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CAN PICTURES BE ARGUMENTS?

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My purpose in the following paper is to consider whether the term "argument" should be extended to include pictures.[1] Clearly, a drawing or photograph independent of words can influence the thought and action of others; but can it, I wonder, *argue*? And if we say that it can, do we risk losing something important in our conventional understanding of argument? Below, I elaborate more fully what I mean by "conventional understanding of argument"; as for "picture," I define it here as any representation meant to *look like* the thing it represents. Thus, a sketch, drawing, painting, photograph, or three-dimensional model would be a "picture" if it were constructed to resemble imagined or actual objects in the visible world. Now, the concept of likeness has been much criticized of late; as Mitchell (1986) and others have pointed out, the picture is often (if not always) every bit as opaque and cultured as language. But without *some* notion of visible likeness, it is difficult to see how one would make sense of the everyday, and presumably useful, distinction between "showing" and "telling." I define "picture," then, as an artifact constructed to be iconic with the external world; and my question is, can such a thing, independent of language, be an "argument"?

Many scholars are now convinced that the application of the word "argument" needs to be broadened. Willard (1989, p. 109), for example, has rejected the traditional association of the term with propositional discourse. Argument is interaction around incompatibility, he has written, and any attempt to distinguish it from other forms of persuasive communication is driven by "a bureaucratic rationale." Similarly, for Hesse (1992), *all* discourse is argumentative because all discourse is productive of belief. Narrative persuades because its "emplotment" of events over time engenders belief in acceptable sequences of action. It involves, that is, some propositions *causing* other propositions. At the same time, Hesse writes, what we have traditionally referred to as "argument" is itself a kind of narrative, a believable sequence of propositions plotted over time in such forms as the enthymeme.

Fisher and Filloy (1982) agree. Although argument has typically been conceived in terms of inferential structures (claims and reasons), people also "arrive at conclusions based on 'dwelling-in' dramatic and literary works" (p. 343). The mode of arguing in such works is "suggestion": an immediate, emotional response becomes a reasoned belief through critical interpretation (p. 347). "Aesthetic" proofs, then, are those structures of suggestion which are invented by an author, experienced by an auditor, and used by a critic to substantiate a reasoned interpretation (p. 347). On this line of thought, it is hard not to see argument "everywhere," as Brockriede (1975, p. 179) had proposed. Couldn't a picture, by virtue of suggestion, engender belief in an argumentative sort of way? Yes, say Medhurst and DeSousa (1981), for whom political cartoons are a kind of enthymeme, relying on socially-sanctioned presuppositions to produce reasoned belief and action in others. Cartoons, that is, *argue* for political positions by adducing acceptable (albeit unspoken) reasons to hold those positions. Similarly, for Buchanan (1989, pp. 97, 107),

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arguments can inhere in things as well as words. When material objects solve problems in a reasonable manner, they are persuasive in the same way that verbal arguments are. Deliberation and use reveal the premises of such objects and arrange them into inferential structures. According to Buchanan, the Krups coffee mill, for example, is an "argument" for use and aesthetics over technology.

Paintings are also susceptible to this kind of analysis. For Varga (1989), a 13th century painting of St. Francis of Assisi is a kind of argument; the portrait in the center is claim, and the narrative episodes flanking it are evidence for that claim: he who lived thus, who did these things, should be revered. Similarly, Kessler (1993) has written that medieval images often contained arguments. Not only were such images used as evidence in verbal disputes; their visible nature was itself an argument for various contested beliefs. The painting of Christ over a sketch of the Jewish tabernacle, for example, was not just a pictorialization of a prior verbal text; it was an argument for the New Testament supplanting the Old, the Incarnation of God replacing the shadowy presence of the Law.

Others, however, have resisted the idea of non-linguistic argumentation. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), for example, maintain that the theory of argument should concern itself only with "the *discursive means* of obtaining the adherence of minds" (emphasis in original, p. 8). An action "designed to obtain adherence falls *outside* [italics added] the range of argumentation," they write, "to the degree that the use of language is lacking in its support or interpretation" (p. 8). Van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Kruiger (1984) also consider argumentation to be necessarily verbal:

> Argumentation requires the use of language. A person engaged in argumentation makes an assertion or statement, assumes or doubts something, denies something, and so on. For the performance of all these activities he must utter words and sentences (whether spoken or written). Besides these verbal means he can, of course–just as in any other verbal activity–employ non-verbal means (e.g., facial expression and gestures). To the extent that these fulfill an argumentative function, they can always be explicitized verbally. However, non-verbal means of communication can never completely replace verbal ones: argumentation without the *use of language* is impossible.
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> This means that a person engaged in argumentation has deliberately *opted* for the use of verbal means. He clearly prefers to use words rather than non-verbal means of communication; he speaks, rather than resorting to blows or other forms of violence. Here we have another excellent reason for calling argumentation a pre-eminently verbal activity. The arguer uses words to lend force to his words. (p. 3)

For Kneupper (1978), non-verbal signs may be used in argument, but they don't function *as* arguments unless linguistically translated. And Balthrop (1980, p. 185) claims that argument is "inherently discursive and linguistic." The notion that non-discursive or artistic forms can be arguments, he writes, "would preclude argument from fulfilling" its reason-giving or justificatory function (p. 188). Finally, Toulmin, Rieke and Janik (1979, p. 137) write that "reasoning could not exist in the absence of language. Both claims and all the considerations used to support them must be expressed by some kind of a linguistic symbol system."[2]

Let's try out a fairly conventional definition and see how pictures stack up. An argument is an intentional human act in which support is offered on behalf of a debatable belief. It is characterized first and foremost by *reasonableness.* Now, to say that an act or object is "reasonable" is, first, to assert that reasons can be adduced in order

[2] Similar attempts have been made to limit the application of the term "rhetoric" to linguistic entities. Bryant (1953), for example, complained that, unless rhetoric were limited to "the designed use of language for the promulgation of information, ideas, and attitudes" (p. 412), all "interhuman activity" would fall under its purview (p. 405). Compare Leff's (1987) concern that recent extensions have stretched the word "to the point that it has lost virtually all meaning" (p. 22).

to make that act or object acceptable to some audience (*what* is acceptable is, of course, local and indeterminate, but *the act of* adducing reasons to make something acceptable is, I believe, cross-situational). An argument, in other words, involves a two-part relation, one part (evidence, data, proof, support, reason, etc.) supporting the other (position, claim, assertion, conclusion, thesis, point, argument, proposition, etc.). Second, to say that something is "reasonable" is to assert that it admits of improvement, is corrigible, refutable, accountable; it is an act or object which can be interrogated, criticized, and elaborated by others (and even *invites* interrogation, criticism, and elaboration). An argument exists, that is, in a specifiable context of debate, controversy, opposition, or doubt; its position is thus necessarily *contestable.*

Now, whatever else a picture can do, it cannot satisfy these two criteria. First, it lacks the requisite internal differentiation; it is impossible to reliably distinguish in a picture what is *position,* and what is *evidence* for that position. The distinction at the heart of argument, the difference between that which asserts and that which supports, is thus collapsed. Second, a picture cannot with reliability be refuted, opposed, or negated. It can be countered but only by introducing words into the situation; the picture itself makes no claim which can be contested, doubted, or otherwise improved upon by others. If I oppose the "position" you articulate in a picture, you can simply deny that your picture ever articulated that, or any other, position. The picture is only refutable if first translated into language–in which case we have left the realm of pictures altogether.

Now, we can ignore these problems and call pictures "arguments" anyway. But to do so would, I believe, deprive the term of its significance. Because if a picture can (self-sufficiently) be an "argument," then what do we call the linguistic act of asserting and supporting debatable claims? To say that a picture can be an argument is to leave individuals with the impression that they have argued for something when they have merely placed it in someone else's field of vision. Further, to claim that a picture can be an argument is to make it less likely that analysts will attend to the rhetorical functions that pictures *can* and *do* serve.

An Argument Contains Two Parts

Traditionally defined, an argument has two parts.[3] These go by many names, and there is some disagreement as to which of the two, if either, needs to be linguistically explicit (see O'Keefe, 1982). But the belief that an argument has two parts–"claim" and "support"–is a cornerstone of Western thought. The practice of bringing forth statements that explain, support, question, and comment on *other* statements was perhaps the most important contribution of Greek efforts of the 5th and 4th Centuries, BCE, to systematize knowledge and edify public life.[4] The centrality of this practice can be seen in Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* with its logical notion that a statement is persuasive because proved from other statements, either inductively or syllogistically (trans. 1991, 1.2 1356b), and its rhetorical notion that a speech has two parts: statement and proof (trans. 1991, 3.13 1414a).

The two-part structure is a pervasive constituent of modern definitions of argument as well. For Woods and Walton (1982), an argument is a set of propositions that can be divided into two categories: premises and conclusion; for Thomas (1981, p. 8), it is "a sentence or sequence of sentences containing statements some of which are set forth as

[3] It is sometimes said that an argument has *three* parts: claim, reason, and underlying assumption (see, for example, Toulmin, 1958; Gage, 1984; and Hatch, 1996). Wellman (1971), for one, disputes the necessity of the third part.

[4] The practice probably required both the rise of writing and the development of relatively stable social institutions for managing public discourse.

supporting, making probable, or explaining others"; for Fisher (1988, p. 5), people argue by presenting grounds or reasons which establish, justify, prove, support, or demonstrate some conclusion. O'Keefe (1982, p. 12) posits the paradigm case of "argument-making" (as distinct from "arguing," which he claims is ambiguous between a kind of social interaction and a speech act) as one involving "the communication of both (1) a linguistically explicable claim and (2) one or more overtly expressed reasons" in support of that claim (p. 14). Toulmin (1958), meanwhile, defines argument as support produced on behalf of a claim:

> The claim implicit in an assertion is like a claim to a right or to a title. As with a claim to a right, though it may in the event be conceded without argument, its merits depend on the merits of the argument which could be produced in its support . . . in each case we can challenge the assertion, and demand to have our attention drawn to the grounds (backing, data, facts, evidence, considerations, features) on which the merits of the assertion are to depend. We can, that is, demand an argument. (p. 11)

And Perelman (1982, p. 21) writes that the aim of argumentation is to transfer to the conclusion the adherence accorded by an audience to one's premises. The two-part structure of argument is also a staple of contemporary textbooks; Govier (1991, p. 2), for example, defines argument as "a set of claims that a person puts forward in an attempt to show that some further claim is rationally acceptable" (see also Ramage & Bean, 1995; Gage, 1991; Weiss, 1995; Hatch, 1996).

Now, why can't a picture satisfy this demand, that is, be structured so that claim-like and support-like entities can be identified? The answer appears to have something to do with the fact that a picture typically functions as a simultaneous whole rather than a sequence of bits. It lacks, in other words, the internal linear arrangement that characterizes verbal discourse. Argument requires a structure in which conceptually-distinct ideas can be *sequentially* linked (thus, "X, therefore Y," "X because of Y," etc.). Hintikka and Bachman (1991, p. 8), for example, define argument as a "line of reasoning," while Andrews, Costello and Clark (1993) characterize it as a sequence or chain. Langer's (1942) distinction between presentational and discursive symbols rests on this same notion of linearity (see pp. 63–83). For Postman (1985, p. 26), the sequentiality of verbal arguments has an almost ethical quality to it; in arguing, each participant must delay his or her verdict until the other's turn is finished.

Without syntactic arrangement, then, the visual can *present* or *express* ideas but cannot *state* them, an act which requires a more restricted structure. For Langer (1942, p. 75), visual forms are capable of combination, but not *discursive* combination. That is, the relation of constituents in a picture is grasped in one act of vision, "given all at once to the intelligent eye" (p. 77), and allowing simultaneous presentation of a direct, continuous articulation of reality. Although some claim a vocabulary and syntax for visual communication (Bowman, 1968, p. 8), it is more typically asserted that the visual lacks both lexicon and syntax. For Gombrich (1982, p. 138), this means that the visual, while "supreme" at arousal, is altogether incapable of statement. Goodman (1976, 1978) concurs: the non-verbal can exemplify, but it cannot denote.

By itself, then, a picture lacks sequential syntax and is therefore unable to array ideas in the two-part conceptual structure of argumentation. But couldn't a picture still function as *one* part of an argument? That is, couldn't it function as claim *or* evidence even if, as a non-discursive entity, it cannot do both? This is, in fact, how some scholars have interpreted the argumentative function of the picture. According to Jamieson (1988, p. 240), if rhetoric is statement and proof,

then visual rhetoric is statement alone. In the age of television, she writes, argument has been replaced by assertion; there is no narration, no definition, no counter-argument, no evidence. Concerning a different kind of visual, and acting as friend rather than enemy, Buchanan (1989, p. 108) proposes what he calls an "assertoric rhetoric" for material artifacts, a form of discourse presumably devoid of reason-giving but rich in positionality.

But there are problems with this notion. If the visual can play an "assertoric" role in argument, what kinds of things can it assert? How does it go about making assertions? How do we know when and if our interpretation of a picture's assertion is the same as someone else's? And how do we adduce and evaluate evidence for assertions if we can't with any reliability know exactly what is being asserted? The difficulty of answering these questions has led some scholars to claim that, because of their inherent richness, concreteness, and ineffability, visual artifacts actually *resist* assertion. According to Becker (1986, p. 275), pictures are too subtle to act as assertions. Given a photograph without linguistic accompaniment, it is nearly impossible to say what its topic is. And even if we know the topic, Becker argues, we still don't know the statement. The picture itself can be seen to assert, or be evidence for, multiple statements regarding multiple topics (again, the non-discursiveness of pictures makes these functions problematically collapsible). For Moran (1989, p. 101), this is, in fact, the great power of the picture: it "can be used to get a point across without incurring the risks and responsibilities of asserting that point or it." Fox (1994b, p. 70) agrees: the image is "the ultimate tool" of nuance, intimation, hint, and suggestion. It is for this reason, he writes, that imagemakers focus on values, attitudes, feelings, and effects, caring little about logic, proof, and argument (p. 77). Similarly, for Postman (1985), the photograph is limited to concrete representation:

> As an "objective" slice of space-time, the photograph testifies that someone was there or something happened. Its testimony is powerful but it offers no opinions–no "should-have-beens" or "might-have-beens." Photography is preeminently a world of fact, not of dispute about facts or of conclusions to be drawn from them. . . . When applied to a photograph, the question, Is it true? means only, Is this a reproduction of a real slice of space-time? If the answer is "Yes," there are no grounds for argument, for it makes no sense to disagree with an unfaked photograph. The photograph itself makes no arguable propositions, makes no extended and unambiguous commentary. (pp. 72–73)

In the world of the photograph, Postman writes, there is no beginning, middle, and end: "there is only a present and it need not be part of any story that can be told" (p. 74).

The ideational limitation that Postman identifies here has been described by Sontag (1990) as a kind of narrative failure. Gerbner (1994) and Hayakawa (in Fox, 1994a) have also commented on the picture's inability to represent a temporal succession of ideas (cf. Lessing, 1962). For Berger (1972, p. 26), this means that a picture, independent of a sequential array of signs, is incapable of functioning as an argument. When a painting is reproduced in a film, and thus unfolds in time, it becomes part of the film-maker's argument. But outside of such use, a painting has its own authority and can potentially reverse or qualify any (verbal) conclusion reached about it. According to Berger and Mohr (1982, p. 120), it is an event's development *over time* which allows its meaning to be perceived. A photograph arrests this movement, and its meaning, therefore, is ambiguous.

We are left with two provisional conclusions. First, a picture unaccompanied by language lacks the two-part conceptual structure of argument. Second, while it may be able to function as evidence, a picture is

incapable of serving *independently* as an assertion.

An Argument is Two-sided

In the 20th century, the traditional definition of argument as one or more propositions in support of a further proposition has been called into question. The definition has been attacked for tending to abstract the *structure* of argument, segregating it from social practice, divorcing it from content, and reducing it to the formal equations of symbolic logic. Contemporary reformulations have attempted to contextualize argument by examining how it works in "natural" activity. The reason-claim structure of earlier theories, then, is not so much discarded (although this sometimes happens) as *situated.* In this reconceptualization, argument is still understood as the bringing forth of reasons in support of a claim, but this act is now seen to occur in the inextricably social and practical contexts of controversy, doubt, and opposition. Argument, in other words, is both two-part *and* two-sided.

"Two-sidedness" was in fact a central feature of ancient theories of argument as well. Aristotle's art of rhetoric, for example, was intended to help rhetors argue on either side of a question (*Rhetoric,* trans. 1991, 1.1 1355a). But the notion of discourse arrayed against itself–each *logos* battling its *antilogos,* each "this happened," "this is good," "this should be done" confronting its opposite–probably reached its intellectual apogee a generation or two before Aristotle. The Greeks, as Lloyd (1966) reminded us, had always been obsessed with opposition; but it was the sophists who made the possibility of every *logos* overturned in practical, discursive action the heart of their teaching (see Kerferd, 1981; Robinson, 1979; Schiappa, 1991).

The idea that argumentative reasoning always exists in a context of disagreement (and demands therefore that interlocutors recognize the legitimacy of alternative points of view) may help us understand why people have such difficulty doing it well (see, Berrill, 1992; Kuhn, 1991; Finocchiaro, 1994). And it may also help us to distinguish argument from other forms of meaning-making. According to Kress (1989), for example, argument differs from narrative precisely on this count:

> Argument provides, in culture-specific textual forms, the means for bringing difference into existence. At the same time, it provides conventionalized textual forms not just for maintaining and tolerating difference, but for culturally productive use of difference. Yet where there is only difference, the cultural group cannot attain stability, cannot reproduce itself or its values. Narrative, as a textual form, provides means of resolution of difference, of reproducing, in an uncontentious mode, the forms and meanings of a culture. Narrative serves as a major means of the reproduction of social and cultural forms and values.
>
> Narrative, in other words, is a form whose fundamental characteristic is to produce closure; argument is the form whose fundamental characteristic is to produce difference and hence openness. (p. 12)

Likewise for Billig (1987), argumentation is incomprehensible apart from controversy.

> The context of argumentation is one to which the maxim of Protagoras directly applies. According to the great sophist, it is possible to argue both sides of a case. Thus, both pro and con can be given justifications and reasons. In a literal sense one might say that within an argumentative context contrary statements can each be reasonable and justified. Simultaneously, both can be open to criticism. (p. 93)

Of course, we ultimately have to choose between sides; but this choice will not be because one side is irrational. It will be because the other side is preferable.

What O'Keefe (1977) calls "argument$_1$" (a reason-giving speech act), then, is fully understandable only in the context of "argument$_2$" (a social interaction characterized by disagreement). We provide reasons for our beliefs, Toulmin (1958, p. 97, pp. 214–216) wrote, because other people can always demand them from us. Similarly,

Kuhn (1991, pp. 12–13) proposes that we consider "rhetorical argument" (an assertion with accompanying justification) as interiorized "dialogic argument" (the juxtaposition of opposing assertions). Habermas (1981/1984) also posits a close relation between reason-giving and social opposition. People advance reasons, Habermas says, in order to gain intersubjective recognition for "criticizable validity claims" (p. 17). The "rationality of an expression," then, is a function of "its being susceptible of criticism" (p. 9).[5]

To our earlier principle that an argument always contains two parts, claim and support, we can now add the related principle that an argument always occurs in a context of (implicit or explicit) disagreement, doubt, and opposition. Pictures seem to have difficulty satisfying the first requirement; can they satisfy the second? Our definition of a picture as a representation meant to "look like" the visible world turns out to have some bearing on this question. Because if the picture is perceived to be *closer* to the material world than language, then it may be less negatable as a communicative entity. Why? Because negation is a linguistic function, foreign to the concrete and analogic world of the non-verbal. As Burke (1966, p. 419) put it, "the negative is a peculiarly linguistic resource."[6] It is only with language, he writes, and particularly through the linguistic act of proscription, that the non-verbal is imbued with negative force. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 155) also restrict negation to discourse, although they are more explicit about its social origins.

From this perspective, the pictorial has no negative. "Art," says Langer (1942, p. 214), "gives form to something that is simply there." Worth (1981, p. 173) is also clear on this point. The "ability of words to deal with what is *not*," he writes, "is one of the central functions of language"; the picture is incapable of this function.[7] We can use language to indicate what a picture is not, but there is no *pictorial* way of doing this. An example may help here. A photograph in a college brochure showing a smiling student walking down a sidewalk on a sunny day can be an effective device for promoting the school to high school students and their parents. When they arrive on campus as freshmen, however, many of those students will discover that there aren't many sunny days in that part of the world (what's worse, there aren't many smiling people either). The picture is not necessarily deceptive; unless faked, it is a recording of an actual–albeit posed–event. What the picture cannot do, in other words, is provide viewers with access to its opposite, cannot by picturing a smiling student on a sunny day suggest *non*-sunny days and *non*-smiling students. We can't look at a picture and produce its pictorial opposite without first translating it into a negatable linguistic assertion. To pictorially "oppose" the picture, we would have to treat the original as somehow equivalent to or captioned by the relevant language which our new picture refutes.

With words, on the other hand, there is *always* the possibility of negation; as Peirce (1991, p. 189) wrote, an "assertion always implies a denial of something else." When you say "It's hot out here," the statement is actually or potentially the opening volley for an infinite range of subsequent and easily-imagined or -produced opposing statements: "no, it's not," "*I* think it's cold," etc.[8] Because language is, from this point of view, so

[5] An expression not capable of being defended against criticism, however, is not a wasted expression. For Habermas, the "negative experiences" of refutation and failure are the preconditions for learning (p. 19).

[6] See "A dramatistic view of the origins of language and postscripts on the negative" (Burke, 1966, pp. 418–79) and "Definition of man" (Burke, 1966, pp. 3–24). See also Burke, 1970, pp. 18–22.

[7] See also Goodman (1976, 1978), Novitz (1977), and Walsh (1981).

[8] The so-called "preference for agreement" in conversation is merely another way of saying that people are aware of the ever-present possibility of *dis*-agreement and go out of their way to avoid it.

distinct from the existential complex which it is apparently "about," any assertion pretending to "be" reality is–by its very *difference* from that reality–open to doubt, question, elaboration, criticism, testing, disagreement, endorsement, etc.[9] With pictures, however, what is shown just *is*. A picture, because it seems to have a closer material relationship with the represented world, is therefore less available for opposition than language. It *resists* opposition, improvement, and debate as much as it resists assertion. The point here is not that language is more responsible than pictures; only that it is difficult to access reliably with a picture any message other than the one being pictured. To doubt, question, or criticize that message, we would need to introduce language into the situation, an operation that can be especially difficult (and risky) if the initial message is not linguistically explicit. Now it is true that we can construct a visual sign reliably translated as a verbal proscription; but this, Worth (1981, p. 173) claims, is simply a linguistic use of a visual form (e.g., a drawing of a cigarette superimposed by a red diagonal line is merely a visual substitute for the verbal utterance "No smoking").

Because, then, it partakes so powerfully of material reality, the picture lacks the distance both from "reality" and historical context which allow us to reliably negate it. Postman (1985, p. 73) writes that the photograph, for example, is "not refutable"; and Berger and Mohr (1982, p. 92) write that it is "irrefutable as evidence."[10] On this line of thought, refutability becomes a criterion of rationality. Sontag (1990, p. 23) writes, for example, that "all possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no," in "*not* accepting the world as it looks" to the camera. Is it for this reason that the visual has often met with such suspicion and hostility? Explaining his newspaper's refusal to print editorial cartoons, an editor of the *New York Times* argued that "A good strong cartoon is very likely to distort an editorial position that can be made more clearly, more fairly, and more accurately through the use of words" (as cited in Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981, p. 229). Gerbner (1994) claims that to resolve conflicts we must entertain a variety of perspectives, yet dramatic imagery tends to inhibit the complexity of thought and preempt alternative points of view. Fox (1994b), meanwhile, writes that the emotional intensity of visuals limits the number of rational options we weigh in thinking through problems (p. 77). And Hayakawa (in Fox, 1994a) has said that it is easier for people to have an uncritical confidence in images than in words (p. 184). The only way to "negate" an image, Hayakawa says, is to compare it with others and put it in a context (p. 188).

Williams' (1987) analysis of the 1940 Nazi documentary *The Wandering Jew* is relevant to this point. The images in the film, he writes, are *condensed* (i.e., partial, synecdochic) versions of a formal ideology, achieving with their very compression the simplicity, ambiguity, and emotional intensity which can protect the argument against deconstruction. They are also *present* (i.e., concrete, metonymic), material instantiations whose very materiality–their apparent closeness to actual life–makes them hard to refute. Williams argues that the "condensation of abstract ideology into representative form," combined with the "self-articulate vividness" of its images, makes *The Wandering Jew* seem "unimpeachable, if not 'incorruptible' " (p. 299). The film's "presence"–its sensory realism–imbues it with an "un-negated con-

[9] This is true even if we grant to language, as rhetoricians typically do, the illocutionary force posited for it by Austin (1975). Because if we claim that language as much *creates* reality as it is *about* reality, it is still, as language, subject to negation, only now what is being negated is not a statement *about* the world, but an intervention *in* the world. Rhetorical discourse always requires some kind of endorsement from others but must work for that endorsement because of the ever-present possibility that others will doubt, reject, or ignore that discourse.

[10] Becker (1986) says that once the photograph has been labeled, though, it can be tested for validity, representativeness, etc. This labeling, however, requires treating the photograph as evidence for a verbal claim.

creteness or totalization" (p. 300). As a "present" argument, Williams says, it "*is* what it *is* (undeconstructed; unhindered by negation)" (p. 303). He continues:

> Arguments which are visually, and perhaps more generally sensorily, present are less susceptible to the deconstructive turn in linguistic representation: as sensations, they simply are. (p. 303)

According to Williams, the Nazis represented their ideology in "picture units" whenever possible, knowing that rational argumentation could be better superceded in that way than through language (p. 305). Interestingly, the two characteristics of ideological argument that Williams points to–its compact and concrete qualities–would suggest that, according to the theory I have been advancing, the film isn't really an argument at all. That is, it lacks the requisite two-part structure of claim and support, and it is un-negatable. *The Wandering Jew* is dangerous, in other words, not so much because it argues a pernicious point, but because it communicates that point by avoiding argument altogether.

Some Conclusions

To sum up, argument is reasoning towards a debatable conclusion. It is a human act conducted in two parts (claim and support) and with awareness of two sides (the claim allows for and even invites opposition). By this definition, something which cannot be broken down into claim and support, and whose claim is not reliably contestable, is *not* an argument, whatever else it may be and however else it may *participate* in argument. It would seem, then, that a picture can be considered an "argument" only by stretching the meaning of that word beyond recognition. Its lack of internal differentiation between claim and support precludes it from serving as a self-sufficient argument. And its non-refutability precludes it from acting as an argumentative claim without language because it is unable to assert a *contestable* position. To be refutable, the picture would have to be translated into a linguistic statement, in which case either the visual is irrelevant (since now duplicated by language), or the verbal is such a reduction of the visual as to be an entirely new thought altogether. This last possibility, in which the non-argumentative artifact is translated into one, appears to be what Fisher and Filloy (1982) mean when they claim that fictional and dramatic works are "arguments." When they translate *The Great Gatsby*, what they end up with is clearly argumentative; but it is no longer *The Great Gatsby*.

So, if the visual cannot function as *both* claim and support (unless we make the distinction between them meaningless), and if it cannot, without language, be a claim, we are left with only one possibility: the visual can serve as support for a linguistic claim. This is not, it should be said, a minor role. In photography, for example, the picture can still carry the brunt of the communicative function, but its meaning is now argumentatively "anchored" by a verbal caption (Barthes, 1977, pp. 38–40). According to Berger and Mohr (1982), the photograph is "irrefutable as evidence" but weak in meaning; words, by contrast, are weak in authenticity but capable of great generality, negation, etc. (p. 92). Combined, the two create an artifact that is potentially reasonable by both of our criteria. The verbal claim is supported by pointing to or holding up a non-verbal "reason," the very materiality of the reason being what commends it rhetorically. Here's how Quintilian describes this kind of argument:

> But many other things have the power of persuasion, such as money, influence, the authority and rank of the speaker, or even some sight unsupported by language, when for instance the place of words is supplied by the memory of some individual's great deeds, by his lamentable appearance or the beauty of his person. Thus when Antonius in the course of his defense of Manius Aquilius tore open his client's robe and revealed the honourable scars which he had acquired while facing his country's foes, he relied no longer on the power of his eloquence, but appealed

directly to the eyes of the Roman people. (*Institutio Oratoria*, trans. 1920/1963 II.xv.6–8)

Rhetorical theory has often been uneasy with such "direct" evidence.[11] In O'Keefe (1982), for example, Aquilius' scars would be, at best, a "fringe" case of argument, the paradigm case being a linguistically explicable claim and one or more *overtly expressed* reasons (p. 14). But what O'Keefe calls a "fringe" case may well be the central form of argument in situations like the architectural design review. In such a case, the linguistic claim is supported by non-linguistic evidence which instantiates, illustrates, confirms, even proves it. This kind of evidence cannot be translated into language because the whole point of the evidence *is* its non-linguisticality, its closeness to the way the material world looks, used to look, or will look.

Now, it might be said that I define argument in such a way that it has a built-in bias towards linguistic forms. But that is precisely my point, that traditional conceptions of argument reflect an inherent connection to a particular kind of speech act, and to dissociate the term from that act would strip the concept of its most important qualities. While it may be true that form is often subordinate to use, it is also true that form can determine use *to a degree.* A stick may indeed "be" a spoon if it is used as one, but some things can be used as spoons only by completely distorting what we mean by "spoon." Argument, that is, may not be as flexible a concept as some have hoped. My approach here might also strike some as overly normative: it deals with what an argument *should* be but doesn't help us understand the range of arguments actually encountered in the world. But definitions of argument cannot avoid normative thinking.[12] Defining "argument" is not, in this regard, like defining "question." The criterion we use to demarcate argument from non-argument (for example, "reasonableness") is typically a criterion that has inescapable cultural value. For me, an argument is an intentional act structured in claim and support components and situated in a specifiable social dispute. This is normative in the sense that that kind of act often has cultural value; but something could be an argument by this criterion and still be "bad."

My purpose in this paper has not been to disparage the pictorial. I am not arguing here that pictures are rhetorically uninteresting or irrelevant. Pictures exert enormous influence in our culture, and they deserve increased attention from scholars whose primary interests are verbal. I have rehearsed here a conventional theory of argument in the interest of highlighting features of that theory that might be obscured or lost if the concept is watered down.[13] If what we mean by "argument" is the act of advancing reasonable positions in contexts of doubt and difference, then a picture cannot, independent of language, be an argument.

[11] According to Kennedy (1963), the art of rhetoric that developed in Greece during the 5th and 4th centuries, BCE–intended primarily to help litigants manage cases in court–often played down the role of visual or material evidence, such as eyewitness testimony and written documents. In the legend of the Sicilian origins of rhetoric, for example, exiles returning to Syracuse when democracy was restored there wanted to reclaim land to which they no longer had physical title. Teachers of rhetoric instructed these claimants in using probabilistic reasoning to win their cases, appealing to socially-situated beliefs and values without having to adduce "hard" evidence. And even when such evidence *was* available, it was often looked upon with suspicion because it could so easily be fabricated: a property title could be forged or an eyewitness bribed. Probabilities, on the other hand, can never be counterfeited. Necessarily linguistic, they make no pretensions to actuality; they appeal only to what *generally* happens or what is widely (or authoritatively) believed.

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[12] Cf. van Eemeren's (1990) account of argumentation as "normative pragmatics"; see also Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson & Jacobs (1993).

[13] Balthrop (1980) refers to this as the "radical act" of returning to the roots of argumentation theory (p. 184).

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