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# Argumentative functions of visuals: Beyond claiming and justifying

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**ABSTRACT:** Up until now, the study of the argumentative role of visuals has been restricted to the formal concept of argument as product, consisting of premises and conclusion. In this paper, I adopt the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation as a social and discursive activity in order to explore argumentative functions of visuals that go beyond claiming and justifying. To do this I pay attention to the visual form and to the interaction between the verbal and the visual mode in argumentative discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** argument as a procedure, argument as a product, multimodal argumentation, Pragma-dialectics, print advertisements, visual form

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in visual communication and the production of texts, in which the verbal mode interacts with the visual and/or other non-verbal modes, has led argumentation scholars to debate about the possibility of visuals to convey one of the two constitutive elements of an argument, namely its conclusion or its premises. The connection of the role of visuals in argumentative communication to either of these two basic functions of claiming and justifying underlies both the discourse of those who advocate a theory of visual argument and of those who are sceptical about it. While this may be one plausible use of visuals in argumentative communication it is not the only one. Images do not only play a direct role in conveying the premises or the conclusion of an argument but can also communicate something about the argumentation process or about the argument itself. The functional and dialogical approach to argumentation as a social and discursive activity that Pragma-dialectics advocates can provide a framework for accounting for the role of visuals in argumentative communication. In this view, more functions of visuals can be recognised in between the two extremes of a merely ornamental or illustrative role and the evidentiary one. In this paper, I seek to identify these other functions of visuals by paying attention to visual form next to visual content and by considering the use of images in context rather than simply focusing on their depictive content.

In sections 2 to 4, I discuss the views of argumentation scholars regarding the possibility and use of visual arguments in order to show that both the sceptics and the advocates tend to accept a formal understanding of argument as product and neglect the visual form of images. In sections 5 and 6, I argue for a conception of argumentation as multimodal and for the potential of the pragma-dialectical framework to study the verbal and the non-verbal realisation of argumentation on equal footing. In section 7, I conclude with the discussion of some examples from print advertisements, where the verbal and visual elements need to be combined in order to convey the argument.

## 2. REJECTING THE POSSIBILITY AND DOUBTING THE CONTRIBUTION OF VISUAL ARGUMENTS

In their criticisms to the project of visual argument launched by Leo Groarke and David Birdsell in the late 90's, David Fleming (1996) and Ralph Johnson (2003) have stressed the verbal nature of argument and the truth-bearing propositional status of its two constitutive elements, namely its premises and conclusion. Such a view is based on an understanding of argument as product comprised of premises and conclusion, the acceptability of which is guaranteed by the inference from the latter to the former. Moreover this view of argument takes the verbal realisation of argumentation as the defining feature of argumentativity.

According to Fleming, it is impossible to distinguish in a picture what is position and what is evidence for that position. A picture, writes Fleming, lacks the internal linear arrangement that characterizes verbal discourse. It is only by introducing language that the two-part conceptual structure of argument can be conveyed but in this case a picture may only be able to function as evidence, if anything. Moreover, it is not possible to refute, oppose or negate a picture. He writes (1996, p. 16):

A picture, because it seems to have a closer material relationship with the represented world, is therefore less available for opposition than language. ... it is difficult to access reliably with a picture any message other than the one being pictured.

In asserting the above, Fleming confuses the representational property of pictures with their use (see Novitz, 1977). What a picture represents is one thing, how that particular picture is used in a given context is another. It is picture use that we should be dealing with when analysing visual arguments. Furthermore, when discussing the depictive aspect of pictures, Fleming conflates the content of the picture with the style of it. He thus fails to acknowledge the possibilities that image makers have in guiding the viewer's eye through the use of shapes, colour, framing, composition and arrangement.

In his critique of the possibility and use of a theory of visual argument, Ralph Johnson, too, stresses the verbal origins of the study of argument that have determined to this day the apparatus used for its analysis and evaluation. He refers to "a fundamental asymmetry between verbal arguments and so-called visual

arguments" (2003, p. 3). According to him, the identification of the argument's components and the 'translation' of visuals into propositions is heavily dependent on "verbal reasoning and verbal expressions of reasoning", something which defies the purpose of identifying 'visual arguments' as different from 'verbal' ones. Moreover, the analysis of visual arguments requires so much contextual information to be brought in, something which leaves one wonder whether the proposed analysis is one of the text or of its context.

Despite their severe criticisms of a project of visual argument, or rather precisely because of these, the texts of Fleming and Johnson have challenged a number of scholars to address the issues they have raised. In doing so, scholars such as Anthony Blair, Ian Dove, Leo Groarke and Georges Roque, among others, have assumed varying positions, which nevertheless endorse, to a greater or lesser extent, a formal conception of argument as product and emphasize visual content, neglecting questions of visual form and style.

### 3. ACCEPTING THE POSSIBILITY BUT QUESTIONING THE ACTUALITY OF VISUAL ARGUMENTS

Unlike Fleming and Johnson, scholars such as Anthony Blair and Ian Dove are in principle more open to the study of visual arguments. Blair sees no theoretical problems with the possibility of visual arguments but he is rather sceptical about their actuality. He writes (2012a, p. 218):

While visual arguments are possible, they seem not to be widespread. More significantly, they seem not to constitute a radically different kind of argument from verbal ones. What makes visual messages influential, taking television advertisements as the most striking examples, is not any argumentative function they may perform, but the unconscious identifications they invoke. There is no reason to ignore or overlook visual arguments. However, their existence presents no theoretical challenge to the standard sorts of verbal argument analysis.

Moreover, Blair (2012b, p. 271) contends that "the visual element in visual arguments is most significantly a rhetorical dimension, rather than logical or dialectical". While visual elements can be said to express claims or to provide evidence, they seem to function more at the emotional and instinctive level of communication. It is along these lines that Blair draws a distinction between visual persuasion and visual arguments, considering the latter to be a species of the former.

Dove, while taking the sceptics' criticisms of visual arguments seriously, is interested in finding "a legitimate place for visual elements within argumentation", as he puts it (2012, p. 223). He thus adopts a modest position according to which it is possible to grant visuals the argumentative role of adducing evidence in support for a claim expressed in the verbal mode. Visuals such as images (namely photos) and diagrams are used in order to verify, corroborate or refute the truth value of the premises that are used as support of a claim. In this view, visuals are not a stand-alone argument or premise but evidence for the truth or acceptability of that premise. As his discussion of the evidentiary role of visuals makes clear, Dove

assumes a rather reduced definition of visual argumentation according to which visual argumentation contains explicit verbal elements.

Despite their conditional openness to the possibility and actuality of visual arguments, both Dove and Blair start their accounts from a formal conception of argument as a set of propositions and ask what role visuals can play in that configuration. In doing this, they cannot but restrict the role of visuals in either making claims or putting forward evidence, or simply acknowledge the rhetorical power of images (Blair in particular). But things can be different if one starts from the assumption that communication involves more than the verbal mode and that sometimes the verbal mode is not at all necessary for communicating arguments.

#### 4. OVERLOOKING VISUAL STYLE AND OVEREMPHASIZING THE EVIDENTIARY POWER OF IMAGES IN VISUAL ARGUMENTATION

Leo Groarke (2007) dismisses the positions of critics of visual argument as originating in the dogmas of verbalism and reductionism. According to Groarke, scholars such as Johnson and Blair (I may add Fleming to this list) start from the view that arguments are made up of propositions and that the sentences that correspond to them are the best, if not the only, way to represent the elements of an argument ('verbalism'). As a result, the discussion about the possibility and use of visual arguments revolves around the question of the translation of visuals into verbal equivalents, since the important argumentative elements of any visual argument need to be reduced to verbal equivalents ('reductionism'). In response to these two dogmas, Groarke (2002) puts forward a "comprehensive theory of argument", in which the two modes of the verbal and the visual are considered as contributing on equal terms to the representation of arguments. Georges Roque (2009, 2012), along similar lines, dismisses the supremacy of verbal communication, which reduces argumentation to the written or spoken linguistic form and ignores the other modes.

In their seminal introductory text to the special issue of the journal *Argumentation and Advocacy* from 1996, Birdsell and Groarke place emphasis on the role that the context plays by identifying the three layers that one needs to take into account when analysing visual arguments: the immediate visual context, the immediate verbal context, and visual culture. Moreover, in search of a theoretical framework within argumentation studies that is friendly to the project of visual argument, Groarke (2002) turns to *Pragma-dialectics* from where he draws inspiration in order to formulate the three principles of visual communication that guide the interpretation and reconstruction of visual arguments. These are: a) images designed for argument are communicative acts that are in principle understandable; b) argumentative images should be interpreted in a way that makes sense of the major (visual and verbal) elements they contain; c) argumentative images should be interpreted in a way that makes sense from an 'external' point of view, that is, one that fits the social, critical, political and aesthetic discourse in which the image is located (Groarke, 2002, p. 145).

In addition, Groarke has been working out a typology of non-verbal elements in argument (see Groarke & Tindale, 2013, pp. 143-158 for the latest version) in

which he distinguishes the following: argument flags, non-verbal demonstrations, visual symbols, and metaphors. Of these, the authors consider non-verbal demonstrations as "the most basic way in which non-verbal elements function as argument components" (p. 145). With this comment, Groarke suggests that the default use of visuals in argumentative communication is to provide evidence; a claim with which Dove would agree, but one which does not do justice to a project about a comprehensive view of argument, in my view. In suggesting this, Groarke overemphasizes the denotative meaning that can be extracted from the use of a sound, image or even aroma. But an image or a sound have other properties besides their demonstrative meaning, which also convey meaning, and which given the context could be said to play a role in the argumentative activity. It is therefore not enough to consider whether one is presenting an image depicting a starfish as opposed to one depicting a jelly, for example, but one should also consider the effect of choices regarding composition, angle, framing, etc. as well as the effect of presenting the one or the other image in a given context. The verbal analogue to this would be to care equally about the proposition conveyed by a given sentence as well as about the way that particular sentence was eventually formulated into an utterance – considering the choice of words, style, etc.

Georges Roque (2012) provides his own classification of visual arguments, which takes into consideration the relations that may exist between the verbal and the visual mode in argumentative communication. He thus distinguishes among cases where: the visual is merely used to draw the attention, having no specific argumentative function ('visual flag'); the visual and the verbal present the same argument ('parallel argument'); the visual and the verbal combine in order to construct the argument ('joint argument'); and the visual and the verbal are contrasted to each other in order to construct the argument ('contrasting argument').

While both Roque and Groarke stress the importance of recognizing the role that visual and non-verbal modes play in argumentative communication on equal footing next to the verbal mode, they end up relegating the role of the visual almost exclusively to an evidentiary one, in the same way that Dove does. Roque notes that in the case of a 'joint argument', what I would call the most typical case of a visual or multimodal argument (see the following section), it is usually the conclusion that is given in the text, while the visual functions as evidence in support of it. Similarly, despite the four-part distinction of the ways in which visuals may interact with verbal elements in an argument that Groarke and Tindale propose, the most important function that the authors illustrate in their examples is the evidentiary one, namely what they call 'visual demonstrations'.

When one considers the intricate ways in which verbal and visual elements combine in multimodal discourse that can be reconstructed as argumentation, visuals can be shown to convey other argumentative functions. To be sure, a visual can simply depict the premise or the conclusion of an argument (or elements of the proposition to be reconstructed as the premise or the conclusion of an argument), as the examples discussed by Dove, Groarke and Roque illustrate. In addition to that, however, visuals or properties thereof (such as colour, lines, perspective, framing, composition) can be shown to provide valuable information on how the inference

relationship between the premises (rendered partly or wholly visually) is to be understood or what the argumentative force of the verbal elements is (countering, refuting, defending, attacking, doubting, etc.). Moreover, visual elements can be said to convey information as to how the audience is addressed or how the difference of opinion is shaped.<sup>1</sup>

## 5. ARGUMENT IS NEITHER VERBAL NOR VISUAL

When argumentation is studied as a procedure (Wenzel, 1990), attention is paid to the rules that need to be followed for the testing of the arguments, not merely to the argument in terms of its formal and structural aspects. Within this procedural view it is possible to relate the function of visuals to other aspects of argumentative communication that go beyond the mere evidentiary role and concern the argumentation process as a whole. The pragma-dialectical view of argumentation as a social and rational activity provides a good starting point for exploring these argumentative functions of visual elements.

Within the pragma-dialectical approach, argumentation is studied as a "dialectical procedure for solving problems regarding the acceptability of standpoints by means of a methodical discussion aimed at testing the tenability of these standpoints" (van Eemeren, 2010, p. 31). In this view, the concepts and tools that are proposed for the analysis and evaluation of argumentative discourse relate to the various tasks that need to be accomplished at each stage of the procedure of resolving critically a difference of opinion. Such tasks go beyond those of putting forward a standpoint and of adducing arguments in support of it. They involve moves (carried out by either the protagonist or the antagonist of the standpoint) such as expressing doubt, establishing starting points, giving clarifications, making critical questions, responding to or anticipating counter-arguments, among others.

For the analyst who seeks to reconstruct and evaluate argumentative discourse from the pragma-dialectical perspective, the close study of ordinary language use and of the context within which argumentative activity takes place plays a crucial role (see also van Rees, 2001). It does not only provide the analyst with direct information about the content of the various moves that have been carried out, but equally important with clues for recovering information that has not been conveyed explicitly<sup>2</sup>. Such information can then be of use for reconstructing

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<sup>1</sup> In a similar line of research, Jens Kjeldsen (2012) considers visuals to be more than mere accompaniments to the verbal in argumentative communication and studies the role that visual figures such as metaphors, contrasts and parallelisms, play in guiding the viewer's interpretation of the argument in print advertisements.

<sup>2</sup> There is a tacit tendency to map the explicit/implicit distinction with the verbal/non-verbal modes of communicating information. Such a tendency can be arguably connected to what has been called linguistic imperialism, namely the belief that verbal language is language *par excellence* (see Roque, 2009). I do not take an image by definition to be an implicit or indirect way of communicating a message. Indirectness or implicitness is a function of the use of images or of sentences, for that matter, not a property thereof. There is nothing implicit or indirect in the use of a photo of me by the sea in order to prove that I was on the beach last summer, as there is nothing direct in the use of a sentence enquiring about your ability to pass me the salt in order to ask you to pass me the salt.

the argumentation structure and the argument scheme, as well as the context of the dispute, for example.

Moreover, van Eemeren (2010, p. 27) acknowledges that the moves carried out by the parties in an argumentative discussion need not be qualified as linguistic or verbal but rather as 'communicative', allowing thus for the possibility that these be conveyed partly or wholly by non-verbal means. With this in mind, the study of the language use that is necessary for the pragma-dialectical reconstruction and evaluation of argumentative discourse can be more broadly understood as the study of any mode of communication, be it verbal or non-verbal, at the arguers' disposal for making their contributions to an argumentative discussion. Thus argumentation is not to be understood as verbal or visual in essence. As Roque (2012, p. 277) also observes, the distinction between visual and verbal concerns the way argument can be displayed in communication.

Finally, within Pragma-dialectics attention is paid to the effectiveness of the moves carried out by the parties and the possibilities that the various contexts and genres of communication, within which argumentative discourse is produced, allow to these parties for balancing their quest for effectiveness with the requirement for reasonableness. Within this broader view of argumentation as a social and rational activity the role of visual and other non-verbal modes can be assessed as the extent to which they contribute to one or more of the tasks involved in and to the moves carried out during the dialectical procedure of resolving a difference of opinion. Visual and other non-verbal modes of communication can thus be analysed next to choices made regarding the use of the verbal mode as ways at the arguers' disposal for producing a piece of argumentative discourse. Given the possibilities and the constraints of the particular activity type and background context, the use of visual and other non verbal elements can be interpreted as playing a role in the argumentative process (see Feteris, Groarke, & Plug, 2011). It is the task of the analyst to identify those elements of the discourse, be it verbal or non verbal, that have a pertinent function and to specify their contribution to the analysis and evaluation of the discourse.

Instead of defining visual argument in relation to or as an extension of verbal argument, thereby endorsing the verbal nature of argument, I propose to acknowledge first the multimodal nature of communication within which argumentation as an activity finds its place. Once we accept that communication involves more than the verbal mode and that argumentativity is not a function of the semantics and syntax of the linguistic code, then we can ask interesting questions such as: how do various modes combine in genres of different argumentative activity types and how can we go about evaluating all this.

A distinction could thus be made between mono-modal and multi-modal argumentation. In the first case, all information necessary to interpret and reconstruct the argument (including the standpoint and the argument but not limited to that) is cued in only one mode, be it verbal, visual or other. Multimodal argumentation, on the other hand, can be defined as an activity, in which more than one mode, other than the verbal one (be it spoken or written), play a role, aimed at convincing another party (present or implicit) of the acceptability of a standpoint



that has been put (or is likely to be put) into question.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of multimodal arguments needs to take seriously and systematically into account not only the situational and institutional context within which the argumentative activity takes place, as Groarke (2002) and Roque (2012), among others, have already stressed, but also the properties of the distinct modes of communication involved each time and their interrelationships.

## 6. PUTTING THE EMPHASIS ON PICTURE USE AND VISUAL FORM

The scholars I have discussed so far have tended to focus on what the visual image depicts, especially when the image is a photographic representation, and thereby to overemphasize the evidentiary role of visuals. Moreover, the focus of the analysis has been more or less on the representative properties of images and visuals, neglecting questions of visual style and visual form. Critics of visual argumentation have also focused on what images depict but for rather different purposes, namely to claim that an image cannot argue or be put to question (see Fleming, 1996), or that an image constitutes a rather non-rational mode of persuasion (see Blair, 2012a).

An image, however, is more than just its representative content. The meaning of an image is not reduced to what the image depicts but is also a function of how the image depicts what it does. To draw an analogy with language, the meaning of an utterance cannot be reduced to its truth-evaluable propositional content. At least not when one assumes a pragmatic and functional approach to communication that takes meaning to arise in the context of use and not to be independent of it. In making an image or designing a text composed of visuals and text, choices are made regarding line, shape, colour, tone, texture, orientation, arrangement, movement and framing (see Dondis, 1973, and Horn, 1998) that also convey meaning, which need to be considered when seeking to understand the role that visuals play in argumentative communication. Moreover, image makers employ various techniques such as contrast, regularity, repetition, and symmetry, among others, in order to bring visual elements and/or verbal ones together in one meaningful whole. When the contribution of visuals in argumentative communication is analysed, attention needs to be paid not only to the content but also to the form and style. In this view, more possibilities open up for describing the argumentative functions of visuals.

The argumentative analysis of multimodal discourse is therefore not merely seeking to identify whether a picture or some visual element plays the role of the standpoint or the role of the argument but how choices made in the formatting can be said to contribute to the on-going argumentative procedure. It is not only a question of what a certain picture or visual depicts but also a question of how it does that, and related to the latter, how the audience sees what they see, that need to be considered when the argumentative role of visuals is to be accounted for. Andrea Lunsford et al. (2010, pp. 446-451) suggest a series of questions that need to

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<sup>3</sup> Roque (2012) uses the term 'mixed media', and Barceló (2012) 'heterogeneous arguments'. I also take Groarke's (2002) 'comprehensive view of argument' to refer to the multimodal view I define here. Not to confuse with Gilbert's (1994) conception of 'multimodal argumentation'.

be answered, regarding the creators of images, the medium, the audience addressed, the content and the design.

Axel Arturo Barceló Aspeitia (2012) is a scholar who suggests that images can play a substantial role to the argumentation process as a whole besides conveying the premises or the conclusion of an argument. Even though he mainly focuses on examples where images are used to convey the premise or the conclusion of an argument, in the very last part of his paper, Barceló discusses an example where the image does not convey premises or conclusion. It concerns the use of a crossed picture of George W. Bush accompanying an article against the Iraq war in 2003 that appeared in Daily Mirror to signal the party against whose claims the argument of the article is directed. In the last section of the paper, I discuss some examples in order to illustrate the potential there is when considering the functions of visuals beyond claiming and justifying.

## 7. DISCUSSION OF EXAMPLES

As suggested from the discussion of the literature and from the two previous sections, my interest in the use of visuals<sup>4</sup> in argumentative communication lies in accounting for their function in cueing various argumentative aspects and not so much in their direct depiction of the content of the standpoint or the argument. The examples I discuss below would thus fall under what Roque (2012) calls 'joint argument', texts where the visual and the verbal need to be combined to convey the argument. But unlike his examples, where the standpoint is to be recovered from the text and the visual conveys the argument, in neither of the examples discussed here can the visual or the verbal mode be said to convey directly the argument or the standpoint. Instead, the argument is to be reconstructed by taking into account the interaction of the two modes, the verbal and the visual, and by paying attention to choices made regarding the visual form and composition.

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<sup>4</sup> The visual is only one of the non-verbal modes of communication that can be considered as playing a direct or indirect role in an argumentative activity. The audio mode, for example, is yet to receive attention (for a first attempt see Groarke, 2003).

7.1 *The Chux ad*

Figure 1.

Figure 1 is a copy of an advertisement for Chux kitchen gloves with extra grip. What one sees in it is a picture of a row of four glasses all identical but the last one, which stands out in green colour and different shape. In the right hand bottom corner, next to the icon of the product, one reads the prompt "Keep the whole set". Neither the text nor the image can be fully understood independently of each other. It is by reading the text and by looking at the image that we understand that 'the whole set' mentioned in the text refers to a set of wine glasses. To complicate matters, however, 'the whole set' to which the text refers is not what is actually depicted. By having recourse to our knowledge of what a set of glasses refers to and to what the scenario of doing the dishes involves, in which the advertised product can be used, we can interpret the picture of the row of the glasses as the unfortunate result of not having used the advertised gloves, that is, as an incomplete set of glasses.

What is depicted cannot be reconstructed directly as an argument in support of buying the advertised product. Moreover, the prompt "Keep the whole set" does not refer to the depicted four glasses. Neither the verbal element nor the visual could be considered as conveying directly the standpoint or the argument in this text. By showing how the incomplete set of glasses looks like, the image maker invites the viewer to assess the consequences of not using gloves with a strong grip and to think of the risk he/she is running of ruining a set of glasses. Visually, the symmetry of the set is broken by the different shape and colour of the fourth glass (shorter, not elegant, green not transparent, thick glass), a visual form that draws

the viewer's attention. By grouping similar but perceptually incompatible elements in this picture, instead of using a text that could have possibly read "or would you risk breaking one?", or something along these lines, the image maker draws the viewer's attention to the negative consequence of not buying the product in a much more effective.

## 7.2 The 'Music is what matters' ad



Figure 2.

The image reproduced in Figure 2 is one of a series of three ads produced for a radio station in Brazil. It features a black and white photo of singer Bob Marley.<sup>5</sup> The singer is unwinding on a sofa, oblivious of the camera. In his fingers he holds a cigarette, which we can plausibly assume that it is a joint. A superimposed white, thick textured line representing a speech waveform crosses the photo from left to right, covering the spot with the joint in the singer's fingers. In the top left hand corner we read the text "Music is what matters" next to the logo of the radio station. Once more neither the verbal text nor the visual can independently inform the viewer's interpretation of the argument. At best, the sentence "music is what matters" with its emphatic syntax can be understood as making a statement,

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<sup>5</sup> The other two print advertisements reproduce a black and white photo of Keith Richards and Amy Winehouse, the one giving the finger and the other drinking alcohol, respectively.

presumably countering some other statement about what it is that may matter when listening to a radio station. But even so, we cannot tell from the text alone where the difference of opinion may lie. It is only when taking the photo into consideration that the viewer understands what the statement counters, namely the judgment that some may pass on the artist, based on his habit of smoking joints. The speech waveform that runs over the part of the photo that depicts the condemnable act, so to say, is visually conveying the point of the text: it is not the singer's habit of smoking joints that counts when listening to music but the music itself. It is on these grounds that the advertised radio station seeks to attract its listeners, inciting them to tune in. They do not pass judgments on the artists' music other than purely musical ones.

The photo of the artist cannot be said to directly count as argument in support for the inciting standpoint of the ad and the text alone cannot be understood as conveying the standpoint or the argument either. Neither can the processing of the original photo with the addition of a waveform be said to constitute the argument or the standpoint. It is the understanding of the text in relation to the interpretation of the image and knowledge of the cultural context regarding artists and the music world that guide the viewer to reconstruct the argument in support of choosing to listen to the particular radio station. It could be said that the processed image itself can be understood as a creative version of the iconic crossed red line that stands for negating or forbidding what lies behind it. The mere fact that the line is not red but replaced with the line of a waveform could also be a clue as to the position the people of this particular radio station assume with respect to the depicted act in the photo: it is not one of disapproval or at least not one of direct disapproval. In fact the creative way of crossing the condemnable act by using not just any line but a waveform can be understood as protecting the radio station owners from being criticized as endorsing the particular behaviour and acts of these artists. While a photo cannot be taken to mean the opposite of what it depicts, as Fleming (1996) argues, it is still possible to treat a photo in such a way and eventually to use it in a context that conveys a disagreement move.

## 7.3 The WWF ad

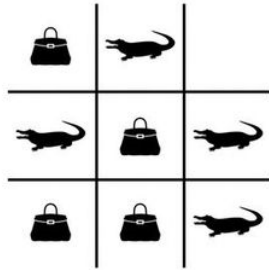


Figure 3.

The picture in Figure 3 is a copy of an ad from a campaign of the environmental organization WWF. The only verbal element in it is the text "It's your turn" which can be understood as a threat: you are next, or as an invitation: it is your turn to do act X. The regularity of the vertical and horizontal lines that creates a grid and the use of the iconic pictures of a bag and a crocodile repeated in various spaces in that grid convey visually the format of the tic-tac-toe game. Thus the visual helps the viewer arrive at the correct interpretation of the illocutionary force of the text. The whole configuration does not only engage the viewer mentally (asking him/her to make the connection among the use of symbols of a bag and a crocodile in an ad by WWF) but also kinetically as it literally invites him/her to make the next move by choosing for the one or the other symbol in filling the empty block. The format of the tic-tac-toe game conveys visually the dilemma that a consumer needs to decide upon: go on buying leather products or protect the animals from being killed for their skin? The game format succeeds in confronting the viewer with a choice that makes a difference (filling the empty block with the crocodile instead of filling it with the bag icon will end the game in favour of the one or the other). At the same time it shows that the situation is rather urgent. By inviting the viewer to take a stand, WWF asks them to support their organization. The inciting standpoint of the ad can only be recovered when taking into account the viewer's knowledge of the

work carried out by an organization such as WWF and the promotional genre of communication. The arguments in support of that standpoint concerning the urgency of the situation but also the rather simple process involved in joining the organization are conveyed by the interpretation of the game scenario that the rather minimal visuals activate. Contrary to what Blair (2012a, 2012b) seems to suggest about the workings of images in the advertising genre, advertisements (at least those promoting public services or nongovernmental organizations) can be said to address the reasoning capacity of their viewers rather than their instincts.

#### 7.4 The Guardian ad



Figure 4.

In 2013, British newspaper The Guardian launched an outdoor ad campaign in the US to promote its distinctive editorial voice and commitment to open journalism. The campaign sought to depict both sides of a core political debate in the US: individual freedom versus government regulation, by addressing four issues, namely internet privacy, gun control, women in the military, and the use of condoms in the adult film industry. The possibility of looking at the image from two perspectives, by manually flipping it over lies at the core of this ad campaign and of the message that the newspaper wanted to pass. What the image depicts differs depending on how one looks at the image. Figure 4 presents side by side the two

'readings' of the poster on women in the military. On one side, the two grey tanks on a green ground, targeting a red helicopter against a white semi-oval-shaped background become the eyes and red lips of a woman wearing a helmet, when flipped on the other side. On each side, a different text presents the main position of the party supporting military liability or military equality, respectively. The image can at first sight be interpreted merely as a schematic colour background accompanying the text. But when interpreted in connection with the text under the logo of the newspaper, "the whole picture", the visual composition is a firsthand representation of the newspaper's commitment to reporting both sides of the story. Literally both sides on the issue of women in the military are depicted on the same piece of paper, constituting thus a visual representation of the disagreement space. While it is true that visual images present their elements simultaneously, so that an understanding of the image begins with the whole in contrast to the processing of a text, which follows the linear path of reading from left to right, there are techniques and visual codes at the image maker's disposal, however, which can guide the viewer's sight (saliency of colour, shape, positioning, framing etc.). In this case, the spatial arrangement of the verbal and visual elements, and the schematic, monochrome treatment of the visuals have succeeded in guiding the viewer to 'see' the double 'reading' of the text. In doing this, the newspaper provides a strong visual argument for its impartial and comprehensive coverage.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The term 'argument' in 'visual argument', be it in the discourse of the advocates of a project of visual argument or in the discourse of the sceptics, invariably seems to be related to the formal concept of argument as product consisting of premises the acceptability of which is transferred to the conclusion. This tendency risks restricting the discussion about visual argumentation to proving the propositional nature of pictures or to arguing for their evidentiary role. In this paper, I have argued for an acknowledgement of the multimodal nature of communication in which argumentation as a social and rational activity finds its place. In this view, the verbal and non-verbal modes are studied on equal footing as to the role they play in contributing directly or indirectly to the various moves that arguers make and the tasks that need to be carried throughout the procedure of critically testing a standpoint. The pragma-dialectical conception of argument as a social and rational activity allows for the systematic study of the interaction of the various modes and for the recognition of argumentative functions of visuals beyond that of claiming and justifying. Further study of specific genres of multimodal communication is needed where the properties of the various non-verbal modes and their interaction with the verbal is systematically linked to specific aspects of the procedure of critically testing the tenability of a standpoint.

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#### *The Music is what matters ad*

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