Jun 1st, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Political Cartoons in a Stephen Toulmin Landscape

Leo Groarke
Wilfrid Laurier University

Political Cartoons in a Stephen Toulmin Landscape

LEO GROARKE

Office of the Dean
Wilfrid Laurier University
Brantford, Ontario
Canada N3T 2Y3
lgroarke@wlu.ca

DATA — CLAIM
QUALIFIER
WARRANT
BACKING

A TOULMINIAN ARTIST PAINTS A LANDSCAPE
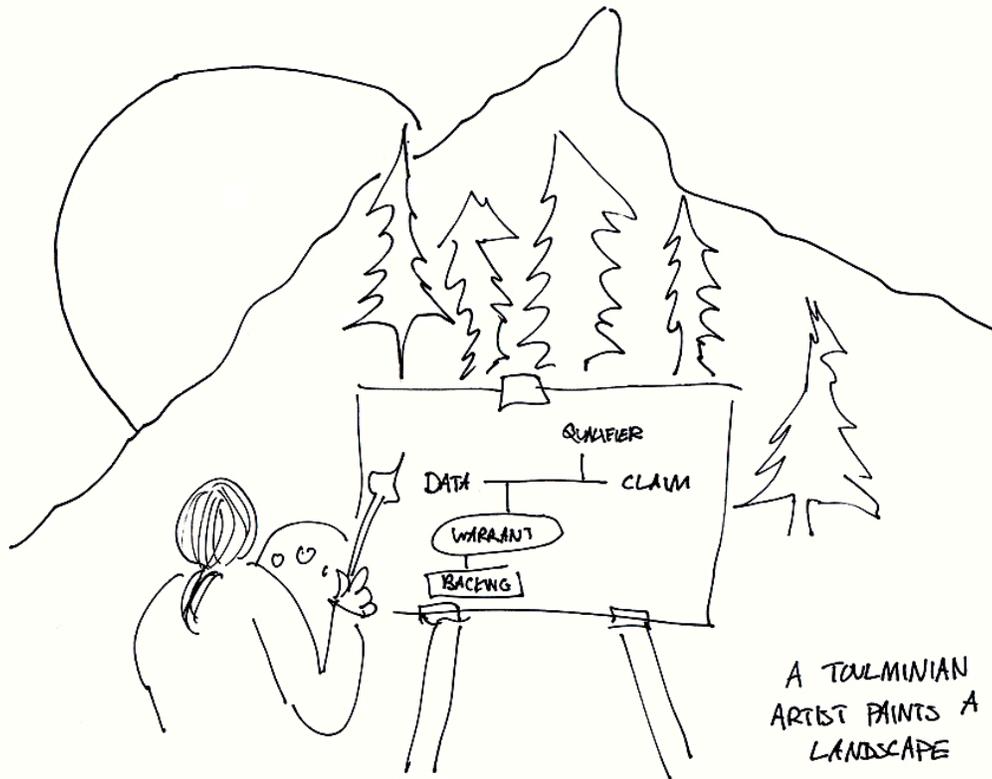
ABSTRACT: Fifteen years ago, those who studied arguments assumed that they are sets of verbal claims. Since that time, 'visual' arguments have emerged as an important topic in the theory of argument. In the course of this development, a number of commentators have made important contributions to our understanding of such arguments (see, e.g., Shelley 1996; Shelley 2003; Blair 1996; Blair 2003; Gilbert 1997; Groarke 1996; Groarke 2002; Groarke and Tindale 2004; Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz & Walters 2005.).

Some other commentators (most notably Johnson 2003) steadfastly reject the suggestion that visual images can be arguments. But even they accept that a satisfactory attempt to understand argument must recognize the pervasive role that visual images play in everyday persuasion, argument

and debate, and this itself implies the need for an account of argument that recognizes the role that visual images play in these kinds of contexts.

The interest in visual argument that characterizes contemporary work on argument befits an age in which technology has made images an increasingly important feature of day-to-day argument. It is in view of this that public argument is frequently framed, defined and fuelled by the images we see on television, in photographs, glossy advertisements and political cartoons, on the World Wide Web, and in promotional, documentary and feature film.

In the present paper, I hope to add to the literature on visual argument by showing how the Toulmin model of argument can be applied to visual arguments. By 'Toulmin model' I mean the data-warrant account of argument that Stephen Toulmin develops in Chapter III of *The Uses of Argument*. In this discussion I will, like many commentators in Speech Communication, be using the model as a practical tool in the analysis of arguments. In using the model in this way, I will leave for elsewhere a discussion of the important implications that Toulmin's view of argument has for the philosophy of argument.

In applying the Toulmin model to visual arguments, I take the latter to be sets of premises and conclusions that are expressed by (non-verbal) visual means. Not every argument that is accompanied by visual images is, on this account, a visual argument. In many cases, the images that accompany arguments are coincidental or purely aesthetic, or function as 'visual flags' that attempt to capture our attention, but play no role within the argument in question (see Groarke & Tindale 2004). A visual argument is an argument in which images are essential to the argument or its communication. If one eliminates its visual components, then what remains of a visual argument does not convey the argument in question.

Photographs, drawings, cartoons, logos, symbols, film footage, dramatic performances, etc. may all function as elements of visual arguments. One can find visual arguments that are expressed in entirely visual ways, but most visual arguments combine visual and verbal cues. In the world of working argument, this makes good sense because it allows arguers to expand the possibilities for creating and expressing argument. In this way, visual arguments can combine the strengths of verbal and visual modes of communication.

The Toulmin model has become a popular model for argument analysis (most notably in Speech Communication) because it illuminates aspects of argument that are not as clearly delineated in alternative approaches. In the context of visual argument, the model raises a number of intriguing questions. Are the different elements of the Toulmin model – data, warrant, backing, qualifier, reservation, rebuttal, field – evident in visual arguments? Is it possible to understand visual arguments in these terms? How can one express the different Toulminian features – qualifiers, for example – in visual terms? Does the Toulmin model have any shortcomings when it is used in this context? And can its analysis of visual argument teach us anything about the analysis of arguments more generally?

In this paper, I shall argue that the Toulmin model can be applied to visual arguments, and will attempt to illustrate the different aspects of the model – data, warrant, backing, qualifier, reservation and rebuttal – with concrete examples of cartoons and especially political cartoons. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate that visual arguments incorporate the elements of argument countenanced in the Toulmin approach to argument. In view of this, the Toulmin model can be a useful tool in the analysis of visual argument.

REFERENCES

Blair, J. Anthony 1996. 'The Possibility and Actuality of Visual Arguments,' *Argument and Advocacy* 33.1.
Blair, J. Anthony 2003. 'The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments.' In Charles A. Hill & Marguerite Helmers, eds. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Gilbert, Michael 1997. *Coalescent Argument*. Mahaw, NJ: Erlbaum.
Groarke, Leo 1996. 'Logic, Art and Argument.' *Informal Logic*, Vol. 18, 116-131, Nos. 2&3 (Summer & Fall Double Issue).
Groarke, Leo 2002. 'The Pragma-Dialectics of Visual Argument,' in Frans H. van, ed. 2002. *Advances In Pragma-Dialectics*. Amsterdam: SicSat.
Groarke, Leo 2003. 'Commentary on Ralph H. Johnson, 'Why 'visual arguments' aren't arguments.' J. Anthony Blair, Daniel Farr, Hans V. Hansen, Ralph H. Johnson & Christopher W. Tindale, eds. *Informal Logic @ 25*. Windsor: Ontario Society for the Study of Argument, 2003.
Groarke, Leo and Christopher Tindale, 2004. *Good Reasoning Matters!* (3rd edition). Toronto: Oxford University Press.
Johnson, Ralph H. 2003. 'Why 'visual arguments' aren't arguments.' J. Anthony Blair, Daniel Farr, Hans V. Hansen, Ralph H. Johnson & Christopher W. Tindale, eds. *Informal Logic @ 25*. Windsor: Ontario Society for the Study of Argument, 2003.
Lunsford, Andrea A., John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters. 2005 *Everything's an Argument*. 3rd ed. New York: Bedford / St. Martins.
Shelley, Cameron, 1996. 'Rhetorical and Demonstrative Modes of Visual Argument: Looking at Images of Human Evolution.' *Argumentation and Advocacy*. 33.4.
Shelley, Cameron, 2003. 'Aspects of visual argument: A study of the `March of Progress',' *Informal Logic* 21.2.
Toulmin, Stephen E. 2003. The Uses of Argument. Updated Edition. Cambridge University Press: NewYork.