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Visual argumentation in an Al Gore keynote presentation on climate change

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The use of digital presentation tools such as PowerPoint is ubiquitous; however we still do not know much about the persuasiveness of these programs. Examining the use of visual analogy and visual chronology, in particular, this paper explores the use of visual argumentation in a Keynote presentation by Al Gore. It illustrates how images function as an integrated part of Gores reasoning.

KEYWORDS: Al Gore, Analogy, Climate, Visual Rhetoric, Slide Presentation, Visual Argumentation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of digital presentation tools (DPT) such as PowerPoint and Keynote is ubiquitous in academic, business and organizational life; however, we still do not know much about the persuasiveness and argumentative uses of such programs. Researchers and audiences have lamented the use of PowerPoint for leading to a cognitive style of presentation causing abbreviated argument and fragmented thought (e.g. Tufte 2003). However, even though there is no doubt that DPT pose serious challenges to presentations and the delivery of argumentation, such programs also provide new possibilities (cf. Kjeldsen 2006). Text and bullet-points dominate slide presentations; although their greatest potential for supporting and creating argumentation might be the use of images. In this paper I will examine such visual argumentation through a study of an Al Gore speech on climate change presented at a TED conference.¹

Research on visual argumentation is limited, but growing steadily. Most studies deal with still pictures (e.g. Bridsell & Groarke 2007, Blair 1996, Groarke 1996), while almost none have addressed the functions of visual argumentation in multi-modal presentations or in moving images, which is, by contrast, the aim of this paper.

As a means of visual argumentation two strategies are common in Al Gore's talks—and they are especially suitable for slide presentations in general. I call the first strategy *visual chronology*. This term signifies the use of images or graphics to show the chronological development of a process such as the North Pole ice cap getting smaller, for example. The second strategy I call *visual analogy*. This is accomplished by comparing entities, such as when Gore visually shows how much ice has actually disappeared, and analogically illustrates how much of the United States would vanish if a corresponding amount of territory disappeared.

¹ See the presentation at: http://www.ted.com/talks/al_gore_s_new_thinking_on_the_climate_crisis.html

Gore's images are not mere illustrations meant only to entertain or provide variation to his talk. The images have persuasive functions. They are an integrated part of his reasoning, and they function as arguments and evidence.

2. PRESENTING A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

In his presentations Al Gore has often introduced himself with humour and wit by saying: "I am Al Gore, and I used to be the next president of the United States of America". Since leaving the post of Vice President he has fought for the environment, with his famous Keynote presentation as his most important weapon. The presentation also became the core of the Oscar-winning movie "An Inconvenient Truth" (2006). In 2007 Gore and the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) received the Nobel Peace Prize for their "efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change."

I will describe how Al Gore in a presentation at TED in March 2009 effectively uses graphics and photographic images to make and support rhetorical arguments. More specifically, I will show how Gore uses his Keynote presentation to argue through visual analogy and chronology. The central claim of Gore's talk is that we should put a price on carbon dioxide in order to reduce emission of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, thereby stopping the dangerous and rapid development of global warming. In my résumé of his 20-minutes-long talk he presents his lines of reasoning in the following manner:

The climate crisis is like the rare, but all important global, or strategic, conflict. Everything is affected. Both in the Arctic and the Antarctic the ice is melting and disappearing. It is melting due to emission of greenhouse gasses, which could make the Earth as warm as Venus. More people believe that human activity is responsible for global warming, but we are still missing a sense of urgency. Unfortunately, the developing countries have taken up the thinking and technology of the wealthy countries, increasing the crisis through, for example logging and deforestation. Peak fishing is a similar example. We need a CO2 tax to solve the problem. We need it because the old model is not working. Solving the problem is also possible through investing in new technology. The USA is the only nation that has not ratified the Kyoto treaty, but we can't wait for a draught like the one in Australia to change our political culture. We need another hero generation to solve a planetary emergency, and we have the capacity to do it.

It is worth noticing *en passant* that Gore—as an experienced presenter and user of digital presentation tools—does not begin his talk by showing slides, but instead relies on the spoken word in his opening. Employing only traditional means of oratory, he creates goodwill (*eunoia*) in the audience by praising TED, previous speakers and the listeners. He talks about his vision and he strengthens his ethos by self-deprecating remarks. "I have been trying to tell this story for a long time," he says:

I was reminded of that recently by a woman who walked past the table I was sitting at, just staring at me as she walked past. She was in her '70s, looked like she had a kind face. I thought nothing of it until I saw from the corner of my eye she was walking from the opposite direction, also just staring at me. And so I said, "How do you do?" And she said, "You know, if you dyed your hair black, you would look just like Al Gore."

3. THE RHETORIC OF IMAGE SLIDES

Not until after five minutes into his presentation does Gore show the first slide. Following his introduction Al Gore shows a picture of the Earth seen from outer space; as a prediction of a frightening future, the North Polar Ice Cap is missing. Then he goes back in time: “Twenty-eight years ago, this is what the polar ice cap—the North Polar Ice Cap—looked like at the end of the summer at the fall equinox.”

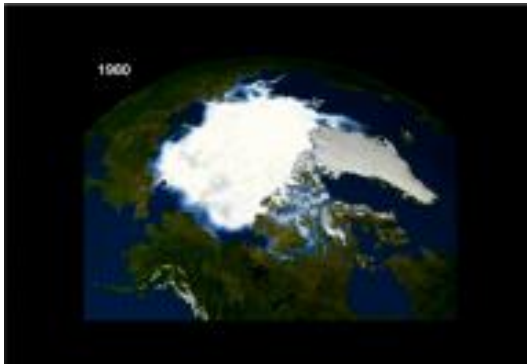


Figure 1

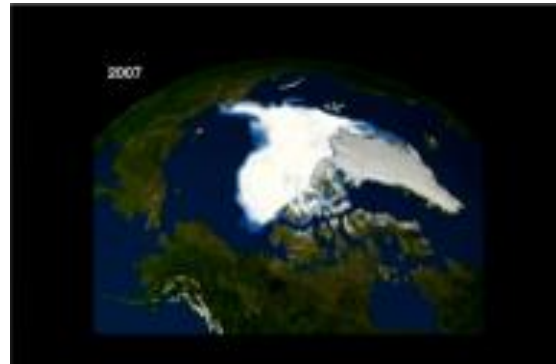


Figure 2

The slide shows the Earth in 1980 with ice covering the whole of the North Pole (Figure 1). Gore says that last fall he went to the Snow and Ice Data Centre in Boulder, Colorado, and that he talked to the researchers in Monterey at the Naval Postgraduate Laboratory. He then states that: “This is what’s happened in the last 28 years. He proceeds to show an image of the North Pole from 2007, which makes evident that a substantial amount of ice has disappeared (Figure 2).

The pictures stand as documentation of two facts, which jointly create a visual chronology, or rather a chronological development that the audience can observe: the ice is disappearing. Because Gore is not just alleging this, but actually showing it, the pictures appear as irrefutable proof of a specific development. At the same time they give a very good sense of the magnitude of the problem.

Of course, these pictures do not really document anything, since they are neither photographs nor have any kind of indexical relation with the areas depicted or the disappearing ice—as far as we can tell. Because such pictures are illustrations of claimed factual relations, I call them *pseudo-documentary* images. After having “documented” the state of affairs with pictures of the disappearing ice, Gore strengthens his claim with a graphical representation (“Northern Hemisphere Sea Ice Extent”, Figure 3).

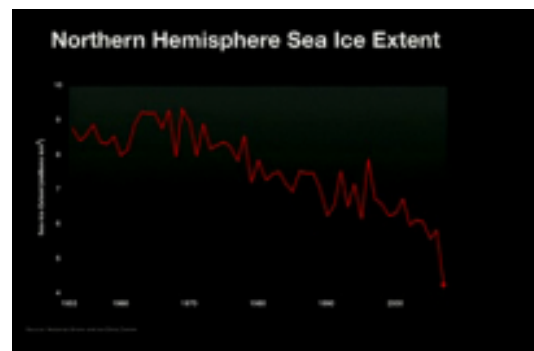


Figure 3

With figures and graphs, the slide visually establishes that the ice recedes every year, and that this diminishment was especially remarkable during the previous year (2008). The interaction between word, pictures and graphics creates an argument of ur-

gency supporting the claimed fact that the ice is actually disappearing, and that the pace of this problematic development is increasing every year.



Figure 4

To give an even better understanding of *how much* ice has disappeared, Gore presents a *visual analogy*, comparing the North Polar Ice Cap with the United States. The Ice Cap, he explains, is geographically the same size as the United States minus an area roughly equal to the size of the state of Arizona. The amount that disappeared in 2005 was equivalent to the whole area of the USA east of the Mississippi; and after 2005 even more has disappeared. On the slide we can see that this is actually the case. A blue colour

covers more and more of the ice cap in one image and a corresponding area of the United States in the other, thereby illustrating the amount of ice disappearing. The amount remaining, Gore says, could be completely gone in as little as five years. The audiences are implicitly encouraged to understand that this corresponds to the United States disappearing in just five years.

Al Gore then proceeds to show three picture slides, barely commenting on them at all. However, the implied narrative of the slides, and their sequential organization invites the audience to combine and understand the slides as causally connected. As proposed by reception theory, such a sequential organization is interpreted by simultaneously



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

keeping in mind our expectations for the future of the discourse and our experience with the discourse so far (Holub 1984: 90, Iser 1978). This creates a *wandering viewpoint* in which each picture is interpreted in relation to the previous *and* the succeeding picture in a process of *retention* and *protention* (cf. Iser 1978). This connection of the pictures is then interpreted in relation to the main argument of the talk.

First, we see a photograph of an immense ice raft from which water is dripping into the ocean, which gives the impression that the ice is melting (Figure 5). Then we are presented with a picture of a house that has collapsed because, it seems, there is no longer any ice to support it (Figure 6). Finally Gore plays a short movie clip entitled “Daniels Harbour. April 19, 2007”, which shows a house literally falling off a cliff (Figure 7). In this picture there is only a narrow, sparse line of snow in front of the house. Gore only comments on these pictures with the following words:

already, around the Arctic Circle—this is a famous village in Alaska... this is a town in Newfoundland. Antarctica. Latest studies from NASA. The amount of a moderate-to-severe snow melting of an area equivalent to the size of California.

Looking closer at the relationship between the spoken words and the shown photograph, it seems that Gore is as surprised as the audience by the image (of Alaska) suddenly appearing on the screen. In fact, he does not really comment on the three slides. Referring to the first picture he just implies that this is “around the Arctic Circle”; about the second, he only states that it is famous village in Alaska; and to the third he merely says that this is a town in Newfoundland. Thus, Gore’s words hold no argumentation whatsoever, just very brief mentions of geographical origins.

However, perceived and understood in their context (cf. Kjeldsen 2007) and in view of Gore’s previous words and images, the connection between them—and thus their argument—seems obvious: The ice in the Arctic is melting (Figure 5), this means that houses—human civilization—will collapse, drop from the edge of the cliff and fall right into the abyss (Figure 6-7).

This entire section of the speech could have been summed up with the words: “The Ice on the North Pole is melting. A lot of ice is disappearing, and this development is evolving more and more rapidly. This may result in houses collapsing.” Gore does not say this. Firstly, because he does not have to, since the pictures make it obvious; secondly, because communicating the message through pictures has certain rhetorical advantages: at the same time the pictures function as proof for factual circumstances, *and* make these circumstances present and vivid. Furthermore, they give the audience the opportunity to be active in the interpretation process by piecing together the pictures into a coherent narrative. Finally, the narrative does not end with those factual circumstances that the audience can actually see (“documented”) in the pictures; it also invites the viewer to develop and continue a future scenario. Gore never says in words that an amount of ice corresponding to the size of the entire USA will—or has—disappeared; the chronology of the narrative, however, implies that this is what may happen if man does not change his behaviour.

Having established and made vivid the diminishing ice cap as a disturbing fact, Al Gore proceeds to a “tale of two planets”. The Earth and Venus are precisely the same

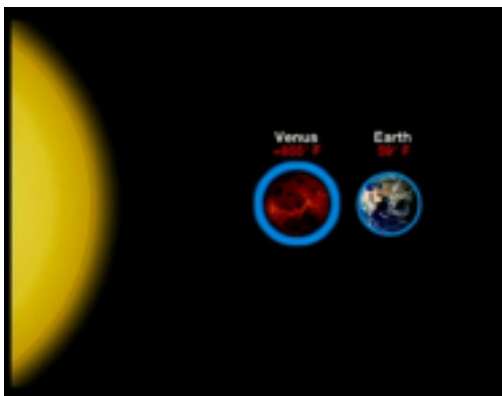


Figure 8

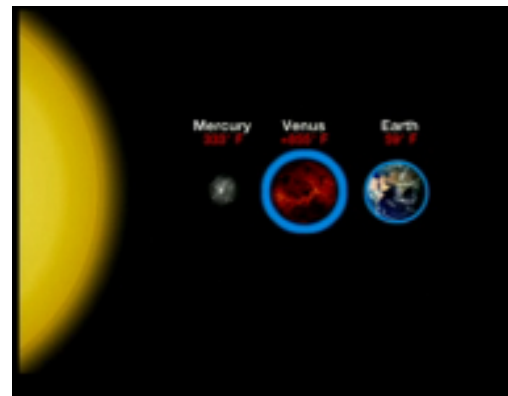


Figure 9

size, he tells us, and they hold exactly the same amount of carbon. However, there is a difference: on Earth most of the carbon is deposited in the ground as coal, oil, or natural gas. On Venus, on the other hand, most of the carbon has been leached out in the atmos-

phere. This means that while the temperature on Earth is around 59 degrees Fahrenheit on average, it is 855 degrees Fahrenheit on Venus.

This is relevant, Gore points out ironically, “to our current strategy of taking as much carbon out of the ground as quickly as possible and putting it into the atmosphere”.

Saying this he displays a slide of the two planets shown to the right of the sun (Figure 8). White letters and red figures indicate that the Earth has a temperature of 59 degrees Fahrenheit and Venus, 855 degrees Fahrenheit. The image displays two planets that are approximately the same size, and therefore should have the same temperature. Since Venus is so much warmer, it must—in the light of the narrative—be because the carbon on this planet is not in the ground, but in the atmosphere. Releasing carbon from the ground and letting it into the atmosphere, must consequently lead to the Earth becoming as hot as Venus.

The rhetorical and pedagogical advantage of the images is that they make it possible for the audience to see with their own eyes that the two planets are the same size—and thus comparable. But at the same time this slide (Figure 8) invites refutation because it also makes it evident that Venus is much closer to the sun, which seems a much more likely reason for the high temperatures. However, that is not the case, Gore assures, and “proves” it by visually adding Mercury to the image, placed between Venus and the Sun (Figure 9). Even though Mercury is closer to the sun, it is only a third as warm—333 degrees Fahrenheit.

The images of the planets, the comparison between the North Pole and the USA, and the images of the decreasing Ice Cap, all invite the viewer to rely on analogy as an underlying thought pattern. However, the rhetorical functions of the three analogies differ. The tale of two planets is meant to show that the planets are alike, so that what happens on one (Venus), consequently can be expected to happen on the other (the Earth) as well. Even though the narrative thus constructed indicates what will happen in the future, it does not establish—as do the two other examples—an apparently irrefutable development. On the other hand, the rhetorical strength of two other examples of juxtaposing images, like those of the ice cap in 1980 and in 2007, is that the audience becomes active by participating in the reconstruction of the development of this historical period. The *affordances* of imagery in digital presentation tools make this possible. Furthermore, DPT have affordances for communicating sound and displaying animations and living images, thus making it possible to create a visual chronology with even more presence compared to separate and individual stills presenting before and after relationships.

When Gore for instance describes the consequences of the developing countries now employing western technologies and ways of thinking, he does this visually by means of a photographic animation of logging in the jungle of Bolivia.



Figure 10



Figure 11

It is not easy to know exactly how this movie has been created, but we see the jungle in a satellite perspective. The animation shows more and more of the trees and plants disappearing and areas lying wasted. Simultaneously, in the upper left corner, the passing of time is marked with running years from 1975 to 2003—the closer we get to our time, the more of the green disappears, and the rate of this change accelerates (Figure 10-11). The destruction is accompanied by the unpleasant, acute sound of logging machinery right up to the year 2003, and then, for a brief moment, we return to 1975 when everything is green again and we only hear the chirping of birds and sounds of animals. However, this state only lasts a brief second, before we once again are back in 2003, met by the infernal noise of machinery and logging. Here the audience is not invited to participate in the construction of the chronology, but is forced into it. We see second by second, year-by-year, how an increasingly large area of forest disappears before our very eyes. The moving images establish an irrefutable fact underscoring the urgency of the situation.



Figure 12



Figure 11

Gore employs the same type of visual animation when he moves on to display the development in world fishing from 1950 to 2000 (shown in Figure 12 and 13). “This is peak fishing in a few seconds,” he says, and presents a map of the Earth where the ocean is almost completely blue, with only a few red and bright red spots (Figure 12). The blue colour represents “Pre-peak”, the red “Harvest Peak”, and the bright red “Post-Peak”. The title of the slide with the animation is “Fisheries 1950-2000. Exploitation and Decline”. The animation begins, and simultaneously as time in the lower left corner moves decades from 1950 towards the present day, more and more of the red and then light red colour spreads across the ocean, until it covers almost every part (Figure 13). Gore does not explain this animation, except for the statement: “We have to stop this!”. But his lack of verbal explanation does not really make a big difference. As in the animation of logging

in Bolivia, the audience can see the red colour spreading relentlessly across the ocean, “documenting” a development and marking it with urgency.

3. THE RHETORIC OF VISUAL ANALOGY AND CHRONOLOGY

Gore makes use of many other affordances of DPT than the ones I mention here, but visual analogy and visual chronology are the most dominant in his presentations. They are also—I contend—among the most rhetorically effective kind of argumentation in slide presentations.

Gore often employs the use of analogy in his rhetorical efforts. As early as 1992, when he was Vice President, Gore published the bestselling book *Earth in the Balance*, introducing three analogies in his rhetorical fight to engage people in overcoming the climate crisis. He compared the environmental difficulties facing the world to nuclear war; he likened civilization’s relationship to the Earth with that of a dysfunctional family, and he compared the effort needed to combat these crises to the Marshall Plan (Murphy 1994).

In general we may say that argument from analogy is based on the *principle of justice*, which claims that people—or phenomena—that are in similar situations should be treated similarly (e.g. Garssen 2001: 92). Gore’s visual analogies draws upon the same kind of rhetorical qualities as analogical argumentation in general, namely the topos that similar entities must be understood and treated in the same way. Such analogical argumentation is based on a relationship of comparison, where adherence to something uncertain or controversial is sought through a comparison with something less uncertain or controversial. The general argument scheme for the relationship of analogy is (e.g. Eemeren et al. 2002: 99f):

	X is true of Y
<i>because</i>	Y is true of Z
<i>and</i>	Z is comparable to X

Following this scheme, the comparison between the decreasing ice cap and the size of the USA could be expressed like this:

	The area of melted ice (Y) is vast (X)
<i>because</i>	this area (Y) is the same size as the USA east of the Mississippi (Z)
<i>and</i>	the USA east of Mississippi (Z) is vast (X)

When applying the scheme to the comparison between the two planets, we get the following:

	It will be extremely hot on Earth if we emit carbon into the atmosphere
<i>because</i>	Venus (which has carbon in its atmosphere) is extremely hot
<i>and</i>	Venus is the same size as the Earth.

Extracting the formal lines of argumentation from the images in this way does not seem to add much to our understanding of the rhetorical benefits of visual argumentation. This is really no surprise, because if the images did nothing more than provide premises and conclusion (or support or anchor them, cf. Barthes’ notion on *anchorage* 1977), there would be no reason to use images at all.

One of the benefits of visual rhetorical argumentation is its distinctive enthymematic character. In order to make meaning of the multimodal presentation, the viewer has to actively transform the images into specific pieces of argumentation and thus form a main line of reasoning (cf. Bitzer 1956). In this way the images contribute in making the viewer himself construct the rhetoric meant to persuade him.

Earlier I argued that such an enthymematic audience participation was invited by the three pictures introducing the consequences of the melting ice (Figure 5-7). In order to make sense of the pictures, the audience first had to mentally construct the causal relationship that melting ice will lead to houses collapsing. Secondly, they had to understand that these circumstances were caused by too much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Finally they were invited to relate this to Gore's moral claim that we should act now. Thus, in context the pictures are more readily understood as part of an overarching pragmatic argumentation based on a chain of causal effects:

	We must prevent the emission of green house gasses
<i>because</i>	it makes the ice melt and leads to terrible consequences (like houses collapsing)
<i>and</i>	we must prevent terrible consequences

This argument, of course, is neither new nor surprising, but what makes it rhetorically advantageous is the vivid presentation leading to active audience participation in the construction of it.

In a similar fashion, visual analogies in still images can be used to evoke visual chronologies, wherein the audience is invited to construct the development between images from two different points in time, thus indicating a causal relation between the two. Such chronologies can also have a narrative nature, making it possible to tell stories that simultaneously are able to create presence, causality and argumentation.

While still images primarily seem to present a development from departure point to finishing point, visual chronology in moving images provides a stronger indication that the depicted development will continue into the future, as we have seen in the examples of deforestation and peak-fishing. Both examples present the passing of time, which of course never stops, and thus give us no reason to think that the terrible developments we are witnessing will stop. In this way visual chronologies in moving images display such development as incontestable and irrevocable progressions.

4. PRESENCE, URGENCY, AND MODALITY

Even though it is important for Gore to let his presentation establish the fact that global warming is a man-made disaster causing the ice in the Arctic and Antarctic to melt, this is not his main rhetorical task. He even acknowledges explicitly that the audience is well aware that heat is being trapped in the atmosphere: "You all know that". So, he does not really need much argumentation to support that view. Instead, an even more important rhetorical task is to communicate a sense of urgency:

There has been progress, but here is the key: when given a list of challenges to confront, global warming is still listed at near the bottom. What is missing is a sense of urgency. If you agree with the factual analysis, but you don't feel the sense of urgency, where does that leave you?

This is also reflected in the way Gore talks about the climate crisis continuously using words such as “emergency” and “urgency”. It is no coincidence that the book “An inconvenient Truth” has the subtitle “The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and what we can do about it”. In general accounts, narratives and arguments about climate crises are embedded in the *locus of the irreparable* (cf. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 66; Cox 1982) marking the uniqueness, precariousness and timeliness of that which we are about to lose. The same applies to Gore’s narrative, which implicitly evokes the urgency of the matter.

The images in the slide presentation help Gore to achieve this sense of urgency. By displaying *visual* analogies and chronologies he achieves more ontological rhetorical power—I suggest—compared with the use of pure verbal argumentation. Because we can clearly see what is being described analogically or chronologically the argument and the issues is given presence and a sense of incontestable reality. The images seem to simultaneously affirm that something actually *exists* and that something is *developing*. As we have known since the ancient rhetoricians, nothing is more convincing and urgent than “reality itself” (cf. Kjeldsen 2003).

In *The New Rhetoric* Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 116-117) describes *presence* as something that “acts directly on our sensibility”, it makes present what is actually absent, but something that the speaker “considers important to his argument or, by making them more present, to enhance the value of some of the elements of which one has actually been conscious”. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 119) considers presence to be “of paramount importance for the technique of argumentation”, and Gore’s use of images in his slide presentation illustrates how visual presence is connected to such argumentation techniques. As Murphy (1994, 4) has pointed out in his reading of presence and analogy in *The New Rhetoric*, analogy is a form of reasoning that functions to establish the structure of reality. If an analogy is to act as proof, and not as ornamentation, “then it must attain presence; it must become ‘real’ and urgent to the auditor or reader”. Urgency is “a key element of presence”.

The images in Gore’s presentation simultaneously give presence to the argumentation and mark it with urgency. They function, in a sense, as *qualifiers and indicators of modality*.

In longer verbal presentations, as well as in visual rhetoric, it is challenging to determine specific elements of an argument, such as qualifiers, and it is especially challenging to determine their interconnection. When applying the argumentation model of Toulmin, one often experiences that the same part of a discourse may be viewed as different argument elements or different parts of a discourse may all be able to function as the same element in the argument. Interpretation and reconstruction of such argumentation become even more challenging when analyzing multimodal communication, such as DPT presentations.

I have argued elsewhere (Kjeldsen 2011) that images in predominantly pictorial advertising often serve the function of ground (data) or backing because both usually emerge as facts, evidence and categorical statements, and thus are more readily expressed visually than are warrants or claims.

In Al Gore’s presentation, it seems that visual analogies and chronologies in images also function as visual modal qualifiers, serving to indicate the seriousness of the

problem described and the urgency of the situation it creates. In Gore's presentation the images support the claim that global warming is *really* happening, that it is a *serious* problem, and that it is *imperative* (urgent) that we address this problem.

Translating the pictures into words would result in a text saying something like: the ice is *really* melting and it will cause *severe* problems. In Toulmin's terms, the pictures function as a qualifier establishing that the ice is undoubtedly melting (as we can see it with our own eyes). Simultaneously the pictures express the severity and gravity of the problem and the urgency of the situation. We may, for instance reconstruct the visual argument comparing the North Polar Ice Cap to the geographical size of the United States:

Claim 1: We must (Q) act now in response to the climate crisis

Ground 1: The problem is serious and the situation urgent

Claim 2/Ground 1: The problem is serious and the situation urgent

Ground 2: The amount of ice that has already disappeared from the North Polar ice cap equals the size of all states east of the Mississippi.

Claim 3/Ground 2: The amount of ice that has already disappeared from the North Polar ice cap equals the size of all states east of the Mississippi.

Ground 3: As you can see (with your own eyes, documented) in the images

In this argument reconstruction, the images function as ground 3 supporting and documenting the claims that much ice has disappeared, and that the problem is serious and the situation urgent. Simultaneously, however, the pictures seem to perform the role of qualifying the claims, by underscoring their moral strength and urgency.

In the claim that we must act now, the qualifier "must", I suggest, is rhetorically best understood as a kind of deontic modality applying to human action. It does not primarily concern propositions "that are actual facts in the world, but propositions that are ideals" (Rocci 2008, 178). It is not an ontological modality (cf. Rocci 2008) marking a logical consequence, but a moral imperative that could have been expressed with words such as "we have a moral obligation to ...".

5. CONCLUSION

When Al Gore verbally explains that the world is facing a problem, the images function as visual rhetoric documenting the degree of the problems (their seriousness) and the urgency of the situation. We know that there is a serious problem because the temperature is constantly increasing, while enormous areas of ice, as well as forested areas are disappearing, and houses are falling into the abyss. We also know that the situation is urgent because we can actually see this development happening rapidly and relentlessly.

So, an important rhetorical function of the images is to argue for the seriousness of the problem and the urgency of the situation. This argumentation is meant to encourage people to address the issues immediately, and do what they can to solve the problem. In this way, the images in Gore's slide show establish and support argumentation. They create presence, invite lines of reasoning (such as analogy and chronological causality), and they function as a modal amplification in a way that is parallel to the role of qualifier in Toulmin's sense.

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Commentary on “VISUAL ARGUMENTATION IN AN AL GORE KEYNOTE FOR THE CLIMATE” by Jens Kjeldsen

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kjeldsen’s paper offers a compelling explanation of Al Gore’s use of visual rhetoric and argumentation—in particular Gore’s use of what Kjeldsen calls *visual chronology* and *visual analogy*. Indeed, Gore’s campaign has been successful in large part because he is one of only a handful of climate change activists who has mastered, and perhaps in some cases added to, techniques of visual rhetoric.

Yet, I think we may accentuate the explanatory power of Kjeldsen’s paper and arrive at a deeper understanding of Gore’s success by returning, as it were, to first principles. Although I agree with nearly every point in Kjeldsen’s argument, I believe some critical factors have been overlooked. So what I would seek to do here is not to undermine or counter Kjeldsen’s work, but rather add to it in my own meagre way by raising some potentially fruitful questions.

2. BACK TO ENTHYMEMES

Visual argumentation and rhetoric are largely devoted to pathos; emotions are far more susceptible to manipulation through images than words. Yet, as Kjeldsen recognizes, Gore does not begin to use his persuasive visuals until he is 5 minutes into his 20-minute talk. That is, a quarter of the talk is over before Gore launches into the visual techniques under consideration. Gore spends those first five minutes preparing his audience to be receptive, by manipulating their emotions and pre-empting qualms about his ethos—using words.

Gore uses humour quite effectively to put his audience in a positive frame of mind. His use of self-deprecation is particularly impressive. Any of us who have attended talks by controversial activists would probably agree that, while the bulk of the audience is comprised of the converted, most of the others are people who have come to challenge the speaker, people who remain unconvinced, even cynical. They tend to see the speaker as a charlatan lacking in credibility. Gore, for instance, is frequently accused of arrogance and stuffiness by his detractors. And he knows this.

So what does he do? He spends the first quarter of the talk persuading the audience to like him by making fun of himself. He pre-empts concerns about his ethos by selectively calling attention to the flaws people perceive in him—such as his status as a failed presidential candidate and his age—and poking fun at those flaws in order to un-

dermine their power. Although he doesn't specifically call attention to his perceived stuffiness and priggishness, his humour undermines those perceptions indirectly. By making his audience chuckle along with him, he projects an image that is incompatible with those negative attributes. And it is a technique all the more powerful because it is indirect. As Kjeldsen notes, Gore also uses this time to create goodwill by praising the talk's sponsor, the other presenters, and the audience. His ethos is thus in a much better state by the time he begins his presentation proper.

Before hitting his audience with the images that Kjeldsen ably analyzes, Gore presents an abbreviation of his argument in words. And it is worth noting that this précis is, by and large, a collection of non-sequiters. Gore's central claim is that we need a carbon tax to halt the problem of global warming, but there isn't a single proposition in the précis that directly supports that conclusion.

In fact, none of the visual rhetoric that Kjeldsen analyzes supports Gore's conclusion either. Gore uses these techniques of visual analogy and visual chronology to lead the audience into constructing the argument for themselves, as Kjeldsen indicates. The audience is led to draw inferences, make connections, develop expectations—and as long as these actions are restricted to the question of whether ice caps are disappearing, or whether carbon is being released into the atmosphere, there is little to which we could object.

But in fact, Gore's goal is to lull the audience into accepting the claim that a carbon tax is needed. Following reception theory, as Kjeldsen indicates, we may say that Gore is relying on the goodwill and trust created by images that were directly related to earlier points to lead the audience into expecting that his central claim is similarly warranted—so that he does not have to justify it. The audience, having followed along throughout the presentation, having seen images obviously supportive of the claims being made at those times, lets down its guard. The fact that the conclusion is left hanging escapes their attention. Though his goal is to persuade people to support a carbon tax, he spends very little time on the matter, instead focusing nearly the entire presentation on establishing facts that, he admits, his audience probably accepted when they walked in.

As Kjeldsen recognizes, visual rhetoric and argumentation have an enthymematic character in that the audience must construct for itself the connections between premises. This is precisely the problem, as visual argumentation thus suffers from the same weakness as traditional logical enthymemes: the most crucial premise, the one that postulates the connection between items of evidence, is the one missing, the one that audiences must create for themselves. As a teaching technique, this can be quite effective. As an argumentative shortcut, this can save us from some tedium when we're dealing with obvious connections that need not be spelled out. But as a device of rhetoric and propaganda, enthymemes are easy to abuse. Through implication, expectation, and manipulation, audiences can be led to assume connections that are not actually there.

Kjeldsen breaks down the process by which Gore uses images, step by step, to lead audiences to accept the moral or pragmatic demand that we must act now. That this immediate action must come in the form of a carbon tax is left unsupported.

3. CONCLUSION: AN ISSUE OF AFFECTIVE LEARNING

Gore's objective could be framed as one of affective education. He is attempting not to teach his audience new facts, or change what they believe, for the most part, but rather to

change how they feel about something. Affective learning, when it is successful, typically has conative consequences; that is, when we succeed in changing the emotions, attitudes or values of an audience, they typically feel driven to do something as a result. Their *will* is affected. This is the sense of “urgency” that Gore wants to create in his audience. He wants them to feel driven to act, in the form of demanding their leaders support the imposition of a carbon tax.

Relative to other pedagogical enterprises, affective education is notoriously difficult. But Gore knows what he is doing, as images have a much greater chance of bringing about affective change than words. Although the use of digital tools and visuals may be new objects of study in argumentation studies, they have been studied for decades in educational studies and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Less successful activists would lecture about climate change. They would spend hours carefully crafting intricate logical arguments that would have virtually no probability of changing the way audiences feel and thus little chance of motivating them to act.

Once Gore starts talking about the carbon tax, his argument is brief, scattered, and by and large irrelevant to what has come before. This makes no difference—his visuals have delivered the audience into his hands. Nevertheless, by dancing around the question of whether a carbon tax is the best solution to the problem of global warming—or even merely a feasible solution—Gore may have done himself and his cause a disservice. For all of his ability in visual rhetoric and argumentation, his cause remains vulnerable to those few people in the audience who did not come in with sympathetic feeling and are not overwhelmed by images—not to mention those who entered ready to support him, but who now feel misled. These people may interpret Gore’s evasion as evidence that his conclusion has no merit, and may then experience a different sort of affect than the kind Gore hopes for: irritation, anger, contempt, suspicion. And what are the long-term effects of these affective changes?