

ISSA Proceedings 2006 - Visual Arguments In Film

✘ 1. Introduction

New developments in the study of the argumentation have been addressed to extend to contexts beyond those with which it was initially preoccupied. One significant point has been the recognition that important realms of argument exist outside the verbal and written arguments. One of these is found in the visual argumentation. In this context, Birdsell and Groarke (1996) defend that some visual images are arguments, but of a non-propositional kind. Blair (1996) maintains that images can have propositional content and qualify as propositional arguments, since the propositions and their argumentative functions are expressed visually. The controversy affects to the paradigm of arguments as verbal entities, a paradigm which is centred on arguments understood as products that people do when argue. This is the logical dimension of argument. But we may consider the rhetorical dimension that allows us to understand the process of arguing as a natural process in the persuasive communication.

In our opinion, that controversy is unnecessary. We assume that some images function as arguments intended to persuade viewers. As our concern is cinema, we think that the contextual factors, the filmmaker's aims and characters' emotions are crucial for determining the meaning of visual arguments in film and eventually for persuading audience to accept the thesis the filmmaker wanted to establish. We know that rational argument is not omnipotent. The power of persuasion which this argument possesses might be impressive, but inferior to the direct force of images. Vision and images go together in allowing this driving force. According to Gorgias, our spirit is moulded even in its character through vision, "for the things we see do not have the nature which we wish them to have, but the nature which each happens to have; through sight the soul is impressed even to its core" (2003, p. 82). As Carl Theodor Dreyer (1999, pp. 60 and 90) used to say, cinema is a visual art and images reach viewer's consciousness easier than words. Images have a great influence on our state of mind, and filmmakers cause emotions and passions with the intention of touching us.

As orators, filmmakers try to promote their intentions and to get the adherence of spectators to their standpoints using images with the eventual support of

characters' dialectical interchanges. But in cinema *éthos* and *páthos* seem to be more important than *lógos*. Visual images impact on spectators' emotions through the emotions experienced by characters which are part of filmmaker's strategies. However, we are neither compelled to share the point of view of the camera or of a character, nor entirely free to supply inferences or judgments of our own. Obviously the viewer is free to supply value judgments based on previous experience. But freedom is submitted to complex process of reading/viewing the film. Thus, by adding an element of rhetorical analysis, cinema allows that criticism carries forward into a domain where questions of the viewer's activity become necessary.

2. Verbal arguments and visual arguments

Visual arguments can be understood as propositional arguments in which the propositions and their argumentative function are expressed visually. This is due to the fact that the argument definition has always carried with it the idea that an argument is something that can be made explicit. This point brings up what Tarnay has called the requirement of propositionality. Although some scholars consider that there is continuity between verbal and visual forms of argument (cf. Groarke 1996), it is not difficult to see with Tarnay that, when one clarifies an argument transmitted by a succession of images, one has carried out a hermeneutic reconstruction. That is, an argument is built starting from the hierarchy of meanings associated with, or transmitted for, the images (*lógos*); the rhetorical context in what they are taking place or the intention (*éthos*); and from the emotional effect produced (*páthos*) (Tarnay 2003, p. 1001).

Now, when asking himself for the possibility of the visual argument, and trying to answer affirmatively, Blair (1996) seems to say that it is necessary to communicate visually the functions of the propositions. But this must be done in a way that can be communicated that some visual propositions are proposed as theses (conclusions) and others as reasons in favour of those theses, with independence that some of them have not been expressed explicitly (not even visually). In other words, in principle it doesn't seem to be impossible to express visually the illative function or the function of being "a reason in favour of." As a last resort, images can only be understood as arguments if their (manifest and latent) content is reconstructed in propositional terms, repeating the subordination of aesthetics, literature and rhetoric to the perspective of the logic as a unique critical method in the argumentative field.

Blair also assumes that the topic requires of the adoption of certain visual conventions, but this is not less certain with the verbal communication. Cinema, for example, is full of visual conventions. The greatness of some movies proceeds, however, of the capacity shown by some filmmakers to subvert the conventional meanings, leaving the way open to multiple interpretations and to the critical polemic. But this, once again, is not less certain of the problems posed by large arguments in academic contexts that are not exclusively visual, as it is the case in philosophy and the way of interpreting the arguments of great philosophers (See, for instance, Santas 1979).

Blair points out an important difference between the verbal expression and the visual expression. A verbal or written sentence transmits or gives an idea of its propositional content, if there is no indication against it. But it doesn't happen this way with all visual expression. In this line, he mentions *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989) as a merely entertaining movie, while *Dancing with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990) or *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991) would aim to the existence of "thesis" movies—an idea so old as cinema— or "intellectuals"—I. Bergman's or A. Tarkovsky's cinema come to our mind— that could be dramatically structured with the purpose of expressing a certain point of view and, in this way, to show up as candidates to visual arguments.

Nevertheless, Blair concludes that there is a much bigger indetermination in the visual expression than in the verbal one. This conclusion is quite trivial so far as propositional contents are concerned. Somehow, visual images are arbitrary, vague, and ambiguous, but this also happens to words and propositions. This is the reason that, for example, historians discuss about the interpretation of historical documents or that personal antagonism will turn around what one said and what sought to say. While the verbal expression so understood enjoys a bigger precision than the visual expression, it may enjoy a smaller force of persuasion.

The meaning of a visual argument depends on a complex set of internal relations between (successions of) images and a set of interpreters, but it should be recognized that the (visual) meaning is not necessarily arbitrary and it usually depends, also, of the context. This involves a wide variety of cultural suppositions, ideas related with the situation, information that can change as time goes by, the knowledge of the interpreters, and the dialectic developed among them. So in the case of visual expressions, a range of interpretive possibilities can open up to be inferred from the external or internal contextual clues. This is what endows visual

arguments with a bigger force and versatility. They are arguments in whose interpretation, analysis and evaluation, the (meta)-argumentative idea of “discussing matters” (Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 14) makes more sense as something typical of the argumentative processes. Here resides, in our view, a very important difference between verbal arguments and visual arguments.

For his part, Tarnay seems to sustain that most of the images belong to a special mode —to be named mixed because “it makes use of both verbal or textual and visual capacities” (2003, p. 1004)— up to the point that it is possible to affirm that “image is thought and thought is image” (p. 1005). However, we find the statement a bit exaggerated at least with regard to moving images in general, because it would be only applicable to films of an “intellectual” kind. This is made clear when Tarnay mentions in this context to the Soviet filmmaker S. Eisenstein. But it is obvious that there are movies that continue producing concrete emotions in the spectators without enjoying that label. They make use of a determinate form of montage of images. We think, for instance, in the peculiar form of altering the temporary order of narration in *Pulp Fiction* (Q. Tarantino, 1994), a film that is far from being classified as intellectual, no matter how much it argues in a plausible way against the gratuitous violence of the visual American world, either in films or in comics, making exclusively use of images (and music) no less violent, but that possess concrete and perfectly recognizable meanings.

Finally, Tarnay points out, rightly in our view, that the explanation of a visual argument should highlight how the images can be articulated. He points to two forms of articulation. According to the first one, it would be necessary to trace a lineal order inside the structure of the image on a par with the way of understanding the narration, and then to describe the result again, an operation possibly connected with ambiguities or important changes. According to the second form —and interpreting Tarnay—, articulation will take place making connections based on the perceptive similarity, connections that could give place to arguments, but that for themselves they would not constitute arguments, due to the mediation of a perception that would be direct and non-inferential. It is not difficult to agree with these two forms of articulation of the images, but not with the problems that Tarnay sees in them. We believe that *Pulp Fiction*, with its peculiar narrative structure —changeable in an easy way after recognizing trivially the causal and inferential connections—, could remove his worries. By the way, it would be hardly surprising that Aristotle had been happy with the

structure of this film. It is enough to remember that for him, "it is necessary for demonstrative understanding in particular to depend on things which are true and primitive and immediate and more familiar than and prior to and explanatory of the conclusion" (1991, p. 115). The axiomatic skeletal nature of Tarantino's film is "protected" by the appropriate colour and music.

On the other hand, in movies, viewers have to interpret what was said starting from the explicit elements, reconstructing with a lot of frequency the original message for their own means and with their own words, and connecting the meaning constituted in this way with their own experiences, beliefs and values. In this sense, and by way of example, it could be said that the most intellectual films, as visual arguments, leave the way open to different interpretations. Interpreters will endow arguments with a meaning that it will not necessarily coincide with the meaning that the filmmaker had originally in mind. In this sense, we can speak of the formal or open character of the visual arguments. The visual arguments already interpreted will be a motive of controversy among the critical interpreters, because there will always be discrepancies on the correctness or on the incorrectness of the interpretation, and thus we find ourselves in a new argumentative, or better meta-argumentative, situation.

Now, it could be thought that, to some extent, all that we have are psychological processes of reasoning and interpretation, and rhetorical processes of expression. As an instrument, logic has not still come on stage. As a critical method or instrument, logic is better understood as a dimension that comes on stage after an argument has been expressed (Toulmin 2003, pp. 3-8). Although argument crosscuts the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, it relies on logic, at least in the informal sense. It may employ not the strict demonstrative logic but rather the softer of the rhetorical enthymeme. The logic may be also inductive, or perhaps analogous. But unlike narrative (chrono-)logic, argumentative logic is not temporal. Arguments rest not on continuity but on some intellectually stronger, usually more abstract ground such as that of the relation of logical consequence. Generally, arguments presuppose differences of opinion. Arguers presume the audience already to have a certain attitude, which they try to alter or sometimes reinforce (cf. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 14).

Since the arguments do not always appear in the form required by logic, it is a retrospective point of view that is activated when somebody adopts a critical position and "lays out" an argument ready for analysis and evaluation. When

carrying out the logical evaluation, the critics should also deploy their rhetorical and dialectical perceptiveness. Rhetoric intervenes in the analysis of the arguments in order to understand what is happening. Given that the symbolic resources by means of which we can make arguments are virtually infinite, the arguments can be knitted in the subtlest and dark way. So rhetorical analysis is useful when unwrapping the subtle movements inside the argumentative texts and, hence, the rhetorical analysis transforms itself into a necessary instrument of the logical reconstruction. In other words, rhetoric allows us to see what arguments are being knitted and by means of what symbolic elements.

3. Story and argument

In film all the elements serve the purpose of telling a story. What makes stylistic elements particularly special is their function to involve the viewers in the storytelling process as active, intelligent partners. They stir their imagination and make them realize that there is only a fine line between comedy and tragedy, while entertaining them and letting them have fun. But visual argument works in films in other different way. As it is involved with questions of interpretation and intention, interpreters may offer different interpretations and here is where the pragma-dialectics comes in. That is, the interpretation of visual argument may entail a certain position in a dispute about which was the filmmaker's intentions in making that film or filming such a sequence.

The idea that there is a connection between the beliefs of the filmmaker and what is true in the story gains support from certain structural similarities between a person's system of belief and what is true in a story. In fact, as Currie says (1990, p. 74), "the logical structure of fictional truth is very like the logical structure of belief". This is one of the reasons why is so important to make clear the nature of visual arguments in film. And one of the most important and difficult questions in this field, is the question of recognition: when can we say that a sequence in a film (or a whole film) provides us with an argument? It is not enough to guess about, or point to, the conclusion and premises of the argument. The problem here is to understand how (visual) rhetoric provides the filmmaker with ways of constructing meaning and the spectator with ways of interpreting and knowing.

In a variable degree, filmmakers have the heuristic capacity to conceive ideas and to generate alternative in order to take a creative decision. But this decision can be done through visual arguments, which have the power of reasoning and discourse. Filmmakers have also the associative capacity to propose meanings to

the spectators, and to articulate the images in a way that viewers will be able through interpretation to make the relevant inferences. We may discover here the originality of the filmmaker through two capacities: (1) the capacity to complete to a certain point, and to set against each other, the images generating argumentative structures, which are possibly identified by the spectators; and (2) the capacity to conceive a narrative program in order to make it acceptable by the spectator, setting its elements in a way that the audience could participate (their complicity), and making it entertaining. But film is at its most powerful when it leaves things to the viewer's imagination. Notice that spectators give consistency and verisimilitude to the story, and they contribute to the structural articulation offered by the filmmaker. In this way, the spectators may unveil fundamental positions in the story and explain the validity and coherence of the arguments put forward by the filmmaker.

In film, the story is narrated in action, developing the theme and the points that confer aesthetical value to it. With respect to the story, the whole argument is an element that exhibits these functions: (1) arranges the referential plane, (2) transforms the story in an abstract and discursive operation of the mind (logical and philosophical plane), (3) shapes it in order to be content of (persuasive) communication, (4) articulates it as a dialectics of human actions, committing characters with scenarios and all of them with strategies and goals, and leaving arguments as central elements in the speeches made by characters, and (5) allows legibility. It is not difficult to find all these functions illustrated in *Der Name der Rose* (*The Name of the Rose*, Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1986).

When the idea and the theme have been exhibited through the argument, we reach the claim that has been argued. In some way, the argument has been the dialectics of action and the claim is gathered from it. At the end of *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), Maria says to Freder: "Head and hands want to join together but they don't have the heart to do it... Oh mediator, show them the way to each other..." The whole film has served to argue the validity of the assertion that heart must be the mediator between head and hands. Notice that in this film, as in other silent films, the claim is the result of the didactic function (traditionally) assigned to the image. It is not (only) the result of a rational argument, but the result of the evidence provided by images. The claim not only is connected to a rhetorical dimension in the image, but, above all, to a pragmatic dimension. It links (argumentative) discourse with the ideology and with the universe of values,

and it constitutes an assertion that refers to a determinate world view.

The quality of the audiovisual story lies not in the theme but above all in the discourse, i.e., in the way it is dealt with and developed till the moment it is converted in an argument. So the argument is the rhetoric and pragmatic effect of the audiovisual discourse. It reveals in action the consistency of the rational argument, and the efficiency of the persuasive force (i.e., verisimilitude of the content of the story and the constructive involvement of the spectator). The proclivity of some filmmakers to associate the iconic story with the argumentative discourse gives way to the films of thesis. In some way, the thesis is the theme that is rationally, but visually, argued. The theme is the abstract formulation and the thesis is the visually argued proposition. But when the argument hypertrophies and breaks with the aesthetical equilibrium of the film, we face a literary story and not an argument. The literary contamination of the supposed argument may be detected when the film arrives to its end. For instance, the final shaking hands between boss and worker at cathedral door in *Metropolis* ruins the whole argument, because a social film like this cannot finish in this way: it looks more like a fairytale than an argument.

4. Rhetoric, argument and imposition of images

In film, visuality is not merely a language or a representation of the real. Visuality functions as an appeal. There is then a rhetoric that elaborates and exploits visual ambiguity to promote identification and that rhetoric will function whether a filmmaker self-consciously directs spectators' attention to that process or not. In *North by Northwest* (1959), Hitchcock takes spectators as victims that suffer with the protagonist the incomprehension of the people that surround him. This is a mechanism of identification that manipulates spectators playing with their emotions. However, Hitchcock does not care about speeches, but about images. He is not interested in saying, but in showing. He is a creator of visual forms in order to express emotions in his characters and transmit them to the audience. Emotions can affect perception, though not systematically. Conversely, perceptions can affect emotion —hence, powers of cinema. Emotions are also associated with meaning, and beyond visual information we may create hypotheses in order to interpret what was seen. But to serve this function, rhetoric must be a means of discovery and communicating good reasons. It must be the process by which the filmmaker tries to achieve justified consensus with spectators on questions of action and belief. In this way, rhetoric may generate

knowledge, the kind of knowledge that helps us to judge when we should change our minds, especially about value questions. If it is constitutive of good reasons, rhetoric may tell us when we are in the presence of truths worthy of collective assent. Obviously the process operates in the realm of contingent judgment, and involves not the imposition of the views of the filmmaker on a passive audience but the active participation of spectators, which must interpret the film's proposal.

Here we are understanding "argument" in the first sense of Daniel J. O'Keefe (1982, pp. 3-4) as "a kind of utterance or a sort of communicative act." It is a kind of argument that we can make in the absence of an interlocutor, that may have a relatively implicit message, and that may require considerable interpretation. In this case, it tends to require the greatest degree of interpretation from the critic who would appreciate fully what it means. We know that this is a bit different of O'Keefe's view, because making an argument in this sense involves the communication of "a linguistically explicable claim" and "one or more overtly expressed reasons which are linguistically explicit" (1982, p. 14). It is obvious that we can find the second meaning that O'Keefe assigns to argument, "to have an argument," inside the filmed story. But on the whole it is most important the first sort of argument, because it will be the argument the filmmaker wants to present to the audience. In this case, it is more satisfactory to say that the formulation of the argument avoids any reference to the way in which an argument of the first sense was actually communicated.

This is a very important point that may fade away the reserves that some theoreticians have shown with respect to visual arguments (cf. Johnston 2003). These arguments may have elements that contribute to their persuasive force. But when interpreted in order to be reconstructed as arguments in O'Keefe's first sense those elements may be lost or cannot be expressible in (verbal) language. As O'Keefe, we think that there is nothing questionable or faulty in abstracting the argument from its communicative vehicle. But the problem with visual arguments is the fidelity with the intentions of the filmmaker. This is why a lot of interpretation is necessary in order to make fully explicit the claim of the argument and the whole set of premises. And the most important question will be: For what sorts of objects or phenomena should one hold a theory of visual argument accountable? (Sentence adapted from O'Keefe 1982, p. 20). We feel that a theory of visual argument is not absolutely necessary. If we do not forget

the role that rhetoric must play in an argumentation theory, we can talk about visual arguments that are arguments. We may transform visual arguments in verbal arguments losing part of their rhetorical force. But logic will remain if we want to recognize the argument as such, although the persuasive force will be clearly weakened. Arguing rationally is not the same as arguing persuasively.

To fix a little more what we mean, we can go to images that for their beauty can exercise, as Dreyer pointed out, a great influence on spectator's state of mind. If the image could be constituted in visual argument, the beautiful objects would intervene in the argument. Here, "intervene" can mean that the beautiful qualities are not directly implied in the argument. Beauty would be only that judgment that calls the attention on the argument, just as the style gives weight or strength to the content. Hence, the beauty of the object is virtually irrelevant for the argument (cf. Toulmin, Rieke & Janik 1979, pp. 349-367). But the qualities that are considered beautiful in an image are good enough to capture the attention and to make of the image a particularly interesting object of interpretation. In this way, beauty works in support of the eventual meaning of the image as a visual argument. In other words, beauty could be subordinate to the visual argument. But the claim that beauty raises the aesthetic interpretation—aided possibly in arguments that will be or not visual—is different from the claim of the interpretive conception in which the beauty is subordinate to the argument. In the first case, we would have what Johnson (2003) pointed out as an aesthetic interpretation that can vary from an individual to another. That is, while the interpretive conception understands beauty as a feature that gives support to the argument, the other conception would understand beauty as an arguable feature.

On the other hand, the beauty of the moving image is good enough to question the perceptions and experiences of the viewers, and it presents a new look on some facet of their existence, influencing probably their beliefs or making them pay attention to the argument. We must remember that in some way image is imposing upon viewers. So, the argumentative function of beauty does not reside in its propositional content or in its support to a favourite interpretation of the work of art, but in the possibility of reconceptualising, for instance, some of the viewers' beliefs and attitudes. The suggestion transmitted by beauty alone is strong enough to question my way of conceptualizing, for example, the relations among the characters that appear in a moving image. We can even act with

bigger understanding toward people implied in a determinate relationship. Returning to Dreyer, anybody who has seen his film *Ordet* (*The Word*, 1955) will be able to remember the way so subtle and delicate with which the Danish filmmaker argues his positions in favour of a certain form of understanding the religious faith as something alive and concrete, and against a dead and abstract faith.

5. Concluding: visual arguments in the man who shot liberty valance

Groarke (2002, p. 145, 2006) says that in order to interpret images in visual arguments three principles of visual communication are available from pragma-dialectics. In an attempt to apply them to film, we take them to be like these: (1) moving images must be in principle understandable; (2) moving images must be interpreted making sense of its internal elements; and (3) moving images must be interpreted making sense of its external connections. As we have suggested, the evaluation of visual argument in film will depend on a successful interpretation. But this does not mean that there is just one available and valid interpretation. Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992, p. 44) explain that “the problem is that the communicative function of speech acts often remain implicit.” Needing then considerable interpretation in order to be understood, film, as an open work of art, may have more than one interpretation. *El ángel exterminador* (*The Exterminating Angel*, Luis Buñuel, 1962) may be a nice example. But for our purpose we had the fortune to find a film that may have just one interpretation and has a lot to say about communication in a non-civilized society in transition to another supposedly civilized. In our opinion, this film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962), illustrates the three principles of visual communication. In short, everybody may understand and interpret its images in a way that does not lack of internal and external coherence.

In *The Man...*, we are faced with a society in the process of being taught to read and write, because education is the basis of law and order. Everything turns on the birth of a new state, and so it is necessary to sacrifice a determinate way of life. The thesis defended by Ford may be translated into a question for the (American) spectators, “Are you proud of this transition with progress?” Ford’s argument is centred on the comparison of these five pairs: violence / law and order; revenge / legality, state; pre-rational / rational; passion / reason; and preverbal communication / verbal communication. The first component of each pair is shown in the film through images. Words are conspicuous by their

absence. The representative of the first component is Liberty Valance who establishes the conflict between the Western law and the law that comes from the East.

But while Valance is the ugly face of the West, Tom Doniphon is the man that will be self-sacrificed in order to facilitate the change to a new age. While Tom represents the strength and the natural authority, Ransom Stoddard, a representative of the second pair, will represent the word and the knowledge of law, and therefore progress. Not being a man of words, Tom will reproach Ransom precisely for this ("You talk too much, think too much!"), although unconsciously his will be the hand that drives the progress making of himself an obsolete piece of the past. Indeed, this was possible dramatically because Tom is a hero that leaves the stage deliberately and silently for loving Hallie. When Tom tells Ransom about the true man who shot Valance, exonerating him from his moral scruples, we know for sure that Tom is the man of this transition ("Hallie wanted you alive. You taught her to read; now... give her something to read about"). This is the story of *The Man...* that is narrated visually. In doing so, Ford has defended that progress is a contaminating force (cf. McBride 2004, p. 692: "There is no future in America"), and although he has consciously shot the falsity of the legend, he has proven —visually but unconsciously— a truth, namely, that there is a territory for visual argumentation in films.

As we see it, *The Man...* introduces explicit visual argumentation in an innovative way. The film both tells a story and explicitly argues a thesis. The viewer is faced with a question that never seems answered: Is this an argumentative essay serviced by a visual narrative whose story line is explicated by one of the character without never says a word about the argued thesis? The answer is positive. In fact, the visual is used to argue. Ford metaphorically characterizes the contaminated progress with the train at the beginning and at the end of the film. The smoke through the sown fields speaks thousand words about the thesis that have been sustained along the film. Narrative is at the service of argument. As Ransom becomes very much involved in the life of Shinbone's citizens, visual images have been doing their job in an informal way and plenty of emotions, although they have not been mechanically matched. The discontinuity of sound and visual images seems to accomplish a very important thing: to stress the independent objectivity of the story and so the independent objectivity of the (dialectical) arguments exhibited by characters. It seems as if the camera has nothing to do with the story. It is like the collective eye of the audience. And it

seems as if the camera were telling us, if you accept this story then you must accept that progress is a contaminating force.

The behaviour of the fictional characters illustrates the need to argue visually, but naturally, in a preverbal community. Beneath their too familiar personal ways of communication, we can see the broader ways of persuasion. The dialectic of the verbal and preverbal has been driving the story, showing the conflict between two mentalities. In fact, words will be associated to progress. But people who were born in that preverbal community will be using the same norms of behaviour to communicate and argue among them. At the end, even Ransom will adopt that behaviour —silence— as an answer to the ticket collector in the train, because the meaning of some feelings is beyond words.

Ford describes visually the limitations placed on men and women by their situation in Shinbone's society. That human culture, whose purpose is to secure the cohesion of the group, stringently controls the degree to which some of its members may fight. Because overt physical struggle will not do in "civilized" society, little by little, it will be replaced by dialectical fight through political speeches. Shots of these moments constitute a visual representation of men arguing a certain case. But precisely in those moments, filmic shots of Tom —silently, unshaven, old cowboy dressed— show that we are attending to the end of a society. The smoke from his cigarette at the moment of starting to reveal the truth about the man who shot Liberty Valance is the prelude to the train's contamination and a visual argument that tries to prove that modern society, and so democracy, is based on a lie.

The uniqueness of the film turns on the fact that we are attending to a story where visual arguments have a place in order to show a transition from a nonverbal society (where visual arguments abound as a way of communication) to a verbal society. Anyone who knows Ford's love for Western may understand his preference for that old preverbal world, which even enjoys a different morality. Somehow this film was his last word defending it. But notice that we may divide up the discourse functions: on one hand, the inside story and, on the other, Ford's reflections and argument. One tells the events of the story, the other tells about the moral, political and social ideas of his creator. From the narrative perspective, the last one is parallel to the first, but must be reconstructed by spectators. In other words, the reconstructed argumentative discourse makes reference to the story, but the narrative discourse brings together the elements of the

argument—sometimes in an emotively way. The return of Ransom and Hallie to Shinbone for Tom’s funeral is a case in point.

We have gone into detail in characterizing this film because of its effective demonstration of how cinema can tell a story and explicitly argue a relatively simple case at the same time, but in a visual way. The visual elements of film foster identification and appeal to the capacity of our mind to assert its vision of the world. The experience of visualizing is quite distinct from the experience of propositional (verbal) argument. It leaves open the possibility that in some uses of visual imagination we are drawing upon past experiences of seeing as evidence, because the visual field arrives in consciousness as fully formed visual experience. But the visual field is usually tainted by ideology or desire (cf. Gregory 1998). In some way, what we see is a consequence of what we are looking for. So this is a peril we must face when trying to interpret the supposed visual argument. Besides, the medium requires the audience to do a lot of inferring. Filmmakers prefer to present information visually, through different techniques. Even unsophisticated audiences have learned to draw conclusions from relatively small bits of visual information. Our skill in doing so is especially developed for narrative films, since they are the kind that we most often see. We constantly test our interpretations against some story line. In films like *The Man...* many of its shots constitute evidence for intellectual propositions, and narrative is used to express its arguments visually.

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