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Why "Visual Arguments" aren't Arguments

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Title: Why "Visual Arguments" aren't Arguments
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Commentary: L. Groarke

Introduction

        In a series of papers, Leo Groarke has called for the development of a theory of visual argument, and he has argued that informal logic can and should be reconfigured so as to support this development. A number of other writers appear to support this point: Blair (1996), Birdsell (1996), Shelley (2001), perhaps also Gilbert (1997) and Slade (2002). The lone dissent I am aware of is that of Fleming (1996). I share some of Fleming's reservations but rather than repeat or dwell on those, I here seek to articulate my reservations. In this paper I deal only with Groarke's position and mainly with his 1996 paper—"Logic, Art and Argument."[1] Let me say that Groarke has raised an important and interesting issue, and the discussion he has stimulated is important for informal logic and the theory of argument.
        When I look at the case that Groarke (and others) have made for visual argument, I understand why they are minded to claim that there are visual arguments, for it certainly seems plausible to say that pictures or images can sometimes be persuasive, can sometimes—not always but sometimes--have argumentative force. In spite of that seeming plausibility, I believe there are good reasons to resist this extension.
        My reservations will emerge in the course of dealing with three questions:

        Question 1: Why do we need a theory of visual argument?
        Question 2: What exactly would a theory of visual argument be?
        Question 3: What benefits would accrue if we possessed such a theory?

After suggesting that Groarke's answers to these questions are problematic, I propose to add some further skeptical considerations and then end by asking what is at issue here and why it matters.

1. Why do we need a theory of visual argument?

        In *Logic, Art, and Argument*, Groarke emphasizes the importance of visual images. They are, he notes, "especially pervasive in everyday discourse" (105). Indeed some [Hayakawa] hold that "the visual is more powerful than the verbal." That combines with the view (attributed to Langsdorf) that informal logicians have been "curiously unaware of the needs of visual literacy" (106). Informal logic has done little to contribute to visual literacy. The reason for this, Groarke suggests following Gilbert, stems from a prejudice for "the linear discursive model of rationality" (107). What about this rationale?

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First, Groarke and others are certainly right in calling attention to the prominence of the visual in contemporary culture. Indeed, it seems clear that the 20th century witnessed an important cultural shift, and sometimes it seems to me that shift is so immense that I have real questions about to the degree to which our students are capable of functioning in what I call argumentative space. They certainly seem to have great difficulty seeing the structure of elementary arguments.

Second, Groarke seems to assume that if visual literacy is to be achieved, it needs input from informal logic.[2] As one long associated with informal logic, I am delighted when people find it useful. Yet it seems to me, for reasons that emerge later, that other methods of analysis and interpretation exist that are likely to be even more helpful in the aim of developing visual literacy: deconstruction, semiotic theories, message design theories, etc

I would have thought that one would seek to promote visual literacy by introducing students to modes of interpretation that focus specifically on the visual dimension of messages (in which the notion of argument is remote). For example, with respect to film, if you are going to understand the genius of a Fellini or a Kubrick, you will need to know a lot about symbolism and film technique, but I suspect very little about argument (in any robust sense). If you want to instill in students the ability to appreciate about painting, then you will need to teach them about how to observe a work of art, what to look for. Informal logic is not going to be of help much there. If you want student to know how ads function, students will be better off reading Carl Wrighter's *I Can Sell You Anything* or David Ogilvy'*s Confessions of an Advertising Man* than Howard Kahane's *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*.[3] I don't mean to suggest that logic (informal logic) has nothing to offer the goal of helping students to become visually literate, but I differ with Groarke on how that is to happen.

Groarke is right when he points out that informal logic was developed as a tool for handing verbal arguments, primarily arguments as products; it is not clear that can be extended in the way that Groarke suggests. But let us see.

2. What is required for a theory of visual argument?

Groarke writes (Groarke & Birdsell, 1996, p.9) that "any account of visual argument must identify how we can

a) identify the internal elements of a visual image
b) understand the contexts in which images are interpreted
c) establish the consistency of an interpretation of the visual
d) chart changes in visual perspective over time."

Insofar as I understand these requirements, I don't see any insuperable problems with their being met. There are, however, some things are *missing* from Groarke's articulation of a theory of visual argument.

It seems to me that a theory of visual argument must offer an account or characterization of just what is meant by a *visual argument*—a definition, if you like, or at least an indication of how to revise traditional definitions which, as Groarke is aware, were drafted with verbal argument in mind.[4] He says on page 105 that "I broaden this definition" but in fact he does not offer any such broadened definition of argument.[5] What exactly is a visual argument? There

are two dimensions to this important question. First, how are we to understand what argument is? Second, under what conditions is that argument visual?

To the first: any definition of visual argument will have to begin with some conception of argument. A lot has been written about this. Part of the informal logic intervention has been to criticize the conception of argument inherited from traditional modern logic. I think Groarke means to align his theory with that initiative. That is, I believe that it is Groarke's intention to work with a conception of argument that is informal in character. Now while there is no such animal—that is, various informal logicians have various ways of conceptualizing argument—I think we can discern from what he has written what he takes an argument to be. For Groarke, a verbal argument is a collection of propositions in which one (the conclusion) is supported by others that together are meant to persuade rationally the recipient. (Some theorists will be quick to point out that this is just one function or use of argument, and that there are others---a point we shall be returning to later.)

To the second: as noted, Groarke does not offer a definition of "visual argument." He offers a number of examples of what he takes to be visual arguments: cartoons, posters, etchings, advertisements, paintings. So we can perhaps understand the denotation of the term by looking at these examples. In this collection we have 6 cartoons, 2 ads, 1 poster, 1 painting, and 1 etching. What strikes me, as I look at this list, is the number of examples in which there are not only images but also words. I would have thought that paradigm cases of visual argument would consist of visuals alone. There is but one example in which there are no words—the etching by Durer.

In (2002), Groarke makes a distinction that may be helpful in further clarifying his conception of visual argument. He says that there are three categories of image that, he says, may be combined with argument.

Category 1 consists of images that merely accompany a verbal argument, playing no argumentative or persuasive role (140).

Category 2 consists of what Groarke calls a visual flag, which functions to attract attention to the argument that accompanies it (140).

Neither of these, says Groarke, is really a visual argument. To fully show that images can argue, Groarke says, "we must therefore turn to…"

Category 3 [which] consists of images that "show that they can, *like verbal claims which are the epitome of argument*, be understood as speech or communication acts that contribute more directly to argumentative exchange" (140).

Groarke seems here to suggest a parallel or symmetry between verbal and visual argument (as well as between a theory of verbal argument and a theory of visual argument). I would express that parallel in the following terms. A visual argument is made up of images, whereas a verbal argument is made up of claims. Just as claims do the essential work in verbal argument, images do the essential work in visual argument.

It seems then that by "visual argument" Groarke means one in which the *essential argumentative work* (however that is identified) is done by images (rather than words), just as in the case verbal argument, the essential work is done by the words/claims.[6] My strategy will be to argue that there is no such parallel as Groarke has suggested above. Rather we will find *a fundamental asymmetry between verbal arguments and so-called visual arguments.*

Now one test that might be proposed in dealing with mixed cases would go like this: If you can take away the text and what remains can be seen to constitute an argument, then the argument is visual. If, when you take away the text, it becomes unclear either that there is an

argument or what that argument is, then the message is not a visual argument. Thus, consider the political cartoon on page 115. If you take away the text, do you still have an argument? I don't think so; hence I would not call this a case of visual argument—certainly not a paradigm case.

The first problem, then, for a theory of visual argument is that the notion of a visual argument remains somewhat unclear, there being no definition and the examples offered being somewhat problematic.

The second problem for a theory of visual argument is to deal with the related issue of how to "convert" the images, which are the components of a visual argument, into reasons which can function as premises that are supposed to lead to a conclusion, so that the machinery of informal logic can be applied to the resulting argument. Groarke's interpretation of the UVA poster illustrates some of the other difficulties that attend his proposal of a theory of visual argument, so let me turn attention to his analysis of it.

The UVA Poster

On page 112, we are presented a picture of a UVA poster. Groarke interprets *this* poster as an argument advocating opportunities for women at the University of Amsterdam. Groarke offers a description of the photograph which, he says, "contains the University's three chief administrators in front of the official entrance to the university" (111). Already this interpretation reveals itself as highly dependent background knowledge that is verbal; I doubt that someone who did not possess this background could so decode this image. Groarke goes on: "Especially in poster size, the photograph makes a stark impression, placing all this confident maleness in front of (visually blocking) the university's main entrance." Here again, a great deal of background knowledge and interpretation has been introduced into the reconstruction. (At this point, I am not questioning the legitimacy of Groarke's interpretation, so much as pointing out that it is highly complex, tied to background knowledge that is verbal in character.) Groarke then cites the view of the committee that commissioned the poster according to which it is statement which "effectively makes the point that we want more women at our university and we still have a long way to go." Groarke states:

> From the point of view of logic, the poster is something more than a statement, for it visually makes the point that the UVA's chief administrators are all men, to back the intended claim that the university needs more women. The poster thus presents an argument (111).

> P: The University of Amsterdam's three chief administrators are all men.
> C: The University needs more women.

To extract this argument out of this poster has required a great deal of interpretive work. No one who is not already familiar with the situation and who did not have access to the background knowledge cited by Groarke would be likely to come up with this premise, just by looking at the image. The image by itself cannot determine the premise. Further, it is not clear that the conclusion Groarke has settled on is the only or the best one. I can imagine any number of other conclusions that might well be have been "implied" or "suggested."

The University needs more women in key administrative positions.

The University wants to hire more women in key administrative positions.
The University needs more women professors.
The University needs more women in tenured positions.
The University recognizes that it has a problem in the gender composition.

Indeed, absent the background information that Groarke has introduced, one might just as easily see this as an argument advising women not to go to UVA because of the barriers imposed by men. (Some to whom I have shown this poster have so interpreted it.) Groarke's reconstruction is thus heavily dependent on verbal information, and beyond that it seems questionable. But those are not my main concerns at the moment. It is rather that the most important steps in the process of extracting the visual argument have been glossed over.

Let me develop this point by referring to what happens with verbal argument. In the process of dealing with arguments, the intended receiver must first recognize that he or she is being presented with an argument; then he or she must in some fashion get clear on that argument. Next he must get clear on the structure of the argument—its premise/conclusion structure. Then the receiver must decide whether it is a good one and or whether it warrants a response. People accomplish these tasks without necessarily having the guidance of a theory of argument, but the belief that underlies informal logic is that the ability to do these can be improved by theoretical guidance. Thus most theories of argument will outline a process that includes the following steps:

Step 1: How to recognize that an argument is present
Step 2: How to identifying the components of the argument
Step 3: How to reconstruction of the argument: putting in missing premises, rephrasing where necessary
Step 4: How to evaluate the argument

My questions surrounding visual argument have to do with the counterparts of Step1 and Step 2. How are these tasks to be achieved? Again, I turn to the counterpoint of visual argument—verbal argument—for guidance.

For Step 1, there are various indicators of the presence of an argument. First of all we are mindful of the context; there are certain settings in which we expect to find arguments: editorials, op-ed pieces, journal articles, etc. We attend to argument indicators—words like "therefore"; we look to see whether there is a conclusion, something that the author intends to persuade us of. In this process, we look for a certain kind of structure, reasons that are given to support a conclusion; we consider the intention: is the author intending to persuade rationally? In paradigm cases, these tasks do not detain us long, for the arguer will have taken pains to make it clear just what his conclusion is and what the support is.

For Step 2, informal logicians have developed various strategies. I won't go into them here. Once these first two steps have been accomplished, the apparatus of informal logic is available to help with Steps 3 and 4, as Groarke has shown elsewhere in his paper.

In the case of visual arguments, these first two steps will involve additional, and I think, more vexing considerations. The receiver will first have to recognize that the image(s) contain an argument, and will then have to translate or convert the images into propositions, if as Groarke proposes, the apparatus of informal logic is to be brought to bear. I believe this step is much more problematic that Groarke has acknowledged. In his paper, Groarke simply presents us with

visual images that he has already determined to be argumentative without attending to the question of how this recognition occurs and how the argument is extracted.

But the crucial step is converting the images into premises. There is a famous Seinfeld episode in which the "yada-yada" phrase is introduced. At one point Jerry and George are wondering if you can "yada yada over sex." Elaine says "Yes" and proceeds to describe a time when she did so. Later, talking with the girl he has been seeing, George says: "No more yada yada; just give me the full story." That is what I want to say to Groarke: "No more yada yada." Give us the full story of how these images get transformed into propositions so that the apparatus of informal logic may be deployed.

The process of going from the image to the propositions they convey is not clearly defined or nor yet well understood, but to the degree that we can understand it, it seems to me that process will be heavily dependent on verbal reasoning and verbal expressions of reasoning, thus illustrating that ultimately the process of reconstructing visual images as arguments will depend on our ability to "translate" them in words and that in doing so we are dependent on our experience with verbal argument (thereby illustrating the dependence of the former on the latter)—a theme I return to later..

The Durer Engraving*: The Coat of Arms of Death*

Here is a visual image with no accompanying text, so something pretty close to the definition of visual argument in the sense defined above. The question is not whether it is visual but whether it deserves to be described as an argument. Notice what Groarke gets from it:

> The message of Durer's engraving—that death makes beauty, wealth and glory insubstantial—is relatively uncontroversial, but it has not been recognized as the basis of an intriguing exercise in visual argument. Thus the statement that it makes provides a reason for rejecting coat of arms, which celebrate the values it critiques…Given that it is a coat of arms itself it can best be described as a visual *reductio ad absurdum* (123).

I think it is clear that Durer is here doing something very like what Groarke describes and that it resembles a *reductio* in some ways -- (the coat of arms format is used to "critique" itself; the premise is used to disprove itself). But in others ways not at all. In a *reductio,* the premise is posited hypothetically and then shown to lead to a contradiction (nothing comparable occurs here). The conclusion is then drawn that the premise is false (nothing comparable occurs here). It seems to me that then that calling this a *reductio* is a hermeneutic stretch. And though Groarke refers to "the values it critiques" (123), the critique is in fact radically understated, for it consists, not of an argument but rather of what Groarke calls "an uncontroversial statement." Thus it seems to me that it is far from a *reductio* and questionable as to whether it is an argument in the sense Groarke intends.

To summarize this part, I have been arguing that that there are some important gaps in the theory that need to be filled: exactly how we are to understand the very idea of a visual argument, and how we are to decode the images that are supposed to constitute such an argument.

3. What benefits would accrue if we possessed such a theory?

Suppose that these gaps are filled, and suppose we accept Groarke's reconstructions. What benefits are there? And are there any negatives?

To answer this I want to comment on Groarke's evaluation of the UVA poster and then his reconstruction and evaluation of *The Death of Marat.*

The UVA Poster. We have already seen that Groarke gets the following argument from the poster.

P: The University of Amsterdam's three chief administrators are all men.
C: The University needs more women

At first glance, this seems to be a very weak argument. How does it follow from that premise that the university needs more women? How could one hope to persuade rationally using such an argument? (Possibly there is a stronger argument that Groarke has failed to extract.) Here it seems to me is a problem for Groarke's proposal. The poster, as it presents itself even those who do not know the context, seems to have a certain power and efficacy. The argument that Groarke gets out of it not only does not explain this power; it seems to some degree to undermine it. With respect to this particular visual image, then, I fail to see the benefit of interpreting it as an argument.

The Death of Marat

After providing a fair amount of background knowledge drawn from various sources, focusing on the context in which it occurred and including statements from David, Groarke engages in fairly detailed aesthetic commentary (pp.119-121), after which he extracts the following argument:

P1: Marat was a man of great dignity.
P2: Marat's assassin herself recognized his reputation as a benefactor of the. unfortunate.
P3: Marat gave his last penny to the poor.
C1: Marat was like Christ a great moral martyr.
MC: You must strive to emulate Marat in support of the revolution.

Groarke claims that this reading "well captures the essence of the piece, which is a call to emulate Marat built upon an argument from analogy which compares Marat to Christ." I am not myself in a position to countermand this interpretation. I did take the time to read what Anita Brookner, for instance, wrote (1980) and can report that her interpretation, which at one point quotes Baudelaire, makes no mention at all of this as the essence. In her assessment Brookner never once mentioned Christ.[7] And Baudelaire, perhaps not surprisingly,[8] finds this painting "an unusual poem within which is food for the soul—this is the bread of the strong and triumph of spiritualism." I suspect that if I were to canvass other interpretations, I might not find any who extracted just the argument which Groarke claims captures the essence. Many fairly astute persons will have viewed this painting and offered fairly sophisticated interpretations of it yet not have extracted this particular argument.[9] So it seems to me that Groarke is not so much

extracting an argument (which all can be expected to recognize) as he is offering a certain kind of aesthetic interpretation (which will differ from one individual to the next). If it was David's intention to accomplish the task that Groarke has ascribed to him (rational persuasion), he has not been successful. Not because people see the argument and fail to be persuaded but because most of them won't get this argument out of it at all.

Indeed it seems to me that such hermeneutic moves raise doubts about the degree to which Groarke's theory may be expected to yield the intended dividend--visual literacy. Groarke and others argue that the recognition of visual argument would go a long way to helping us develop the sort of strategies needed for visual literacy. In the process of making this appeal Groarke alludes to Gilbert's suggestion that "informal logic must deal with non verbal arguments by adopting varieties of analysis which reject the linear discursive model of rationality it assumes." Groarke's approach appropriates much of its machinery from the realm of verbal argument and from informal logic and would thereby be guilty of *imposing a linear discursive model on visual images,* rather than rejecting it, which was, I thought, his purpose.

I have recently been questioning the benefits of this approach to argument and discussing what I think is one possible negative consideration. I want now to return to a theme sounded earlier—the asymmetry between verbal and visual argument.

4. The asymmetry between visual and verbal argument

Throughout I have been calling attention to some of the differences between verbal argument and "visual argument." What I want to do at this point is develop this thematically around the claim that there is an important asymmetry between them. That emerges if we consider important differences in the following areas: structure, use and context.

Structure: With verbal arguments we have a wide range of types. To name just a few: convergent, linked, serial, complex; conductive, inductive, deductive; presumptive, to mention just a few possibilities that occur in verbal argument. Visual arguments will, it seems, have to have a very simple structure, much of which will be provided during the conversion/reconstruction. Both in terms of type and complexity, visual arguments will be far more limited than their verbal counterparts.

Use: Arguments have number of uses. A primary use they have is to persuade rationally. Groarke puts forth a number of examples of this use in connection with visual argument, though I am skeptical about their suitability to achieve this purpose. But arguments have other uses. They are often used to inquire; it is not clear that visual argument can serve this function. Verbal arguments often open up new territory: think of Hume's argument against induction; Searle's Chinese box argument; Wittgenstein's private language argument. It is not clear at all clear to me that visual arguments have the possibility of doing that. So visual arguments have a much narrower range of employment.

Context: It seems to me that the similarity between verbal and visual argument is strongest *so long as we focus simply on the product*, the end result, abstracting from the setting in which it occurs.[10] In the case of verbal arguments, typically the argument has been prompted by some issue which is controversial and which the author wishes to address. I have argued (2000) that an argument (qua rational persuasion) is typically a response to some other position and that it *expects* criticism to which it will have to respond. One often hears it said that the strength of an argument is determined by its ability to withstand criticism (Toulmin, 1958; Perelman,

1958/1969). We know what all this means in the case of verbal argument.[11] We have seen verbal arguments subjected to criticism or objection and revised accordingly. But what can any of this mean in the context of a visual argument. Do visual arguments get criticized? criticized by other visual arguments? then revised and re-presented?[12]

I have recently been pointing out what I think are some salient differences between verbal and visual arguments. I will draw this line of reflection to conclusion with *a set of conjectures* about the fundamental asymmetry between verbal and visual argument.

1. For every visual argument, there will exist a verbal counterpart of that argument; *but not vice-versa.* Or at least it is not clear that we can expect to find a visual counterpart to Aquinas's proof for the existence of God (though it would be a nice touch). Moreover, it seems very clear that while verbal arguments may be either textual or oral in character-and that the differences have contributed to the development of the theory of argument; no such duality exists with visual agreement.

2. Visual argument depends on verbal argument*; there is no evidence of a dependence the other way*. The practice of argumentation as we have it today has developed largely out of verbal argument: whether spoken or written. The apparatus that surrounds it (the notions of premise, conclusion, enthymeme, missing premise, internal argument objection, criticism) all are verbal in character. (They may be adapted to visual but that is another matter.) And I incline to think that the ability to mount a visual /argument depends on their being a practice of verbal argument—not vice versa.

3. A theory of visual argument depends on a theory of verbal argument*; there is no evidence that the dependence runs the other way*. We have seen this in Groarke's evaluations of the visual argument that rely on the standard approaches of informal logic: fallacies.

In sum, I have argued that the rationale given by Groarke for a theory of visual argument is questionable. As it stands, the theory is incomplete in two important respects—its explication of the nature of visual argument, and how the visual is converted; that the benefits of a theory of visual argument are unclear and finally that there exists important asymmetry between verbal and visual argument. This result does not entail that there are no visual arguments, but I think it presents some dialectical material (questions, objections,) for Groarke and others to work with as they attempt to develop their theories.

5. What's at stake here? Why does it matter?

Mindful always of James's advice, I want to ask : What's at stake here? If advocates of this thesis are correct then, certain consequences follow. *First*, the resources of argumentation theory may be brought to bear on the task of evaluating such arguments. Indeed, Groarke hypothesizes that there is a two-way street here: that not only may these realms benefit from our resources but also we may learn from them. I do think that there is value in the challenge that Groarke has put forward. Translation is a two-way street. If Groarke can develop a theory that helps us convert images into propositions that form an argument, then it should be possible to go the other way; i.e., to convert arguments into images. (Now there's a project: find a visual representation of Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul.)

Second, if Groarke's position is viable, that would suggest that there is a much more extensive commitment to the practice of argumentation, and that arguments are in much wider use than I had suggested in *Manifest Rationality*. The concerns expressed there would be

misplaced. But I am not convinced. My students have an enormous amount of experience with and a certain savvy about images, they are visually literate and astute—in certain respects. But I have not noticed that this "literacy" equips them any better to do argumentation. They have real trouble seeing premise conclusion relations, seeing the structure of simple and complex arguments, finding missing premises, and generally operating in what I call like to call argumentative space. My conjecture is that their difficulties here have a lot to do with the cultural sensibility (which I would describe as a highly visual orientation) they have grown up with.

One final point: it seems to me important to preserve boundaries, to distinguish between communication, reasoning and argument. That visual images are a kind of communication that both result from and impart reasoning is, it seems to me, beyond doubt; I question whether anything is gained by construing them as argument. Indeed I am inclined to resists what seems an ever-widening hermeneutic circle which seems to include just about everything as argument. Among the sorts of item that it has been suggested or claimed can/should/might be interpreted as argument of late are: dance; musical scores; buildings/architecture, and clothing (McBurney). Perhaps the logical conclusion of such interpretation can be seen in book with the title of Lunsford and Ruskiewicz's book, *Everything's an Argument* (1999). But, of course, not everything is an argument. My concern is that the sort of extension advocated by Groarke and others will result in attenuation of the category. As Gilbert (not Michael but W.S.) put it: "When everyone is somebody, then no one's anybody." When everything (or just about everything) can get counted as argument, then it seems to me the category has begun to lose its capacity to mark important distinctions in the variety of messages that we confront on a regular basis.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that there are reasons to doubt whether there are what Groarke call visual arguments. I have here attempted to set forth some of my misgivings. I agree wholeheartedly with Groarke and others about the importance of and the need for visual literacy. Where we disagree is about the means for achieving this. Groarke thinks that by broadening the domain of argument to include visual argument, we will be able to bring the apparatus of informal logic to bear on these important types of reasoning, thereby increasing the tools available for achieving visual literacy. I am not persuaded.

First, I am not persuaded by his attempt to broaden argument to include visual arguments. This is partly because I have an agenda of my own which pulls in the opposite direction--rather than broadening the conception, I want to tighten it. Rather than focus our theories on what I consider marginal examples, I want to focus it on what I consider the best sort—arguments with a dialectical tier.

Second, I am not persuaded that the approach suggested by Groarke is the best way, or even a good way, to promote visual literacy--for one very important reason; his approach seems to be is simply an extension of the old verbal literacy into a new domain, rather than an attempt to approach that domain on its own. To the degree such strategies emerge from some reconfiguration of informal logic to accommodate visual argument, to that same degree it seems to me that they will simply further ratify that "linear discursive model of rationality" from which the break was to have been made.

To be sure, there are messages that, at first glance, look like a lot like what might be called visual arguments. My conjecture is that with a second glance and deeper reflection, it will turn out they are not *visual* arguments (because most of the essential work is done by words and text); or they will turn out not to be visual *arguments* (because though they are clearly visual, their status as argument—in the sense intended by Groarke is problematic).

It is often said: A picture is worth a thousand words. I have no doubt that this is true. One need only recall the image of the child in Vietnam just napalmed to make that point; or the picture of JFK's funeral procession down Pennsylvania Avenue in November, 1963; or the television images of the decay of the Columbia shuttle over California and Texas earlier this year. By the same token, a word or concept may be worth a thousand pictures; a proper grasp of the ideal of justice or love is, Plato would say, more important than its many manifestations.

An educated person needs to be able to both grasp and criticize the force of both words and images. There may be crossover and overlap between the techniques required to achieve this. I remain convinced that nothing valuable is lost *by recognizing the differences*[13] *between visual and verbal literacy* and seeing to it that our students have the tools they need to handle both.

Notes

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[1] It is quite possible that other approaches to this matter, e.g. that of Blair (1996), will not be open to the same line of objection.

[2] I must confess that I am not entirely sure what is meant here by "visual literacy." I think it means the ability to deal intelligently and critically with images.

[3] Indeed it might even be the case that teaching students these to deploy techniques of argument analysis would be counterproductive. See Johnson and Blair (1993).

[4] See O'Keefe's much discussed definition (1977;1982); or Copi's (1986).

[5] I assume the broadened definition would follow the verbal account but add the notion of [visual] image as a component. It may seem a simple matter to add a phrase, but I think it will not prove to be that simple.

[6] I seem to recall that when he gave a paper, Bob Binkley sometimes would lay out his argument using something like a tree diagram. The diagram is visual, to be sure; yet in my view the argument remains verbal—the essential work is done by the claims, statements, or assertions.

[7] Brookner writes; "This is the true wonder of *Marat assassine*: David has made real life the pretext for a new type of high art" (1980, 115) and again "Traditional art criticism had not yet caught up to the fact that standards of excellence were changing but had already changed" (ibid). Nanteuil does refer to the "Descent from the Cross" (1985, 80) without however seeing an argument here.

[8] Interesting that a poet finds in the painting a poem, while a logician finds an argument.

[9] Something of the same thing takes place in the domain of verbal arguments; not all parties agree on the reconstruction, but I suspect the range of interpretation will generally be far narrower. In any event once again we have occasion to notice that this interpretation is heavily indebted to text and verbal reasoning.

[10] Visual arguments must, it seems, occur as products; it is difficult to imagine a visual argument as part of a dialogue—except as a flag or an illustration.

[11] In fact I don't think we do understand this process all that well, though we think we do.

[12] In critiquing a Nuprin advertisement, I asked my students in my Reasoning Skills course to respond to two questions: How is this ad like an argument? How is it different? To the latter one student (Keith Ball) wrote: "It differs because it is just an ad, it most likely won't be given as much thought as an argument, it is just there to input something into your brain whether you agree or not. It's not even looking for argument or denial, just that you look and remember; it doesn't want to debate with you." This last statement makes a very important point: whereas real arguments do seek to engage the recipient in a debate, advertising is a one way street!

[13] Wittgenstein is said to have wanted to use as the motto for the *Philosophical Investigations* the line from King Lear: "I'll teach you differences."

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