist. She can, with them, react on the spot to current affairs, listening to the others' claims, discussing with them and fighting them without having to care for hierarchies or politeness rules. This could be one of the functions of flaming in particular, and of polemical discourse in general – meaning we have to understand polemics as one of argumentation's poles (Amossy 2010a) in a broad definition of argumentation as a continuum going from co-construction of common answers to the violent confrontation of antagonistic theses.

NOTES

[i] For an essay of Internet Political discussion from a pragma-dialectical point of view, see Lewinski 2010.

[ii] On the use of arguments in talkbacks, see Chaput 2006. On political talkbacks in French newspapers, see Marcoccia 2003.

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ISSA Proceedings 2010 – The Reasonableness Of Retracting A Standpoint In A Political Interview

1. Responding to an accusation of inconsistency in a political interview

Accusing a politician of being inconsistent is common practice for interviewers in a political interview. In a political interview, interviewers are interested in gaining information from their interlocutors but, more often than not, their questions require the politician to clarify and justify his views. Questions by means of which an inconsistency is pointed out are an excellent means of urging the politician to justify his views before the listening, reading or television-watching audience, that is, in fact, the primary addressee in a political interview.[i] The audience presumably values political consistency and expects a politician who is inconsistent to account for this lack of consistency.

A charge of inconsistency may affect the politician's image in the eyes of the public negatively. The politician, being well aware of the possible damage, more often than not tries to answer in a way that makes him no longer look inconsistent. Possible responses, among many others, are avoiding discussing the criticism of inconsistency, giving the inconsistency a positive connotation and retracting the earlier standpoint so that the politician is no longer committed to two inconsistent standpoints.

In this paper, I will concentrate on the cases in which the politician retracts a

standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency. I will be concerned with the evaluation of such responses from a pragma-dialectical perspective.**[ii]** The argumentative move at hand will be seen as an instance of strategic manoeuvring reconstructed as part of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion**[iii]** by means of which a politician is taken to be dialectically interested in defining clearly the difference of opinion and rhetorically in doing so in his own favor. The evaluation of the politician's move of retracting a standpoint will be carried out by applying a set of soundness conditions. These conditions will constitute the criteria for identifying the move as reasonable or unreasonable.

2. Reasonable confrontational strategic manoeuvring

In the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, the arguers' concern is to define the difference of opinion without hindering the critical testing procedure. Viewed from a dialectical perspective, the arguers are interested in clearly defining the issues that are at the heart of the difference of opinion and making explicit the positions they assume regarding these issues. From a rhetorical perspective, they are concerned with steering the confrontation towards a favorable definition of the difference of opinion and assuming a position that increases the chances of making their standpoint acceptable (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002). Confrontational strategic manoeuvring is considered reasonable as long as the combined pursuit of defining the difference of opinion and doing so favorably does not violate one of the discussion rules in accordance with which the critical testing procedure is applied.**[iv]**

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007, p. 380) have formulated three general soundness conditions for strategic manouevring. These conditions make clear what the general requirements are for a move not to violate the rules for critical discussion. In accordance with these general conditions, it can be judged whether the norms specified in the rules for critical discussion are violated. According to them, every instance of strategic manoeuvring, whether it is carried out in the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage or the concluding stage of a critical discussion, should in principle (a) *enable* an analytically relevant continuation of the dialectical route that is taken and should *lead to one of the outcomes* of the discussion stage concerned (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009, p. 14); (b) respond *to the preceding move* in the dialectical route that is taken (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009, p. 14), and (c) be *formulated* in such a way that it can be *interpreted* as enabling a relevant

continuation and being responsive to the preceding move (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009, p. 14).

Each discussion stage, however, has its specific strategic maneuvers which need to be evaluated differently depending on the outcome pursued at the stage concerned. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the soundness conditions in accordance with which *confrontational* strategic manoeuvring to which the politician's manoeuvring concerned belongs can be evaluated.

Taking the first general soundness condition into account, confrontational strategic manoeuvring should further the achievement of any of the possible outcomes of the confrontation stage: creating a non-mixed difference of opinion, creating a mixed difference of opinion or ending the discussion.[v] Although these outcomes are not all favorable to an arguer, a participant who maneuvers strategically should allow for any of them to be reached and should not prevent the other participant from taking a dialectical route that may lead to a different outcome than the favored one. For example, the outcome favored by an antagonist who advances an accusation of inconsistency in the confrontation stage is to bring the process of defining the difference of opinion to an end. This outcome can be achieved by making the protagonist retract his standpoint in response to the accusation. In order for an accusation of inconsistency to be a sound move, however, it should leave open the protagonist's option to maintain his standpoint. Maintaining a standpoint could lead to a non-mixed or a mixed difference of opinion, outcomes which are both unfavorable for an antagonist who is making an accusation of inconsistency (Mohammed 2009).

The second condition that needs to be fulfilled for confrontational strategic manoeuvring not to hinder the critical testing procedure is that the move should be a relevant response to the preceding move. This condition requires that an arguer should ensure that his move is relevant to the move of the other party in the discussion. For instance, in the confrontation stage, a request for clarification should be responded to by means of a usage declarative that provides the expected clarification (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984).

Taking the third general soundness condition into account, confrontational strategic manoeuvring should be performed so clearly that the other party understands that the move is relevant to the previous move as well as that it aims to obtain a particular interactional effect. This condition is meant to eliminate any

hindrance to achieving one of the possible outcomes of the discussion caused by the use of unclear language. For example, an accusation of inconsistency needs to be performed so clearly that the accused understands that the accuser attributes to him two inconsistent commitments and demands him to retract one of them (Mohammed 2009).

Each argumentative move that is an instantiation of confrontational strategic manoeuvring should meet the soundness conditions just outlined. Although each move should meet these conditions, specific soundness conditions need to be developed. Such conditions will provide the specific criteria for deciding when a rule for critical discussion is violated in each particular case. For example, every form of criticism in the confrontation stage needs to meet the three general soundness conditions in order not to hinder the critical testing procedure. However, an accusation of inconsistency (as a form of criticism) needs to be evaluated by taking into account the following: (a) whether the accuser is justified in attributing the two inconsistent commitments (the second soundness condition), (b) whether the move is clear enough for the accused to understand what he should do in response to such a charge (the third soundness condition), and (c) whether the move precludes the accused from accepting or not accepting the accusation (the first soundness condition) (Mohammed 2009).

My analysis of cases in which an interviewer accuses various British politicians of being inconsistent revealed that the politicians who respond by retracting a standpoint acknowledge that there is an inconsistency but try to turn the discussion in their favor by reformulating the original standpoint (Andone 2010). In the political domain, the politician's role obliges him to avoid simply conceding that he was wrong. Reformulating the original standpoint is an effective way to live up to the institutional expectations while accepting that there is an inconsistency which cannot be maintained.

By reformulating his standpoint, a politician attempts to define the difference of opinion in such a way that the interviewer retracts his doubt concerning the standpoint and ideally he will not make another accusation of inconsistency. After all, a politician who constantly gives room to doubts about the consistency of his words or actions is perceived at least as unclear, indecisive and lacking well-founded principles. The politician's rhetorical attempt to define the difference of opinion in his favor has to be balanced by the dialectical attempt to remain within the boundaries of reasonableness. In order to judge whether the pursued balance

is indeed realized I will formulate soundness conditions for the strategic manoeuvring concerned. In order to decide when a rule for critical discussion has been violated, criteria are necessary for judging whether the norms stipulated in the rules for critical discussion have been violated. It is precisely these criteria which my set of soundness conditions will provide for assessing the reasonableness of a politician's strategic manoeuvring.

3. Conditions for reasonably retracting a standpoint
The first soundness condition for confrontational strategic manoeuvring stipulates that favorable as well as unfavorable outcomes resulting from defining the difference of opinion may both be reached after the move has been made. For the manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it, this implies that the protagonist should not hinder the antagonist in taking dialectical routes that lead to one of the three possible outcomes of the confrontation stage. In my characterization of the strategic manoeuvring concerned (Andone 2010), I have shown that the favorable outcomes at the juncture at which an accusation of inconsistency is made are as follows: leading the antagonist to retract his doubt (in a non-mixed discussion), and leading the antagonist to retract the opposite standpoint (in a mixed discussion). An unfavorable outcome of the strategic manoeuvring concerned is reached when the antagonist maintains his criticism expressed by means of mere doubt or by advancing and/or upholding the opposite standpoint.

The requirement that favorable and unfavorable outcomes should not be precluded means that the protagonist's manoeuvring should leave open two options for the antagonist: (a) accepting the protagonist's strategic manoeuvring by retracting his criticism and no longer advancing new criticism, and (b) not accepting the protagonist's strategic manoeuvring by upholding the current criticism and/or advancing new criticism. In order for the protagonist's confrontational manoeuvring to leave open these two options, the following *condition of openness* needs to be fulfilled:
Confrontational strategic manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency should leave open all the other party's available options to continue the current discussion, including the option of advancing a new accusation of inconsistency.

The condition of openness provides a criterion for judging whether the norm for critical discussion specified in the Freedom Rule has been violated. The Freedom

Rule stipulates that "discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into discussion" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 190). The condition of openness is not fulfilled in the case in which the antagonist's freedom to advance moves that realize illocutionary acts consisting of the illocutionary negation of the commissive *accepting* is obstructed. Just as the protagonist has the right to replace his original standpoint by advancing a modified standpoint, the antagonist should also enjoy the right to advance new criticism against the same protagonist. The freedom of advancing new criticism includes advancing another accusation of inconsistency.

The violation of the condition of openness by a protagonist who maneuvers strategically by retracting a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency and advancing a modified standpoint blocks the revision and flux of opinions, because the antagonist is prevented from exercising his rights in the discussion. This blocking may obstruct the process of resolving a difference of opinion in several ways. Two prominent cases of possible violations of the condition of openness are putting pressure on the antagonist by threatening him with sanctions and by attacking him personally. A protagonist who resorts to threats violates the antagonist's freedom by means of an *argumentum ad baculum* aimed at eliminating the antagonist from the discussion. A protagonist launching a personal attack becomes guilty of an *ad hominem* fallacy aimed at silencing the opponent.

In the activity type of a political interview, it seems sensible to assume that politicians will often find subtle ways of violating the condition of openness. This assumption stems from the institutional characteristic that politicians try to give an account of their words or actions while striving at the same time to create a positive image of themselves for the audience at home. The politicians' aspirations to appear as political representatives whose words and actions are up to standard motivate them to design their strategic manoeuvring in such a way that the interviewer is prevented from advancing and maintaining impending criticism. Since obviously, by virtue of his role, the interviewer has to criticize the politicians so that they answer for their words and actions, the politicians can as a rule only hope to soften the harshness with which they are questioned.

The politician's attempt at minimizing the critique with which he is confronted in a political interview can sometimes go as far as trying to preclude the interviewer from continuing to pursue a critical line of inquiry. Using very subtle means of

attacking the interviewer, the politician tries to prevent his interlocutor from putting forward criticism, especially such fierce criticism as an accusation of inconsistency. Such is the case in an argumentative exchange from the BBC *Politics Show* in which Jon Sopel interviewed Alan Duncan on December 9, 2007. At the time, Duncan was Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in Great Britain. Asked by Sopel to express a view on the issue of nuclear energy, Duncan advances a standpoint according to which he favors the use of nuclear energy. This standpoint is met with criticism, because, according to Sopel, it is inconsistent with a previously expressed standpoint. Sopel quotes Duncan's earlier words which are an indication of an unfavorable attitude towards the use of nuclear energy. Because denying the inconsistency is almost impossible, Duncan's remaining option is to distance himself from the current standpoint, which he does in the following way:

(1)

Alan Duncan:

*I think what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy. I think it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words and I think the policy as it has always been is exactly as I've just explained.***[vi]**

In his reply, Duncan introduces a dissociation. Without doing so explicitly, he assumes a distinction between the nuclear waste *policy* (of which he now approves) and nuclear waste *practice* (which he claims to have opposed earlier).**[vii]** The introduction of the dissociation enables Duncan to give a particular interpretation of his standpoint – presented as the less important one (concerning the practice) – in which he gives up this standpoint, while maintaining another interpretation of the standpoint (concerning the policy) presented as the most important one.

The tactic employed by Duncan is potentially rhetorically advantageous, because it connects well with the preference of the watching audience for a consistent politician. Duncan does away with the inconsistency by claiming that his standpoint now concerns the policy, while in the past it concerned the practice. But the attempt to be rhetorically strong transgresses the bounds of reasonableness. The way in which his strategic manoeuvring is formulated is an attempt at precluding Sopel from maintaining his criticism. Duncan's remark that *it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words* is an indirect attack on Sopel conveying two things: (a) that it is of no use to discuss the issue of being inconsistent (*it's*

unhelpful), and (b) that Sopel is obsessed with minor aspects (*it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words* contains the presupposition that Sopel "got hooked on two words").

By means of this double attack, Duncan tries to put an end to the discussion about the Conservatives' view on the use of nuclear energy. In the first place, his attempt could prevent Sopel from maintaining his criticism because it highlights that his constant questioning on the matter is simply unhelpful: according to Duncan, the Conservatives' position at the moment is obviously related to the policy, which is a different matter than the previous position which had to do with the practice of using nuclear energy. Further discussion on this, Duncan seems to suggest, is not useful because things are clear now. Presenting Sopel's questioning as unhelpful can prevent him from going on with his line of inquiry. Because the interview is directed at an audience, which judges the performance of the politician as well as that of the interviewer, if Sopel were to continue in the same way, it would look as if he was nitpicking. This is obviously an image which Sopel would rather avoid in a political interview. Had the same remark been used in a conversation between friends, the other party would have had more freedom to continue the discussion by maintaining criticism. There would be no concern for an audience that could prevent him from persisting in criticizing his interlocutor. In this context, this possibility is precluded.

The second part of Duncan's attack is equally harsh as the first part in which he highlights the uselessness of the discussion. He points out that Sopel is obsessed with Duncan's words about nuclear energy, which after all, are just "two words." Apart from the strong negative qualification that Sopel is hooked, the reference to "two words" is an endeavor to present the disagreement at issue as just a matter of verbal disagreement. Duncan wants to suggest that Sopel is overprecise about his use of words with regard to the use of nuclear energy. In reality, Sopel remarks that Duncan's statements in another interview indicate a change of position with regard to the use of nuclear energy, which needs to be clarified and justified. Sopel's criticism, fully pertinent in a political interview, is presented by Duncan as concentrating on a matter that is irrelevant. He seems to leave the impression that instead of discussing matters of interest and importance for the public, Sopel concentrates in the exchange on a minor issue of language use.

The second general condition of reasonableness for confrontational strategic manoeuvring requires that a move be responsive to the move that precedes it.

This means that the politician's strategic manoeuvring should be a relevant reaction to the expression of criticism advanced by the interviewer in his accusation of inconsistency.

Whether a move can be considered relevant depends on the goals with which it is put forward. Since every move constitutes an illocutionary act, it is by definition put forward with a communicative and an interactional goal. The communicative goal concerns obtaining understanding of the illocutionary act, and the interactional goal concerns obtaining acceptance of the illocutionary act (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984). As a reaction to an accusation of inconsistency, the manoeuvring at hand is considered relevant when it shows understanding of the accusation of inconsistency and it indicates acceptance of the accusation of inconsistency. Acceptance implies, among other things, that the speaker understood the accusation and takes the accusation to be correctly performed. Taking the accusation to be correctly performed means assuming that the speaker has the intentions and preferences specified in the correctness conditions for an accusation of inconsistency. In order to 'fully' accept the antagonist's accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist should not only recognize that the antagonist has certain intentions and preferences – as specified in the correctness conditions for an accusation – but he must also share these intentions and preferences or be ready to share them (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984).

The politician who in his response accepts the accusation of inconsistency implicitly agrees that the inconsistency should be resolved so that the discussion is no longer obstructed. His strategic manoeuvring should at least convey that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with a commitment to another standpoint on the same issue. Unless the manoeuvring resolves the inconsistency, it cannot be a relevant response to the accusation to which it reacts. In pragma-dialectical terms, the politician's strategic manoeuvring by means of retracting a standpoint and reformulating it is relevant to the accusation of inconsistency when an interactional relation is envisaged between the two elements (the politician's manoeuvring and the accusation of inconsistency). This relation is functional in light of the goal of defining the difference of opinion clearly (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992). Pragma-dialectically, defining the difference of opinion that is free of inconsistencies is part of this contribution (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 95)

That the politician's response should resolve the inconsistency of which he is

accused does not make it possible to judge fully the relevance of the manoeuvring. It is specific of the move of retraction that it involves the illocutionary negation of an earlier illocutionary act. That is to say, a protagonist who retracts a standpoint makes it understood that he is no longer committed to the propositional content of the earlier standpoint. For the manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it to be relevant, it needs to count both as a relevant reaction of acceptance of the accusation of inconsistency and as a relevant reaction of non-acceptance of a previous standpoint (i.e. the retraction should concern the standpoint advanced earlier which is no longer found acceptable). In order for the strategic manoeuvring to be evaluatively relevant in these two senses, the following *condition of relevance* needs to be fulfilled:

In confrontational strategic manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist should give up one of the inconsistent standpoints altogether, thus resolving the inconsistency.

The manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it is a violation of the soundness condition of relevance when the protagonist gives the impression that the original standpoint has been retracted, but in fact maintains some interpretation that is exploited afterwards to defend a standpoint that is easier to justify. This way of manoeuvring is fallacious because it prevents the original standpoint from being criticized by conveying the false impression that the original standpoint is given up. The antagonist will no longer challenge the protagonist for the original standpoint because he is led to believe that the protagonist is not committed to it any longer. This view is supported by Kauffeld's observation that commitments are undertaken by speakers in order to generate presumptions which provide addressees with reason to act in ways desired by the speaker (2003). A speaker who retracts a standpoint undertakes a commitment generating the presumption that he can no longer be held committed to the acceptability of an earlier standpoint. That means that an antagonist can no longer challenge the protagonist with respect to the standpoint he gives up.

This immunization strategy may constitute the violation of two pragma-dialectical rules. The derailed manoeuvring is a violation of the *Freedom Rule*, because the antagonist is prevented from calling the original standpoint into question. The fallacious manoeuvring can also be a violation of the *Obligation-to-defend Rule*,

because the protagonist may abusively exploit that he is (supposedly) no longer committed to the original standpoint by refusing to defend the original standpoint if challenged to do so. The Obligation-to-defend Rule stipulates that "discussants who advance a standpoint may not refuse to defend this standpoint when requested to do so" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p.191).

a fallacious way of manoeuvring strategically is at issue in the following fragment from a discussion between Jon Sopel and William Hague on November 12, 2006. At the time, Hague, former Conservative Party leader, was the British Shadow Foreign Secretary. The interview from which the exchange has been taken concerns the Conservatives' support to the British government concerning the issue of combating terrorism. One aspect related to this issue concerns the introduction of biometric identity cards. Drawing on the institutional convention of discussing political matters for which the politician can be held to account, Sopel makes an issue of one of the Conservatives' political stances indicating lack of support for the government's proposal to introduce biometric identity cards. The Conservatives' non-supportive attitude is met with criticism from Sopel because, according to him, it is inconsistent with an earlier supportive attitude towards the introduction of biometric identity cards. In response to the charge of inconsistency, Hague acknowledges that attributing an inconsistency to him is correct. But he argues subsequently that the original standpoint (indicating a supportive attitude) concerned the principle of introducing biometric identity cards, whereas the current standpoint (indicating a non-supportive attitude) concerns the practice of introducing biometric identity cards. By responding like this, Hague justifies his words, as he is institutionally obliged to do, and can give the impression that the inconsistency has been repaired:

(2)

William Hague:

We supported, I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out. The details are not impressive and the grasp of detail and the ability to control the costs of the current government is so terrible, that it's not a scheme that we can support.

In this fragment, the aiming for rhetorical advantages seems to override the concern for reasonableness. Despite accepting that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with a commitment to an earlier standpoint on the same issue because the standpoints are inconsistent, Hague

retracts only 'part' of the original proposition of the standpoint he advanced earlier (concerning the principle of introducing biometric identity cards). In itself, there is nothing wrong with this manoeuvring. After all, making a dissociation, which involves retracting an interpretation while maintaining another, is not by definition fallacious. On the contrary, as van Rees (2009) shows, it can be an excellent way of making a clarification.

What derails in Hague's manoeuvring is that he makes it seem as if Sopel can no longer call the original standpoint into question. Duncan claims that the original standpoint concerned the principle of introducing biometric identity cards. However, the original standpoint, as can be inferred from the accusation of inconsistency, concerned the unitary concept of support for the introduction of biometric identity cards. Otherwise, there would not have been an accusation of inconsistency, or the inconsistency could have been easily denied because it is unjustified. This manoeuvring of maintaining a certain interpretation of the standpoint and retracting only one interpretation of the original standpoint is a way of immunizing against further criticism the original standpoint that the Conservatives support the introduction of biometric identity cards. In a political interview, claiming that the original standpoint had a different interpretation is easy to get away with. The record of the original interview is not immediately available, which makes it very hard for Sopel to refute Duncan's claim. Because Sopel cannot easily find evidence that would reject Hague's claim (especially since the earlier interview took place around two years before), he cannot uphold a demand for justification.

The third soundness condition for confrontational strategic manoeuvring requires that a move be formulated in such a way that the antagonist can interpret it as a relevant response to the previous move and that all possible continuations of the discussion (leading to the creation of a non-mixed discussion, the creation of a mixed discussion, or the end of the discussion) are allowed. The first two soundness conditions for strategic manoeuvring by means of retracting a standpoint and advancing a reformulated standpoint stipulate that (a) the antagonist should not be prevented from maintaining his criticism or advancing new criticism, and (b) the inconsistency should be resolved. If the antagonist does not accept the politician's manoeuvring, he should be allowed to maintain his criticism or advance new criticism if he finds this necessary. He may express his non-acceptance of the protagonist's manoeuvring by denying that it answers the

charge of inconsistency, as required by the essential condition of an accusation of inconsistency.

In order for the first two soundness conditions to be fulfilled, the strategic maneuvers should be adequately formulated. That means that the protagonist should be so clear that the antagonist understands what his options are for continuing the discussion and that the protagonist's response resolves the inconsistency as required by the accusation of inconsistency. Otherwise, the antagonist may not understand that the protagonist's manoeuvring is an attempt at eliminating the inconsistency. The strategic manoeuvring concerned should fulfill the following soundness *condition of clarity*:
The moves in confrontational strategic manoeuvring that involve retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency should be formulated as clearly as required for a proper understanding.

Failure to fulfill soundness condition (c) constitutes a violation of the *Language Use Rule* of a critical discussion. This rule requires that "discussants may not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p.195).**[viii]** A formulation that is not clear enough for the purpose of the communicative exchange may amount to the fallacy of misuse of unclearness.**[ix]** An example of fallacious manoeuvring that violates the soundness condition of clarity is an obscure wording that gives the false impression of resolving the inconsistency.

In order to show how the soundness condition of clarity can be applied, I will evaluate Yvette Cooper's manoeuvring in the discussion with Sopel on July 15, 2007 on the issue of housing in Britain. At the time of the interview, Cooper was the Housing Minister of Great Britain. As can be expected, Cooper is interviewed on an issue for which she is in the first place responsible: housing in Great Britain. Sopel criticizes Cooper with regard to the power of the local councils to take decisions on the issue of housing, because, as he puts it, she said in the beginning of the interview that local councils are free to take decisions about housing, whereas later in the same interview she said that local councils are not in fact free to do so. Cooper replies as follows:
(3)
Yvette Cooper:
No, we're clear that the way that the regional planning process works and the way that local councils have to wait together, they will all have to accept their

responsibility to deliver more homes. Where they have the flexibilities around where within their community the homes should be built, you know, what the best location is, whether they've got good brown fields available and what kinds of homes.

By embedding a clarification in her answer, Cooper accepts that what she said in the beginning of the interview has been unclear. In her answer, addressing directly Sopel's accusation of inconsistency, she admits that her original (unclear) standpoint about the power of the local councils is tenable only if a more limited interpretation is given: local councils have the power to decide about the location, the brown fields and the kinds of homes. Cooper restricts the decisional power of the local councils originally advocated by retracting her standpoint and reformulating it in terms of responsibilities (*they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes).* In this way, she leaves the impression that there is no inconsistency and clarifies what might have been unclear. Cooper goes for a middle solution: she retracts what she said in the beginning, reformulates that in terms of responsibilities and clarifies how these responsibilities are divided. Cooper clears herself from an apparent inconsistency by retracting her standpoint advanced in the beginning of the interview that local councils have the freedom to decide what the best location is. Following this retraction, she emphasizes that whether to build or not is not a matter of decision for the local councils. Finally, she outlines what kinds of decisions local councils can take, namely decisions with regard to the location of houses and the kinds of houses that are to be built.

Cooper's strategic manoeuvring is a good example of how the soundness condition of clarity is fulfilled. Her response is clear enough for the purpose of the exchange in which she and Sopel are involved. In virtue of her role in a political interview, she clarifies her view with regard to the matter on which she is interviewed and subsequently justifies it to give the account expected of her. The clarification is sufficiently precise for Sopel, the audience at home and the local councils to understand how responsibilities are divided and where the flexibilities lie. In this way, Sopel is not in any way prevented from continuing the discussion asking for more clarification or justification if he wants to.

4. Conclusion
In this paper, a politician's strategic manoeuvring involving the retraction of a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency has

been evaluated by applying criteria that relate to the norms of critical discussion. I have derived these criteria from a set of three soundness conditions that I have established in order to assess the reasonableness of the manoeuvring at hand. The starting point for formulating the soundness conditions has been that an instance of fallacious strategic manoeuvring occurs when a move or a sequence of moves inhibit the realization of the dialectical goal of the stage concerned. In the particular cases evaluated in this paper, the dialectical goal of the confrontation stage of defining clearly the difference of opinion has been taken into account.

The first soundness condition (condition of openness) ensures that a protagonist whose standpoint is declared inconsistent with another standpoint he advanced previously and who responds by retracting a standpoint and reformulating it, leaves open all dialectically possible continuations of the discussion. That is to say that the antagonist should not be prevented from maintaining his criticism and/or advancing new criticism. The violation of this condition gives rise to fallacies in which the antagonist is attacked with the aim of excluding him from the discussion. The second soundness condition (condition of relevance) requires that the protagonist resolve the inconsistency with which he is charged by retracting one of the criticized standpoints altogether. This condition is not fulfilled when the protagonist maintains some interpretation of the original standpoint that is exploited afterwards to defend a standpoint that is easier to justify. Doing so conveys the false impression that the original standpoint is given up so that the antagonist no longer raises criticism about this standpoint. The condition of relevance is also violated when the protagonist abusively exploits that he is supposedly no longer committed to the original standpoint by refusing to defend it if challenged to do so. The third soundness condition (condition of clarity) requires a formulation of the strategic manoeuvring concerned that is as clear as necessary for a proper understanding. The violation of this condition takes place when the lack of clarity is exploited in such a way that the other party does not understand what his options are for continuing the discussion and to cover for the inconsistency not being resolved.

NOTES
i An interviewer's accusations may point out an inconsistency between a politician's words and actions (between what the politician claims and what he does) or between his words (for instance, between two standpoints on the same issue).

ii In the pragma-dialectical approach, argumentation is viewed as part of a critical discussion in which the participants try to resolve a difference of opinion on the merits. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst define argumentation as "a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint" (2004, p. 1).

iii The accusation of inconsistency is seen as a way of expressing criticism (by casting doubt or advancing an opposite standpoint) concerning a standpoint.

iv In the ideal model of a critical discussion, the exchange of argumentative moves is regulated by a critical procedure specifying the rules in accordance with which the resolution of the difference of opinion could be achieved on the merits. The rules for critical discussion constitute for each stage the norms of reasonableness authorizing the performance of certain types of kinds of moves.

v The idea that strategic manoeuvring should allow for both favorable and unfavorable outcomes to come about is already prescribed in the definition of strategic manoeuvring. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007) make clear that every move is by definition an attempt to steer the discussion towards a *favorable* outcome without overruling the commitment to having a reasonable exchange. Having a reasonable exchange of moves involves, among other things, that the parties should not prevent each other from expressing freely moves that might be unfavorable to the other party, such as criticisms.

vi All examples are presented as they are transcribed on the BBC website. For my purpose, a transcription that guarantees readability is sufficient, because prosodic and other conversational phenomena are irrelevant.

vii Van Rees (2009. pp. 31-44) provides various kinds of clues that can serve as indicators for the existence of a dissociation. Two of these clues are present in Duncan's response: (a) it comes in an attempt to resolve an inconsistency pointed out by the other party ('But you were completely different, you were very skeptical there'), and (b) one of the dissociated terms is valued as being more important ('what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy').

viii The Language Use Rule does not impose an obligation on the protagonist to formulate his move explicitly, since it is often perfectly possible for the antagonist, using sentence meaning and contextual information, to recognize what is intended with the move even if it is implicit.

ix A closely related fallacy amounts to the misuse of ambiguity, as in the cases in which the speaker is lexically ambiguous.

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