Perception, inference, and understanding in visual argumentation (and beyond)[1]

In the previous chapter, I was concentrating on some theoretical concepts VA was (in my view) lacking (and still is), but should be incorporated in their conceptual framework in order to better explain how visuals really function, that is, how they catch the viewers' attention, how the viewers break them down, and how they reconstruct and infer their meaning.

I'll be returning to some of these concepts at the very end, when (tentatively) introducing the 'perceptual-cognitive filtering grid' (a purely technical working name), a version of pragmatic-semantic interface, indispensable (but usually implicit) in every meaning construction and interpretation.

My conclusion in the previous chapter, after analyzing Groarke's famous Detroit River fruit paper in detail, was that

> If after checking and re-checking different photos, different texts, and the strange fruit that was found in Detroit River, we finally point (and probably gaze) at it, declaring: 'This fruit is (not) a bread fruit!', we have produced a composite utterance, (enchronically) embracing several (at least) seven layers of meaning, belonging to three types of signs (conventional signs: words/text; non-conventional signs: photos, gesture, gaze; symbolic indexicals: demonstrative pronoun 'this'). (Žagar ibid.: 852)

Or put differently and more explicitly: in case of visuals and VA, reasoning is not and cannot be just seeing, and just seeing is not and cannot be reasoning, as Groarke hastily claims in his paper 'The Elements of Argument: Six Steps to a Thick theory ' (Groarke 2013: 34–36). Consequently, there can be no 'pure' visual, but only multimodal, argumentation: at least verbal and most probably other codes should be taken into consideration when analyzing an alleged visual, in order to reach sufficient, satisfying, complete, and as less biased meaning interpretation as possible.

'Pure' and 'infected' visuals, eye tracking and pilot questionnaire

In the present chapter, I want to upgrade the theoretical (conclusions) from the previous chapter, and support them with empirical research and data.

The first step to achieve this was a short stay at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt,[2] where (with some help from more experienced colleagues in empirical methodology) I devised a preliminary proposal/pilot study to be tested experimentally and exploratory at the eye-tracking lab at the Institute for Specialized and Intercultural Communication (University of Warsaw).

The overarching research question of this pilot study was: When confronted with visuals, 'pure' (no verbal elements) or 'infected' (visuals combined with (a few) verbal elements)), could reasoning (i.e., constructing meaning through inferences) really consist only of seeing the visuals? More precisely: when confronted with 'infected' visuals, would (and could) people really disregard the few verbal elements present and just concentrate on the visual? And when confronted with 'pure visuals', would they be looking for (expected, usual, possible, hypothetical …) verbal (or other) cues in order to make sense (construct the meaning) of the visual?

To shed some more light on this question, an eye tracking experiment was to be conducted, involving 10 participants and 10 visuals (mostly visual advertisements (posters) and comics well known from the VA literature that contain a few verbal elements). The experiment would be of the so called 'between subjects design', consisting of 2 rounds, a pre-test and a post-test.

A pre-test would try to establish how experimental subjects (in their own view and in their own words) see, perceive, process, and interpret

2 The workshop in Frankfurt was part of COST Action IS1404, *E-READ, Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitisation.*

visual materials. Whether they look for other (non-visual) cues in order to help them interpret what they see, and construct (some) meaning.

The same test would be administered to them after 2 rounds of eye-tracking, while during these two rounds the experimental subjects would be asked what they have seen (what the visual was about, what was its 'message'; in their view, of course) after each visual.

Round 1:

Participants 1-5 see visuals 1-5 from which all verbal elements were eliminated.

Participants 6-10 see visuals 1-5 as they are, with verbal elements.

Round 2 (reverse of round 1):

Participants 1-5 see visuals 6-10 as they are, with verbal elements.

Participants 6-10 see visuals 6-10 from which verbal elements were eliminated.

0 hypothesis: participants would process 'pure' visuals and 'infected' visuals in the same way.

1 hypothesis: participants would look for potential verbal (or other non-visual) elements in order to help them interpret the visuals.

Unfortunately, for the lack of funds, the experiment had to be postponed in the last minute, so I had to find a more or less suitable replacement. I opted for an experimental survey study, involving a pilot questionnaire.

This pilot questionnaire, titled *A Short Questionnaire on Understanding the Visuals (Drawings, Pictures, Photographs ...)* comprised three well-known visuals from Leo Groarke's work on VA, namely:

(1) The smoking fish (where all the text was removed from the picture):
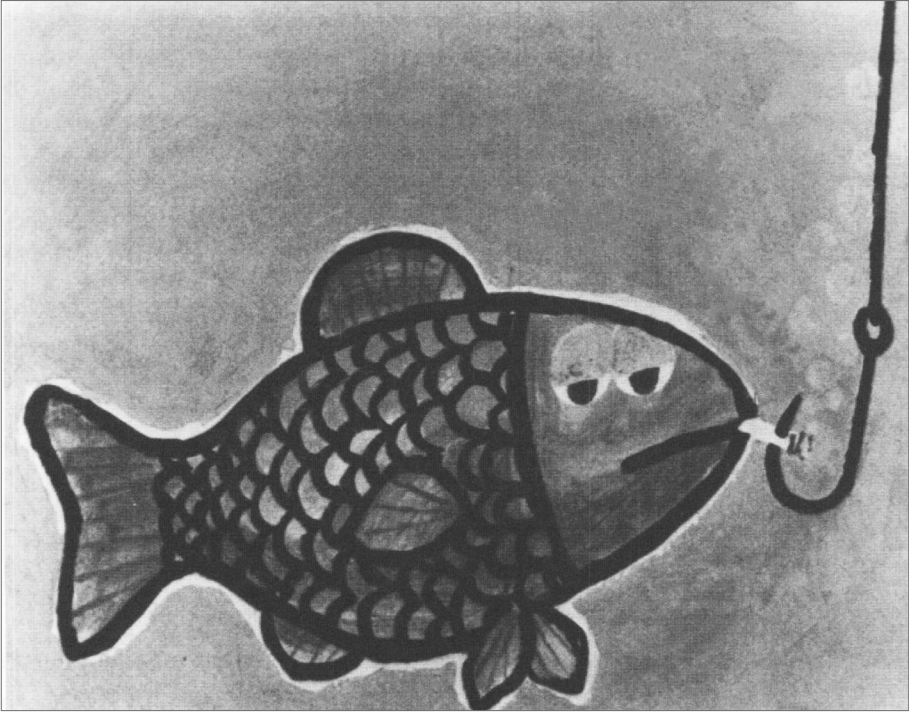
(2) The poster 'UvA for Women' (see pp. 78–79 for details):

(3) Jacques-Louis David's painting *La Mort de Marat (Marat's Death)*:

Calibrating the questionnaire: not too much and not too little

Each visual was preceded with a necessary but short introduction—necessary for historically or chronologically framing the visual (but not explaining the context)—, while following each visual there were two questions, constructed in as neutral way as possible, at the same time trying to avoid a very actual possibility in this kind of surveys that respondents wouldn't understand what the goal (the intention) of these questions was. Here they are.

In the case of the smoking fish:

Introduction: The drawing below dates back to the seventies of the previous century. Please, take a good look at it, and then answer the two questions below.

Question 1: What do you see on the drawing (how would you describe the 'content' or 'what is going on' in the drawing in the most correct and objective way)?

Question 2: In your opinion, what could be the goal/purpose/meaning of the drawing? In other words, how would you interpret it (e.g., advertisement against smoking/cigarettes, advertisement in favour of smoking/cigarettes, advertisement in anglers' bulletin, joke, caricature, other). Please, give reasons for your opinion.

In the case of UvA for Women:

Introduction: The photograph below represents a poster that was to be found around Amsterdam some time ago, probably especially in the vicinity of the University of Amsterdam. The text on the poster reads: 'University of Amsterdam—for Women'. Please, take a good look at it, and then answer the two questions below.

Question 1: What do you see on the poster (how would you describe the 'content' or 'what is going on' in the poster in the most correct and objective way)?

Question 2: In your opinion, what could be the goal/purpose/meaning of the poster? In other words, how would you interpret it (e.g. advertisement for the university, call for enrollment, call for employment, joke, parody, other). Please, give reasons for your opinion.

In the case of David's Marat:

The painting below was created in 1793 by Jacques-Louis David, and bears the title *La Mort de Marat* (*Marat's Death*). Please, take a good look at it, and then answer the two questions below.

Question 1: What do you see on the painting (how would you describe the 'content' or 'what is going on' in the poster in the most correct and objective way)?

Question 2: Does the painting remind you of anything or recall any historical (or other) reminiscences? If yes, please explain which one(s), and why.

This questionnaire was distributed/administered to three different age groups, with different educational background, all European, with Slovenian citizenship. I planned a fourth one, a group of refugees living in Slovenia (mostly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, some of them from North Africa), but the refugee coordinator refused to participate because of ethical reasons. The survey took place between 29th May and 8th June 2017.

Here are some of the characteristics of these groups:

Group 1: STUDENTS (number: 26; age: 20–24; sex: 25 female, 1 male; education: completed high school, currently 2nd year students of Educational Studies at the University of Primorska, Slovenia).

Group 2: RESEARCHERS (number: 7/30;[3] age: 28–68; sex: 6 female, 1 male; education: PhD in Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Education Sciences, two PhD candidates, all working at the Educational Research Institute, Slovenia).

Group 3: SENIORS (number: 3/12; age: 69–86; sex: 2 female, 1 male; education: high school to university education, all attendants of the University of the Third Age, Slovenia).

Obviously, from the methodological point of view and strictly statistically speaking, samples vary too much and cannot be compared in an orderly quantitative fashion. But at this point, I was interested in qualitative data, and as a pilot study, even such disparate groups are acceptable.

What follows are the findings of our survey.

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3   For different reasons, in group 2 only 7 questionnaires out of 30 that were distributed were returned, and only 3 out of 12 in group 3.

About the smoking fish

The claims

First, let us have a look at Groarke's and Birdsell's argument from 1996, and my criticism from the previous chapter:

> The authors (Birdsell and Groarke) first admit that 'visual images can, of course, be vague and ambiguous. But this alone does not distinguish them from words and sentences, which can also be vague and ambiguous' (Birdsell, Groarke 1996: 2). And I agree with that. Than they qualify this poster as 'an amalgam of the verbal and the visual' (*ibid.*), which, again, sounds quite acceptable. But then they conclude: 'Here the argument that you should be wary of cigarettes because they can hook you and endanger your health *is forwarded by means of visual images ...*' (*ibid.: 3*). Which is obviously not the case. Without the verbal part, 'don't you get hooked!', the poster could be understood (framed) as a joke, as a cartoon, where, for example, smoking is presented as such a ubiquitous activity that even anglers use cigarettes to catch fish. Only when we add the verbal part, 'don't you get hooked!'— where 'hooked' activates a (this time semantic) frame of (semantic) knowledge relating to this specific concept, which includes 'get addicted', and is, at the same time, coupled with a visual representation of a hook with a cigarette on it—is the appropriate (intended) frame set: the poster is now undoubtedly understood as an anti-smoking add, belonging to an anti-smoking campaign.

And what does our pilot study show.

The results

Group 1: 9 students out of 26 (34,6%) thought that the drawing 'could have been/might have been/probably was/likely was' an anti-smoking ad (but none of them straightforwardly answered that the ad *was* an anti-smoking ad).

There were another three answers (12,8%) that the ad was probably against smoking, *but* two of them argued further that anti-smoking intention was just an intermediate stage, while the main point of the ad was that by smoking, we are polluting the environment. One of the respondents (3,8%) opted for an anti-smoking ad because 'the hook pulls the cigarette out of the fish's mouth, thus preventing it to smoke'.

Interestingly, three students (12,8%) thought that the drawing was a representation of society in the seventies. One of them commented that 'the society realized that smoking was bad, but has already surrendered to destiny', the other one that the drawing 'represents people dissatisfied with the system'.

What is even more interesting is the fact that most of the respondents substantiated their claims not with the maggot on the hook in the fish's mouth, but by the expression on the fish's 'face'. Here are some qualifiers they used for the expression of the fish's face in relation with the maggot on the hook (and further, social situation at large):

- sad expression
- indifferent eyes
- bored and apathetic fish
- bored and indifferent gaze
- dead face
- sad gaze
- angry gaze
- unsatisfied expression
- boredom and discontent
- not in good mood
- reluctant and angry
- without emotions
- sad eyes.

This shifting focus from the (1) maggot on the hook to the (2) 'facial expression' of the fish, while (3) keeping in mind the info from the instructions that the drawing is from the seventies is a perfect proof that the decision about the meaning of the drawing was reached through *enchronic analysis*, something I argued for in previous chapter on purely theoretical grounds. Just a reminder what enchronic analysis is:

Enchronic analysis is concerned with *relations between data from neighbouring moments*, adjacent units of behaviour in locally coherent communicative sequences (Enfield 2009: 10).

And what about the other answers from Group 1? Two of the respondents (7,7%) thought it was (a kind of) a joke, meaning/implying that smoking is so widespread nowadays that even fish started to smoke.

Another two thought the drawing was an ad in an anglers' newsletter, its purpose being to alert the readers against the pollution of waters.

One of the respondents (3,8%) thought it was a joke at the expense of non-smokers, another one that it was a teaser, a challenge to non-smokers (pleading in favour of cigarettes). Another one thought the drawing was a protest from the vegetarian viewpoint (emphasizing the feelings of a fish when it gets caught), somebody took it as a kind of allegory (in her own words): you can get hooked or you cannot (the choice is yours).

The remaining three (11,5%) couldn't decide about the meaning of the message.

Group 2 had much less to say about the appearance of the fish, for most of them it looked 'sad and bored'.

As for the message, three of them (42,8%) answered it could have been an anti-smoking ad, two of them (28,8%) emphasized it could be either a funny ad, a joke, or an anti-smoking ad, while one of them (14,3%) was reminded of the Rat Park Experiment, and one of the respondents thought the drawing looked like an illustration from a child book.

From the Group 3, we got the following three answers: (1) advertisement of the tobacco industry, (2) could be anything, and (3) I really don't know (33,3% each).

The discussion

The conclusion we can draw from all these answers is pretty obvious, I think: Birdsell's and Groarke's claim that the argument that you should be wary of cigarettes because they can hook you and endanger your health *is forwarded by means of visual images*, *is clearly refuted*. Unless there is a clear verbal supplement, 'don't you get hooked', the interpretator's inference about the (intended) meaning of the drawing (let alone its possible argumentativity, which may not be inferred at all), obviously depends on their historical, social, cultural and/or individual background, on the specifics of their education and/or their values (to name just a few parameters)—as will become more and more clear with the following examples.

About UVA for women

The claims

First, here is Groarke's argument(ation) from *Informal Logic* (1996: 112), and my counter-argument from the previous chapter.

Groarke's argument goes as follows:

The black and white photograph [...] presents the university's three chief administrators in front of the official entrance to the university. 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. *According to the committee,* which commissioned the poster, it is a 'statement', which effectively makes the point that 'we want more women at our university' and 'still have a long way to go in this regard'.

And this was my objection:

But, if we are not acquainted with the committee's 'statement' that they want more women at their university (as, I guess, an 'average' Amsterdamer is not), and we just, walking the streets of Amsterdam, bump into this poster with three corpulent males, 'stating' 'UvA for Women', it is not at all clear how the poster was intended to be framed (by its authors). Is it (simply) a bad joke? Like, these corpulent males looking down on women and explicitly mocking them (with an implicitly inverted message like 'We don't need any women at UvA!'). Should it be taken ironically, maybe cynically, as a meta-statement from somebody who knows and objects the fact that UvA is all male? There is even a (at least implicitly) sexist interpretation that all these males at UvA need more women (but not necessarily for teaching and research ...).

In other words, because of the insufficiently unambiguous framing it is *not at all clear* that we (the observers) can (and even should) reconstruct the argument(ation) in question the way Groarke does:

$$P$$
$$\downarrow$$
$$C$$

where the premise P is *the* (visual) statement that 'The University of Amsterdam's three chief administrators are all men' and C is the conclusion

that 'The University needs more women' (Groarke ibid.: 111). Even if we take P as rather unambiguous (which it is not; for one thing, the fact that the University of Amsterdam's three chief administrators are all men is not a matter of general knowledge; also, it is far from obvious that the three men in the photo are University's administrators), the arrow leading to C is in no way—at least it couldn't have and it shouldn't have been—so linear, uni-directional, or monotonic (if you want) as to lead exclusively and direct-ly to C, interpreted as 'The University needs more women'. C could easily have had many other interpretations (and P many other formulations than the one chosen by Groarke, for that matter), for example: 'UvA doesn't need women!', 'UvA is a sexist institution', 'UvA needs some women to change appearances'.

The results

Here is what my survey showed.

When describing the photo (question a), all three groups formulated what they saw in the photo in very similar, almost identical words: three well dressed middle-aged white males with spectacles, standing together, looking seriously.

As for question b, asking about the purpose, the objective of the post-er, the answers were very far from Groarke's claim.

Group 1

Most of the students, 12 (46,1%), thought the poster was a joke or a parody, two of them (7,7%) qualified this joke as irony, one (3,8%) of them as a sex-ist joke, and another one as some kind of advertisement for some kind of a band.

One of the respondents took it as a provocation (from the part of fem-inists), another one as making fools of women as well as of the university.

One respondent understood the poster as a criticism of the system (be-ing unfair to women), another one as means of discouraging women to enrol.

Two of the respondents answered that the message was not clear, but maybe the purpose of the poster was to get attention of women (in one way or another).

Only two students answered that the poster may represent an ad-vertisement for the university (asking women students to enroll), while a third one added the following explanation: 'call for enrollment addressed

to women, so that they could have the same education as the men on the photo.'

The remaining 3 (11,5%) couldn't decide.

Group 2

Two of the respondents (28,6%) saw the poster as a parody (one of them as originating from students, the other as emphasizing the contradiction: more and more women at universities, while most of the leading positions are still in the hands of men).

One of the respondents (14,3%) saw the poster as sexist, one of them as protest (against inequality), and another one as an effort to promote equality through contradiction.

One of the respondents saw the poster as failed advertisement for the university (failed because it was, according to the respondent, conveying the message that at UvA men work also for women).

Only one respondent saw the poster as calling more women to enrol, but added, 'especially in the fields where traditional patterns are dominant'.

Group 3

Out of only three answers, one of them 33,3) saw the poster as a joke, the other one as pointing to the problems (in the society), and the third one couldn't tell.

The discussion

It is quite obvious from the answers that the poster does not present the argument:

$$P$$
$$\downarrow$$
$$C$$

where the premise P is *the* (visual) statement that 'The University of Amsterdam's three chief administrators are all men' and C is the conclusion that 'The University needs more women' (Groarke 1996: 111). P and C could have been, even should have been, formulated quite differently, in many different ways and versions, and the possibilities of starting from different starting points should have been considered in interpretation (as rhizome theory (Deleuze, Guattari 2005) and superdiversity theory (Vertovec 2007; Blommaert, Rampton 2011) convincingly show), while the arrow

connecting P and C should not be straightforward, but bent, curved or broken in different ways and on different places, indicating different non-linear ways to reach the conclusion.

About Marat'a death
The claims

Leo Groarke's interpretation of Jacques-Louis David' painting La Mort de Marat (IF 18/2-3, 1996) was often praised (but without giving any concrete arguments for this praise) as 'arguing convincingly' for the argumentative potential or argumentativity of David's painting presumably representing Marat as a dying Christ. Leo Groarke himself speaks more cautiously of 'the way in which argumentative analysis can illuminate a work of visual art' (119); according to him, it is 'the interpretation, not the work of art itself'.

But, how does Groarke proceed?

After a series of quotes and references *from art history* (which is an important fact for his argumentation as well as for my counter-argumentation), Groarke first comes to his (intermediate) claim:

> We might easily understand the message of David's painting as the argument: 'Marat was a great martyr. You should, therefore, strive to be like him (and support the revolution).' There is something to this analysis, but a fully satisfactory account of *Marat* must better recognize the *painting's visual and political context* [sic!], which are evident in the number of details. Above all else, it is important to recognize that its *style and composition compare Marat to Christ* [sic!]. This is in keeping with *hymns and rumours of the day* [sic!], which celebrated this comparison (*Marat's heart was, for example, treated as a relic and claimed to resemble Christ's* [sic!]). (Groarke ibid.: 120)

If we sum up Groarke's analysis so far, in order to recognize the presumed resemblance between (the depiction of) dying Christ and (the depiction of) dying Marat, the observer is supposed to know about:

- painting's visual and political context
- style and composition
- hymns and rumours (of those days = Marat's days = days of French revolution)

- Catholic doctrine/mythology about the importance of people's hearts (especially heroes and martyrs).

But then, to justify his claim even more firmly, Leo Groarke gives this quote from his brother Louis Groarke's paper 'David's Marat: Beautiful Falsity or False Beauty'[4] that goes even deeper into detail and finesse of *art history* [sic!]:

> David likewise presents us with a homage to a revolutionary Christ. The treatment of the figure recalls *traditional religious iconography*. The idealized nude body is like a *Renaissance Christ*. The recumbent pose with the extended, trailing arms *recalls, in detail, depictions of the Dispositions of Christ (cf. Giroet,*[5] *Caravaggio, Montagnea,*[6] *Pontormo, Fiorentino, van der Wyden*, etc.). The gaping wound with the stream of blood *parallels the wound in the Saviour's side*. The knife, smeared with blood, is *the instrument of his passion, comparable to the lance and thorns and nails emphasized in many paintings of Christ's passion*. Even the note clutched in his languishing hand *might be compared to the notice nailed to the cross above the Saviours's head* ...

When reading all this erudite and detailed thoughts and comparisons, we should be aware that Louis Groarke specializes in ethics, aesthetics and political history, this is (one of the reasons) why he was drawn to and fascinated by David's picture, and why he was able to see and discern all those details. But, could just anybody do it? Could an 'average' person from the street do it? Could a person with just an average education, without special interest in art history, do it? Could a(ny) person from another (non-Western) culture do it? Could a(ny) person belonging to another religious tradition than Christianity do it? I have serious doubts about that and my survey confirms them.

But after this quote and several other details coming (again) from art history, Leo Groarke proposes a diagram of the extended argument supposedly contained in and presented by David's painting. In short, the argument goes like this:

P1 = Marat was a man of great dignity and composure;

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4   The exact reference of the paper, marked as 'forthcoming', is unfortunately missing.
5   Supposedly Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (1767–1824).
6   Supposedly Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506).

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.

After giving a series of detailed, but disputed, historical facts, Groarke rejects all the above premises (P1, P2, P3), as well as the claims (C1, MC), and concludes:

> These criticisms of the argument in *Marat* cannot undermine the fact that it displays a magnificent ability to paint. But one artificially ignores the meaning of the painting if one does not recognize that *David was a social commentator as well as a painter* when he created *Marat*. It is not insignificant that *he wielded tremendous influence and contributed to out-of-control executions* by propounding faulty arguments that glorified Marat. *One might best compare his masterpiece to a rhetorically powerful verbal argument, which is nonetheless founded on false premises and invites a faulty inference.* (Groarke ibid.: 122)

Not just everybody can follow this chain of reasoning (and those who can would certainly not agree on all the points Groarke is making), not everybody can recognize David's painting of Marat as a powerful argument, based on a series of (disputed) social, cultural, political and religious details (that have different evaluations, depending on class, religious preference and many other socio-cultural factors).

A prototypical consumer of Groarke's reasoning, of his detailed 'argument' about Marat resembling Christ, could only be constructed as a well-educated western male/female, educated in the humanities and especially in the art history, with (rather) good social and economic standing, profound interest in history, culture and religion, and strong inclination for (visual) arts.

But this hypothetical construct represents a very thin segment of mostly 'Western' population. Most of the younger or elderly people (even if Westerners), don't qualify. Neither do 'average' people, 'everyday' people, 'people from the street'. Probably not even most of the professionals from natural sciences and technology, unless they've had good, probably 'classical' education, and share special interest in arts.

And we could go on, but my bottom line is this: a presumably *visual* argument that needs more than 3 pages *of technically sophisticated, but dubious explanations* in 10 paragraphs (but no visuals, even if they are available!) to persuade/convince a rather thin layer of population of itself being a *visual* argument, can hardly be called a *visual argument*.

Here are my arguments to support the above claim from my survey.

The results and the discussion

First (question a), what the students saw in the painting (all emphases are mine):

'I see a man, *leaning on the chair*, not showing any signs of life. We could conclude from what the picture is showing that he was writing a letter and *committed suicide*.'

'I see a person who *committed suicide*.'

'A man *lies on the table/chair* in a motionless position, in his hand he holds a letter he has just written, he is *dressed inadequately, as a matter of fact just in blankets/sheets*.'

'A man is sitting *at the table. He has a turban on his head, so he could be of Muslim religion*.'

'I see a man who leans on something. *I suppose he committed suicide, because there is a knife on the floor*.'

'*I see a gentleman who dies while writing a love letter*.'

'I see *a young boy*, who has just finished writing a letter. From what I see in the painting, *I conclude that he is suffering from some illness, and is writing about how he feels to somebody*.'

'I see a man who was killed in a bathtub.'

It is pretty clear from these answers, I think, that the respondents (except, maybe, for the last one), despite the fact that they were told who was depicted, and when the painting was created, didn't have a clue about what was going on in the painting, let alone of any argumentative potential imputed to the painting by Groarke.

Now let us have a look at the following answers on question a:

'*There is a woman in the painting*, with a scarf on her head... I conclude that she has maybe died.'

'*There is a women in the picture that holds a letter in one hand, while she is gazing in another direction with a sad expression on her face..*'

'*I see a woman in the picture, lying in the bathtub. She was probably writing a farewell letter.*'

'*I see a woman who, with a last bit of energy, wrote a farewell letter.*'

'*I see a woman* who wrote a letter. *She is lying on the counter, she has a headdress on her head and wears a robe.*'

I don't think any commentary is needed, but nevertheless: if people think Marat was a woman, then it is safe to conclude that they don't know at all who Marat was, and that they know even less what his role in the French revolution was. Which undermines a good part of Groarke's argument(s) if not all of it.

Let us have a look at the remaining part of the answers, answering the question b).

19 respondents (out of 26), 73%, answered that the painting didn't remind them of anything, that seeing it doesn't recall any memories whatsoever. The other seven answers were the following:

'It reminds me of French revolution.' (The same person who under a) answered: 'I see a man who was killed in a bathtub.')

'It reminds me of high school where we learned about this painting.' (Under a that person answered that the man on the painting committed suicide)

'Maybe the end of some historical era, signing the contract with death.'

'Reminds me of assassinations that occurred through history.'

'Reminds me of war, because at that time women wrote letters to their husbands who went to war.'

'The painting reminds me of suicide.'

'The painting casts un ugly feeling.'

Hence, *absolutely nothing* that could substantiate Groarke's claims. As for mine, it is pretty obvious from the answers that the level and the quality of education greatly affect possible interpretations.

Group 2
First a few answers to question a:

'I see a dead man in a bathtub.'

'What I know of French revolution.'

'I see a man who committed suicide (?). The light on the right indicates the departure toward light, which symbolizes belief in the afterlife.'

'I see a dying man who has written a farewell letter.'

'Dying Marat writing his last message.'

Despite the fact that most of the members of Group 2 hold a PhD in humanities or social sciences, the answers don't seem very encouraging (in any sense, the quality of education included). What about answers to question b?

'It reminds me of events after the French revolution ... The person depicted *may be fictitious or real historical personality* ... The inclination of the head and the expression on the face give the impression of martyrdom.'

'*It reminds me of the death of Jesus.* I don't know, *maybe because of the way he died. Similarly wrapped head,* the knife wound on the body, tranquility at the transition to the other side, belief in the afterlife.'

'*Reminds me of the crucifixion of Christ, because of the position of the body.*'

'French revolution, violence, terror, Napoleon, Bastille.'

'I think of Robert Capa: faking reality to get a good picture/photo.'

'Reminds me of French revolution, dynamics of struggles for power.'

'It makes me think, how hard it is if a man is alone in the last moments of his life. Older you are, more you are aware of it.'

If, for a moment, we neglect the fact that the doctor of philosophy thinks Marat might have been a 'fictitious or real historical personality' (ignorance that speak in favour of my point of view), we finally get two answers, relating the painting of dying/dead Marat to the dying/dead Christ.

But the first respondent in question is reminded of the death of Jesus because the way Marat died. And her first argument is 'similarly wrapped head'. But while Jesus was on the cross, when he was taken of, and while in his mother's hand, his head was not wrapped. He was only wrapped for the burial.

Also, Jesus is usually described as expressing suffering, not tranquility.

The other respondent mentioning Jesus is reminded of the crucifixion of Christ, 'because of the position of the body'. That is, Marat's body. But Marat's body is not in the crucifixion position, it is in the *pieta* position.

In short, the only two persons reminded of Jesus by David's painting of Marat, are actually reminded of different attributes of Jesus, even of different versions of Jesus, which are historically not attested or were transformed in the (enchronic) process of inference. They somehow recognize the similarity between some depictions of Christ and David's depiction of Marat, but they are far from attributing any arguments or claims to the latter.

Group 3
Rather interesting were the answers of the 3rd group. Already under a, not b, two respondents (out of three) started to literally quote what Wikipedia was saying about David's painting, while under b, they were quoting the same source about who David was and what was his role in the French revolution and later.

(The 3rd respondent wrote: 'If a revolutionary dies while soaking in a bathtub this is not a heroic death worthy of a revolutionary.')

It therefore is obvious that the third group was not addressed by David's painting in any way, even more, they didn't have a clue what the painting was about at all. And since the questionnaire mentioned the name of the painter and the title of the painting, they obviously thought that copying the relevant entry from Wikipedia would be the best solution ...

In place of conclusion: A perceptual-cognitive grid
This small research (which is to be continued and upgraded) persuasively shows that direct - linear, uniform and 'objective' - argumentative impact

of (more or less pure) visuals on different audiences is rather small. In other words, *different audiences (different by age, education, cultural and social background ...) infer differently (or different 'things) and via these inferences come to different conclusions (if any at all).*

That is why I would like to tentatively propose a basic sketch, a scheme, some may call it a model (in the making), I'll call it a grid, of how (and why) interpretations of visuals (but not just visuals, verbal arguments operate in similar way) function, what may trigger the inferences leading to these interpretations (and why), what these interpretations depend on (i.e. what are the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for such interpretations to unfold), and what may be their restrictions and limitations.

I will be using and combining the concepts mentioned in the previous chapter, but in time other concepts may show themselves useful and be(come) incorporated into the developing mechanics of the grid.

We will take a look at two perspectives, let us call them an 'objective' and a 'subjective' one (which are only technical, working terms).

Objective (diachronic) view

Step 1

'Reality'

The most obvious, natural, neutral and general *background* (note that all these adjectives should really be placed between quotation marks,

because they are quite ambivalent, meaning different things to different people and in different situations) is, of course, reality. Well, it seems to be. And since there is really no reality as such—*per se* or *an Sich*—we can talk about (but only reality as it is 'for us'), we should put at least this one between quotation marks.

What I understand as 'reality' here is undefined, undiscerned and indistinct 'reality', things (material or immaterial) that are 'out there', that may be 'out there', that allow us to be, to do things, to think and act, but are not, or not yet, part of our 'social "reality"' (or 'subjective "reality"'; but subjective always depends on the social, even if this dependence seems minimal), that is, we have not given them any form of (intentional) conceptualization, and are not conscious to us as possible signs (i.e., something we can manipulate mentally and/or verbally).

That is the reason the space above is blank, empty (white), even without a frame. It could have also been full (black), symbolizing everything or nothing, a step before the first basic/primitive conceptualization.

Step 2

'Reality'

┌───┐
│ Social 'reality'   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
└───┘

Second step narrows the perspective (in the direction of foregrounding), imposing a kind of a frame on the previously (still) undefined and undiscerned 'reality', thus forming our social 'reality'. This social 'reality' frame is a fuzzy frame, a frame that changes all the time, a frame that is

being (enchronically) constructed and re-constructed all the time, thus becoming wider (expanding) at some point in time, comprising more elements, while at some other point in time it may become narrower (shrinking), comprising less elements.

And the term 'social' in this case/usage, embraces physical, intellectual, emotional, cultural, economic, demographic ... everything we (can) see, notice, and *are aware of* (but *do not necessarily understand or conceptualize it yet!*) at our individual hermeneutical horizon (as part of our necessary social perspective). Even nature is part of this framed social 'reality', in the sense and in the degree it enters our social experience. If it doesn't (a very rare experience), it is still part of our social 'reality' (by being, more or less, absent from it). And as such, social 'reality' is still pretty undifferentiated and unconceptualized.

Step 3

'Reality'

> Social 'reality'
>
>> Framed 'reality'
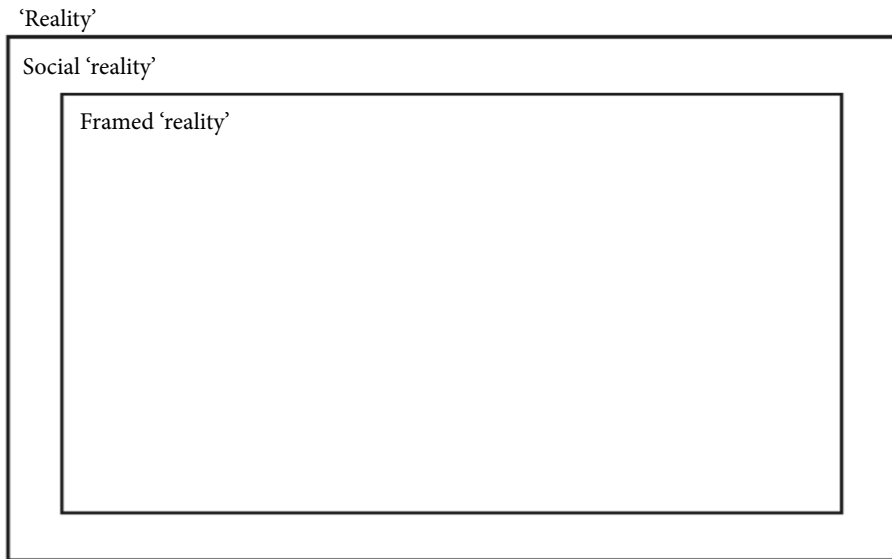
With framed 'reality' (in the sense of Goffman as well as Fillmore and Lakoff), we are narrowing the perspective even more, actually much more. Framed 'reality' isolates and concentrates on specific aspects, fragments, usually situations from the largely undefined social 'reality', in order to achieve (more) certainty, definiteness, in order to disambiguate and de-bias what may (still) be undefined and uncertain in the social 'reality' at large,

thus giving it (at least) basic conceptualization and allowing further necessary cognitive processing.

Framing certain 'reality' or situation often implies predicting possible actors, topics, as well as possible (verbal) exchanges, scripts or scenarios. In other words, framing certain reality implies choosing or determining the possible semantic networks, verbal and conversational exchanges, and consequently possible lexical choices as well as boundaries.

Step 4
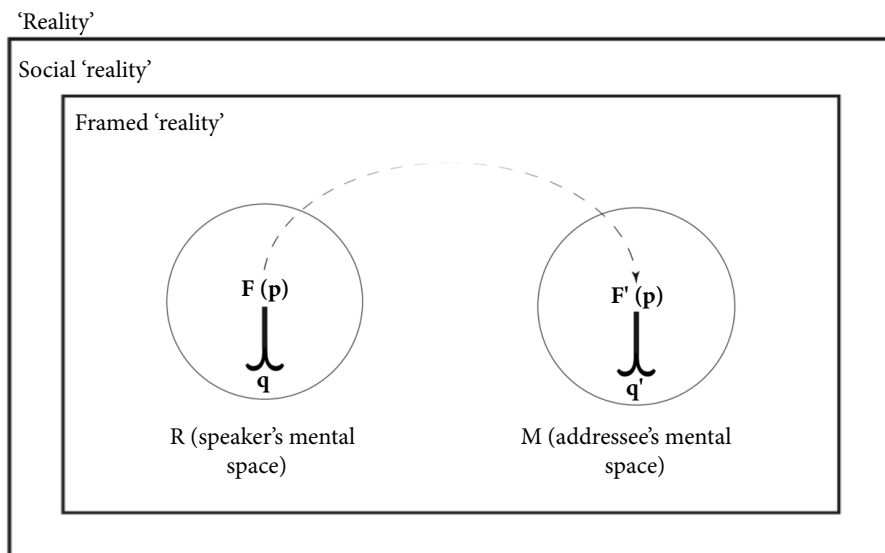
If we narrow the perspective even further towards the foreground (as we always do in everyday life), we come to mental spaces (Fauconnier, 1984). Mental spaces are fleeting, ephemeral constructions, relating to a certain framed 'reality', and triggered by a specific, very often singular elements, such as verbal (visual) expressions, which can assume a (specific) role in an activated semantic frame, polysemy chain, polyphony construction or something else.

For the explanation and illustration of the above table, let us try to apply it to the UvA poster.

R stands for the 'reality' of the speaker (speaker's mental space), and M for the 'reality' of the observer (observer's mental space). *p* represents the poster in question, *F(p)* its (intended) premise, and *q* its (intended) conclusion in R.

In M, on the other hand, *p* still represents the same poster in question (hence the long dotted arrow connecting the two spaces), but *F'(p),* the observer's premise, and *q',* the observer' s conclusion, *may be quite different from speaker's premise and speaker's conclusion* (depending on the observer's experience, social and cultural background, education, gender, and many other demographic, even bio-neurological and cognitive factors).

On top of that, M spaces may be multiplied in relation to R space—depending on the number of people, taking part in the conversation/event—, precisely because of observers' different (social, cultural, etc.) background, education, gender, and many other factors we have already mentioned, addressee's imminent intentions (based on the addressee's processing of the concrete situation) being one of the strongest factors.

This could be a (simple and simplified) model of a filtering grid, involved in a possible reconstruction of a diachronic, objective perspective on interpretation and meaning construction. But from the synchronic, subjective perspective things may look somehow different.

Subjective (synchronic) view

Of course there is still a generic, undefined 'reality' in the deep background. But in the immediate foreground, there are always just mental spaces, the elements that trigger the imminent construction of meaning interpretation of the problem at hand. And this construction (and re-construction) of respective ephemeral mental spaces in the subjective perspective, always already implies the framed chunks of 'reality' in the background (which again depend on the hermeneutical horizon of the social 'reality' the framed 'reality' relies upon). The synchronic view could be schematically represented in perspective, something like this:
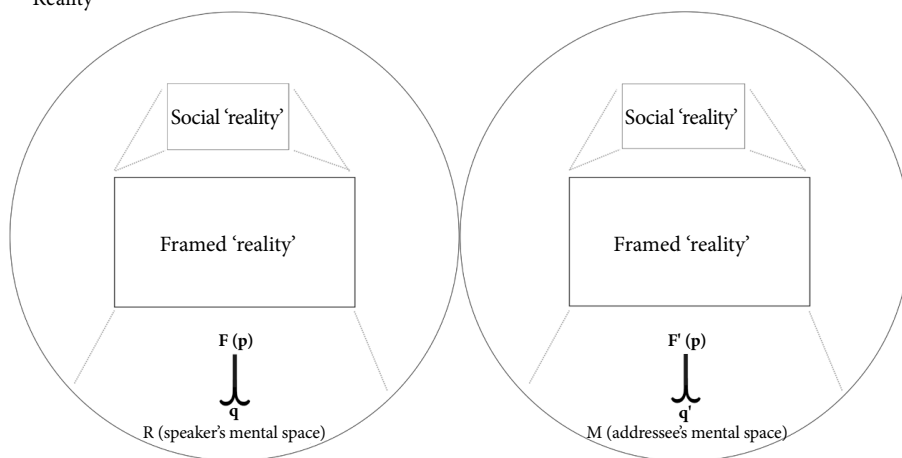
Enchronic view

Enchronic view embraces both, synchronic and diachronic perspective. Since it is concerned with relations between data from neighbouring moments, enchronic analysis is therefore looking at sequences of social interaction in which the moves that constitute social actions occur as responses to other such moves and in turn these give rise to other such moves.

Enchronic analysis is therefore constantly moving from synchronic to diachronic, thus constructing a new perspective, relative to and relevant for the particular moment in time, its representation and (re)construction of a particular mental space.