

**MM2014, Bremen, 10-13 September 2014**

**Towards an argumentative analysis  
of multimodal discourse:  
Balancing facts against emotions in  
documentary films about the  
economic crisis.**

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# Background

- Argumentation studies
- Interest in multimodal analysis
- Possibility and actuality of visual and multimodal argumentation
- Focus on moving images, documentaries

# Aims of this talk

- Proposal for an argumentative analysis of multimodal discourse
- Documentary films on the financial crisis as a case in point
  - How are modes exploited in order to present facts and elicit emotions in the filmmaker's attempt to convince the audience about the plausibility of the claim that the documentary is advancing?

# Argumentation

Argumentation is a communicative and interactional act complex aimed at resolving a difference of opinion with the addressee, by putting forward a constellation of propositions for which the arguer can be held accountable in order to make the standpoint at issue acceptable to a rational judge who judges reasonably.  
(van Eemeren et al., 2014. *Handbook of Argumentation Studies*, p. 7)

## Definitions of 'visual argument'

- Groarke (2007: 135): By 'visual argument' I mean an argument conveyed or communicated in images – drawings, diagrams, photographs, paintings, actions, film and so on. In many cases, such arguments incorporate visual and verbal cues, combining images and words.
- Blair (2004/2012: 270): Visual arguments constitute a species of visual persuasion in which the visual elements overlie, accentuate, render vivid and immediate, and otherwise elevate in forcefulness a reason or set of reasons offered for modifying a belief, an attitude or one's conduct.

## Three positions regarding visual argument

- Scholars who take visual argument to constitute an object of study on its own, which deserves close study within a theory of visual argument or visual rhetoric;
- Scholars who do not consider that any such object of study as a visual argument exists;
- Scholars who acknowledge the possibility of the existence of such objects but wonder whether their treatment within argumentation studies is really pertinent.

## David Fleming (1996) “Can pictures be arguments?”

“whatever else a picture can do, it cannot satisfy these two criteria”:

- An argument involves a two-part relation, one part (evidence, proof, premise, etc.) supporting the other (thesis, standpoint, conclusion, etc.)
- An argument exists, that is, in a specifiable context of debate, controversy, opposition, or doubt; its position is thus necessarily contestable

Argument, in other words, is both two-part and two-sided.

## David Fleming (1996) “Can pictures be arguments?”

“A picture, because it seems to have a closer material relationship with the represented world, is therefore less available for opposition than language. *It resists opposition, improvement, and debate as much as it resists assertion.* The point here is not that language is more responsible than pictures; only that it is difficult to access reliably with a picture any message other than the one being pictured”.



## Ralph Johnson (2003) “Why ‘Visual Arguments’ aren’t Arguments”

- No definition of “visual argument”.
- No concrete method for recognizing that a “visual” argument is present.
- No means for identifying the components of an argument.
- Visual argument depends on verbal argument but not the other way round.

## Anthony Blair (1996) “The possibility and actuality of visual arguments”

“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*”.

# Monomodal vs Multimodal argumentation

**Monomodal argumentation:** 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:** an activity, in which more than one mode (other than the verbal one), plays 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.

# Pragma-dialectics

- Argumentation is viewed as a procedure not as a product.
- Attention is paid to all the moves that are carried out to accomplish the various tasks at the four stages of a critical discussion.
- Acknowledgement that these moves are communicative rather than verbal in nature.
- Interest in the effectiveness of argumentative discourse.
- Consideration of the situational and institutional context of argumentative activity.

# Argumentative analysis

Seeks to:

- Identify the standpoints assumed with respect to a disputed issue
- Identify the (sub)arguments advanced in support of each standpoint
- organize the various arguments and specify their relation to the standpoint (their type)
- identify strategies that have been employed by the parties involved in the dispute in order to have their standpoints accepted
- eventually evaluate the quality of the argumentation produced (the extent to which it can be deemed reasonable and effective)

# Documentary film

“Documentary work does not appeal exclusively to our aesthetic sensibility: it may entertain or please, but does so in relation to a rhetorical or persuasive effort aimed at the existing social world.” (Nichols 2010: 104)

- Five modes of documentary filmmaking (Nichols 2010):
  - expository [the mode that most people associate with documentary in general; it emphasises verbal commentary and has a clear argumentative logic],
  - observational,
  - interactive [later called participatory],
  - reflexive,
  - performative,
  - poetic.

# Creative decisions

1. When to cut, or edit and what to juxtapose
2. How to frame or compose a shot (close-up or long shot, low or high angle, artificial or natural lighting, color or black and white, whether to pan, zoom in or out, track or remain stationary, and so on).
3. Whether to record synchronous sound at the time of shooting, and whether to add additional sound, such as voice-over translations, dubbed dialogue, music, sound effects, or commentary, at a later point.
4. Whether to adhere to an accurate chronology or rearrange events to support a point or mood.
5. Whether to use archival or other people's footage and photographs or only those images shot by the filmmaker on the spot.
6. Which mode of documentary presentation to rely on to organize the film (expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive or performative).

(from Nichols, 2010: 72)

# Forms of documentary 'voice' (Nichols 2010: 76)

## Direct Address

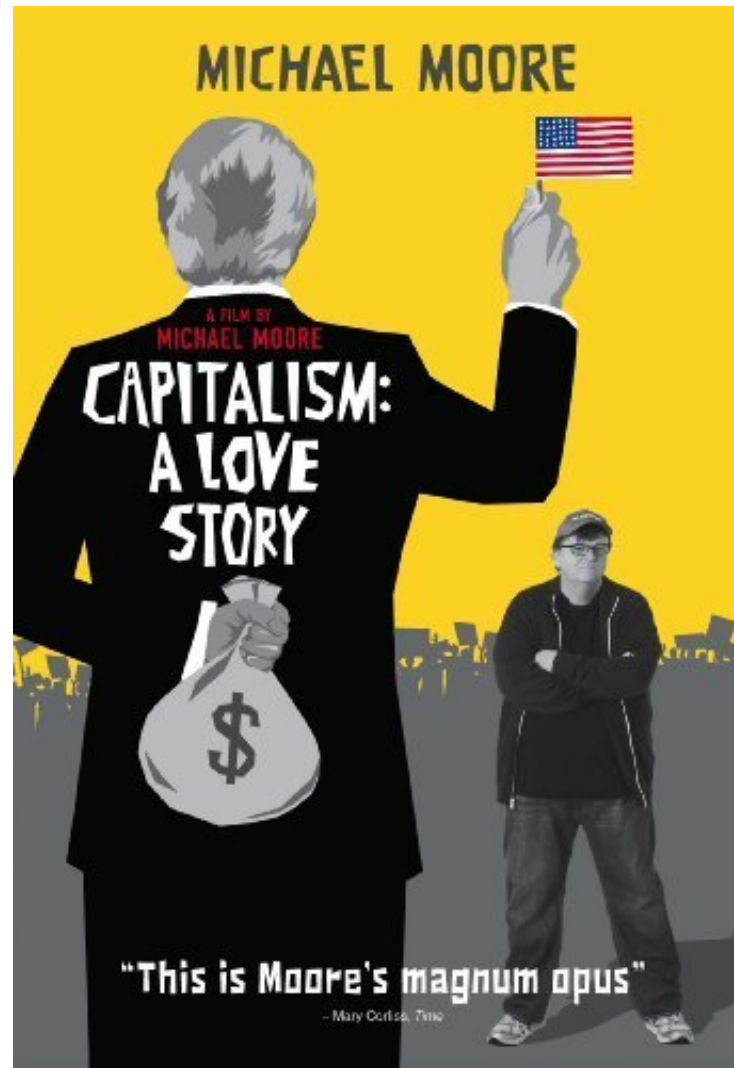
Embodied (see a person, social actor)	Disembodied (do not see the speaker)
Voice of Authority (news anchor, reporter)	Voice of God (voice-over commentary)
Interview (see interviewee, maybe see or hear the interviewer)	Titles/Inter-Titles (printed material addressed to us)

## Indirect Address

Embodied (conveyed by social actors)	Disembodied (conveyed by film technique)
Observation (watch social actors go about their lives)	Film Form (the filmmaker tells us things by means of editing, composition, camera angle, music, effects, etc. It is up to us to interpret how these choices address us)



# Capitalism: A love story (Moore, 2009)



[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLDIloO\\_ug2c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLDIloO_ug2c)

# Interviews with everyday people in despair; images evoking sympathy



# Talking about complex financial instruments



$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \sum_{i=1} (sM\Delta) B(0, t_i) [1 - F_{(k)}(t_i)] . \\
 DP &= \mathbb{E}^* \left[ M \sum_{j=1}^N (1 - R_{(k)}) B(0, \tau_{(k)}) 1_{\{\tau_{(k)} \leq T\}} \right] \\
 &= M \sum_{j=1}^N (1 - R_{(j)}) \int_0^T B(0, t) F_{(k)}^{k^{th}=j}(dt) \\
 &\quad \left[ \frac{n}{\tau_{(k)} - t_{i-1}} \right]
 \end{aligned}$$

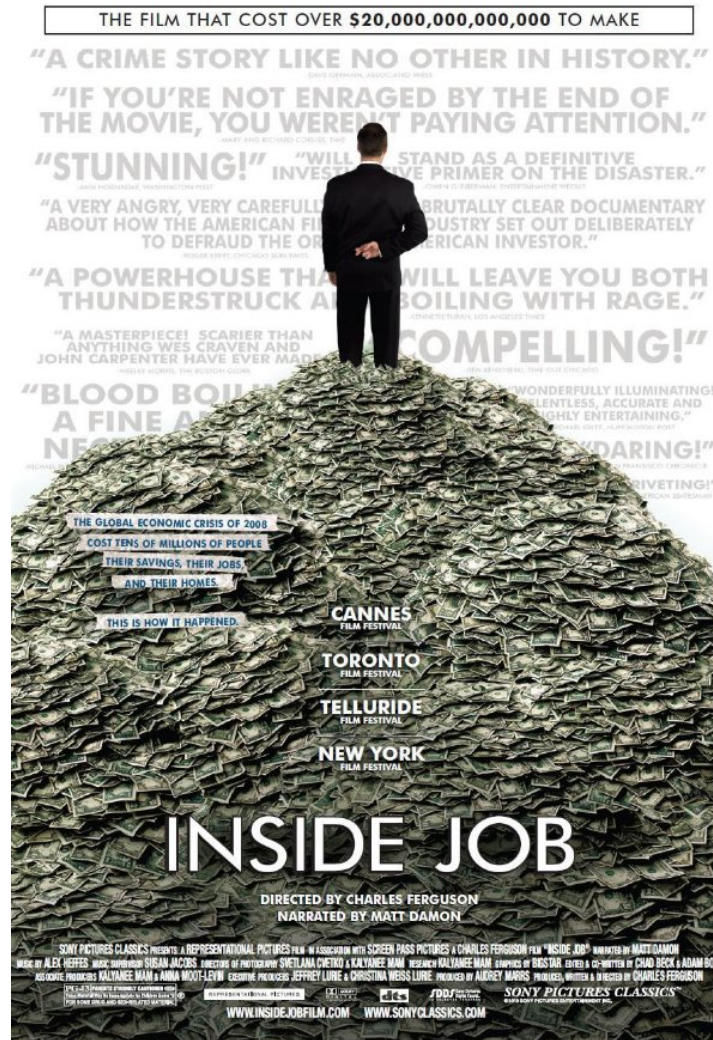


# Infographics



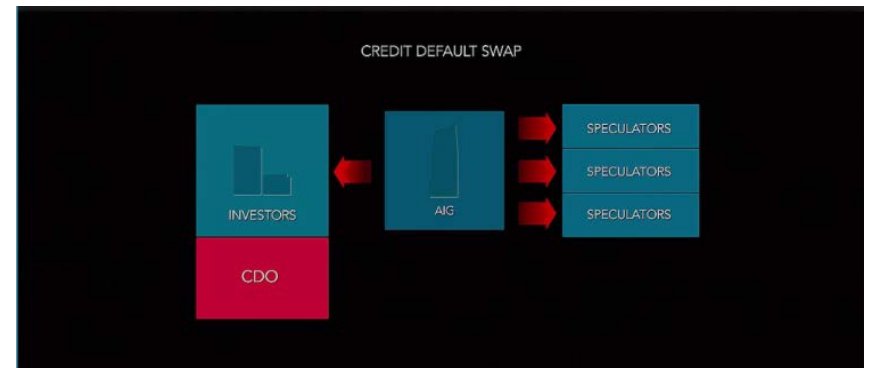
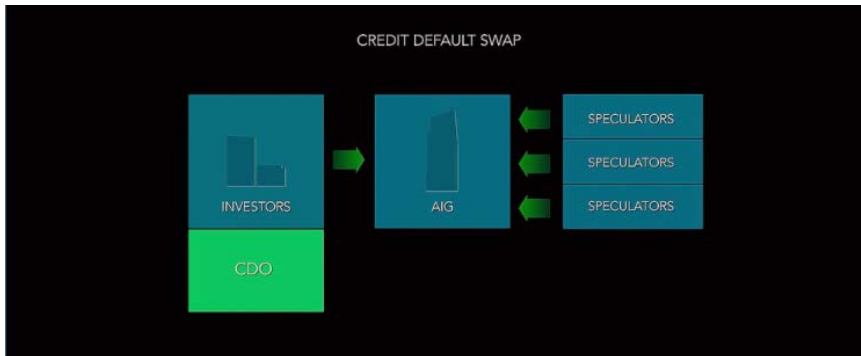
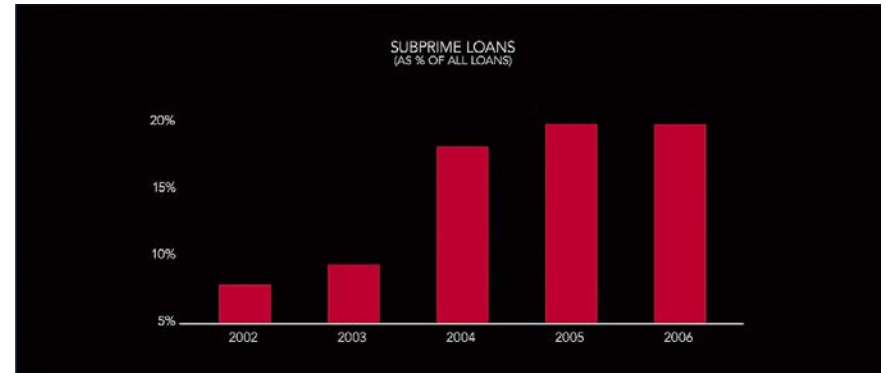


# Inside Job (Ferguson, 2010)



<https://ia601509.us.archive.org/6/items/cpb20120505a/Vimeo.com.insideJobNarratedByMattDamonfullLengthHdOnVimeo.mp4>

# Infographics



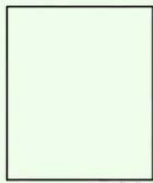
# Banks engaging in criminal activities



ers The New York Times (1851 - 2006)

## aking: How the Banks Aided Enron's Deception

complicated, al engineering, m, they berg proud. arently named wolves that live borrowed mon-hin days, it sold to Cit. It could report bills as operat-estors and genuine. t this week in a tied trustee, accounting



Neal Batson

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even then the banks found themselves engaging in practices that they knew should invalidate the accounting.

It was a profitable business. As one J. P. Morgan executive put it, Enron was "enticed to pay a premium" over normal interest rates to obtain money in ways that would be, in Mr. Batson's words, "in-scrutable to rating agencies, creditors and other users of Enron's financial statements."

Congress can change the laws, or the S.E.C. can change the rules," said Elizabeth Warren, a Harvard law professor. "The banks that financed the arrangements that caused the companies to collapse need to bear a substantial part of the risk that they injected into these companies."

The question now is what will happen in bankruptcy court. Mr. Batson concludes there is ample ground for "equitable subordination" of the debts owed to the banks. That would move them to the end of the line, leaving more for the creditors that were not participants in Enron's fraud. But for that to happen, some creditors would have to mount a costly legal effort. It is not clear anyone will try.

One might expect Congress to change the bankruptcy law to make it crystal clear that banks with dirty hands should not prosper when a company they aided in fraud goes under. Instead, the bankruptcy bill now being pushed through Congress goes out of its way to help the banks.

# Uncovering the administrators' hypocrisy



Larry Summers later made \$20 million as a consultant to a hedge fund that relied heavily on derivatives.



The recession had actually started four months before Paulson made this statement.



# Uncovering the academics' hypocrisy

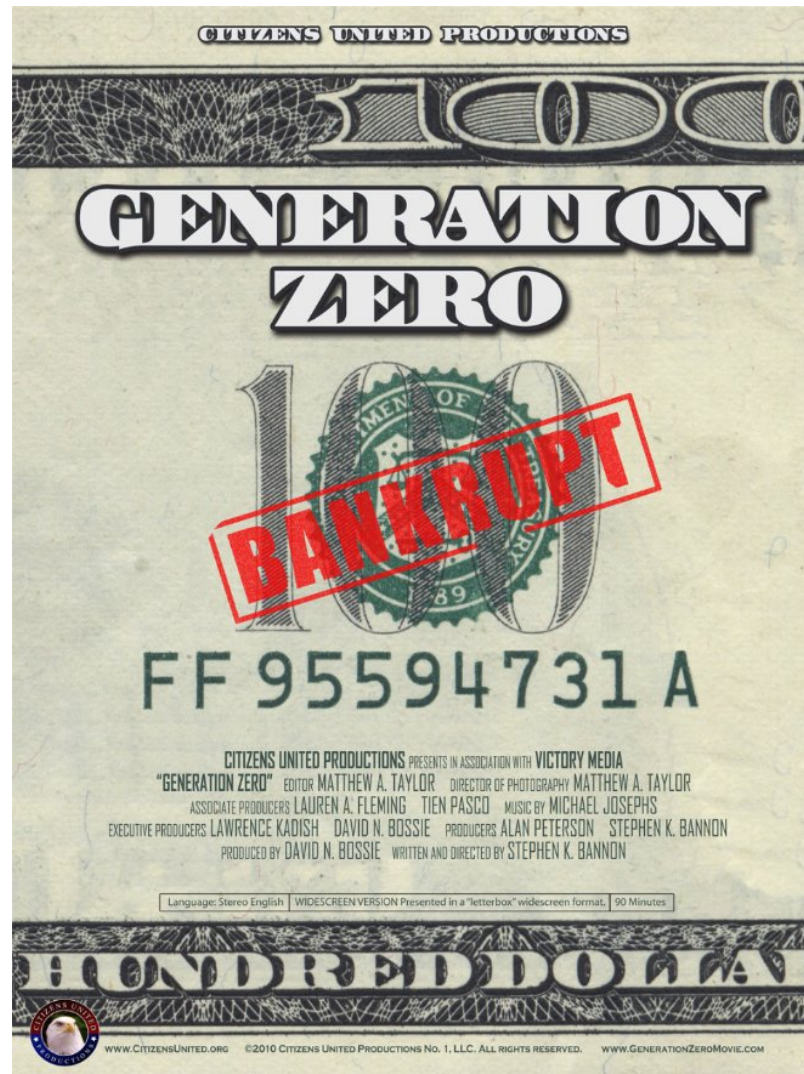
	15.	<i>Prudential Supervision: What Works and What Doesn't</i> (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2001)
	16.	<i>Conflicts of Interest in the Financial Services Industry</i> (with Andrew Crockett, Trevor F. Smith) (World Economic Forum: Geneva, 2008)
	17.	<i>Financial Instability in Iceland</i> (with Tryggvi T. Herbertsson) (Commerce: Reykjavik, Iceland, 2006)
	18.	<i>The Next Great Globalization: How Disruptive Financial Systems to Get Rich</i> (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2008)
	19.	<i>An Evaluation of Swedish Monetary Policy</i> (Giavazzi) (Sveriges Riksdag: Stockholm, 2008)



Credit derivative obligations have become an important element that has helped protect bank lending portfolios against loss.

These instruments allow a bank to obtain protection from a third party against the risk of a corporate bankruptcy. This protection allows the bank to continue to lend. At the same time, the bank can limit its credit exposure to individual counterparties and di-

# Generation Zero (Bannon, 2010)

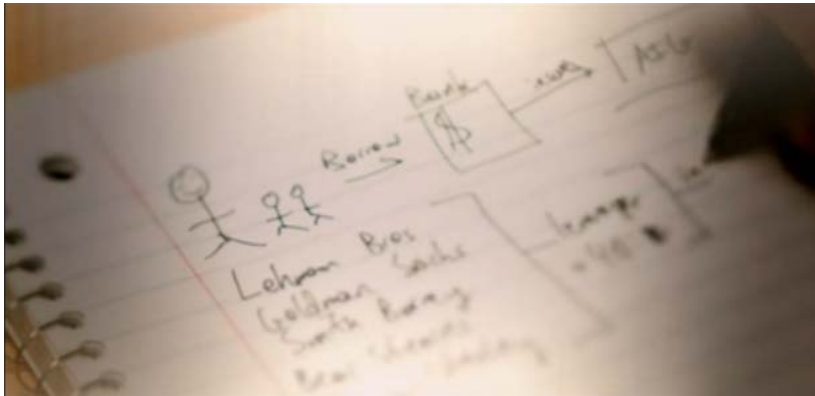


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oogLt0Kyhc>

# Ominous images



# Imaginative infographics





# Discrepancies between the image and the voice-over



How did that happen? There is a lot of blame to go around. One of the things that happened was the institutionalisation of a many of the ideas of the 1960s



we established mankind's relation with technology



in the 1930s the government was all the time trying to help people with big plans and the irony was the forgotten man was the little guy. They were hurting the entrepreneur, the entrepreneur was afraid even the Roosevelts knew it

# Final thoughts & further research

- Pragmatic / interactional perspective in multimodal analysis
- Focus on the contribution and effectiveness of the various modes in argumentative communication
- A number of small-scale case studies on a variety of media
- A critical review of a number of multimodal frameworks and image-text typologies
- Connect the micro analysis with the bigger picture

# Thank you!



Adventures in Multimodality (AIM) blog:

<http://muldisc.wordpress.com/>