

The Argumentative Reconstruction of Multimodal Discourse, Taking the ABC Coverage of President Hu Jintao's Visit to the USA as an Example

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Abstract This paper addresses the question how to analyze multimodal public discourse in such a way that the resulting reconstruction of the rhetor's accountability either obliges the rhetor to acknowledge the argumentative reconstruction as valid or to refute its validity in a meta-discussion. This is a challenge for discourse theory as well as for argument theory because multimodal discourse seems far removed from the 'standard' propositional format of an argument. We argue that multimodal discourse should be analyzed as a coherent and relevant discourse, assuming the possibility of instant interactions between all modes. We introduce a method that allows us to account for an argumentative reconstruction in a systematic way. We illustrate our method by analyzing the ABC news item titled *Hu Jintao Visit: Economics and Panda Bears* of January 20, 2011, holding ABC news as a rhetor accountable for several far reaching standpoints that are implied in the multimodal format.

We want to thank our three anonymous reviewers for their important and valuable comments. The complexity of the issue forces us to take some delicate theoretical positions. However, we hope this article to be a step in an ongoing debate about accountability in multimodal discourse.

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1 Introduction

ABC News broadcast by on January 20, 2011 an item about the visit of the Chinese president Hu Jintao to the USA (to be found on ABC's website: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/hu-jintao-visit-economics-panda-bears-obama-joe-biden-economic-economy-world-politics-12725661>). Suppose that a rhetorical analyst puts forward the following, analytical 'meta'-claim about standpoints that ABC News as a protagonist should take responsibility for, resulting from a critical rhetorical analysis of a news item.

On January 20, 2011, ABC News broadcast as its standpoint¹ that China intends to take over the leading position of the USA in technology (including aircraft construction technology, space technology and military technology), in infrastructural development, in education and that it is close to doing so. It also commits itself to the standpoint that China will extend its influence using its military position.

A rhetorical analyst who puts forward this 'meta'-claim should account for it, just as that analyst will claim that ABC News should account for the standpoints mentioned. We thus have two competing but also interdependent accountabilities. Only when the analyst can convincingly account for his interpretative reconstruction of the alleged standpoints taken by ABC News should this reconstruction become a socially significant one instead of merely a private interpretation. To account for a reconstruction does not mean claiming that it is the only conceivable one; it means that the reconstruction 'is a reading the rhetor—in the eyes of a reasonable judge—cannot simply dismiss without a decent refutation.

In this article we accept the role of analyst. We claim that ABC News can indeed be held accountable for the standpoints mentioned. However, the 'news item' in which—as we claim—these standpoints were communicated is not a regular news item, nor does it present a straightforward line of argumentation, but a complicated multimodal text. The question to be addressed in this paper is therefore:

Can we systematically analyze multimodal public discourse in such a way that the resulting reconstruction of the rhetor's accountability either obliges the rhetor to acknowledge the argumentative reconstruction as valid² or to refute its validity in a meta-discussion?

This is a challenge for discourse theory as well as for argument theory because multimodal discourse seems far removed from the 'standard' propositional format

¹ Obviously *standpoint* is a technical term; we use this term to indicate that this is a reconstruction of an expert, to be used in a meta-discussion.

² We use the word *valid* to indicate that indeed it is not the issue whether the reconstruction is *correct* or even *true* - if one can ever claim such qualifications for an interpretative reconstruction - but whether a reasonable judge would accept the reconstruction on the basis of its genesis as a one that should count as a *prima facie valid* argument in the meta discussion. The reader may consider our research question as a method to find out how far one can come reconstructing these complicated, multimodal discourse forms.

of an argument. The interpretative acts required are considerable; nevertheless the analyst claims that his reconstruction is more than a private interpretation. We purposefully formulate a rather extreme claim to articulate the problem; how to determine the argumentative commitments of the rhetor of complex multimodal discourse? The challenge is to propose a method that convincingly shifts the burden of proof for the validity of the reconstruction from the analyst to the rhetor.

In a world in which multimodality³ is the standard in public discourse (e.g. the impact of television and the Internet on opinion formation) and in which—as the ABC News example illustrates—there is a need for a critical argumentative reconstruction of multimodal public discourse, advanced media-literacy should include having a method for critical rhetorical analysis of public discourse at one's disposal that is aimed at reconstructing the discourse in a way that establishes argumentative accountability. This also requires that we develop a systematic approach that can be disseminated. We propose and illustrate such a method. We intend to argue for the following four claims.

1. *Multimodal discourse that includes modes such as (moving) pictures, animations, inserted frames, inserted verbal texts, voice-overs, direct dialogue, answers in interviews, speech of anchor persons in different situations, graphics including symbolic uses of colors, music, non-diegetic sounds and complex editing, can coherently convey rhetors' standpoints and argumentation.* This first claim has also been defended in Van den Hoven 2011, 2012. In Van Eemeren 2010, the possibility of other than verbal modalities to convey argumentation is recognized. For further information on this debate about 'visual argumentation', presenting views for and against, see also: Alcolea-Banegas 2009, Birdsell and Groarke 1996, Blair 1996, Chryse et al. 1996, Groarke 2002, 2007, Johnson 2003, Tarnay 2003.⁴
2. *The rhetoric of multimodal discourse cannot be understood without accounting for intermodal interactions.* This claim has also been argued in Jiang and Van den Hoven 2011. Our method assumes coherence and relevance of all, often simultaneously presented modalities, and thus allows us to account for intermodal interactions. We will show that important elements in the reconstruction are conveyed by means of such interactions.
3. *Our method meets to a large extend the requirement that the argumentative commitments assigned to the rhetor should result from the application of a clear set of reconstruction principles.* An argumentative reconstruction requires

³ By the semiotic concept of multimodality we mean that in the discourse more than merely the written verbal mode is used; in our discourse visuals, diegetic sounds, music. It is essential that several sources of 'information' may operate simultaneously and sequentially in complicated ways, at least some of them in formats that cannot be simply converted in sets of ordered propositions.

⁴ This does not mean that the arguments are to be judged reasonable by an independent judge. Even when discourse strongly deviates from the standards of argumentative reasonableness, it will still show an implicit *orientation* on these standards and can therefore be the object of an argumentative reconstruction (compare Van Eemeren 2010, Chapter 1). Nor does it mean that a reconstruction of multimodal discourse as argumentative reflects the rhetor's 'real' intentions. If in the eyes of a reasonable judge in a meta-discussion the reconstruction is *prima facie* reasonable, the discourse indeed conveys rhetor's standpoints (compare also footnote 10).

many interpretative acts on the part of the analyst. It can therefore not claim objectivity, but should be accessible for inter-subjective evaluation (compare Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004). To be accessible for inter-subjective evaluation it should result from the application of a clear set of reconstruction principles (compare Van Eemeren et al. 1993). A fortiori this should be the case if the reconstruction is meant to shift the burden of proof for its validity from the analyst to the rhetor.

4. *The argumentative reconstruction of multimodal public discourse is a necessary element of advanced media-literacy in a world in which multimodality has become the standard and a critical attitude of experts is desirable.* This broad claim can of course not be based on a single example; it will be further developed in the dissertation of the second author.

We first introduce the method, which is based on four parts: (a) a perspective on argumentation, (b) two discourse principles, (c) an analysis of the rhetorical situation and (d) mode-specific theories. Together these four elements allow us to account for an argumentative reconstruction in a systematic way. We illustrate this by analyzing the ABC news item titled *Hu Jintao Visit: Economics and Panda Bears* of January 20, 2011. The first part of the news item appears to be typical of the genre and is in line with what viewers would expect, reporting as it does events of the third day of Hu Jintao's visit to the USA. Then, however, there is a sudden shift to a (pre-shot) second half, which—we claim—carries a strong argumentative load. If after seeing the whole item we subsequently take a fresh look at the first part, this part turns out to contain a number of elements that anticipate the shift from news item to political opinion, bringing up strong claims that are open to question. The elements responsible for this are 'hidden' in the complex multimodal format of the discourse. This creates an interesting rhetorical situation that requires systematic analysis.⁵

2 The Method

2.1 (a) A Perspective on Argumentation

Because of its clear transition into a political opinion, we analyze the news item from an argumentative point of view, creating a reasonable reconstruction of the protagonist's position. This means that we approach this multimodal discourse as if it were meant as a (complex) move in a critical discussion on one or more standpoints. In doing so, we take recourse to an argument-theoretical paradigm, pragma-dialectics (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; Van Eemeren 2010). According to this paradigm, the analyst specifies the argumentative commitments that the rhetor—analytically reconstructed as a protagonist in a critical discussion—

⁵ Qualifying discourse as argumentative may bring the analyst temporarily into a bootstrap situation, especially when analyzing multimodal discourse forms that are far remote from the verbal text formats that are prototypical for argumentative discourse. However, bringing up a convincing argumentative reconstruction post hoc indicates that indeed the discourse was qualified rightly so.

has to answer for. Relevant information from all modalities is included in the reconstruction. This dialectical approach with its strong emphasis on the accountability of discussants aligns with the question that we have formulated in section one in which the proposed reconstruction is conceptualized as a move in a meta-discussion, aiming at resolving a possible difference of opinion between analyst and rhetor.

We can summarize this argumentative approach as the assumption that the rhetor is *oriented towards* argumentative reasonableness. This should not be misunderstood as being equivalent to the assumption that the rhetor intends to act in a reasonable manner. The meaning of this interpretative principle is that we assume the rhetor to be aware of the fact that his audience expects him to act in a reasonable manner. Therefore all elements in all modes of the discourse can be understood by the analyst as an attempt by the rhetor to keep up the impression that he meets this expectation; this is expressed in the concept of strategically maneuvering (Van Eemeren 2010). The challenge for argument and discourse theory is to account for the required interpretative transformations, making clear that the analyst does not hold the rhetor responsible for more, or for less than is reasonable (Van den Hoven 2011).

2.2 (b) Two Discourse Principles

The rational reconstruction is the result of an interpretative process. It is up to the analyst to accomplish the interpretative transformations. In the method proposed, we integrate the information from the many simultaneously working modalities, mainly guided by just two principles: the analyst assumes that the rhetor presents to his audience a COHERENT discourse (Halliday and Hasan 1985) and a RELEVANT discourse (Sperber and Wilson 1995). The application of both principles to multimodal discourse turns out to be fairly straightforward, but certainly not in any sense ‘automatic’. Intermodal coherence and the ‘division of labor’ between modalities can only be determined by means of analytical interpretation (compare also Kress 2009, Chapter 1). But the application is explicit and therefore verifiable.

These two principles come very close to interpretation principles that Groarke has proposed, developing a “pragma-dialectics of visual argument” (Groarke 2002, 144v). Groarke states that the argumentative function of images (as of many verbal utterances) is best classified as “implicit and indirect” and proposes interpretation principles to reconstruct the indirectly and implicitly presented argumentation. We tend to take a slightly different position; we avoid saying that some elements of non verbal modalities have an (implicit and indirect) argumentative function, we prefer to say that the principles of coherence and relevance help an interpreter to justify a reconstruction as such. This is an attempt to avoid begging the question; it is the analyst who has to take responsibility for the construction of the rhetor as a protagonist. Still, the coherence principle comes close to Groarke’s second principle: “we must interpret argumentative images in a way that makes sense of the major (visual and verbal) elements they contain [...] and plausibly explains their connection to each other” (2002, 145). The coherence principle is more general in the sense that it states that all new meanings, irrespective of the modes in which

they are conveyed, should be interpreted in such a way that they connect to meanings conveyed immediately preceding, following or simultaneously conveyed. The principle is applied immediately in the flow of information. At the moment that a mode is exploited, this is taken to be a sign to search for a coherent link to the meaning represented so far and to the meanings conveyed by other modes. Meanings from all modes are assumed to cohere unless it is clearly indicated otherwise. Non coherence is for example plausible when the television screen is showing a test card while music is being played; the ‘genre’ makes it clear that no coherence is to be expected. More relevant for our topic is that no strong coherence may be expected when a strong caesura is indicated: a new piece of music, a strong hard cut in a sequence with for the rest soft cuts, a change in voice-over, and so on).

Closely connected to the coherence principle and parallel to it, the slightly more difficult relevance principle is applied. This principle comes close to Groarke’s first principle: “images that are designed for argument are communicative acts that are in principle understandable” (2002, 145). Again, avoiding begging the question, we emphasize that the interpreter has to argue that elements in the discourse “are designed for argument”, that a reconstruction as an argument is justified; the principle plays a role in his justification of that reconstruction. The general principle is that all modes are assumed to convey information that is relevant in guiding the audience towards an intended interpretation. Relevant’ is taken in a strong meaning: if an interpretation can be brought up in which elements are ‘indispensable’, this is an argument to present such interpretation as an interpretation the rhetor is *prima facie* committed to, as a valid interpretation. Obviously modes sometimes merely ‘strengthen’ or ‘repeat’ each other; application of the principle of relevance however starts seeking for a strong relevance.

The relation between both principles in the context of an argumentative reconstruction can be formulated as follows: if an element conveyed by whatever mode has a strong relevance (conveys indispensable new meaning) as a coherent element in an argumentative reconstruction, then this (element of) the argumentative reconstruction gains a strong validity (and by adding up the argumentative reconstruction as a whole).

So we apply both principles together, searching for an interpretation that attaches a meaning to a modal element that is relevant because it coheres with preceding information, (immediately) following information, or simultaneously presented information in other modes.⁶

2.3 (c) An Analysis of the Rhetorical Situation

Accounting for an interpretative analytical reconstruction requires that we relate the complex multimodal format of the discourse in an insightful way to the

⁶ The third principle that Groarke formulates (2002) is the principle “that we must interpret argumentative images in a way that makes sense from an ‘external’ point of view - in a sense that it fits the social, critical, political and aesthetic discourse in which the image is located” (2002, 145). In fact we adopt this principle in our analysis of the rhetorical situation (see the next point c). Here we require that the analyst accounts for the relation between the discourse world and the audience’s reality: one might call this the principle of external relevance.

argumentative reconstruction. To accomplish this we apply a model of the rhetorical situation. Our model is based on the rhetorical tradition (Corbett and Connors 1998) and its modern applications and variations (Kuypers 2009).

Defining a situation as rhetorical means that the rhetor attempts to reinforce or alter the way an audience perceives its reality. Discourse is supposed to do the work. In the discourse, a narrator (=the organizing principle, the hand that organizes the discourse) presents a discourse world to the audience. The concept of narrator is used here as an abbreviation of a complex set of organizing principles (Branigan 1992, Chapter 4).

In the presentation of the discourse world, we analytically distinguish between *mimesis* (Greek μίμησις, imitation) and *diegesis* (Greek διήγησις, narration), taking these two terms from narratology (Bunia 2010) and using them in the way they have been contrasted since Plato (Van den Hoven 2011). The narrator constructs and develops a discourse world (*mimesis*). This world may be a direct ‘mime’, an ‘imitation’ of what the rhetor perceives as reality. It can also be fictional, or a model, and so on. It can never be reality itself. That is why we use the term *mimesis* “not as mere imitation (as Aristotle wrote), but as a form of identification” (Sherwin 2011: 2). The narrator also interprets and evaluates this world (*diegesis*). Often these aspects are intertwined, particularly in multimodal discourse. In our analysis we try to unravel both aspects because the distinction is highly relevant from an argumentative point of view.

The aim of rhetorical discourse further implies that the discourse world obviously has a meaningful relation to the audience’s reality. A discourse world that has no relation to the audience’s reality can never have any rhetorical force. If an audience were to consider a Chinese airplane leaving a hangar (which is an animated shot in the ‘news item’) as mere fiction, such a shot might be amusing, but it would not alter the audience’s perception of reality. The rhetor has to relate this scene to the audience’s reality or to invite the audience to do so. Therefore, we also need to analyze the claimed relations with the audience’s reality. Relations can be claimed explicitly by the discourse voice (sometimes using performative speech acts (Austin et al. 1976)), or by an embedded voice that the narrator uses. The narrator may also implicitly ‘invite’ the audience to create these relations themselves.

Finally these mimetic and diegetic relations together account for the rhetor’s pragmatic intention, which is the change that the rhetor tries to establish in the audience’s perception of its reality.

In a scheme, we can summarize this analysis of the rhetorical situation as shown in Fig. 1.

The analyst needs to find (1) the mimetic relations and (2) the diegetic relations to see how these construct the intended (3) pragmatic intention. To do this he has to analyze the discourse world as such. How does it ‘look’ (*mimesis*) and how is it interpreted by the discourse voice (narrator) (*diegesis*). We depict the pragmatic intention horizontally, developing in time with the interpretation process, to express that these are not the ‘true’, historical intentions, but the intentions as reconstructed from the discourse by the interpreter. We intend to emphasize this way that the relation (1) and (2) are constructed and updated continuously and immediately when new meanings are conveyed (compare section 2d), from $t = 0$, the start of the

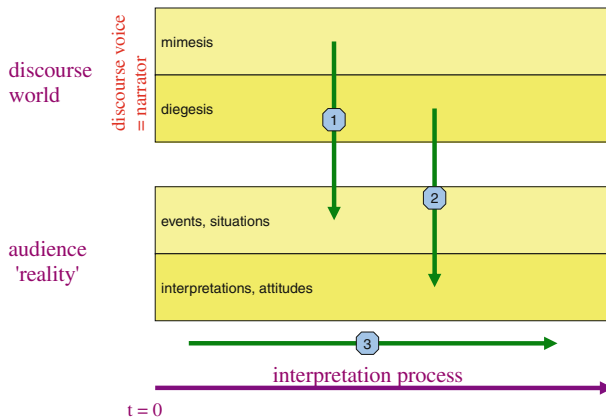


Fig. 1 Basic scheme of the rhetorical situation

interpretation process, until the interpretation is judged as completed by the interpreter.

2.4 (d) Mode-Specific Theories

This model allows us to incorporate theories about specific modalities in our framework that are needed to analyze the discourse world, such as film theory when we are dealing with moving pictures (Bordwell and Thompson 2005), theories about multimodal metaphor when we are confronted with such metaphors (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009), general semiotic text theories (van den Hoven 2010) or specific theories about film narration (Branigan 1992), theories about multimodal graphics (Kress 2009), music (Cohen 2001), and so on. We apply general insights on communication and cognition (Bertelson and de Gelder 2004; Fauconnier and Turner 2003) to account for the way the audience is expected to integrate the modes online and immediately in a mental representation (Jiang and Van den Hoven 2011). The model also allows us to incorporate explicit knowledge about (sub) genres, such as that of the news-item in the example at hand, knowledge that guides the audience's expectations.

The model of the rhetorical situation, the principles of relevance, coherence and argumentative reasonableness and the mode-specific theories together make a systematic reconstruction possible. In the remainder of this article we will present the analysis of the news item as an example.

3 The ABC Coverage of President Hu Jintao's Visit to the USA

On January 18th, 2011, Beijing Time, Chinese president Hu Jintao started a state visit to the United States. This so-called 'groundbreaking' state visit has been in the spotlight of different kinds of news media, both in China and abroad. Within Chinese news report conventions as well as in the conventions adhered to elsewhere,

we suggest that there is a subgenre NEWS REPORTS ON IMPORTANT STATE VISITS that has established its own specifications of the familiar five basic elements in news reporting (*who* is/are involved in the news, *what* happened, *where*, *when* and *why*). In the audience's expectations of a report on such high-level meetings, the expected elements are: ARRIVALS AT PLACES VISITED, CLIPS FROM THE IMPORTANT SPEECHES, PRESS-CONFERENCES GIVEN, THE STATE-LEVEL ENTERTAINMENT, AS WELL AS THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE AGENDA OF THE FORTHCOMING DAYS, basically in that order. A further option seems to be, by way of including elements surrounding the actual news item, to supply some GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE COUNTRY VISITED AND SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE VISITING AND VISITED COUNTRIES.⁷

In the light of the expected characteristics specified above, an ABC news item, titled *Hu Jintao Visit: Economics and Panda Bears* of January 20, 2011 is exceptional. In the first part, the news item appears to be in line with its genre expectations, reporting as it does what has happened that day during Hu's visit to the USA. The second part (which is pre-shot) appears to be switching to the COUNTRY INFORMATION issue, but then suddenly it presents a lengthy sequence carrying a strong argumentative load. Our focus will be on this part mainly.

Our task is not to present the only conceivable reconstruction. We need to demonstrate that our reconstruction (a) results from a systematic and accountable application of the method which makes it accessible for an inter-subjective debate; (b) shifts the burden of proof in such a debate towards the one who questions the validity of the reconstruction and (c) reveals the way the argumentation is presented. The last requirement is added because in practice not only standpoints and the arguments as such require evaluation, but also—sometimes even chiefly—the way the argumentation is presented to the audience (compare Van Rees and Rigotti 2011 and the literature mentioned there). The presentation of a decent argument can exhibit a rhetorical 'derailment' in its presentation. The term 'derailment' is used by Van Eemeren (2010) to indicate, among other things, situations in which the rhetorical goal to win the discussion (=in our terminology: to establish the pragmatic intention) interferes with the simultaneous intention to do so in a reasonable way.

The scope of this article does not allow us to account for the entire set of decisive moments that lead to the reconstruction as presented. We will present processes of multimodal interpretation that illustrate how an application of the method (argumentative perspective, principles, the model and the mode-specific theories) results in the reconstruction of the standpoints that we formulated at the beginning of this article and their main arguments. It also shows that the application of the method is an 'art', and not an automatic process, which indeed implies that the result of its application should be considered as a starting point for an orderly (meta-) discussion about the rhetor's accountability (Van den Hoven 2011).

⁷ We did not find any specific references that deal with such items as a subgenre. As yet there is a discrepancy between the detailed expectations audiences have about very specific genres and a developed genre theory that accounts for such intuitions (cf. Bhatia 2004).

After presenting the rough data in a kind of ‘score’—presenting the modes simultaneously the way that the various instruments are indicated in a musical score—(a), we will demonstrate the analysis of the crucial scene 6 (b), the structure-establishing scenes 7 and 8 (c), and the most controversial scenes 9 and 10 (d).

3.1 (a) The Data

We first give a description of the ‘data’, and we do this in a very specific way. The modes in the multimodal discourse should not be isolated but need to be approached in a holistic way because, as argued in Jiang and Van den Hoven 2011, immediate and complex interactions between the various sources of information occur. To make this possible, we make a joint description of the modes as they develop in time. A presentation of the material that relates the modes that appear simultaneously to the audience is an essential part of the method. Therefore, even though it takes up some space, we present all the data in a ‘score’. We present the visual design by means of stills; the main aspects of the cinematography; the spoken texts (voice-over and others), using a bold type to highlight elements that are prosodically stressed by the reporters. We present this ‘prosodic mode’ explicitly because it turns out to be significant. This brings out the fact that to a certain extent the choices made in the presentation of the data are pragmatic and interpretative already (Fig. 2).

The integration of different modes that we need to assume all readers make is not a matter of post-perception, not a late, dominantly conscious inference process that operates on more or less finalized mental representations of the separate modes. It depends on perceptual pairing of stimuli, on stipulated cross-modal coherence, and on cross-modal interactions between initial perceptions and knowledge-based inference (Jiang and van den Hoven 2011). This has its counterpart in the production technique. In the process of making television news items, scripts play a very important part. They help the reporters collect materials with focus and provide the intended rhetorical logic to the editor. Although in news production time pressure is high, there is no reason to assume that many of the decisions involved will be taken rashly. Basically, we surmise that what is represented in our reconstruction will have been scripted. This intentional scripting, however, is not decisive; accountability is constructed by means of an insightful and reasonable process of reconstruction (compare footnote 5 and 10).

3.2 (b) The Presentation of the Standpoint(s): Scene 6

Scene 1–3 can be understood as matching in a more or less conventional manner the expectations associated with the subgenre. Scenes 4 and 5 form a transition, with the anchor person filling in the remark: “[T]here are days it sure seems like America is playing catch-up”. The line can still simply be understood as a sports-metaphor, an admiring introduction of a sequence with basic information about the rapidly developing country of the visitor (which the second part of the item in fact also is). The real turn from regular news item into a political opinion item occurs in scene 6, in which another metaphor is introduced.




















scene	time	cinematography	screen shots	Verbals
1	00:00	(background is dominantly red)		China's president Hu Jintao continues his US visit today, reaching out to corporate leaders and panda lovers.
2	00:07	quick fade in		A new deal will keep Meixiang and Tiantian
	00:09	quick fade in, then zoom out		at the national zoo in Washington for 5 more years. Just enough time to produce one more baby panda.
	00:14	hard cut		
3	00:15	soft cut		Meantime, Hu told the executives the US and China will fully recover
	00:19	soft cut		from the global economic crisis only if we cooperate . And there are days it sure seems like America's playing catch-up. (Some voice from the conference audible)
4	00:26	soft cut		Two months ago, Diane Sawyer's team travelled to China to see
	00:29	hard cut		the breathtaking piece of change there. And tonight
5	00:32	hard cut, zoom in		Clarissa Ward reports from Beijing that China is still growing at top speed.
6	00:37	soft cut (dominantly red)		(sounds from radio in the picture first) China is hot on America's heels.
7	00:42	dissolve to animation (airplane red)		Look out, Boeing! China is designing its first commercial airplane. (Inserted words: ABC News Virtual View)
8	00:46	dissolve to animation		Watch out, NASA! China is building its very own space station. (Inserted words: ABC News Virtual View)
9	00:51	soft cut		I think we are going to see China is going to spread its wings more, China is not going to be contained.....(Inserted words: RUSSELL LEIGH MOSES Beijing Center for Chinese Studies)
10	00:51	hard cut, extreme zoom out		China launched into 2011 full throttle ,
	00:59	soft cut		blatantly testing its first stealth fighter jet
	01:02	soft cut		just as Secretary Gates
	01:04	hard cut		arrived in the country.
11	01:06	soft cut		This year, China is paving 16,000 miles of highway ,
	01:09	soft cut		boasting that in just 5 years,

Fig. 2 Score of the multimodal data






















	01:11	hard cut		they will have more highways than America.
12	01:14	soft cut		(Sound of train first) Just a few months ago,
	01:16	Hard cut		when Diane, David and I
	01:18			banned [sic] out across the country,
	00:19			we had the a chance to ride China's new bullet train,
	01:21			breaking records of
	01:23			230 miles
	01:25			per hour This year the nation will start to lay
	01:28	Soft cut		an astonishing 19,000 miles of railway lines.
13	01:32	Fade in		(noises from crowd) Reporting: And China is going to need all the tracks it can get as it prepares to break a new record. In the next 6 weeks (Inserted words: CLARISSA WARD ABC NEWS Beijing China)
	01:40	Zoom out, suddenly quick		640 million people will travel home
	01:43	Zoom out and speed up		for the Spring Festival.
	01:44	USA shape become clear		That's more than two times the entire population of the US.
14	01:50	Fade in		(from the scene) nihao.....nihao.....(voice over) in the classroom, Diane visited
	01:54			with Chinese students, they average
	01:56			41 more days a year of
	01:58			school than Americans.
	02:00	Hard cut		(from the scene) "What's the best thing about China?".
	02:01	Zoom out		(shy laughing from the scene)
	02:04	Zoom in		(from the scene) "Pressure". (low voice, single)(shy laughing again)
	02:08			"And

Fig. 2 continued












	02:09			what is the worst thing about China?"
	02:11			"pressure" (people in the class burst into laughs)
	02:14	Hard cut		These students now top the world in science, math and reading scores.
15	02:18	Hard cut		Still the sobering reality
	02:20			stood large.
	02:22			150 million people here
	02:24			still live on less than 2 dollars a day.
	02:26			(scene with marching people shouting) And human rights abuses
	02:28			(police shouting from the scene) about .
	16	02:30		
				They are doubling down,
02:34				determined to make 2011 (pause)
17	02:35	Fade in		their year. (Singing) CLARISSA WARD ABC NEWS Beijing.

Fig. 2 continued

With a soft cut, the audience enters a mimesis of a large crowd carrying a sea of Chinese red banners, filling the entire screen, evidently representing a march. This is a march with a strongly nationalistic character, similar to the marches typical of the period before the new open China. We hear the sounds of community-singing, vague in the lyrics but clearly executed in communist style. The same shot with the same images also concludes the news item in scene 17.

A complicated interpretation process is triggered here by the PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE. There is no reason for positioning the event in the same time or place as Hu Jintao’s visit. Thus, we are shown a mimetically ‘new’ discourse world with no obvious mimetic relation to the audience’s present reality. A detailed analysis reveals that picture and sound do not stem from the same source, which means that the shot has been constructed very consciously from archive materials. The voice-over starts as the music fades out, adding an explicit diegetic comment: “China is hot on America’s heels”. So the event is not relevant as an element in the expected scheme for a NEWS REPORTS ON IMPORTANT STATE VISITS. The PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE

therefore instructs the interpreter to construct another meaning in which the information *is* relevant.

The PRINCIPLE OF COHERENCE invites the audience to search for such meaning, integrating the red banner-scene 6 into the seemingly incoherent sequence 5–6; the singing people are evidently not chasing after ‘America’, nor are they marching during Hu Jintao’s visit, nor are they otherwise directly related to either of these two events (Hu’s visit or the metaphorical chasing) that are in focus.

GENRE KNOWLEDGE makes us expect that the explicit diegetic comment of the voice-over should be taken as the dominant point of departure. So we look at this mode first. This comment introduces a metaphor. According to METAPHOR THEORY it merely expresses the vehicle. The tenor has to be formulated by the audience, but it obviously relates to some aspect of the relation between China and the USA; China is chasing the USA in such a way that it has almost caught up with it.

According to the PRINCIPLE OF REASONABLENESS, the interpretation so far will result in the reconstruction of a rhetor’s standpoint that contains at least two elements that require further argumentation: China is intentionally ‘chasing’ the USA and it has almost caught up. The preceding sequences (Hu Jintao visiting *business* people) combined with the audience’s knowledge of areas in which this ‘competition between nations’ concept is conventionally used, will cause the audience to anticipate standpoints regarding economics, perhaps regarding technology. The source domain of the metaphor as such is somewhat undetermined but can be understood in the realm of sport competition.

In the context of these potential discussions, however, the other intentionally constructed modes need to be interpreted COHERENTLY and RELEVANTLY. This—and the fact that the images obviously do not originate from January 2011 or from the USA, should guide the audience in its interpretation of the images as a symbol. The symbolic meaning of a large crowd marching, waving red banners, and singing socialist hymns can be expected to frame an (American) audience in a set of values related to the communist China of the Cold War Period.

The relevance of such framing is manifest when a coherent realization has to be provided by the audience of the source domain of the metaphor “hot on the heels”. We claim that this symbolic framing makes the rhetor accountable for suggesting a ‘hunter-hunted’ model rather than one of ‘healthy sportsmanship’ with regard to the domain in which the vehicle of the metaphor is placed, resulting in a rather extensive specification of the tenor with regard to China’s alleged ‘chasing’ intentions.

In sum: the combination of this audio-visual framing with the verbal presentation of a crucial standpoint by means of a metaphorical vehicle results in the rhetor being accountable so far for an extensive interpretation of the standpoint. Of course, the rhetor may redress this accountability explicitly in the rest of the discourse, but so far the framing in the realm of economics and technology, established by scenes 1–5, has now intentionally been replaced by a Cold War framing, broadening the chasing metaphor potentially to the realm of ideological and even military aggression. Using the model, using all three principles, using specifically metaphor theory and framing theory, an immediate integration of the multi modalities leads to the following reconstruction (Fig. 3).

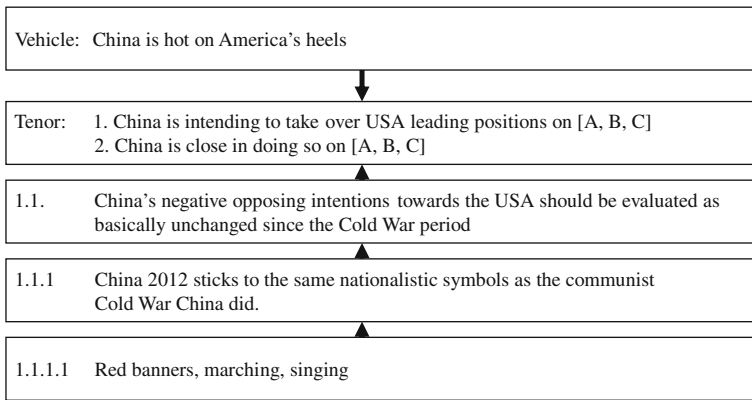


Fig. 3 Reconstruction 1. Regarding argument 1.1.1.1 we encounter a ‘technical’ problem: how to represent non-propositional materials in a schema? We have chosen for this indication of the shot. In Dutch courtrooms this problem is solved by requesting that non-verbal materials are always interpreted verbally. So, the picture or video is actually replaced by a set of verbal statements that is included in the minutes. In less formal contexts this is no option

A, B, C have to be determined in detail, but may involve a broad range of aggressive take-overs.

Looking back briefly at the opening scene 1, we can also illustrate the working of the PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE combined with THE PRINCIPLE OF COHERENCE. We focus on the inserted frame in which we observe President Hu Jintao meeting Henry Kissinger. It is possible and plausible that the two men did indeed meet each other that day. If that was the case, then the insert would fit perfectly, that is be COHERENT and RELEVANT in the genre expectations. However, neither the anchor person nor any other voice-over, nor any other discourse element refers to the insert in any coherent way; there is no explicit reference at all! Given the articulated historical importance of Kissinger in Chinese-American relations, this is remarkable; directed to an American audience, the insert cannot simply be a random clip from Hu Jintao’s visit to business people. Its RELEVANCE thus demands *explicit* intermodal coherence. According to these principles the audience is strongly ‘invited’ to construct an appropriate coherence. In retrospect, the insert (as well as nuances in the formulations of the anchor person which we will not go into here) fit in well with the Cold War framing, reminding the American audience of Kissinger as the person who first extended his hand (as a negotiator in the Vietnam war) in what was to relieve Cold War tensions, initiating the welcome *détente* in China-US relations.

Elements like these are too vulnerable to ground a reconstruction on. They can however support its validity. At the very beginning of the item—hidden in multimodality—a silent symbol is presented that links Hu Jintao to the Cold War period in the person of Kissinger.

This reconstruction elicits skeptical reactions from some of the people we presented it to, responses we understand. However, the issue is not whether the reconstruction is the only one conceivable or even one shared by many, or by the

rhetor. The issue is whether it is systematically related to characteristics of the discourse (insertion of archive materials without explicitly commenting their relevance, using a metaphor by merely formulating the target domain) in such a way that prima facie the rhetor has to take responsibility for the reconstructed argumentation towards the analyst/interpreter. We fully admit that we purposefully push the issue to its limits, but claim that the problem of the rhetor's accountability should be approached this way.⁸

3.3 (c) Detailing the Standpoints: Scenes 7 and 8

Our analysis so far may be judged as verifiable but rather far-fetched in its extensive interpretation of the tenor of the metaphor. The topics of scenes 7 and 8 seem to back this judgment up. The tenor of the chasing metaphor seems to be worked out in detail in the realm of economics and technology, be it technologies that are highly 'strategic'—aircraft construction and space technology. The multimodal rhetoric exploited, however, is reason to hold ABC News accountable again for a rather extreme argumentative reconstruction.

The voice-over in the verbal mode is concise with regard to content: "China is designing its first commercial airplane. China is building its very own space station". But since these statements need to relate to the argumentative reconstruction so far, they at first sight would seem to violate the PRINCIPLE OF REASONABLENESS. These utterances as such cannot be interpreted as providing supporting arguments for the claim that China is about to take over the USA's leading position. On the contrary, a first airplane versus a fully developed, massive industry is far from being close in taking over a leading position. It is even hard to take them seriously as providing support for (sub) standpoint 1 concerning China's intentions. But if we take into account the pathos with which the voice-over presents things, it is clear that the scenes are meant to support both (sub)standpoints 1 and 2: "Look out, Boeing! Watch out, NASA!"

⁸ Actually a reader of an earlier version of this paper submitted this possible response of ABC News: "I could not be committed to such a reconstruction. By stipulation, you see coherence and relevance wherever there can be a plausible interpretation that saves both; also, by stipulation, you see certain components as being part of the (sub)genre you say we are engaged in implementing here. But let me show you that neither need apply. The point you've missed is that, in television, there can be no text (i.e. voiceover) without image. So we have to "fill in" 2 or 3 minutes with whatever images we have, remotely related to the subject. Sometimes, we have to give it a twist so that we broaden the relevance possibilities. Sure, we use the footage from the actual event, which is extremely relevant, but we also use some others, less relevant ones, to fill in those 2 or 3 minutes. Why is this? Because it is not our institutional goal to argue the acceptability of a standpoint with respect to politics, but to keep people in front of the television as much as possible. That's what keeps our institution going. That's the source of the "2-3 minutes" constraint, namely, we cannot have a 10 seconds news report even if 10 seconds of footage is all we have because the event was rather boring. That's also why the voiceover can be anonymous since viewers know that it is not someone arguing a case, but someone filling in the 2-3 minutes with interesting speech." This reaction may reflect the true intentions of ABC-News (although we do not think it does). Nevertheless, the issues at hand is whether such an explanation suffices in the eyes of a reasonable judge to deny accountability for the reconstructions as presented.

In both scenes 7 and 8, the images are consciously ABC produced animations. We see a Boeing aircraft leaving the hangar, but painted in the colors of the People’s Republic of China and we see a fully functioning PRC space station (even more impressive than the one projected for 2020). Integrating COHERENTLY the visual modes, an audience is guided towards a far-reaching reconstruction. Applying the PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE we need to find an implicit argument that relates this information to the (sub) standpoints 1 and/or 2, taking into account a COHERENT relation with the verbal mode. The option we can come up with is: once China has developed or grasped a technology this very quickly results in their taking over the leading positions in that particular technological and commercial field. We then take the mimetic relation of the animation to the audience’s reality as intended to be a reliable visualization of a near future. In fact we would need a mode-specific theory here on animated (re)constructions; as far as we know such a theory is still lacking.

The argumentative reconstruction of scenes 7 and 8 is summarized in Fig. 4.

Argument 2.2—the crucial link—is ‘hidden in multimodality’. This emphasizes once again the need for a transferable, explicit method for its reconstruction.

A verbal stylistic mode supplies additional support for the reconstruction of argument 2.2, not only in the pathetic exclamations, but also in using ‘high-speed’ related expressions throughout the entire news item: *breathhtaking—growing at top speed- hot on America’s heels—full throttle—boasting(?)—breaking records—astonishing—pressure—doubling down.*

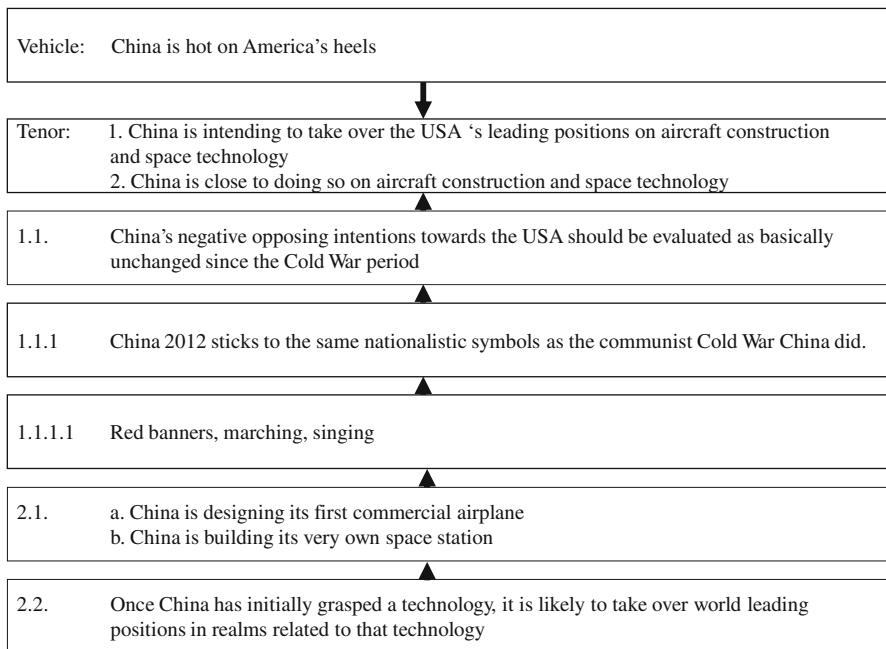


Fig. 4 Reconstruction 2

3.4 (d) Broadening the Standpoint to Military and Diplomatic Relations: Scenes 9 and 10

In scene 6, we get the general standpoint in the form of the vehicle of a metaphor. In scenes 7 and 8 we get more detailed information on two realms, in a strictly parallel presentation. In scenes 11, 12 and 14 we get an extension of the realms in basically the similar parallel presentation, extending the realms to highway infrastructure, high-speed railways and the educational system. In between, in scene 9, we get the clearest and most convincing example of a rhetor's accountability resulting from multimodal narration.

An expert shows up, Mr Russell Leigh Moses from the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies. We see that he is interviewed although we do not hear the question posed to him; the editor decides to start the shot after the question has been asked. His answer has also obviously been cut off. What remains is the spoken text: "I think we are going to see China is going to spread its wings more, China is not going to be contained..."

These editing decisions made by the narrator should be interpreted according to the PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE. The narrator once again explicitly sees to it that only the vehicle of a metaphor is presented to the audience. 'To spread one's wings' has an idiomatic meaning that invites a tenor of 'doing new and different things' but also one of 'making full use of one's (hitherto unused) abilities'. The fledging bird metaphor is immediately followed by a conceptual metaphor of CONTAINMENT. This metaphor requires further specification: contained to what exactly, and by what? The editing narrator decides to leave this undetermined, but the very notion of 'containment' triggers associations of severe and possibly life-threatening danger (such as that presented by biological or nuclear contamination agents) that needs to be kept in check or sealed off.

The PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE cooperates with the PRINCIPLE OF COHERENCE in the sense that the scene in itself, mainly due to the actions of the editing narrator, does not reveal its relevance. This relevance thus has to be found by the audience in what precedes and follows. When we add up what is presented in the preceding 22 s, starting with the Cold War framing of scene 6, the new tenor of MAKING FULL USE OF ONE'S ABILITIES TO BREAK FREE FROM CURRENT CONTAINMENT sounds rather threatening, seriously raising the issue of which realms are at risk in case CONTAINMENT IS BROKEN. It is important to notice that the intentions of Russell Leigh Moses are not decisive here. The multimodal polyphonic discourse is controlled by a narrator, which is an organizing principle that the rhetor is accountable for.

When the audience gets to scene 10, its interpretation process is characterized by:

- The initial standpoint that China is hot on America's heels, still to be specified;
- A framing in Cold War ideology;
- A need to COHERE scene 9 with the total of the discourse;
- A hard cut to scene 10, which is a rare transition in the light of the total discourse.

In this situation, the audience is confronted with an extreme close-up of what after a spectacular zoom-out turns out to be the jets of a fighter jet, taken from a

photo. The voice-over comments: “China launched into 2011 full throttle”, followed by a soft cut to a second photo of the fighter jet, commenting in a rather breathless, staccato diction: “blatantly testing its first stealth fighter jet.”

Based on the parallel presentation of the realms and the points summed up we claim that the rhetor is accountable for the standpoint that China also intends to take over America’s leading position in military technology and military power. In doing so, we assume that the development of a stealth fighter jet stands for a rapid development of a high-tech military system, just as a first commercial airplane stands for civil aircraft industry, and a space station stands for space technology. This means that formulating the crucial generalizing implied arguments is left to the audience (as is formulating the tenor of the metaphors).

We even claim on the basis of a RELEVANT editing of the containment metaphor that this presentation allows the analyst to reconstruct an argumentation supporting the standpoint that China intends to enlarge its ‘territory’ using its military position.⁹ This does not need to imply aggressive military interventions but can refer to it using its military position and support to enlarge China’s ideological and diplomatic sphere of influence.

According to the PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE this latter far reaching standpoint that we reconstruct is supported by the way the scene continues. Without pausing for breath, the reporter continues as a voice-over “just as Secretary Gates arrived at the country”. After this remark, which is illustrated with images of this arrival, the next topic about the number of new highways starts. To account for the indicated COHERENCE (“just”) and the lack of any further comments, the audience is strongly invited to construct the relevance of this coincidence as being self-evident. In our meta-analysis this is sufficient ground to reconstruct a supportive argument (Fig. 5).

Once again, the issue is not whether this reconstruction is right, the only conceivable one. The issue is whether it is valid in the sense that its systematic genesis gives it the status of a prima facie argument in a meta-discussion in which the analyst claims that the rhetor has to take accountability for it. We claim he has, given the fact that the reconstruction is based on the application of the principles of relevance and coherence.

3.5 (e) The Remaining Scenes: Confirmation

In the remaining part of the item in a parallel presentation two more issues are dealt with: infrastructure (highways and high-speed railways) and, in an interesting multimodal format that we cannot discuss here, education. Subsequently, issues of poverty and political suppression are discussed. But the most significant scene for the proposed analysis is the last scene in which scene 6 is repeated.

⁹ When for example the USA first developed stealth fighters and bombers, there was no hue and cry that the USA has territorial expansion ambitions, or even sphere of influence expansion ambitions. So the insertion of scene 9 really requires an explanation in terms of its relevance.

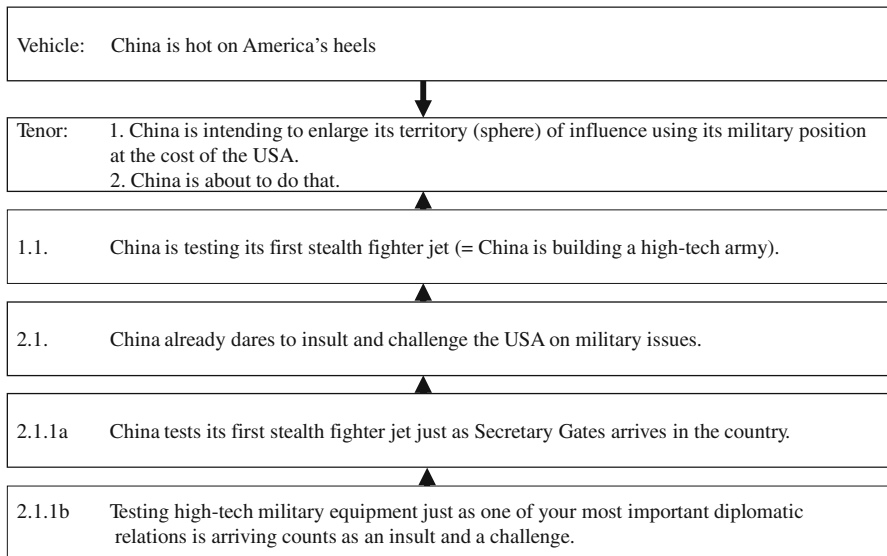


Fig. 5 Reconstruction 3

4 Conclusions

In this article, we discussed four claims.

1. Multimodal discourse can coherently convey a rhetor's standpoints and argumentation. The ABC news item clearly illustrates this claim. But it also illustrates how far removed from an overt, explicitly indicated, propositionally organized format such discourse can be.
2. Such argumentative multimodal discourse should be analyzed as a coherent and relevant discourse, assuming the possibility of 'online' interactions between all modes. Not only the spectacular scene 6, resumed in scene 17 shows the need for this 'online' approach. Even in this serious and 'concise' genre we can discover systematic intermodal interactions, in this case a non-commented addition of the visuals to leading and dominant speech by means of a voice-over. The animations in scenes 7 and 8 for example convey the 'implicit' generalizing argument (a first commercial airplane results in a taking over of the Boeing hangars).
3. It is possible to develop an argumentative reconstruction in such a way that the burden of proof for its validity is met and the rhetor has to rebut his accountability. Because our method is explicit and verifiable at moments that interpretative decisions need to be taken, it convincingly demonstrates—at least in this example—that a *prima facie* meta-argument can be delivered.
4. The argumentative reconstruction of multimodal public discourse is a necessary element of advanced media-literacy in a world in which multimodality is the standard and a critical attitude of experts is desirable. As we said, this broad claim can of course not be based on one example. But this one example does,

however, most evidently show the need to analyze and comment upon multimodal discourse even in a genre that presents itself as a news item.

In this article we intentionally neglected the issue that the information in visuals (Sherwin 2011) and also narratives (Kjus 2011; Van den Hoven 2012) is always more than can be propositionally represented. Our position now is that this does not affect the rational reconstruction as such, but may affect the evaluation. Using the concepts developed in Van Eemeren 2010 we tend to take the position that this issue is related to the choice that the rhetor makes from the *topical potential*. If this is an adequate conceptualization then it follows that aspects of visuals or verbal narratives that are not (propositionally) represented in the reconstruction may lead to judgments regarding derailments of the rhetor. Whether this is indeed the case, however, we consider a question that exceeds the scope of this article.

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