

Dialogue, Distanciation, and Engagement: Toward a Logic of Televisual Communication

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If we are to have a theory of informal logic that is based in an understanding of what argumentation is, we need to step back a bit from ongoing concern with techniques, procedures, and pedagogy in order to consider the phenomenon itself. That's to say that we need to ask: what is this peculiarly human activity called argumentation? How is it like and unlike our other activities (walking, talking, eating, reading)? Indeed, is there an "it" here at all? Are we dealing with just one sort of activity, or a number of similar, perhaps inter-related phenomena? Are there fundamental features or essential characteristics present in all of the behavior we identify as argumentative? Does the ability to engage in it develop naturally, or is it learned—and, can it be taught?

In presenting these preliminary results of my own reflections on these questions, I adopt the characterization of informal logic suggested recently by Ralph Johnson and Anthony Blair:

...informal logic is best understood as the normative study of argument. It is the area of logic which seeks to develop standards, criteria and procedures for the interpretation, evaluation and construction of arguments and argumentation used in natural language.¹

As Blair and Johnson go on to say, most study of argumentation "has not had a logician's orientation"—which I take to mean, has not been concerned with normative aspects of argumentation.² The descriptive analysis I present here is intended as a basis for just that normative study. For I am concerned to identify the *actual* "standards,

criteria, and procedures" which our *reasoning* follows in "the interpretation, evaluation and construction" of natural language arguments and the argumentative activities in which those arguments occur.³ And I find—contrary to much received wisdom and presupposition—that our *actual* "standards, criteria, and procedures" are quite different as we reason within various communicative media.⁴

I begin from a basic definition of "argumentation" as a complex of verbal abilities serving a common goal: conviction as to the connection of parts within a whole. Verbal activity that occurs in discourse—in the oral form epitomized by everyday conversation—differs significantly from that which occurs in printed text. In both cases, however, argumentation (in contrast to narrative or description) *proposes connections* among constituent elements of a whole, and does so with the aim of convincing someone that those are the *appropriate* connections to be made among those elements. Our theorizing about informal logic as well as our efforts to improve argumentative skills through classroom instruction typically occur in both oral and written media. To some degree we usually recognize that the goal of argumentation is conviction as to the appropriateness of connections. But our theoretical and pedagogical activities (again, typically) neglect two features. What I want to discuss here is just those usually neglected aspects of argumentation.

The first neglected feature is this: the differences between argumentation in discourse and in print require us to reason

differently in those different media. I will focus on just one example of this diversity—relative presence and absence of egocentricity—as illustrative of those pervasive differences. The second neglected feature is that argumentation's goal (conviction as to appropriate connections) is shared by other activities that are minimally or not at all verbal. There are two which I would like us to reflect upon here: those non-verbal communicative activities I characterize as kinesthetic, and the minimally-verbal communication that occurs televisually. There are good reasons for not including the conviction-producing activities that occur televisually and kinesthetically within the general category of argumentation, and I am not concerned to argue for such an inclusion here. Rather, I want to propose that the cultural *prevalence* of televisual and kinesthetic ways of bringing about conviction strongly influences both our ability to interpret, construct and evaluate arguments, and our efforts to theorize and teach those activities. In other words: as arguers, theoreticians, and teachers, we are disadvantaged by our neglect of the effects of prevalent alternative modes of producing conviction upon our reasoning practices.

Although this description of argumentation as activity that proposes connections with the aim of convincing someone of the appropriateness of those connections may seem to be an innocuous one, there are three implicit claims within it which deserve consideration. First: argumentation only occurs when there are parts to be joined so as to form a whole. This *articulated* form is shared by narration and description; but the goal of producing conviction—reasoned agreement—as to just how the parts are connected to form a whole is not shared by those other activities. Second: argumentation only occurs in a *social*, dialogical situation in which different possibilities for making connections are held (at least in theory) by argument partners. In other words, there must be a “someone” to be convinced, and

a “someone” to do the convincing. There are times when one person takes both these roles, so as to present to him or herself a multiplicity of positions. This apparently monological presentation of multiple possibilities for connection is more common in print, or in that silent verbal activity called thinking, than it is in oral discourse. For we tend to disapprove of people who talk audibly to themselves. The third implicit claim is a teleological one, for I've proposed that the *purpose* of argumentation is the production of conviction. Unlike persuasion or force, conviction involves reasoned agreement. This is why a theory of argumentation must include an understanding of what reason is and how reasoning functions.

Here we have three claims concerning the articulated (that is: composed of parts and wholes), social, and purposive character of argumentation. Stating those characteristics explicitly may enable us to notice the historicity of informal logic; even, perhaps, to appreciate the importance of that feature among the differences between formal and informal logic. For the “standards, criteria and procedures” operative in informal logic change, and they do so in response to cultural, and especially technological, transformations. As a result, arguers using diverse modes of communication prevalent at different stages in the life of an individual and of a culture require diverse ways of reasoning if they are to construct and interpret arguments appropriately. We can now turn to considering four such modes of communication, with the aim of recognizing differences and similarities in how reasoning occurs—and even, in what it means—in all four. A minimal definition may be helpful at this point: I understand reasoning as both the *synthetic* activity of connecting parts to form wholes, and the *analytic* activity of identifying parts within wholes. Both activities, once again, take place in a social and purposive context—although monological verbal activity and certain argumentive strategies may mute that social and pur-

positive character.

The four modes of communication to which we can now turn are kinesthesia, discourse, print, and television. In considering each of these, my focus will be on how argumentive activity, or activity analogous to argumentation, occurs in each. In other words: we want to attend to how we reason so as to produce conviction in each of the media. There is an initial difficulty to address in regard to that focus: traditionally, we accept the verbal media (discourse and print) as the context for argumentive activity. Thus the very inclusion of kinesthesia on a list of communicative media, much less of means for bringing about conviction, is problematic. Also, there may well be need to justify my inclusion of television as a means of communication distinct from discourse. Given these likely difficulties in regard to two of these four means of communication, I'll begin by considering reasoning in the two less problematic modes—discourse and print—and then go on to the two more problematic media.

Most people, most of the time, engage in argumentive activity within discourse. This mode of communication is universal for all humans over the age of two or so who have fairly complete use of their faculties; more specifically, for those who can hear and speak. Dialogue in this medium requires *engagement* with a *particular* discourse partner, since oral dialogue cannot occur without the actual presence of the participants in the same time and space. In other words: in oral argumentation, the connections of parts into wholes which are at issue are proposed in dialogue with a discourse partner. The proposals constitute positions which intertwine within the space (or at least, time) we both occupy. That proviso reminds us that technologically-enhanced discourse, such as occurs in telephone conversation, can dispense with the shared spatiality that's necessary for non-technological, naturally-occurring discourse. Argumentation is considerably facilitated by the co-presence of discourse

partners. For I need supply only the information required to support connections that I propose, while presuming that alternative proposals will be supported by the discourse partner who proposes them. Furthermore, naturally-occurring (that is, non-technologically enhanced) dialogue provides powerful behavioral reminders that alternative proposals have their genesis in a literally different vision of the world. Cross-culturally and throughout history, as best we know, discourse partners typically face one another—rather than, for instance, stand next to each other on the same plane. Thus, quite literally, the alternative position comes from seeing the same world in a different way (in a different perspective).⁵ Typically, we're aware of that sameness and difference only in an immediate, un-noticed, less than conscious, non-thematized way.⁶

There's another side to how we typically reason in discourse that's especially important to a normative study of argumentation. The ready availability of support from the discourse partner for alternative positions means that we do not need to develop "standards, criteria and procedures" for presenting both (or all) of the possible alternatives. Insofar as I presume that my discourse partner is as capable of presenting the alternative proposal(s) as I am, I can proceed rather egocentrically. That is, I can direct my energies to developing my own proposals both in themselves and in opposition to those proposed by my discourse partner. Now this presumption of equality can be innocent: we do in fact engage in conversations with our intellectual, political, and social equals. It may well be that we seek out just those discourse partners because they allow for a certain comfortable laziness in exercising reason. (We can depend on those others to do their own work.) But this presumption need not be innocent: we can engage in conversations with partners who are clearly deficient or constrained intellectually, politically, and socially, under the pretense of equality.⁷ I don't mean to discount the possibility—some might even

claim, likelihood—of unequal presentation of proposals as I emphasize that discourse encourages a comfortably egocentric pattern of reasoning.

In turning now to considering reasoning in the print medium, we can notice that written argumentation requires some very different assumptions and conventions. Typically, when we argue in writing we do so in isolation from the readers we would convince. Insofar as we don't even know who those readers are and will be, we cannot simply proceed under the assumption I noted in connection with oral argumentation—namely, that they will be capable of formulating and communicating alternatives. Instead, we need to anticipate a variety of alternative positions as we write, so as to take effective account of them in the course of the written text. That need is a structural requirement for arguing effectively in print. Because of it, the written word discourages egocentric reasoning.

One of the peculiarities of academic life is the extent to which it's pervaded by print communication. We academics are a bookish people who tend to rely on texts rather than conversations for information. We also produce texts, often in isolation from and to the exclusion of discourse. These range from printed versions of conversations, such as notes and memos, to scholarly texts that have only minimal similarity to patterns of constructing and interpreting arguments that prevail in discourse. Given this pervasiveness of print, together with the necessity to engage in oral communication both inside and beyond the classroom, we are apt to move rather easily from reasoning in conversation to reasoning in print. Insofar as we're at all aware of differences, we tend to minimize them by attributing them to different conventions of expression in everyday and academic contexts. I find, however, that there are logical as well as sociological differences. That is, there are different "standards, criteria and procedures for the interpretation, evaluation and construction of

arguments and argumentation" in discourse and in print.

We can now look more closely at the lack of egocentricity in written argumentation. Reading and writing, in contrast to hearing and speaking, typically occur at a distance from one another. In other words: written texts are *distanciated* from their readers. Indeed, we rarely use the print medium when the dialogue partner is present and can be engaged in conversation. (To do so often implies the presence or expectation of inequality, interference or even deceit in the communication process.) Correlatively, using print to propose connections implies that the writer intends to convince *any possible* reader, rather than simply those dialogue partners who are present in the same time and/or space. Doing that effectively requires extensive departure from an egocentric standpoint: I (as the writer) must attempt to anticipate alternative proposals made by any other individual (as the reader). Likewise, I (as the reader) consider proposals in the printed text without attending to their source. In other words, arguing in the medium of print requires distanciating the proposals from any ego involvement. This procedure is so ingrained in reasoning in a printed textual context as to be a standard for that sort of reasoning; we proscribe its violation under the rubric of the "ad hominem" and "argument from authority" fallacies.

This difference between reasoning in the context of engagement in discourse in contrast to reasoning in the context of distanciated printed text enables us to understand certain difficulties that arise in classroom work on those fallacies. Typically, our students—and members of other cultures that retain a preference for orality rather than print—fail to identify these categories of fallacies in a way appropriate to our expectations. They may not recognize arguments from authority; or, they may over-ascribe that fallacy to any argument that cites any authority. I would like to suggest that this tendency should not be blam-

ed on deficient intelligence or attention. For observation of our students' usual environment—their everyday life outside the classroom—reveals that printed text, familiar though it is to most teachers, is an alien mode of communication for most students. To a considerable extent, their culture is an oral one in which communication occurs through conversation, the narratives of popular music, and the distinctive form of orality used in televsual communication.

It's hardly surprising, then, that students' reasoning typically and habitually displays the procedures and standards of orality—including a consideration of the arguer's person that appears, to a teacher who adheres to the standards of print, to be an instance of the fallacy of "argument from authority." Likewise, rejection of the person as a basis for rejection of his or her argument is far more defensible in the culture of orality than it is in the culture of print. For those of us who habitually participate in print culture rely upon distanced texts, rather than upon persons who display some level of engagement with the issues, when we seek authoritative evidence for a proposal. Thus we are apt to identify as "ad hominem" arguments that might be quite acceptable to persons whose *actual standards* for reasoning include evaluation of the proposers of positions as part of evaluating the arguments that propose those positions.⁸

The differences we've been considering also appear when we contrast these verbal media (discourse and print) to television. Televsual communication does, of course, utilize verballity. But it does so in a way that's quite different from non-technologically-enhanced discourse. Also, it uses verbal communication in pervasive connection with, and often as only ancillary to, visual communication. For that reason, televsual verballity and visuality are quite different from their non-technologically-enhanced counterparts. I noted earlier that most argumentation, in most people's ex-

perience, occurs in discourse. I'd now add to that the observation that most efforts at improving argumentation—e.g. classroom teaching of informal logic—focus on print, and presume the standards of reasoning in print even when discourse is used. For many people and most of our students, however, most of the communication that carries out the purpose of argumentation—producing conviction as to how parts connect to form wholes—does not occur in written communication. Rather, kinesthesia (a nonverbal means of communication) and television (a partially verbal medium) are the most familiar argumentive contexts. And just as those of us who are habituated to print culture typically fail to notice different standards for reasoning in discourse, we also neglect alternative standards for reasoning in kinesthetic and televsual media.

We can now turn to a brief consideration of reasoning in kinesthetic and televsual communication. My focus here is limited to several aspects of difference from and similarity to features of verballity that typically are preferred or presumed in practicing and teaching argumentation. We can focus on these features in terms of my earlier identification of the articulated (that is: composed of parts and wholes), social, and purposive character of argumentation. Although space constraints limit us to a suggestive and sketchy analysis, I hope that even this brief endeavor supports my proposal that we need to understand the nature of reasoning in diverse media as part of developing a theory of informal logic.

Television and kinesthesia involve articulated products that can be analyzed or criticized in terms of parts and appropriate connections. Thus, with due attention to the values and dangers of analogical description, we can speak analogously of televsual and kinesthetic premises and conclusions. Also, we can investigate the degree to which standards for constructing, interpreting, and evaluating the connections proposed in televsual and kinesthetic communication

are and ought to be borrowed from their verbal analogues. There are substantial differences between these two modes of nonverbal and partially verbal communication. The most significant, for our interests here, involve the analytic and synthetic activities operative in each: how do we actually compose parts into wholes in these two media? What standards do we actually use in identifying their parts, as part of interpreting and evaluating entire actions or scenes? In order to identify the similarities and differences involved here, we will now consider the articulated, social, and purposive character of kinesthesia separately from that of television.

Let's turn first to kinesthesia.⁹ Earlier I identified premises and conclusions as the parts which comprise whole arguments. Analogously, the "premises" of kinesthetic reasoning are the body's muscular movements and tensions. These combine to form the actions and affective states which are the "conclusions" of kinesthetic reasoning. Appropriate connections are those which accomplish intended actions, or bring about desired attitudes. Unlike verbal articulation, not all of these connections are learned, which is to say that some of them seem to occur spontaneously and without culturally-determined ways of expression. Furthermore, many of them are carried out without conscious attention. The multitude of kinesthetic movements that compose actions such as throwing a ball or picking up a jug of water, and the almost unthematizable complexes that bring about states of levity or anxiety, are examples of the articulated character of kinesthesia.

In kinesthetic as in verbal activity, we typically are as familiar with the synthetic activity that constructs actions and affective states as we are with the analytic activity that interprets and evaluates them. That isn't to say that we're equally skilled in construction, interpretation, and evaluation. But I do find that our ability to *appreciate* an action or affective state—which is to say, interpret and evaluate either—is quite directly

correlated with our ability to *produce* that action or affective state—which is to say, construct either of them. Someone who hasn't participated in football, for instance, is unlikely to appreciate the efforts involved in making a particular play. Someone who hasn't lived through a period of depression is unlikely to empathize strongly with a friend who's immersed in that state.¹⁰ In both these areas, I find, understanding requires that we comprehend elements and their connections. That "comprehension," I suggest, is less a matter of intuition, psychic power, or hunch than it is a matter of hypothesis (as to the connection of parts within a whole) and confirmation. We have a reasoning process here that's analogous to the reasoning that we're more accustomed to identifying in verbal activity.

However, kinesthetic activity is quite deficient in the social, dialogical character that characterizes verbal activity. We might want to stretch our analogy to speak in a highly metaphorical way of dialogue between actors and the nonhuman environment, or between different parts of the body. Still more of a stretch would be needed to speak of dialogue between past and present situations as operative in composing affective states such as empathy. Rather than stretching the analogy, however, it seems to me more instructive to consider why it is that kinesthesia lacks social character and is marked by a high level of egocentricity.

Let's consider, as an example, the activity of descending a flight of stairs. It is rather difficult to *tell* how it is that we do that, although we can reflectively recognize that connections are made and conclusions are drawn. Miscalculations, such as misjudging the height of the last step, may sensitize us to the fact that calculation (reasoning) is going on at all. Teaching the activity can also encourage us to notice the complex nature of the nonverbal reasoning that's involved. Elements are composed into wholes in kinesthetic activity as well as in mental cognition. But usually we carry out

kinesthetic activities with little or no awareness of the analytic and synthetic processes, and so translating them into a verbal account is quite difficult and results in a rather fragmentary sketch. Thus the more usual way of teaching embodied skills such as climbing stairs or weaving baskets or hitting a golf ball is through kinesthetic demonstration, rather than verbal account. If someone wants to learn these sorts of activities, the usual method is through a "hands-on" apprenticeship, rather than through a course of "book learning." This pedagogical differentiation carries with it some deeply rooted cultural associations concerning reasoning, cognition, and ver- bality.¹¹

Another difference between kinesthetic and verbal reasoning arises because I can use the words of another's proposals in much the same way—with the same meaning—as does my discourse partner. I can read a printed text and take from its words and syntax the meaning offered there by virtue of the author's intention to communicate that meaning.¹² Kinesthesia does not offer that generalized accessibility. Rather, the reasoning processes that occur in kinesthetic activity remain bound to the person who performs them. The level of *engagement* is so much more complete than in discourse, that I cannot distanciate myself from my own body so as to analyze and communicate its actions and affective states verbally. In contrast, proposals formulated in verbal reasoning (especially print, but also, discourse) are autonomous. With care and effort, they can be interpreted and evaluated by anyone with knowledge of the linguistic conventions in which they are formulated.

It's in regard to the purpose of argumen- tation (producing conviction as to the ap- propriateness of proposed connections among parts) that kinesthetic activity displays greatest similarity to verbal activi- ty. But academic culture, especially as reflected in our classroom practice, minimizes and even denigrates any convic-

tion that's achieved kinesthetically. This seems to me a result of at least three events in Western intellectual history. The first is Descartes' association of cognition with mind, rather than body. Although everyday language retains a sense of embodied knowledge—consider "I just know it in my gut," and similar expressions—academic language reflects this Cartesian thesis.¹³ The second event is a scientistic preference for "objective" knowledge, understood as that which is attainable by anyone who can utilize the appropriate equipment (from language to test tubes). Although some philosophers of science have argued that this preference is misguided, it continues to in- form a conception of reasoning and know- ing that excludes kinesthetically gained knowledge.¹⁴

The third event is a likely association, at a less than conscious level, between kinesthesia and immaturity (on the one hand) and written text, progress, and ad- vancement (on the other hand). That is: we are born with kinesthetic capacities and achieve proficiency in discourse within the following few years. Proficiency in inter- preting, evaluating, and constructing writ- ten texts, however, comes more slowly to all of us and not at all to the great majority of human beings. For both kinesthetic and oral cultures are universally present in human experience, while the culture of print is a relative latecomer in the history of both individuals and humanity in general. The "newer is better" tendency that pervades technological cultures such as ours is ex- pressed in casual references to oral cultures as "backward" or "primitive," compared to cultures that have developed writing. Correlatively, the very notion of a kinesthetic culture is scarcely comprehend- ed as a human culture.¹⁵ Given this culturally-reinforced fondness for the "new, improved product" (whether that be detergent, candidate for political office, or means of intellectual activity) it's hardly surprising that we tend to ascribe superiority to written argument. Also, we tend to ig-

nore the rootedness of the new product—available to comparatively few and requiring a financial investment—in the old, which is available free of charge to all.

But our tendency to prefer the new isn't unbounded. For television is the newest medium to dominate the field of modes of achieving conviction, and television is almost universally disparaged. We can now turn to a consideration of this medium in terms of the articulated, social, and purposive character that we've been attending to in kinesthesia, discourse, and print. That three-part analysis may contribute something to understanding the radical novelty of televisual communication, as a first step toward reconsidering that disparagement. Also, it may help us to overcome the conception of television as a "passive" medium that produces a "mindless" audience. For once we recognize that reasoning functions in televisual engagement we can begin to appreciate televisual reasoning as correlative to verbal and kinesthetic reasoning. We may then come to understand why it is particularly effective in carrying out the purpose of argumentation. And that understanding may then allow us to respond more effectively to the challenge television presents to the values of earlier modes of communication.

Televisual text shares the articulated character of discourse, print, and kinesthesia.¹⁶ The parts which are analogous to premises and conclusions are images which project meaning visually. The syntax of their presentation and their verbal accompaniment serve to propose particular connections with the aim of convincing audiences of the appropriateness of those proposals. Yet even a superficial comparison of television's manner of arranging parts and wholes with the comparable strategies in the other media we've been considering reveals considerable difference. The most significant, for our interest here, is the ease with which televisual text presents itself as equivalent to kinesthetic experience.¹⁷ We cannot mistake an oral or

printed account of an event for the event itself. But the televisual portrayal presents itself as if it were a visual presentation seen through my own eyes. My eyes, however, are an integral aspect of my kinesthetic activity. Therefore their functioning is constrained by the limits of what's kinesthetically possible. For instance, I can only see from within (so to speak) my own kinesthetic organism. (This limitation is a major factor in the egocentricity of kinesthesia.) Also, most adults realize that interpretation and evaluation of the products of our own kinesthetic activity is informed by our own histories.

What appears on the television screen, however, can at one moment present itself as "from within me," and in the next moments, as "from within others." The limitations of kinesthesia may encourage a move to discourse in order to ask others how events appear to them and what connections they would propose. But televisual presentation purports to present both my view and others' views, and so provides little incentive to engage in dialogue. I say "purports" because *nobody's* view is presented, really. Instead, we have a presentation which can only be produced technologically and which originates in an obscure joint authorship of camera person, script writer, producer, and sponsor. In other words: the origins or sources of television's articulated elements and their connections are not accessible, and are not what they present themselves as being. Television shares that first characteristic with print and still photography. But neither of those other media presents its products as if they were the products of my own kinesthetic activity.¹⁸ That presentation, together with a carefully nurtured classification as "just entertainment," disables our critical faculties.

The social character of televisual experience is like printed text in that it is in fact distanced from me. Parts and wholes are proposed by an obscure joint authorship to a potentially vast audience. (Insofar as

visual rather than verbal language predominates, the presumed audience is far greater and broader than the audience for any verbal text.) Yet this *distanciation* differs from that of printed text in that the televisual text presents itself as one in which I am *engaged*, in somewhat the same way as I am in discourse. I am, in effect, a mute dialogue partner: at best, I can propose alternatives “in my head,” rather than as verbal propositions or enacted performances that would contribute to an interactive dialogue. Nor can I imaginatively place myself in the position of the author of those proposals which are presented to me, for they are only producible technologically. These limitations do not disable my understanding of the text’s message, so much as they limit my ability to analyze the “standards, criteria, and procedures” used in the construction of argument-analogues within the text.¹⁹ For unless we study the production process which delivers televisual images to us, we have little access to the synthetic activity by which parts are composed into wholes in televisual texts. I would argue that this lack of access to the means of production, together with its semi-kinesthetic character, means that we are severely limited in analyzing televisual text.

The purposive nature that we have identified in discourse, printed text, and kinesthesia evidently is present also in televisual communication. Indeed, I would maintain that the commercial nature of the medium as it saturates our contemporary culture means that all televisual text aims to convince us of the appropriateness of proposed connections among elements.²⁰ Audience members who resist those proposals—even minimally, by maintaining (for example) that their values are uninfluenced by the solutions to interpersonal difficulties proposed by soap operas and that their behavior as consumers in the marketplace is uninfluenced by commercials—are saying that they *comprehend* the proposed connections but remain unconvinced.²¹ And it is precisely in

comprehending the proposals of televisual communication that we demonstrate competence in reasoning according to that medium’s “standards, criteria, and procedures for the interpretation, evaluation and construction,” of argument-analogs. Understanding the nature and implications of that competence is the point of my argument here: this comparison of three features which are present in the four media is the first step toward establishing that reason is exercised (and exercised differently, as suited to the peculiarities of each medium) in all four means of communication. Thus endeavoring to improve abilities to reason in the medium of print—that is, the sort of endeavor that’s at issue in informal logic classrooms—need not and should not start from a presumption that a new skill is being taught.

More generally, I’ve argued here that argumentation, although it is a specialized human activity which we typically treat as dependent upon verbality, has its basis in kinesthetic reasoning—which is an activity in which all human beings are engaged. Those origins are obscured by assumptions which I traced to events in our intellectual history. But they are recoverable, in an investigation such as this.²² Both the difficulty and the exigency of recovering those origins rests on the current predominance of televisual engagement. For television’s similarity to kinesthesia enables it to carry out the purpose of argumentation in ways that cannot be duplicated by the other media we’ve considered. We as a culture have become accustomed to reasoning in televisual communication. Yet we remain curiously unaware of the need for strategies of visual literacy which would enable us to think critically about televisual text, in a manner analogous to informal logic’s critical stance toward oral and written texts. Furthermore: if we are to retain our ability to reason kinesthetically and verbally, we need to understand the differences among these diverse modes of reasoning as the first step toward strengthening our abilities for

reasoning in those currently less-predominant media. Ultimately, that same understanding is needed as the basis for developing a theory of argumentation which can stimulate ways of developing our abilities for interpreting, constructing, and evaluating conviction-producing texts and textual analogues in any medium.²³

Notes

- ¹ "The Current State of Informal Logic," *Informal Logic* 9 (1987), p. 148. Blair and Johnson note that this is "a more specific characterization than we have been prepared to state heretofore," although they "hesitate to call" it "a definition." One implication of the descriptive investigation I do here is that this characterization should be expanded to include the normative study of activities which are analogous to argumentation by virtue of a common purpose of achieving conviction as to the appropriateness of proposed connections among parts and wholes. More generally: I propose that "informal logic" should encompass the normative study of all reasoning activities, rather than remain within formal logic's verbal boundary and/or argumentation theory's limitation to discourse that convinces or persuades.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ³ "Actual" does not mean "acceptable to a (formal or informal) logic teacher." Perhaps the most general way to state the thesis I'm exploring here is to say: (a) we become accustomed, and perhaps even habituated, to prevalent ways of proposing that particular connections among parts are appropriate; (b) the prevalent ways in contemporary society (beyond the classroom, and especially in televisual engagement) are quite different than those of verbal argumentation; (c) typically, argumentation theorists and

teachers are not concerned with forging links between the actual and the ideal. That is, we tend to prescribe under the belief that replacement is the only feasible relationship between how people do argue and how they *should* argue, in order to produce *good* arguments.

Underlying my reference to this descriptive investigation of *actual* "standards, criteria, and procedures" as a basis for normative study is an alternative belief, namely: norms are grounded in practice, and any attempt to advocate new norms is both ethically and pedagogically more plausible if it recognizes and uses that connection. In other words: prescription should be grounded in description that's been subjected to critical reflection.

- ⁴ There are several distinctions implicit in this remark. I take "reasoning" to be an activity that overlaps, but is not co-extensive with, "argumentation." *Reasoning* seeks to uncover the intrinsic ordering of parts within the whole of our experience, as well as within portions of that whole. This activity does *not* require verbality; young children do it without verbal language, and we continue to do it with little or no verbal accompaniment in both kinesthetic and televisual experience.

Argumentation proposes particular connections among parts with the goal of achieving agreement as to the proposed connections of parts into wholes being an appropriate one. It's important to stress that those proposals can be made in a way that aims at *conviction*—or, at *persuasion*. For "appropriate" can mean "presenting something of the intrinsic order manifested in our experience." In that case, truth claims are involved: we are engaged in philosophical argument that seeks conviction (reasoned agreement) rather than persuasion. Alternatively, "appropriate" can refer to a persuasive context in which something less or other than truth—e.g.

expediency—is at issue. Persuasion can be, but isn't always, achieved through argument. All too often, physical and psychological force is the means for persuading someone of the appropriateness of proposed connections. Correlatively, conviction can be, but isn't always, achieved through argument. Although it cannot be gained through physical or psychological force, nonverbal reasoning can be the means for achieving conviction.

The sort of argumentation I examine here is philosophical, concerned with proposals in which "appropriate" means "true." Furthermore I am concerned here with dialogical argumentation, in which the positions proposed by both discourse partners are subject to revision in the interest of establishing appropriate connections. There are other modes: e.g. legal argumentation seems to me monological in that both prosecution and defense present only their own interpretation of the affairs at issue, without any intention of considering alternative interpretations.

⁵ Here as elsewhere in this discussion, I speak of what's "typically" the case without any suggestion that the feature at issue is constant, necessary, or desirable. For instance, in this case, it certainly is the case that discourse partners often sit in a circle or next to one another, and may even face away from one another—say, when two people are holding a conversation while fishing from opposite sides of a bridge, or while painting different walls in a room. Elementary empirical research does confirm, however, that face-to-face is the most commonly assumed position for conversation.

Furthermore, I don't mean to imply that this literal placement is crucial to recognizing the figuratively different perspectives that two discourse partners have on their common world. It does

provide and often-reinforced behavioral reminder that there is a correlation between the conceptual and physical senses of "position."

⁶ Many epistemological traditions are reluctant to accept this sort of information as a species of knowledge. My analysis here uses a phenomenological method in which three modes of knowing are accepted: (1) this non-thematic and pre-reflective access to the environment; (2) the more commonly accepted notion of cognition that's straightforwardly directed toward the environment; and (3) a reflective consideration which attends to the encounter of knower (subject) and known (object). In phenomenological terminology these refer (respectively) to intuition, intentionality, and analysis within the reduction.

⁷ Jurgen Habermas theorizes the discourse among equals which I have in mind here under the title of the "ideal speech situation." See, e.g., *Knowledge and Human Interests*, J.J. Shapiro, trans. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

⁸ An entire ethos of "objective" in contrast to "subjective" knowledge is implied in this standard for reason. The issue here is not one of relative prevalence of "ad hominum" arguments in discourse. (But see below for comment on that issue.) Rather, the point is that verbal argumentation, especially in oral cultures that are relatively uninfluenced by the standards of written argumentation, typically accepts reference to the person as appropriate (although not conclusive) evidence. Bookish academics are reluctant to grant that reference any evidential status, unless it is (in effect) a shorthand way of referring to "objective" qualifications (properly affirmable by degrees and licensing) rather than to "subjective" qualifications such as integrity, known habits, or family affiliation.

This issue of the appropriateness of reliance upon the person may be pertinent to recent identification of some ways of reasoning that are preferred in our culture as ways that incorporate and impose "male" in contrast to "female" values. Women's vocational life traditionally involved (and to a lesser degree typically still involves) a higher degree of involvement with people than typically is the case for traditionally "male" occupations. Therefore it may well be that women typically retain more of the standards and procedures appropriate to discourse (and more generally, to an oral culture) even when functioning in a printed text culture.

Although I would argue that the *actual standards* of orality include broader acceptance of appeal to persons than those of print culture, it also may well be that relative lack of conditions for reflection on arguments, in the midst of ongoing oral argumentation, encourages greater toleration of appeals that would be cited as "ad hominum" if and when reflection does occur.

⁹ "Kinesthesia" refers to the muscular and sensorimotor tensions and movements that are intrinsic to sensory experience. Kinesthesia has its own vocabulary (those muscular tensions and movements), syntax (ways of connecting those tensions and movements so as to produce actions, sensations, and feelings), and grammar (the study of types of actions, sensations, and feelings, their inflections, and how they function within different sorts of performances).

In developing this understanding of kinesthesia as analogous to verbality, I am indebted to Merleau-Ponty's and Zaner's phenomenological analyses of kinesthesia and embodiment. See, e.g. (for Merleau-Ponty) *Phenomenology of Perception*, C. Smith, trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

Also see (for Zaner) *The Problem of*

Embodiment: Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body, 2nd. ed. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971) and *The Context of Self: A Phenomenological Inquiry Using Medicine as a Clue* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1981).

¹⁰ In phenomenological terminology, the kinesthetic activity I'm thematizing here occurs only in "lived experience," which produces information that's quite different from information which is gained in comparatively indirect ways such as reading about events or mere observation—that is, observation with minimal (and ideally, no) participation. Kinesthetic experience is "lived through" rather than received by a subject who is separate from the objects that are experienced. The non-distanciability of this sort of conviction about appropriate connections, I would argue, is a function of the non-differentiation of subject and object that's characteristic of kinesthetic activity. Verbal activity uses cultural structures (e.g. alphabetic language) that are intrinsically separate from the subject; kinesthetic activity does not. Thus I propose that entering verbal culture means leaving the extreme egocentricity that marks kinesthesia.

Kinesthesia does extend beyond the level to which I attend here, at which my own kinesthetic function convinces me of the appropriateness of certain connections. Although it would go considerably beyond the concerns of this paper to discuss that extension, I do want to mention that I find a variant form of egocentricity in kinesthetic activity that interacts with another human being. For the sort of "knowing" produced in what I'd call interactive kinesthesia is a fusing of ego with alter ego, rather than a taking leave of ego in the course of considering proposals from a discourse partner's or printed texts's position.

¹¹ Separation of the cognitive and the physical (of reasoning and acting; mind

and body) in our educational practice as well as in political life, the workplace, the church, and the home, suggests that we are an increasingly Cartesian culture even as our philosophers denounce Cartesianism and deconstruct "the subject" upon which that theory "stands."

There are two aspects of this everyday Cartesianism that deserve mention, although exploring them would take us too far afield from the focus of this paper. First: I suspect that the Platonic preference for stasis—for stable objects of knowledge, in contrast to the fleeting foci of opinion—is reflected in reluctance to grant the title of "reasoning" to kinesthetic activities which exhibit functions very much like those of verbal reasoning. Secondly: Both the Cartesian and Platonic tendencies are opposed by the expressions we use to speak of cognitive activities in everyday language: we take a position, defend our claims, and stand by our convictions; we claim that a discourse partner doesn't have a leg to stand on; we keep an idea at arm's length, and may not even be willing to touch it with a ten-foot pole; we uncover truth, and often need to root out falsehoods in the course of doing so; we try to avoid straying far afield from the focus of our investigations. The list of illustrative expressions could continue for quite a while; the point is that we talk about our supposedly disembodied, abstract thinking in kinesthetic terminology.

¹² These are controversial claims, which depend upon my holding a text theory that is rejected by many contemporary theorists. Here, as in my characterization of discourse as engaged dialogue and printed text as distanced dialogue, I am indebted to the work of Paul Ricoeur. See, e.g., his *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) or *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and tr. J.B.

Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). A similar position is held by E.D. Hirsch; see his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). An opposing view, which holds that meaning is construed variously by readers rather than presented in the text, is held by a number of contemporary theorists who are generally characterized as deconstructionists. See, e.g., Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹³ When Cartesianism is considered in this context, Descartes' valorizing of "clear and distinct ideas" appears to be a remodeling of human beings' conceptual products (ideas) so as to resemble items in the "extended" world (things). But the results of kinesthetic activity are not distinct from the body (subject) in which they are formed. Thus the Cartesian conception of self as well as the Cartesian ideal of objective knowledge find no support in the basic level of reasoning that I've identified here. However both those notions do accord well with reasoning in the medium of print. Walter Ong's remarks in *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958) as to the effect of the spread of print culture on conceptions of knowledge in the century preceding Descartes' work is suggestive: "Printing from movable type was a kind of disease which Western society was catching... [it] involved a subtle reorientation of attitudes toward communication and toward what was to be communicated, knowledge itself." (p. 310). His characterization of the new attitude reflects my analysis of the importance of distanciation in print reasoning:

The revision of the notion of analysis... is accomplished with the help of certain

spatial models for thought processes... An epistemology based on the notion of truth as 'content' begins to appear. Out of the twin notions of content and analysis is bred the vast idea-, system-, and method-literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This literature consists of treatises on practically all conceivable forms of knowledge... conceived as box-like units laid hold of by the mind in such a way that they are fully and adequately treated by being 'opened' in an analysis. (p. 315)

Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637) exemplifies the importation of the structural model of print into an understanding of how reasoning functions. That is to say that Descartes unthinkingly transferred features appropriate to reasoning in print, into his prescriptions for cognition as such.

The result was a model for correct method that dominated Western thinking for two centuries and is still embedded in what I call our everyday normative assumptions; i.e. the procedures for thinking that are generally aspired to as representing "good reasoning." Unfortunately, by dismissing the ways of reasoning appropriate to kinesthesia, discourse, and television, these assumptions require teachers and students to replace the endemic, valuable basis for good reasoning in favor of valorizing what is only one way of reasoning, suited to particular purposes but without any intrinsic claim to universal superiority.

¹⁴ Michael Polanyi's investigations of "tacit knowing" may be the most extensive proposal of alternative conceptions. See, e.g., *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁵ If Eric Havelock's analysis is correct, the phylogenetic change was occurring in Socrates' time. See, e.g., *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy From Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). Also, see the work of Walter

Ong; e.g. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), Marshall McLuhan, e.g. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), and Harold Innes, e.g. *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

¹⁶ In speaking of "television," "television text," etc., I refer to the contemporary commercial medium with which (researchers estimate) the average North American is engaged for about 47 hours per week. This is an admittedly oversimplified category, which ignores differences between genres (e.g. game shows, dramas, newscasts, sports events) in the interest of focusing upon how audiences or viewers use reason to interpret and evaluate television text that's analogous to verbality and kinesthesia; i.e. that presents messages in a manner that's articulated, social, and purposive, and with the aim of conviction as to the appropriateness of proposed connections.

It may be helpful to emphasize that I am not criticizing the *content* of commercial television here. Rather, I'm arguing that its syntax, grammar, and vocabulary constitute a *form* quite different from that of verbality and closely allied to kinesthesia. Insofar as reasoning is vital to reading with comprehension—to understanding, rather than mere word recognition—we "read" television. But the difference in form requires us to use different strategies than for reading written text; to employ different actual standards for the "interpretation, evaluation and construction" of argumentation in this different, non-natural, language. Research into the form of television, in contrast to the programming which is its content, is a relatively little-known area of investigation. I take Marshall McLuhan's work as seminal; see, e.g., his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill,

1964) and *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

Among contemporary researchers, I am most indebted to the work of Gavriel Salomon. See, e.g., his "Television is 'Easy' and Print is 'Tough': The Differential Investment of Mental Effort in Learning as a Function of Perceptions and Attributions," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 76: 647-658 (1984); *Communication and Education: Social and Psychological Interactions* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981); and *Interaction of Media, Cognition and Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981).

The work of Aletha C. Huston and John C. Wright (with various colleagues) is also instrumental for this analysis. See, e.g., "Children's Understanding of the Forms of Television," in *Viewing Children Through Television* ed. H. Kelly and H. Gardner (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981) and "Communicating More than Content: Formal Features of Children's Television Programs," *Journal of Communication* 31: 32-48 (1981).

For a collection of papers that suggest the scope of this research see *Children and the Formal Features of Television* ed. M. Meyer (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1983). Two of the earliest extensive analyses that concentrate on television's form are *Reading Television* by John Fiske and John Hartley (London: Methuen, 1978) and Raymond Williams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975). Fiske and Hartley summarize several differences that I'd characterize as syntactical in this way:

The written word... works through and so promotes consistency, narrative development from cause to effect, universality and abstraction, clarity, and a single tone of voice. Television, on the other hand, is ephemeral, episodic,

specific, concrete and dramatic in mode. Its meanings are arrived at by contrasts and by the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory signs and its 'logic' is oral and visual. (p. 15)

Williams focuses more on what I would characterize as the grammatical level. He notes: "Many people have said that television is essentially a combination and development of earlier forms..." He goes on to propose, however, that the "adaption of received forms to the new technology has led in a number of cases to significant changes and to some real qualitative differences." (p. 44)

Although Williams recognizes that "absolute innovation" is quite rare, he discusses these "significant innovations within forms" and "possibly new forms":

(a) a "new kind of drama-documentary" that "relies on what is taken as an intrinsic element of television: its capacity to enter a situation and show what is actually happening in it" (p. 72);

(b) educational television that focuses on "what can best be called educational practice... directly related to some of the most encouraging methods within formal education itself, trying to experience a process rather than being taught 'about' it" (p. 74);

(c) "innovations in styles of discussion" that "amount, in effect, to new forms" (p. 75);

(d) a mode which combines and extends elements of the essay, the journal and the film documentary" (p. 75);

(e) sequences built on "fast-moving disconnection" which he analyzes as "not only responding to a highly mobile society but of responding in some depth" through "a kind of eager openness, a sympathetic curiosity, which is perhaps a truer social use of some of the intrinsic properties of television than any of the more fixed and confirming social forms." (p. 76).

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the features of these two media, see my "The Emperor Has Only Clothes: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Televisual Text," in *Video Icons and Values*, ed. Alan Olson (forthcoming) and "Reasoning Across the Media: Verbal, Visual, and Televisual Literacies," forthcoming as a Resource Publication from Montclair (NJ) State College.

¹⁸ Cinema also presents images with this "as if" character. But several features of cinematic experience distinguish it from televisual experience. Perhaps the most important is its public nature, in contrast to the intimacy of televisuality. We must leave home, travel to the theater, deprive ourselves of free movement and conversation as well as of familiar surroundings and known companions. Awareness of the produced nature of cinematic presentation is thus behaviorally enforced. Also, the cinematic image is larger-than-life, while the televisual image is perceived of as on the same scale as the kinesthetically-produced image.

Along with these characteristics of the *images* produced by these media, there is a crucial difference in *amount* of exposure—which is likely to influence degree of habituation. My thesis here is that actual standards of reasoning are influenced by modes of communication. It's at least a plausible assumption that more participation—especially when the time spent in engagement in one medium vastly outweighs time involved in others—means more influence. The generally cited statistic of 47 hours of televisual engagement per week as the average for North Americans suggests that no other single communication medium exercises the influence of television.

divinatory" procedure, which requires access to the author's psyche if the meaning of the text is to be understood. Rather, what's needed here is access to the historical and technological context supporting the message which is aimed at conviction. Thus, it's Schleiermacher's "grammatical" procedure that's frustrated by television's non-human (technologically produced) authorship. For a discussion of these differences, see James Duke's introduction to F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. H. Kimmerle, J. Duke and J. Forstman, trans. (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

The hermeneutical problems here are quite comparable to those of interpreting verbal texts and evaluating their claims. But there is this significant difference: we are very aware, when engaged in discourse or written text, that the context of the proposals we're considering is different from our own. There may be substantial overlap, as in conversation between two friends. There may be insignificant overlap, as in reading an ancient text. But (in the language of informal logic) we *expect* "missing premises" by virtue of the difference between what we know and assume, and what the author of the text knows and assumes. Insofar as television purports to be simply a "channel" through which "reality" presents itself, it diminishes that expectation. Thus the conditions for a "critical reading" of televisual text are damaged by the formal features of the medium. An anonymous referee of this paper astutely notes that my argument here "seems intended to establish that televisual communication is simultaneously more vivid and less accessible than oral discourse or prose." Some examples (as the referee suggests) may help to substantiate "how this might place more severe limits on our analysis of television than on our analysis of words":

¹⁹ These remarks on lack of access to the author do not stem from a hermeneutic such as Schleiermacher's "psychological/

(a) home life is presented as a series of readily-resolved crises or self-supported pleasures, without interference from recalcitrant sociohistorical structures beyond the walls of the “family room” or mundane needs (housecleaning, routine bathroom functions, bill paying) that interfere with dramatic flow in actual reality. Time constraints, the difficulty of keeping audience attention focused on a small image in the midst of a busy and/or cluttered environment, and sponsors’ sensitivities are just a few of the factors that dictate omission of the mundane from what’s purported to be everyday life. To what degree, I then wonder, does this portrayal of purported everyday life influence actual perception of the everyday?

(b) conversation is presented in dramatic shows (and especially, in soap operas) without routine background interference such as traffic noise, lighting differences due to time of day, insignificant variation from standard grammar and pronunciation, and sensory distractions occasioned by the human body (neck cramps, itching, odors). “Talk-shows” present an even less plausible version of conversation: “hosts” rarely move from their positions behind low desks which are themselves set before stylized backgrounds of Los Angeles or New York City; they introduce “guests” with a standardized “now join me in welcoming...”; guests are almost always show business personalities who discuss banal details at great length and/or their latest productions—but almost never mention economic, political, military, or religious issues of the sort that do come up (albeit in a fleeting and perhaps superficial way) in real social gatherings.

Along with these grammatical structures, there are a multitude of “production variables” which function as syntactical features that insinuate meaning visually: camera angles signify comparative importance (I cannot actually

alter my natural viewing of a person in keeping with their importance); fadeouts replace step-by-step transitions to other times and places (I must perform those transitions kinesthetically or verbally in actual experience); split-screens allow the simultaneous and equal presence of several persons in widely-separated locations who cannot see one another (although they sometimes “converse” as though they do) and cannot see us (although they often seem to be addressing themselves to us).

Space limitations preclude extensive considerations of these and many more factors having to do with the pace and density of imagery—all of which contribute to television’s peculiar ability to present meaningful episodes that are both “more vivid and less accessible” than those of other media. My general question is not whether these are “good” or “bad,” but: to what degree must we employ different standards in reasoning so as to understand and assess the proposals offered in televsual engagement, and to what degree does habituation to the reasoning that’s appropriate for that experience influence reasoning in other media?

²⁰ At this point I can only mention, in a speculative footnote, the many parallels between certain contemporary themes in text theory and the nature of television. Specifically, I have in mind the fragmentary, authorless, and pervasively persuasive character that deconstructionist criticism ascribes to all text, and indeed to all human interaction. These characteristics are highly appropriate to the televsual engagement that marks contemporary culture. But I would argue that they are not pervasive in other forms of communication.

²¹ This is not to say that viewers who *maintain* non-acceptance of a proposed connection, are indeed unconvinced. Their behaviour—e.g. in choosing a mate, or

in buying a particular brand of jeans—may well suggest the opposite. Some rather subtle interviewing techniques are needed to determine the accuracy of viewers' claims in regard to influence.

²² The more general phenomenological project of which this forms a part is the phenomenology of the lifeworld, with particular emphasis on the Husserlian theme of grounding conceptual structures (such as logic) in lifeworld activities. For a more extensive treatment, see my *Media and the Evolution of Rationality: An Essay in the Praxiology of Communication* (in preparation).

²³ Several colleagues have contributed to this investigation through discussion of the topic. I would like to thank Mark

Battersby, Erazim Kohak, Richard Paul, and Mark Weinstein. Also, I would express my appreciation to an anonymous referee for this journal, whose detailed and perceptive comments on the earlier version of this paper were especially valuable. That earlier version was read at the Third International Symposium on Informal Logic (TISIL) at the University of Windsor in June, 1988. I thank the symposium conveners, Ralph Johnson and Tony Blair, and the session audience for the thoughtful discussion.

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