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Argumentation, Conspiracy and the Moon: A Rhetorical-Pragmatic Analysis

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Introduction

In what probably amounts to the first scholarly inquiry into Conspiracy Theories (henceforth CTs), Richard Hofstadter (1964) describes in detail a particular way of making sense of the political world he refers to as the 'paranoid style' and provides several examples of such style while broadly defining its features. Hofstadter's pioneering work has subsequently been discussed and expanded mainly in relation to (i) the epistemological problems CTs pose and (ii) their problematic status within civil societies—and what should/could be done to weaken or cancel their impact.[1] In this chapter we address the first set of issues related to the epistemological shortcomings of CTs by examining their argumentative features and by conducting a hybrid rhetorical-pragmatic analysis. Our approach to argumentation is founded on the idea that argumentation is, on the discursive level, the manifestation of what reasoning is on the cognitive level. As a discursive phenomenon, argumentation ideally lends itself to a discourse analytical approach: indeed, arguments and standpoints are speech acts which are articulated together in specific ways by speakers, and which are uttered to ideally fulfil the communicative function of convincing or persuading addressee(s). Our proposal seeks to gain insights on how these are articulated, in what ways, and to what ends. The framework presented here is therefore a discursive one, as it seeks to account for the reality of argumentative moves performed by speakers and its consequences for/in communication. As such, its first purpose is to provide a thorough description of the nature and structure of argumentation as it can be found in discourse. Studying a discursive object from an empirical perspective which takes into account its embeddedness in a communicative situation is common practice in discourse analytical approaches[2]. The second

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[1] A special issue of the journal *Episteme* (vol 4, issue 2, 2007) is devoted to CTs and presents the main disputes and issues nowadays debated by philosophers around CTs.

[2] There are differences of approaches between the co-authors of this paper, for example about the nature and the role of the context or the importance of the historical, interdiscursive and social background of a

purpose of our approach rests in its attempt to formulate clear assumptions about the tentative cognitive effects of the discourse under analysis (Is the argument, and the way it is linguistically formulated, likely to be persuasive?). The hybridity of the model presented here is thus meant to tackle the following traditional discourse analytical research questions: how is the discourse structured, what are its likely effects on the audience, and are the linguistic features of the discourse likely to trigger these effects?

In terms of their epistemological features, CTs can be defined as a "class of explanations to which we should not assent, *by definition*" (Keeley 1999: 111). The philosophical interest in CTs thus primarily lies in their problematic relationship with the notion of *warranted belief*, as they fall short of providing such beliefs: the evidence they supply is typically qualified by analysts as biased, partial or inconclusive. In turn, this has straightforward implications in terms of their argumentative features, and scholars note in this respect some recurring 'justificatory' features, such as the lack of serious consideration for counter-evidence, the purported belongingness of possible sources of counter-evidence to the conspiracy, various delegitimation strategies and an excessive blindness towards the inherent incoherence of CTs, which accordingly came to be defined as *crippled epistemologies*. All these features crucially contribute to the self-sealing or self-insulating nature of CTs accompanying their purported irrefutability (for a detailed exposition, see e.g., Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, Byford 2011, chapter 2, and Wood and Douglas 2013). From the consensus around these features we can draw the idea that CTs are typically argumentative objects:[3] they characteristically aim to undermine the official account (usually termed 'the official story'—note that for convenience we will retain this terminology in our own analysis) and at the same time try to immunise themselves from potential criticism.

In this chapter we provide a theoretically, empirically and analytically motivated rhetorical-pragmatic account of one of the typical features of CTs, namely their refutational character. For this, we focus on an excerpt of a popular documentary titled "Conspiracy theory: Did we land on the Moon?", which was aired in February 2001 on FOX TV Network, and which presents alleged counter-evidence to the claims of the official story.[4] The excerpt of the documentary we will analyse discusses visual evidence that seems to conflict with the official story and concludes that the latter cannot be true, given the presence of these inconsistencies. Our goal is to demonstrate how such argumentative material can be comprehensively analysed with rhetorical-pragmatic tools, in an attempt to combine existing

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discourse. However, beyond these differences—which will not be discussed here –, our vision of discourse analysis departs from that of critical discourse analysis (CDA), in which issues of dominance, ideology and/or power in language are emphasized.

[3] We define argumentation as a type of communicative activity in which interlocutors try to justify and/or refute claims by providing arguments and/or counter-arguments relative to the claim that has been put forward (in this respect, our definition is close to that of van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004: 1), for instance). Central to the definition are the ideas that speakers who engage in argumentation typically try to defend their claims and to refute the claims of others.

[4] The documentary is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIy8ZqqK5G8 (last accessed on 01.11.2015).

frameworks in a novel way in order to provide an original contribution to the study of argumentative discourse.

In the section below, we discuss first some features of CTs and provide the rationale to study them as the argumentative objects that they are. The subsequent section extensively presents our hybrid rhetorical-pragmatic model of analysis: it first details the model of the Argumentative Cell, a linguistically-grounded model of argumentative reconstruction accounting for argumentative structures and patterns, and then summarises the main features of the Context Selection Constraint model, which accounts for the cognitive processing of arguments and produces hypotheses as to their potential persuasiveness. The final section provides an illustrative and in-depth analysis of the corpus according to this hybrid model.

Conspiracy Theories: An Ideal Phenomenon for Argument Analysis

Conspiracy Theories as Refutational Narratives

Finding out specifically how CTs manage to convince their audience requires an assessment of their rhetorical and argumentative features. Hofstadter's (1964) notion of 'paranoid *style'* hinted at the idea that CTs display certain "distorted" (1964: 4-6) formal and textual regularities. For instance, these explanations "start with (…) defensible assumptions and with careful accumulation of facts, or at least of what appears to be facts" and then "marshal these facts toward an overwhelming 'proof' of the particular conspiracy that is to be established" (1964: 36). This is argumentatively and rhetorically significant, since it qualifies CTs as argumentations with particular modes of exposition—from this description, specifically, we could make the case that facts listed to support an explanation function like premises for a global standpoint. Byford, following the footsteps of Billig (1989), explores the assumption that "the conspiracy theorist is always *arguing* against conventional explanations of politics, but also against other versions of the conspiracy theory" (Byford 2014: 88). This also means that CTs are social and argumentative phenomena by essence, since they articulate claims and arguments meant to convince their addressee.

Now, if indeed CTs can be studied in terms of their rhetorical and argumentative import, it makes sense to expect them to recruit specific argumentative tropes and strategies in order to be effective. This idea is explored by Byford (2011, chapter 4), who provides two sets of typical rhetorical features for CTs. He distinguishes the *rhetoric of scientific inquiry* and the *rhetoric of just asking questions* as follows (Byford 2011:88-93):

    A. *The rhetoric of scientific inquiry,* which is meant to convey an impression of irrefutability and has the following features:
      (i)   CTs are *refutational* narratives constructed to contradict the official story;
      (ii) CT proponents usually portray themselves as investigators and researchers;
      (iii) CTs mimic the style of academic research to confer authoritative status through the use of jargon, pseudo demonstrations and proofs, references to other work

    (usually to other CT proponents) and footnotes (which convey an impression of exhaustiveness and scientific rigour).

B. *The rhetoric of just asking questions,* which is a refutational strategy defined in the following terms:

    (i)   CTs do not usually claim theoretical status, but merely pose questions to cast doubt on the official story;

    (ii) once the official version is doubted, alternatives are offered and presented as possibilities the addressee will need to make sense of himself;

    (iii) questions are asked about ongoing or pending research (e.g., AIDS) or investigations (e.g., 9/11) and absence of answers is interpreted as a cover up, and thus as a conspiracy to hide the truth;

    (iv) errant data, i.e., data which the official version cannot account for, is overly focused on;

    (v) questions about the official version are constantly asked as a way of concealing the CT's own gaps (strategy of diversion).

    These features find some echo in mainstream rhetoric and argumentation theory. Zarefsky ([1984]2014), for instance, shows how the "conspiracy argument" (an accusation of being part of a secret plot) is rhetorically used in the Lincoln-Douglas debates that took place in the US political scene in 1858. Interestingly, from a *micro* perspective concerned with the argumentative features and the construction of these arguments, Zarefsky observes that conspiracy charges (i) typically shift the burden of proof to the opponent while minimising one's own burdens; (ii) seem to function following an argument on motives which Zarefsky calls 'argument by residues', of the form 'if X was not part of a conspiracy, what other motive would X have had for doing A?'[5]; (iii) seem to work best when they rely on inference more than hard evidence (such as documents); (iv) are more successfully countered by *tu quoque* replies which revert the charge on the attacker.

    Francophone approaches to the rhetoric of CTs also provide valuable and relevant input in terms of argumentative characterisation (Taguieff 2005, 2006 and particularly Nicolas and Danblon 2010), as they also provide an overview of the rhetorical features of CTs, from the socio-cultural aspects of their emergence and propagation to their cognitive, textual and discursive features. Herman's rhetorical study of the alleged Moon hoax (Herman 2010), which will be approached from a complementary rhetorical-pragmatic perspective in this paper, will be particularly useful here, as it echoes in some respects Zarefsky's characterisation of CTs as mobilising specific types of arguments, but also Keeley's observation that CTs typically seek to tie together seemingly unrelated events (1999: 117), which, transposed in argumentative terms, would make us expect CTs to make use of causal arguments—and these are arguments we will indeed find in our corpus.

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[5] The trick then is to offer systematic refutations of all other possible motives, so that the conspiratorial motive prevails and appears to be the only plausible explanation.

Rationale for the Argumentative Study of CTs

In today's academic landscape on the study of CTs, a genuine and systematic discourse analytical perspective on the verbal nature and structuring of CTs remains to be developed. As already pointed out, what seems to emerge from the studies presented in the previous section is a shared understanding of what CTs are and do, which highlights the potential of CTs to receive a full argumentative and rhetorical treatment. Their argumentative features, taken together, are in our view sufficient to legitimise a systematic inquiry couched in rhetoric and argumentation theory. It is the main objective of this chapter to show how such an argumentative analysis of CTs can be conducted and to specify the different analytical steps involved in such inquiry.

As we adopt an argumentative approach, our proposal follows some methodological and analytical standards of the field. Specifically, we intend to illustrate how two tasks of argumentative analysis can be performed. The first of these is to provide a plausible reconstruction of the argumentative material under scrutiny that should yield a complete description of the structure and internal articulation of said argumentative material. The second is concerned with explaining the effect of argumentation and specifically its persuasive potential.

The first step, which consists of technical argumentative analysis (or standardization, in Govier's [2010] terms), is necessary to supply the input upon which further (argumentative and rhetorical, but also cognitive pragmatic, as we shall see) analysis can take place.[6] At this stage the analyst will therefore be concerned with explicitly laying down the arguments language users have employed in the corpus investigated. Our theory of analysis will draw on the model of *the argumentative cell* (see Plantin 1996), specifically the version developed by Herman (forth. a.). This model, inspired from Toulmin's (1958) and Freeman's (2011) frameworks, recruits additional insights from the francophone theories of argumentation in language popularised in the 1980s by linguists such as Ducrot (1980) and later on Moeschler (1989)—in particular those concerned with the role of connectives. This hybrid novel model, which is linguistically grounded, will allow us to provide a very precise description of (i) the explicit and implicit content of the arguments of our corpus, (ii) their internal structure and (iii) the relations between their constituents.

Although the second goal is inherently concerned with argumentation, it draws on theories that originate outside the field of argumentation theory, as it consists in providing plausible explanations for the potential persuasiveness of argumentative material. Our

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[6] According to which standards reconstructions should be conducted is a hot topic in argumentation theory. Most contemporary theories of argumentation include this (or a similar) step in their models. Pragma-dialectics, for instance, will treat argumentative material as speech acts that fulfil a specific role in a critical discussion (see van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 95-122); proponents of reconstructive deductivism (e.g. Groarke 1992), will apply a validity criterion to reconstruct arguments as deductive inferences; scholars working with argument schemes will adopt Walton et al.'s (2008) extensive list of argument schemes. Options from which the analyst may choose are numerous and the selection of one over the other will usually be a matter of how argumentation is construed (or which aspect of argumentation is focused on).

proposal draws on cognitive pragmatic insights to address these issues, in the vein of research done on deceptive communication and fallacies (Oswald 2010, 2011, 2014, forth., Oswald et al. forth.)

It is our contention that these various tools can be satisfactorily combined into a consistent analytical proposal that can be specifically applied to analyse CTs. Since CTs are argumentative objects, we will be interested in their structure and internal articulation, in their contents and in their effects. In particular, questions such as how people *understand* the arguments put forward in CTs or the extent to which specific structural features of arguments found in CTs are instrumental to further persuasive ends will here receive a precise answer. But before we start using these tools and observe how they play out in the analysis of actual corpora, in the next section we provide the necessary theoretical background and rationale behind the hybrid model presented here.

Theoretical Background for a Hybrid Rhetorical-Pragmatic Model of Analysis

The approach to rhetorical and argumentative discourse defended here postulates the interrelatedness of language, cognition and social context. While the respective weight both of us (co-authors) attribute to these three pillars may vary in our respective research, we remain convinced that discourses should be analysed from these three complementary perspectives, or, more precisely, from a linguistic perspective which postulates the role of social and cognitive mechanisms in the way argumentative discourse acquires meaning.

How to publicly deliver a standpoint or a claim in the hope of gaining the audience's approval was one of the main concerns of Ancient rhetoric. It is likely that the strategies and techniques used by a modern speaker still echo some of the empirical findings of sophists and rhetors in antiquity. Unlike philosophy, rhetoric is related to the art of arguing within a specific and social context and aims at the most efficient way to achieve a speaker's goal (Aristotle's Rhetoric; Kennedy 1994; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958). Even if moral questions may arise about such uses of language, rhetoric seems the best framework to investigate argumentation expressed in *natural language* and *aiming at being accepted* by an audience. To be clearer, the core of the rhetoric, viewed as a process (Tindale 1999), is *anticipation*. A rhetor must steadily think about the *effects* of each of his or her communicative choices, within situational parameters, that may be produced in the mind of the members of the audience and adapt her speech accordingly.[7] Better still, an effective rhetor, we assume, will construct or schematize (Grize 1990, 1996) her discourse in order to control or to provoke effects—either by cancelling undesirable ones or by favouring effects that contribute to the persuasive goal.

The consequences of this perspective are threefold: (i) analysing a persuasive discourse implies analysing a *process* rather than a product which is why we will try to explain how discursive and linguistic features may create cognitive effects that in turn contribute to

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[7] We adopt here the notational convention whereby speakers are referred to as females and addressees are referred to as males.

achieving the persuasive goal; (ii) as each discursive feature (word, syntax, intonation, etc.) is potentially a building block of the rhetor's persuasive strategy, we will analyse speeches or texts *as they evolve and in the way they are delivered*: even if the reasoning that links an argument and its conclusion is identical whether the speaker says "A, therefore C" or "C, because A", it may be significant to investigate the different cognitive effects of such layouts—for the same reason, we generally do not rephrase what the speaker has said in a formal language; (iii) argumentation will be considered here as embedded in rhetoric, which means that discourse may persuade without any argumentation and that argumentation is a persuasive tool which can be strengthened or highlighted by rhetorical devices or strategies.

The idea of giving one's consent is historically central to any account of rhetoric, which is here very minimally defined as "the discipline by which a speaker publicly delivers at least an opinion (thereby constructing a stance within a social territory) in view of gaining (part of) the audience's adhesion" (Herman, forth. b.). Rhetorical strategies are the discursive processes by which the speaker attempts to achieve the goal of securing adhesion. These definitions highlight two constitutive features of any argument: the opinion defended by the speaker and the fact that this opinion comes with various rhetorical strategies meant to increase the chances of adhesion. However, these two features are not yet sufficient to trigger an argumentative process; argumentation, for us is one possible way of making someone adhere to a position. More specifically, according to Jacquin and Micheli (2012: 600, our translation): "Argumentation can be thought of as a specific mode of the verbal processing of disagreements, which consists in the construction of solid positions, namely positions which are supported by textual justificatory work and which are situated through dialogical and interactional positioning work."

This definition moves away from the goal of adhesion that we attribute to rhetoric and at the same time adopts the idea of positioning by introducing three fundamental components: the idea of real or potential disagreement, the idea of support or justification and the idea of resistance to adverse positions ("solid constructions"). Such components may be studied with the help of Toulmin's famous model of argument (1958).

Argumentation in Natural Language: Expanding Toulmin's Model

Analysing real arguments is not an easy task. Stephen Toulmin's micro-argumentative structure (1958) is a precious tool in this respect, precisely because it is open to practical reasoning within a context. In sharp opposition to formal logic models and the notion of validity developed therein, Toulmin proposed to observe the functioning of argumentation by stepping out of the classical syllogistic framework. By abandoning the notions of minor and major premise, by redefining the conclusion as a claim, by introducing epistemic modality with the notion of qualifier (which attributes degrees of certainty to the argumentation), and by envisaging in the same movement possible exceptions with the notion of rebuttal, Toulmin developed an argumentative model which seduced numerous disciplines outside logic for its applicability to natural language exchanges (see e.g., van Eemeren et al. 2014, Hitchcock 2003, 2006).

Let us briefly recall his model: in order to defend a Claim, the speaker puts forth some Data, which, through reliance on a Warrant—a general rule or a topic which links Data and Claim—itself supported by norms, laws or customs (the Backing), allows to infer the probability of the Claim. This probability, given by the Qualifier, gives rise to potential exceptions, the Rebuttal, which, if applicable, would deny the Claim. The classical example about Harry and his British citizenship is structured as follows (Toulmin [1958] 2003: 97):

Harry was born in Bermuda ——— So, presumably ——— Harry is a British subject

Since

A man born in Bermuda will generally be a British subject

Unless

Both his parents were aliens / he has become a naturalised American /

On account of

The following statutes and other legal provisions
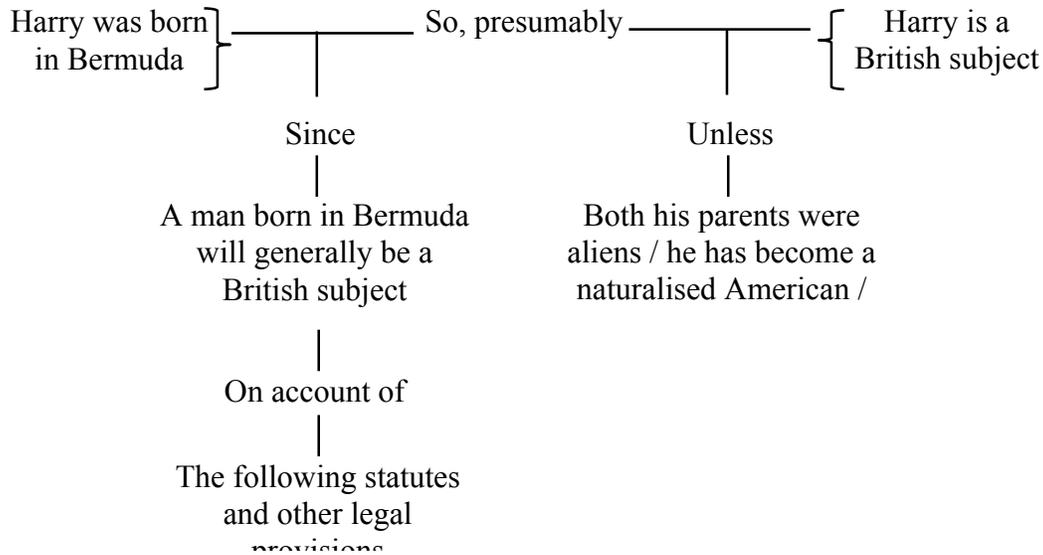
Figure 1. Toulmin's canonical example ([1958] 2003:97)

According to Herman (forth. a.), this structure should be revised on at least four counts. Yet, for the purposes of this chapter, only one of them will be discussed in detail. This revision, which is the most substantial one, concerns the management of disagreement, which is at the core of the definition of argumentation. While argumentation's dialectical dimension is present in Toulmin's scheme through the presence of a Rebuttal, Toulmin restricts it to possible exceptions to the argumentation. However, the Claim, as long as no exception is voiced, remains the one that is defended by the speaker. The Toulminian scheme, as a consequence, does not satisfactorily account for concessions. A simple example such as

(1)   The sun is shining but I'm staying home.

will be treated as follows: the Data is 'the sun is shining' and provides support for a weak conclusion along the lines of 'I should go out'; however, the speaker opts for formulating a Claim, 'I'm staying home', which is contrary to the one we would expect and without any

argument supporting it.[8] According to Ducrot (1972), the clause introduced by the connective 'but' is always argumentatively stronger than the clause that precedes it. In example (1) above, we could thus consider that the claim put forward by the speaker is stronger than the weak Conclusion inferred from the Data. In the canonical case of exception, the Claim is therefore the stronger conclusion, but in the case of a concession, the weak conclusion is abandoned in favour of a stronger Claim. This case, among others, forces us to think about different ways the "dialectical tier" (Johnson 2000)[9] of argumentation can be included in Toulmin's scheme. Freeman's book (2011) is an attempt at combining Toulmin's scheme within classical argument structures and two different kinds of counter-argumentation: undercutters (which "call into question the reliability of some inferential move from premises to conclusion" [2011: 21]) and rebuttals. Because it is not grounded in linguistics, this attempt seems to simplify rhetorical stakes and discursive cases as they occur. For these reasons, we feel more can be done: we would consequently like to show structures of argumentation in monological texts as they evolve and it will be important for us to draw a typology of different ways a speaker can take into account an opponent's arguments and standpoints.

One of the consequences of our epistemological stance is that beginning with a conceded argument—linguistically marked as such ("Even if it is raining" for example)—must be schematically represented as the first step. Therefore, the common position of a Rebuttal within Toulmin's representation (see above) is unsatisfactory. The diagramming of an argumentative cell (one cell can be defined as a unity containing one and only one claim and the set of its possible argument[s] and counter-argument[s])[10] will consequently be different.

Now, numerous problems should be taken in consideration as we analyse arguments as they naturally occur and how linguistic devices may interfere with argumentation. These problems should be easier to grasp if we clarify four important features of any argument, namely: (i) the position of components; (ii) the nature of components; (iii) the cognitive process determined by linguistic instructions; (iv) the function and roles that components play. Let us address these four features in detail.

Argumentative Square and Triangles: Assigning Positions of Components

When an argumentative cell includes some counter-argumentation, it could be useful, as shown by Moeschler (1989) who introduces this as an 'argumentative square', to put

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[8] The difference between Conclusion and Claim will be addressed below (cf. 3.1.3).

[9] Johnson (2000) construes the *dialectical tier* as the set of features of arguments that are directly related to the objections and criticisms they might be faced with. Arguments are produced by a speaker for the purpose of convincing an addressee, and as such their analysis also needs to take into account those features of argumentation that are related to the dialectical circumstances in which they occur (e.g. the obligation to defend a standpoint when challenged, the right to question information, etc.).

[10] Divergent argument structures—in which one argument leads to two or more claims—are an exception to this definition.

forward a diagram with four different poles or positions (α, β, γ, δ) where α and γ are anti-oriented arguments that may lead respectively to the conclusions β and γ. This case is illustrated by (2):

> (2) Even if Peter is smart (α), he is so untidy (γ) that he will probably fail the exam (δ) (implicit β: he will probably pass the exam)

But this argumentative square needs to overcome two challenges. The first is that counter-argumentation does not necessarily require the four positions to be filled. Many concessions only fill three (Moeschler 1989 and other studies on concessions agree on this) and offer then an argumentative triangle,[11] which must not be seen as an incomplete square. The second is that a pole (α, ®, ©, ™) is tied in this vision with a function (argument, conclusion). And this can be quite confusing. We will argue here that the function of each pole is determined by (a) the place of the pole in the triangle or square; (b) the nature of the utterance that occupies each position; (c) the instructions delivered by linguistic markers, when present, or default semantic and pragmatic instructions.

First, we need to introduce the five different possible schemes with these four poles (one square and four triangles) and then illustrate how poles are determined by the relationships between them. As shown in example (2), we underline here that a pole may be implicit or explicit, and that just because a pole is implicit, it does not mean that that pole does not exist.
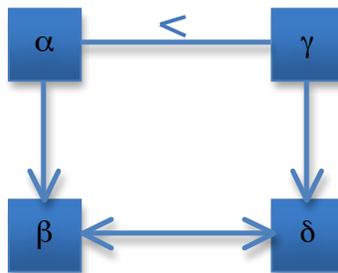
Figure 2. The argumentative square

In this argumentative square, we do not specify functions for each of the poles because β could be the defended claim and γ a rebuttal that would lead to cancel the claim in δ (Toulminian classic case) or β could be a generally expected conclusion and δ the strongest claim (see example [2] above). The point is that the same scheme can be used in different

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[11] Moeschler (1989) advocates a distinction between concessive triangles and the argumentative square that we will not use here. Moreover, he uses a relation of causality between conceded argument and conclusion, but we will show that the nature of the relationship is looser than strictly causal.

ways, depending on the functions of each pole. This is a strong argument to separate poles and functions.[12]

Poles cannot be envisaged without the relationships that can hold between them: our theoretical model postulates four relationships:

- The first is "is contradictory to". The dialectical tier implies a disagreement or an incompatibility between two poles that feeds the counter-argumentation between the speaker and her opponent. In the argumentative square above, β and δ have this relationship, which is depicted with a *double-arrow line*. Contradiction may occur between α and δ, β and γ or β and δ, but never between α and β, γ and δ (vertical lines) or between α and γ (logical rule of non-contradiction).
- The second is "is an argument for". Unlike other researchers (see footnote 11 above), we will not suggest here that this relationship is necessarily a causal relationship. Arguments from sign, for example, are linking the sign used as an argument (for example: Paul suffers from a strong fever) to a possible cause used as a conclusion (for example: Paul has the flu). Here, the argumentative move goes from effect (argument) to cause (conclusion), and the causality relationship is the reverse of this move. The *single-arrow line* illustrates this relationship when the arrow is pointing downwards.
- The third is "is justified by". When a conclusion is textually present before the argument that supports it, we invert the single-arrow line to illustrate this relationship, following our epistemological principle, which dictates that we observe how an argumentation is developed in the linguistic chain. In order to simplify our theoretical approach, we will not represent this case in the next schemes or in the argumentative square above. It is, however, important to understand that arrows pointing upwards are possible. Single arrows are uniquely used vertically between α and β and/or γ and δ.
- The fourth is "in competition with". An *arrowless line* illustrates this relationship. The line may be *topped with a < sign* between the weaker and the stronger components. Arguments and conclusions are in competition in a dialectical tier, but the force of arguments is not a personal evaluation establishing who the winner is. The argumentative force is determined by the way linguistic markers encode that a clause is stronger than another. For example, "argument A but argument B" encodes with "but" that B is stronger than A (see Ducrot 1972 on "*mais*" in French). This line appears

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[12] Numerous details can be clarified and adjusted here, thereby allowing for different forms of the argumentative square (direction of arrows, relationship between poles in certain cases, etc.). But going deeper would not leave enough space for the case study—in which, furthermore, no argumentative square is present. The issue is however tackled in future work (see Herman forth.).

only between α and γ and the sign for the argumentative force < or > will be drawn according to cases and to the linguistic markers used.

With this in mind, let us list the four possible theoretical triangles using three of the four poles and the relationships between poles.
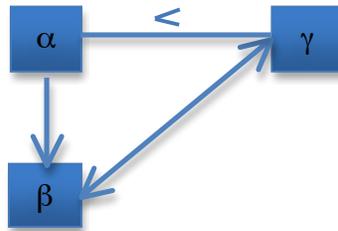
Figure 3. Case I

Example of Case I: (α) the sun is shining but (γ) the temperature is low [implicit β: the temperature should be high]
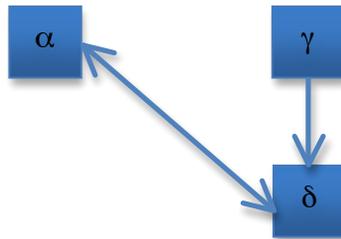
Figure 4. Case II

Example of Case II: (α) the provisory dam stood firm, even though (γ) the flow was thrice as much as usual [implicit δ: the provisory dam should not have stood firm]
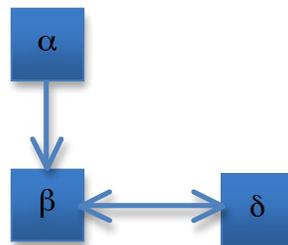
Figure 5. Case III

Example of Case III: (α) The sun is shining but (δ) I've decided to stay at home [implicit β: I'm supposed not to stay at home]
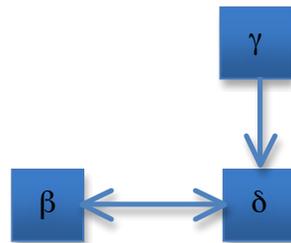
Figure 6. Case IV

Example of Case IV: (β) He should buy this car, even if (γ) it is expensive [implicit δ: he should not buy this car]. These cases may be somewhat similar. This is the reason why we need to analyse the nature of the different clauses in order to understand which case is relevant for the analysis.

Identifying the Nature of Components

We will focus here on the two main components of Toulmin's scheme: Data and Claim—thus excluding from the discussion Warrants, Qualifiers or Backings. The Toulminian labels cause numerous ambiguities that should be resolved. Data, in particular, is defined by Toulmin as the set of already shared facts—but what about known opinions? The Claim evokes something different than a conclusion—so why do we only have Claim, and not Conclusion, in Toulmin's scheme? This is why we suggest it is useful to analyse the nature of the components before labelling them.

Components of an argumentative cell can be of four different natures, depending on two criteria (see Figure 7 below). The first criterion resides in the possibility of separating facts and non-facts. Facts (or statements counted as such) are independent of the speaker and can be identified by a linguistic test: the insertion of "I find that" is difficult or impossible: "I find that Mark is 5 ft tall" seems rather odd. Opinions (evaluations, pieces of advice, decisions, etc.)[13] typically suppose speaker commitment (except when opinions are reported speech) and put the speaker in a position to defend them if she is challenged to do it. The second criterion is whether the clause is used as a starting point of an argumentation (without any justification in the argumentative cell), as an imposed clause (neither justification nor argumentation below) or as a clause that has precisely been justified in the argumentative cell.

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[13] Strictly speaking, we should make a difference between facts and non-facts, but this terminology feels rather artificial, which is why we prefer to label non-facts as opinions.

	Known or Shared	Imposed	Justified
Facts	*Data*		*Explanandum*
Opinion	*Agreed-upon arguments*	*Imposed claim*	*Conclusions or claims*

Figure 7. Nature of the components of an argumentative cell

This is important because we think that the same linguistic devices used in the first clause can construct two different argumentative triangles depending to the following clause. Example 3 contains an imposed Claim ("I'll go out") while example (4) contains new Data.

(3)   Even if it is raining, I'll go out.
(4)   Even if it is raining, roads are dry.

What may follow examples (3) and (4) can therefore be very different: whereas example (3) could end there and be seen as complete, example (4) invites participants to solve the incompatibility of the two pieces of data by formulating an explanation meant to understand how it occurred or what is problematic in the reasoning.

Now, facts can occupy positions β or δ and be "justified" by respectively α or γ. In such cases, we cannot speak about argumentation anymore: it is rather an explanation (or a pseudo-explanation—see Herman 2015). The fact is explained (hence the label *explanandum*) and not defended in this case. By contrast, opinions can also be used in positions α or γ, which are not "natural positions" for opinions, but we must take into account that: (i) these opinions may have been justified earlier in the text and serve here as agreed-upon arguments that can be used in a new reasoning; (ii) a number of opinions can be considered as already shared or agreed-upon by the audience and therefore serve as starting points of an argumentation, even if they lack explicit justification.

Finally, claims are not necessarily justified by arguments: it is the case of "I'll go out" in example (3) above (= imposed claim). A conclusion, by contrast, is justified by an argument (hence its name, which underlines an end point). Now, the difference between a claim and a conclusion is the following: a claim is (or can be in a position to be) defended by the speaker who is committed to it, whereas a conclusion can be the opponent's opinion or a consequence of a weak counter-argument. It follows that a claim—even if it is an imposed claim—cannot be in positions α or γ. Conclusions, by definition, cannot occupy these positions either.

Let us sum up:

- facts or opinions are not tied to different positions in the argumentative square/triangles, even if facts statistically occur more in positions α and δ and opinions in positions β or γ
- facts are neither "defended" nor "justified" (it would be an abuse of language) but may be explained—they are, in this case, *explananda*;
- opinions can be considered as shared (i.e., non-justified), as imposed (neither justified nor developed), or as justified.
- a claim is defended by the speaker (but not necessarily justified), whereas a conclusion is not defended by the speaker (and necessarily justified by an argument).
- neither a claim nor a conclusion can occupy positions β or γ.

Analysing Instructions

Let us take the two following examples:

(5) Even if it is raining, I'll go out.
(6) It is raining, but I'll go out.

While similar, (5) and (6) are not equivalent. The difference is subtle, but if we consider the cognitive processes responsible for their interpretation, clause after clause, input after input, we cannot dodge this question. When a clause begins with "Even if", the addressee can (and is in fact instructed to) expect that what follows "even if" is a weak counter-argument and that the next clause after that will be the opposite of the conclusion triggered by the weak argument. Hence, this limits the structure of the cell to three possibilities: the argumentative square or only two argumentative triangles (case I or case III). In example (6), the first clause, in isolation, cannot be understood as a part of an argumentative move and only the introduction of the connective "but" signals that the preceding clause was a counter-argument which is conceded.[14] The rhetorical impact of an *anticipation* move (5) or a *revision* move (6) may be important to underline for the analysis.

For example, when "Despite" is in α position, the argumentative process can be described as follows for the theoretical example:

- α is a counter-argument to either γ or δ
- α leads to a counter-conclusion β
- β will be the opposite of either γ or δ

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[14] Counter-argument is a function that will be described below.

- the content of β will be determined by the content of either γ or δ[15]

We cannot, of course, exhaustively describe each process triggered by different linguistic markers in different poles of an argumentative dialectical cell, but the idea we would like to highlight is the importance of these processes. It is significant to understand the role of these linguistic markers on two levels: giving instructions to understand how an argument is structured and triggering rhetorical effects by the choice of these markers and their occurrence in the argumentative cell.

Determining a Function

If our model is well-founded, then the last step of the cognitive process we described here is to pinpoint the function of each component in line with its position, nature, and the instructions bearing on it. The idea is that we could define each label of function by the preceding notes.

For example, what is a counter-argument? A clause is a *counter-argument* if and only if (a) it occupies the α pole of a dialectical argumentative cell, (b) another clause occupies the β pole; (c) either a stronger argument occupies the γ pole (argumentative square) or an imposed claim occupies the δ pole (argumentative triangle—case III). Similarly, a clause is an *expected conclusion* if and only if (a) it occupies the β pole; (b) another clause is occupying the α pole; (c) either new data occupies the γ pole or a counter-claim occupies the δ pole; (d) either the γ pole or the δ pole (according to point c) is the contrary of the expected conclusion in β. We could continue our description of all the functions the components of an argumentative cell can fulfil, but we will come back to it once we get to the analysis of real cases.

The Contextual Selection Constraint: A Cognitive-Pragmatic Model for the Analysis of the Persuasiveness of Arguments

The question of argumentative persuasiveness is arguably a psychological one, since it seeks to uncover the mechanisms by which information comes to be entertained as true (or likely to be true) by an individual. At the representational and propositional level, this means that persuasive arguments are those whose conclusion ends up belonging to the individual's cognitive environment (henceforth CE), by virtue of the support provided by its premises.[16]

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[15] This last point has not been commented on, but it's important to see that, despite the argumentative triangle that ties α and β, the content of conclusion β is not directly provided by the content of α. It is indirectly provided by the contrary of what the speaker has chosen to say in position γ or position δ.

[16] We use the notion of cognitive environment in Sperber and Wilson's sense, who define it as the set of assumptions that are available to an individual at the time of utterance processing: "A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39). The notion of

We contend that such a propositional perspective is both suitable and desirable to design a cognitive account of argumentative persuasiveness.

If we want to examine the conditions under which the propositional content of a conclusion comes to be part of a CE given its premises, we need to adopt a procedural model of information processing. In particular, we need to consider that being persuaded is the outcome of an inferential process in which the information supplied by the premises, once combined to the information present in the informational context used by the individual to process the argument, is found to provide evidence for the conclusion—at least sufficient and relevant evidence to accept it as true or likely true. Intuitively, this outcome can result from two argumentative scenarios: (i) either the argument is persuasive because its propositional import has successfully withstood (possibly all sets of) critical information adduced against it by successfully overcoming attempts to refute it, or (ii) the argument prevails because no relevant critical information has been considered during its evaluation by the addressee and its content is compatible with the addressee's CE. From this characterisation, we can therefore consider that scenario (i) involves critical submission to doubt, whereas scenario (ii) excludes it.

Our proposal, which draws on the Context Selection Constraint (CSC, see Oswald 2010, 2011, 2014, Maillat and Oswald 2009, 2011) supplies a cognitive interpretation of this very idea by providing precise criteria under which scenarios (i) and (ii) should in principle obtain. The CSC framework adopts a representational perspective in which the premises and conclusion of a given argument are modelled as mental representations of propositions, the forming acting as justifications for the latter. Importantly, it provides a cognitive model of verbal information processing which details how information is *selected* in the comprehension process, which, as we shall see, can be used to account for argumentative persuasiveness.

Further reflection on the conditions under which each of two scenarios defined above may obtain yields the following hypotheses: in scenario (i) critical information sets are selected because they play a relevant role in the evaluation of the argument and/or because the individual finds a motive to look for them, while in scenario (ii) no critical information is present, most probably because the processed information is perceived to be contextually relevant and/or because there is no available reason to look for critical information. The cognitive difference between (i) and (ii), therefore, has to do with whether the quality of the premise/conclusion relationship, which is processed during evaluation, is perceived to be somehow contextually acceptable or not at that point. If this output of the process obtains, the argument should be accepted and persuasion will have succeeded. If the output does not obtain, then the argument should not be accepted and persuasion will have failed.

The rather intuitive notion of acceptability we employed above can conveniently be captured by the notion of relevance, as defined in Relevance Theory (Sperber and

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manifestness is related to that of truth: when an assumption is said to be manifest in someone's cognitive environment, it means that the individual considers it to be true or probably true (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39).

Wilson 1986, 1995, Wilson and Sperber 2012). Technically construed as a relationship between processing effort and cognitive effect (cognitive effects being in turn defined as the addition of reliable new information to the CE or as the suppression or revision of unreliable information in the CE), relevance is said to determine whether a given piece of information becomes part of an individual's CE. More precisely: a given assumption will be perceived to be contextually relevant if it requires little processing effort to be represented and, in parallel if its representation yields large cognitive effects. The assumptions that are perceived to optimally fulfil the ratio between processing effort and cognitive effect are the ones that are likely to be perceived as the most contextually relevant by an individual. Crucially, when a cognitive system reaches the point where it is able to figure out the contextual relevance of a given assumption, it will stop devoting resources to process it and the assumption will be integrated into the individual's CE.

While Relevance Theory is primarily directed at explaining the comprehension procedure, the cognitive principle of relevance is a general feature of human cognition that can also be used to explain under which conditions information is selected during cognitive processing. Our assumption is that this model can be applied to account for the two persuasive scenarios we have defined above in cognitive terms. In scenario (i), the argument is deemed persuasive when it prevails, which, in cognitive terms, can be characterised as the situation in which the argument's content is perceived to be contextually relevant in light of criticism, i.e., when its content is more accessible and yields more cognitive effects than its criticism. In scenario (ii), the argument is deemed persuasive when its content is immediately perceived to be so contextually relevant, i.e., easy to process and yielding large cognitive effects, that it disposes of the need to consider counter-evidence or critical information (see also Oswald forth. for a detailed exposition of these ideas).

Now, how is this theoretical model exploitable in discourse analysis? When it comes to analysing whether an argument that we have been able to fully reconstruct is persuasive in a given text, such a framework can be used to assess comparative relevance of its premises against the context, this in turn giving us insights into the likely persuasiveness of the argument. Given the premises and the context (composed of relevant assumptions) supplied by the reconstructive stage of analysis, we can indeed subsequently comparatively assess the relevance of competing assumptions, namely their ease of processing and their likelihood to trigger cognitive effects. If critical information is more likely to be found relevant in the context, then the argument is not likely to persuade its addressee. If, on the other hand, the argument's content is perceived to be more relevant than other sets of information, then the argument is likely to persuade its addressee. Put in more general terms, the idea is to assess which pieces of information will be foregrounded and which pieces of information will be backgrounded along the dimensions of processing effort and cognitive effect. The concluding assumptions as to the persuasiveness of the argument will thus depend on whether it is the content of the argument or the content of critical information that will be foregrounded and integrated in the individual's CE. Another way of looking at this dynamic would be to consider that there are weakening and strengthening strategies bearing on the perceived relevance of information. Weakening strategies target critical information to make

it less relevant or irrelevant, while strengthening strategies are meant to make the contents of the argument more relevant. The next section will detail how the two models presented above can be used in a comprehensive analysis of argumentative discourse.

A Rhetorical-Pragmatic Analysis of the Moon Hoax Documentary: 3 Arguments

This analytical section provides a rhetorical pragmatic analysis of some of the arguments found in the Moon hoax documentary. We chose to illustrate how both our approaches can be combined in a comprehensive analysis by restricting our focus to 3 main arguments. The excerpt we will analyse is reproduced below in (7). It is centred on Bill Kaysing's investigation, who is presented as a former analyst and engineer who worked for Rocketdyne, a company involved in the construction of some parts of the engine that propelled the Apollo rocket into space. Kaysing is a central figure in the documentary, as he is the one presented as the main investigator of the conspiracy. Here is the excerpt:

(7)　　But what he saw on television, combined with his experiences at Rocketdyne made him a sceptic. "The whole thing then seemed phony to me. I think that was an intuitive feeling that what was being shown was not real". As he studied the footage more closely, he was shocked to find several inconsistencies: Kaysing observed that despite the clarity of deep space, the stars were missing from the black lunar sky. He saw the American flag waving, even though there is no air on the Moon. And he discovered that there was no blast crater beneath the lunar lander, where its powerful rocket engine had fired. This evidence convinced Kaysing that we never sent a man to the Moon.

The main claim defended here, (8), is clearly identifiable at the end of the excerpt, as it is explicitly introduced by the indicator "this evidence convinced Kaysing that":

(8)　　We never sent a man to the moon[17]

In the excerpt, three argumentative moves are explicitly performed, and they all relate to some disturbing fact that the official story cannot, according to the documentary, account for. We summarise them in (9), (10) and (11).

(9)　　Despite the clarity of deep space, the stars were missing from the black lunar sky.

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[17] For the purposes of our analysis, it will be sometimes necessary to reformulate it in different ways. We will see that in the details of the argumentation it could be rephrased as 'The Official Story is false".

(10) He saw the American flag waving, even though there is no air on the Moon.

(11) He discovered that there was no blast crater beneath the lunar lander, where its powerful rocket engine had fired.

Rhetorical Analysis

The three arguments we consider are introduced in the documentary as illustrations of disturbing facts. Furthermore, as they all result from Kaysing's investigation, most of what we know about him and his work will be relevant to these arguments. From a rhetorical perspective, a few observations can be made in this respect; we construe what follows as a listing of various rhetorical 'aids' that accompany our three arguments in order to give their content more epistemic weight.

A first relevant observation has to do with the great deal of rhetorical efforts that are devoted to building the *ethos* of Bill Kaysing, who appears to be the main source of authority on which the documentary relies. It is important in this respect to note that the observations in (9), (10) and (11) are narrated from the perspective of this character, presented as a "Moon hoax investigator", and that he is the origin of the arguments provided. We are told that he saw the events on TV, which, combined with his knowledge, turned him into a sceptic; moreover, we learn that his study of the footage led him to discover inconsistencies. The three arguments under consideration are thus given to us as part of the report of an investigation conducted by someone who seems to be capable of conducting it, as Kaysing comes across as a scientist who is interested in the truth. This seems to be corroborated by the way Kaysing is carefully constructed as an expert throughout the first ten minutes of the documentary. In his first appearance, he is sitting in some kind of cockpit, operating some unidentified, yet clearly 'technologically advanced' device. Combined to a representation of Kaysing in formal clothes in some kind of lab and to the mention of his former occupation (analyst and engineer at Rocketdyne), this encourages us to infer that he is a competent technician of some sort, and thus that he knows his subject. An additional picture of him wearing military clothes complements the construction of his identity in such a way that he is also represented as a patriot who cannot, *a priori*, be biased against his country—especially in the Cold War race for the Moon and the stars. In short, Kaysing is shown to cumulate personal experience, scientific rationality and unbiased motivations to question the official story. We argue that this can result in a massive authority effect—provided we do not question these representations.[18]

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[18] Indeed, a number of websites reveal for example that Kaysing only worked for Rocketdyne until 1963 (so 6 years before the Apollo mission), that he was not an engineer, but that he held a degree in Arts and that he was employed as a technical writer and later on as a service engineer (i.e. a technician, but not necessarily the technician who worked on the rockets). We can also learn that Rocketdyne did not design the entirety of the Apollo rockets, but that it was in charge of the engines. All these elements could weigh in to undermine Kaysing's credibility as an expert on the Apollo missions.

Second, we contend that the way the arguments and observations provided in (9), (10) and (11) are framed is also rhetorically significant. Kaysing is said to be "shocked". This can come as a surprise, since we could straightforwardly expect a conspiracy investigator to be extremely happy to find evidence allowing him to debunk the official story and to support his own claim that the whole thing was a hoax. However, were this to be the case, it would actually be detrimental for the conspiracy theory, since it would depict Kaysing as someone who wants to show he is right at all costs—or worse, that he is biased. In this sense, the mention of his "shocked" state of mind, in light of the alleged counter-evidence to the official story, functions as a way of conveying the idea that his sole motivation is the quest for truth. Put differently, if indeed he were biased, he would not be shocked to find this counter-evidence, but delighted. This characterisation, in our view, contributes to building the *ethos* of an unbiased and sincere investigator, who is neither motivated by contradiction alone nor by the need to find a conspiracy at all costs.

A third observation concerns the fact that arguments (9), (10) and (11) all benefit from the same powerful source of evidence, namely perception: in the documentary, we *see* that there are no stars in the black lunar sky, we *see* the waving flag, and we *see* that there is no blast crater beneath the lunar lander. The fact of visually foregrounding perceptual evidence can function as a way of increasing the epistemic strength of any representation associated with the perception. In argumentative terms, this is meant to make sure that the Data presented remains unquestioned. In fact, in both arguments (9) and (10) the source of all pieces of explicit information is perceptual: as a consequence, the implicit components of the argument are more likely to be open for doubt than the explicit ones, which are supported by visual evidence—and this, in itself, might make the arguments more persuasive. These three arguments and the way they are verbally presented are based on facts that are visually laid out for us to check.

Finally, all three examples seek to uncover a form of contradiction that the official story allegedly cannot explain: the absence of stars, the waving flag and the absence of a blast crater. This dynamic of introduction of disturbing evidence reveals an overall rhetorical strategy of doubt construction. Similar forms of argumentation are repeatedly employed, and we postulate that this repetition is rhetorically significant. The documentary offers three arguments, based on perceptual evidence, meant to undermine the official story; they are said to originate in Kaysing's investigation, which shares its photographic evidence, thereby giving these arguments more credence. In other words, not only are strategies repeated; they are also epistemically reinforced over and over (see above for an elaboration of this idea). We now turn to the cognitive pragmatic analysis of the three arguments.

Cognitive Pragmatic Analysis
Missing Stars

The first argument we analyse is the one we noted in (9) above:

(9)   Despite the clarity of deep space, the stars were missing from the black
        lunar sky.

This is the first challenge to the official version and is therefore a refutational move in essence. Following the specifications for counter-argumentation of the model of the argumentative cell presented in the third section above and given both the textual material and the context, we reconstruct the underlying argumentative movement of (9) as follows:

(12) Weak Data[19]:   Deep space is clear
(13) Incompatible Data: Stars were missing from the black lunar sky
(14) (Expected Conclusion):[20] We should see stars in the black lunar sky
(15) (Warrant):   The clearer the deep space, the more visible the stars
(16) (Backing)   Earthly night-time experience of a cloudless sky with
                               no light pollution

The argument starts with the explicitly given Weak Data (12) that the deep space is clear. We specify that it is conceded because it is introduced with the concessive connective 'despite'. In the argumentative scenario introduced by (12), the use of this concessive procedurally instructs us to expect that what follows, here the Incompatible Data (13), [21] is incompatible with some conclusion the Weak Data in (12) would normally entail (see Charaudeau's notion of "restrictive concession", 1992), and which we note in (14) as the Expected Conclusion. This Expected Conclusion would hold that we should see stars in the black lunar sky. In turn, (14) can be licensed by a Warrant connecting it with (12), which we note in (15) as "The clearer the deep space, the more visible the stars". In a Toulminian spirit, we can also then surmise that the Backing for this Warrant comes from our earthly perceptual experience: in night-time conditions where there is no light (e.g. away from the city), a cloudless sky reveals a myriad of stars. The argumentative articulation taking us from (12) to (14) is unproblematic, since everything (including the Warrant and the Backing) seems to nicely support the Expected Conclusion (14); however, the Incompatible Data supplied in (13), which contradicts (14), casts doubt on the official story by highlighting one of the inconsistencies Kaysing has encountered. We will discuss the effects of this inconsistency below.

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[19] Definition: A clause is a Weak Data if and only if (a) it occupies pole α; (b) it is agreed upon or known; (c) it leads to a conclusion occupying pole β; (d) it is in competition with a clause in position γ; (e) its content is weaker than content in γ; (f) its weak status is indicated by a concessive marker that precedes the clause, like 'even if', 'despite', 'although', etc.

[20] We adopt here the convention of noting implicit contents in between parentheses in all our argumentative reconstructions. Contents which do not appear between parentheses are explicitly given in the text.

[21] Definition: a clause is an Incompatible Data if and only if (a) it occupies pole γ; (b) its nature is a fact (known or shared); (c) another clause occupies the position β; (d) it is the opposite of β, (e) the existence of β is announced by a linguistic marker in position α like 'despite', 'although', 'even if', etc.

Our reconstruction in abstract form could thus be summarised as follows: (14) because (13), by virtue of (15) and (16); yet, (14). In terms of the argumentative cell, this argument takes the form of Case I of the argumentative triangles.

Let us begin our analysis by first looking at the way the argument in (9) appears in the text. (9) follows the sentence "As he [Kaysing] studied the footage more closely, he was shocked to find several inconsistencies". So even before the argument is presented, the viewer is led to expect that (9) will reveal an inconsistency. Thus, in order to find (9) relevant in such a way that it fulfils the meaning expectations triggered by the introductory statement, the viewer will need to at least entertain the possibility that (9) is to be processed as something the official story will have trouble explaining—even if in principle he is free to then doubt the relevance or soundness of (9). In other words, the viewer first needs to *understand* that (9) is an example of the inconsistencies Kaysing is said to be shocked by and will therefore presumably process the argument in light of this objective.[22] Whether or not the viewer then doubts it in a later evaluative stage is a separate question. We argue here that there are grounds to suspect that additional contextual constraints are likely to decrease the chances of critical evaluation.

In the case of (9), the proximity of the Weak Data (12) to this first contextual constraint might actually put in place a second constraint on the selection of information, in the sense that the concessive connective 'despite' straightforwardly instructs the viewer that the expectation previously triggered will be immediately fulfilled: 'despite' announces that whatever will follow the conceded proposition is to be taken as unexpected evidence that does not square with the official story. From a linguistic-pragmatic perspective, we can thus say that the interpretative procedure triggered by the use of the concessive connective fulfils the expectations triggered by the introductory statement. Furthermore, in terms of accessibility, (9) does not seem to require unusually large amounts of processing effort, since the tension constructed in the introductory statement finds immediate echo through the use of the concessive, which appears to be a procedurally compatible option to carry on with the exposition.

These first two contextual constraints on the selection of information are thus strengthening strategies meant to make sure that specific information sets are selected, mainly by making them salient and accessible in the context. An inconsistency is announced,[23] thereby raising the expectation of learning more about it; the inconsistency is then revealed through a concession which itself highlights its incompatibility with the official story; in turn, this satisfies the expectations triggered by the introductory statement in an effortless way.

Interestingly, from the perspective of argumentative processing, the *locus* of disagreement is immediately revealed in the concession. We know from the start that the

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[22] Note that since this introductory statement scopes over the three arguments presented in (7), the contextual constraint just described in principle equally applies to (10) and (11).

[23] A simple linguistic observation can actually back up this analysis: the semantic incoherence resulting from the combination of the Weak Data (12) with the Incompatible Data (13) through concessive means is also linguistically conveyed through the use of the antonyms 'clarity' and 'black', so as to highlight the discrepancy.

disagreement between Kaysing and the official story, in (9), will scope over something related to the clarity of deep space. This matters for the argumentative reconstruction of the argument, since processing effort requirements should dictate that the antecedent of any reconstructible premise, such as the Warrant (15), will refer to the clarity of deep space (i.e., the piece of information that has just been processed by interpreting the content of the concession). This shows that considerations of extent conditions of relevance—here processing effort—can also help us ground the reconstruction of an argument (see also Oswald forth.). Incidentally, if this holds, our analysis indicates that the steps involved in processing the argument are deductive steps: combining the easily accessible Warrant and the given Weak Data, we are encouraged to draw the Expected Conclusion through a simple *modus ponens*.[24] We consider that such a straightforward progression in the way information in (9) is presumably processed is likely to decrease the chances of critical evaluation, due to the absence of any interpretative obstacle in the exposition.[25]

While the way concession works in (9), in combination with the constraint induced by the introductory statement, shows how the lack of interpretative obstacles would in principle ensure an unproblematic search for the contextual relevance of the contents of (9), more can be said about the relevance of the support implicitly alluded to. As our reconstruction shows, the argument is warranted by a major premise (15) which links the explicitly mentioned clarity of space (12) to the implicit Expected Conclusion (14). Crucially, if the viewer were to wonder about the legitimacy of the Warrant, we argue that the obvious candidate to be selected would be the Backing reconstructed in (16), as it rests on a source of information deemed to be reliable, namely perceptual experience. The black lunar sky of the official NASA footage suggests that what is represented is similar to what we see on Earth (the absence of light sources in the video and the blackness of the space indeed strengthen the representation that these conditions are similar to the ones that obtain in Earth's night time). Based on this observation, we contend that (16) has good prospects of being assigned a high degree of epistemic strength, which *ipso facto* makes it relevant. The critical information that would be needed to trump this line of argumentation, namely that the Moon has no atmosphere and that as a consequence the lunar sky is black day and night,[26] is thus unlikely to be considered at all, given that the epistemic strength of the evidence supplied or inferable, either visually or verbally, is likely to be perceived as high by the viewer.

Under this analysis, (9) is likely to trigger a representation whose contextual relevance is strengthened via two contextual constraints (the introductory statement and the concessive construction which play on the processing effort parameter); the subsequent evaluation of

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[24] The *modus ponens* is a formally valid deductive inference, the structure of which guarantees truth preservation from premises to conclusion. Its abstract structure is the following: "If P, then Q. P. Therefore Q." An example of this syllogistic form would be: Major premise: "If X is a pragmatician, then X is interested in context". Minor premise: "Laszlo is a pragmatician". Conclusion: "Therefore, Laszlo is interested in context."

[25] We will see that the order in which the concessive is introduced in concessive constructions can play a slightly different role in the constraining of contextual selection.

[26] The Apollo missions were conducted in the Moon's day time, so, crucially, under the sun's light. This is why, just like on Earth, we don't see stars in the sky, despite its blackness and clarity. See for instance http://www.moonlandinghoax.org/3.html or http://www.clavius.org/stars.html for debunking accounts.

the underlying evidence supporting this representation is then likely to leave out critical information through a contextual constraint playing of cognitive effect, as perceptual data foregrounds earthly perceptual experience at the expense of a more critical stance that would supersede the expectation of similarity in Earth and Moon lighting conditions.

Flag Waving

The second argument we analyse is the one given in (10) above, and reproduced here:

> (10) He saw the American flag waving, even though there is no air on the Moon.

This case looks similar to the previous one because it also involves a concession. However, we shall see that it turns out to be slightly different, in so far as its reconstruction and processing are concerned. In this argument, the Data that the American flag is waving (17) is introduced first. The second piece of information given in the argument is introduced by the adversative connective 'even though', indicating that what follows it should be taken as a Strong Incompatible Data (18) ('there is no air on the Moon'). The two members of this adversative relationship are not (18) and (17), but (18) and an Expected Conclusion of (17), which can be *retrospectively* reconstructed as (19): 'there is air on the Moon'. We also add a Warrant (20) and a Backing (21) to make explicit the reasons why the Strong Incompatible Data is puzzling. Here is our reconstruction of the complete argument, whose argumentative cell turns out to also conform to Case I of the argumentative triangles:[27]

(17) Data: The American flag is waving
(18) Strong Incompatible Data:[28] There is no air on the Moon
(19) (Expected Conclusion):   There is air on the Moon
(20) (Warrant):   If a flag is waving, it is because there is wind
(21) (Backing):   Earthly perceptual experience of waving flags

Let us now look, on the basis of how the literal content of the argument is linguistically packaged, at the processing specificities of (10). The argument begins with the Data that the American flag is waving (17). In isolation, this would not lead us to infer anything in particular—even though many entailments could be identified as semantically following from it. But by the time we start processing the Strong Incompatible Data (18) introduced by

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[27] Another reading of this argumentation is possible and will be briefly evoked at the end of this section.

[28] Definition: a clause is a Strong Incompatible Data if and only if (a) it occupies pole γ; (b) its nature is a fact (known or shared); (c) another clause must occupy the position β; (d) β will be the opposite of it; (e) the existence of β has *not* been announced by a linguistic marker in position α such as 'despite, although, even if, etc.'

the adversative connective, we are instructed to consider that whatever this connective introduces must be argumentatively opposed to some conclusion that we can draw from (17). Since (18) mentions that there is no air on the Moon, we are naturally led, by virtue of processing effort, to look for a contradiction which would connect the presence of air and waving flags; this is the point of the Warrant (20), which draws on the general rule that the waving of a flag is due to the presence of air (and moving air or wind specifically). This Warrant could itself be supported by a Backing (21) based on our perceptual experience of waving flags: on Earth, indeed, flags usually move when there is wind.

Notice, however, that the Warrant we identify here takes an abductive form which makes us perform an inference to the best explanation: if we see a flag moving, then the most likely explanation for this fact is the presence of air. This is noteworthy because it somehow reverses our representation of the direction of natural causality. In most (earthly) cases, physical causation would indicate that when there is air, flags can move. In terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, the latter conditional statement about flags holds, as it is formulated, that moving flags are a necessary condition (or consequence, in this case) of the presence of air, even if that does not exclude that other phenomena may cause flags to move, such as planting a flag in an airless environment where movement is not subjected to air friction. [29] Now, the Warrant we identified in (20) somehow reverses this relationship, by making us represent the presence of air as a necessary condition of moving flags—while in fact it is only a sufficient one. Following this line of reasoning, we contend that the intuitive argumentative reconstruction the documentary enjoins the viewers to perform misleads them into construing the presence of air as the only cause of a moving flag. In fact, when combining (20) with the Data (17), we get to the implicit Expected Conclusion (19) through an unproblematic *modus ponens*, which would strengthen this reading in principle. Why, then, do we take this misleading Warrant to be the one intended to be reconstructed by the narrator?

If we reflect on how information is delivered, we first get a statement (17) informing us that the argument we are about to process has to do with the American flag waving, and that this is problematic for the official story (based on the introductory statement that these are shocking discoveries). Then, the adversative connective triggers the search for a Warrant, which is expected to help us explain the discrepancy that has been previously announced—and that we are accordingly expecting. While in principle we could go for 'If there is air, a flag can wave', we contend that the viewer is more likely to go for the version which substitutes the antecedent for the consequent of the conditional statement and vice-versa, namely (20), precisely because the antecedent in (20) refers back to the theme. In other words, this is an issue about waving flags, and it appears to be less effortful to represent a general rule which precisely focuses on what happens when we observe waving flags—in this case, we are led to infer the presence of air from it—than a general rule about the presence of air and its effect on flags. This alternative would require an extra step in the process, namely to abstract from the topic of the discussion for a second and to think about

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[29] See the convincing debunking of this particular conspiracy argument by the team of *MythBusters*, on episode 104 of the show. Available at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2m7k1z (last accessed 30.10.2015).

physical causality of waving flags, which would distract us from the main point of the argument (i.e., to represent and understand the expected discrepancy). Summing up, the Warrant (20) appears to be the most *relevant* candidate for two reasons. First, it can be represented more easily (as it falls within the thematic continuity of [17], which has just been processed). Second, from the perspective of cognitive effects, it is the one that allows us to easily draw the Expected Conclusion (19), which is needed to confirm the shocking evidence discovered by Kaysing.

Crucially, once the Warrant (20) is represented, the rest follows, namely the derivation of the Expected Conclusion (19) and the representation of the inconsistency, which in turns leaves room for an alternative explanation to emerge. It is because the viewer is led to recognise an inconsistency between (19) and (18) that some sort of cognitive dissonance (see Festinger 1957) emerges in his CE.[30] Both facts are contradictory and this contradiction needs to be resolved: either the flag is not waving—but this in turn contradicts our perceptual experience—or the action cannot be taking place on the Moon—and this is where the CT provides a 'better' explanation under the form of an alleged shooting in a secret film studio Kaysing claims is located in Area 51. Crucially, we claim that a failure to critically question the Warrant (20) in the way we described is likely to mislead the viewers and obfuscate that flags may still wave, albeit for other reasons, in an airless environment. Through our analysis, we hope to have shown that (20) is interpretatively strengthened as imposing the presence of air as a necessary condition of waving flags, and that as a consequence the chances of representing alternative reasons for waving flags are weakened.

A final linguistic observation on this example is in order and has to do with the argumentative pattern of (10) and with the position of the adversative connective. In (9), the concession was introduced right at the beginning of the argument, thus explicitly alerting the viewer to the presence of the problem and directly encouraging him to look for the Expected Conclusion (14), thereby revealing the *locus* of disagreement (i.e., the clarity of deep space and the absence of stars). In this case, the argumentative articulation of the argument is explicitly given. In (10), the story is quite different: the connective is introduced in the second clause of the argument, and this forces the viewer to backtrack and reconstruct the Expected Conclusion *via* the representation of a Warrant (20). In other words, the viewer is responsible for reconstructing most of the argument leading to the inconsistency and in this process there are grounds to consider that it is the viewer who is responsible to find the *locus* of disagreement. This constitutes in our view additional incentive to fall for the misrepresentation of sufficient and necessary conditions previously discussed. The information is packaged in such a way that representing the inconsistency is an interpretative challenge that the viewer needs to resolve, and in this light the Warrant (20) is a crucial step in achieving just that in a contextually relevant way.

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[30] A cognitive system is unlikely to hold two incompatible cognitions together (see Festinger's (1957) work on the notion of cognitive dissonance), and in principle should find a way to get rid of the inconsistency. In this context, we argue that the addressee who fails to call into question the information presented in the Warrant and the Backing will be more likely to dispose of the official story in favour of the conspiracy theory.

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Now, the difference between this case and the previous one, in (9), also lies in the fact that it can *simultaneously* lead to another argumentative triangle, namely case II. Indeed, the absence of air on the Moon can legitimately be considered as a good argument for an implicit claim in position δ: "The flag should not wave" (negation of α). Even if the connective "even though" and the negation both incite us to reconstruct, in a *backward* movement, the implicit conclusion (19), the relevance of uttering (18) also leads us to infer, this time in a *forward* movement, that the flag should not wave. It is impossible for us to say, without empirical tests, if both processes are cognitively executed, which one is dominant and their order of appearance, but both interpretations are equally possible and both imply that the invalid abduction "if movement, therefore air" is considered by the speaker as good reasoning and that it has to be considered by the audience as such. Indeed, the warrant of the second argumentative triangle can be reconstructed as: "without air, a flag cannot wave", which is founded on the same piece of abductive reasoning. The clear success of this argument, undoubtedly the *pièce de resistance* of this specific CT, shows how irrefutable it sounds. The abductive inference appears to be a deduction and is used as such to convince the audience that the waving flag is an irrefutable proof.

Absence of Blast Crater

The third and last argument we analyse is particular in its own respect, as it lacks a proper argumentative connective which would provide explicit instructions on how to reconstruct it. For ease of reading we reproduce it here:

(11) He discovered that there was no blast crater beneath the lunar lander, where its powerful rocket engine had fired.

We propose the following reconstruction according to the model of the argumentative cell:

(22) Contradictory Data:[31] There is no blast crater beneath the lunar lander
(23) Data: Powerful rocket engine had fired beneath the lunar lander
(24) (Claim): There should be a blastcrater beneath the lander
(25) (Warrant): Powerful engines leave traces on ground
(26) (Backing): General physical knowledge about heat, engines and their effect on the ground

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[31] Definition: a clause is a Contradictory Data if and only if: (a) it occupies pole α; (b) its content is shared or known; (c) it contains a polemic negation; (d) another clause occupies pole δ and is the opposite of it; (e) another clause in γ justifies the pole δ. Note that in this case the contradictory nature of the data is confirmed by pole δ and only suspected after reading it for the first time in pole α.

The argument starts with a piece of Data (22) describing the absence of a blast crater underneath the lunar lander. (22) is then complemented by a circumstantial complement (23) containing the Data that the location mentioned in (22) is the same location where a "powerful engine had fired". From this Data, we reconstruct an implicit Claim (24) which expresses what we would have expected based on the Data in (23). The Claim connects to the Data through a Warrant (25), which denotes a physical reaction we should know about, and which could be backed (26) by our perceptual evidence of heating engines and the effects these have on close objects (melting and other alterations of their physical state for instance). This reconstruction therefore corresponds to Case II of the argumentative triangles presented above.

In this example, the argumentative articulation is less obvious than in the previous two examples, as there is no explicit connective signalling either an adversative or a concessive relation. However, we do get to represent the incompatibility between (22) and (23) on the grounds of spatial co-reference in both clauses: the same location is common to the absence of a crater and the firing of the powerful engine, and this suggests that a connection between these two events needs to be established.

From a cognitive pragmatic perspective, our analysis begins with the first clause of the argument, as this is the one the viewer accesses first. The argument starts with what we noted as Contradictory Data (22). The reason we called this Contradictory Data mainly has to do with the fact that it contains a polemic negation, which occurs when a proposition denies an opposite assertion that is either explicitly or implicitly present in the context (see Ducrot 1984: 218). In this case, (22) describes the absence of a blast crater under the lunar lander, which implicitly highlights that there would be reasons to expect a blast crater there. In itself, therefore, this negative formulation raises an expectation that (22) is unexpected, or at least contradictory to what should be the case. By the time we read (23), therefore, we anticipate finding something more about the issue. (23) then fills this gap by revealing evidence (the powerfulness of the rocket engine) that would actually support our expectation of finding (22) odd. By disclosing that the lunar lander has a powerful rocket engine, (23) supports the claim that was previously only hinted at: there should be a blast crater, given the powerfulness of the engine. This is where we draw the implicit Claim (24). Polemic negation, in combination with the Data can thus be seen as acting as a strengthening constraint meant to foreground the contradiction between (22) and (23).

In order to secure this, the argument needs to make sure that the audience represents (24) as a piece of information that is epistemically strong. One way of doing that is to support it with premises, which in this case consists in representing the Warrant (25) and its backing (26). Our assumption here is that the relative pronoun 'where' plays a specific role in this process, as it acts as a device that secures an evident causal connection while at the same time downplaying its importance in the justification of (24). As mentioned before, the link between (24) and (23) is arrived at through the representation of spatial co-reference: the place where we would expect a blast crater is identical to the place where the lunar lander fired its powerful rocket engine. In other words, in representational terms, both events are said to be co-located, and one way of explaining why it seems to be relevant for the speaker

to highlight this connection is to assume that they are causally related. This is where the presence of the Warrant (25) becomes likely: we know that engines produce heat (even more so when they are said to be "powerful rocket engines"), and thus that they usually alter the materials they are in contact with or in the proximity of, including the surface they find themselves on. In processing this argument, thus, we are led consider that rocket engines leave traces, and as a consequence that there should be a crater where the lunar lander landed. Crucially, we hypothesise that the use of the pronoun 'where' plays a rhetorical role here: while it implicitly encourages us to reconstruct a causal link, it literally expresses a description of some state of affairs, namely that the spot where there is no blast crater is the same spot where the powerful rocket engine fired. This description carries the strength of perceptual evidence (which is visually corroborated in the documentary). In other words, here the speaker does not appear to be trying to argue in favour of a standpoint; instead, he presents the information (with the implicitly built-in causal link) as visual evidence that is, as a consequence, unquestionable. In cognitive pragmatic terms, we can say that the use of the locative pronoun realises a strategy that weakens the chances of questioning the causal link by strengthening its representation as visual evidence.

More could be said to ground this analysis. A closer look at the lexical choices operated in (11) reveals the presence of the semantic network of *intensity*. We are told about a "blast" crater and a "powerful" engine; furthermore, a "rocket" engine, which has "fired". We suggest that these choices are meant to convey the representation of a device whose powerfulness is likely to have effects on its surroundings. In other words, we are both lexically and visually primed to consider that the connection expressed in the Warrant (25) is relevant in the context. Moreover, mentioning the "powerful rocket engine had fired" existentially presupposes that said engine is indeed powerful. These observations show that within the context, the derivation of the Warrant (25), and thus the representation of an inconsistency with (22) are strengthened.

Concluding the Analysis: One Claim to Connect Them All

Reconstructing the arguments of the documentary with the model of the argumentative cell and then accounting for their processing according to our cognitive pragmatic model yields an exhaustive account of how these arguments may function at a micro-level. What we have done so far is thus to attempt to make explicit (i) the relationships between the constituents of these argumentative cells and (ii) the interpretative instructions that their linguistic packaging carry. In so doing, we have tried to show how a combination of both perspectives is able to shed light on micro-features of argumentation, both on a descriptive level and on an explanatory level. However, we are still one step short of providing a full argumentative analysis of the corpus that would be relevant to the characterisation of one typical feature of conspiracy theories, namely its focus on trying to refute the official version. For that, we need to assess how the three argumentative cells function together to fulfil a higher-order argumentative strategy.

In the material discussed in the preceding sections, the three argumentative cells were described as autonomous argumentative units, each of them being centred around a Claim or a Conclusion on their own. Now, from the perspective of the relationship between them and the broader context of the argument we transcribed in (7), we can consider that the three argumentative cells (9), (10) and (11) can be included in a higher-level argumentative cell in what appears to be convergent argumentation (Freeman 2011) in support of (8). Breaking down the argumentative import of each with respect to the global picture, we can say that the Data presented in the cells would make us expect (i) to see stars in the black lunar sky (9), (ii) to be air on the Moon (10), and (iii) to see a blast crater beneath the lunar lander (11). Now, and this is crucial, these are quasi-perceptual facts that, if we follow the documentary, are perceived to be inconsistent with sets of information we would take to be compatible with the Official Story: if we did indeed go to the Moon, we should see the stars, the only explanation for the waving flag should be that there is air on the Moon, and, finally, we should see a crater beneath the lander. Yet, none of this holds. The accumulation of these three inconsistencies, we contend, is therefore specifically targeted at highlighting the fact that the main claim of the Official Story cannot be true. The claims and conclusions of three argumentative cells in (9), (10) and (11) can therefore be seen to function as arguments supporting the standpoint (28), through the addition of an implicit conditional statement made overwhelmingly evident in the documentary such as (27):

(17)	(Expected Conclusion):	We should see stars in the black lunar sky (and we do not)
(22)	(Expected Conclusion):	There is air on the Moon (but we know there isn't)
(24)	(Claim):	There should be a blast crater beneath the lunar lander (and there is no such crater)
(27)	(Main Warrant)	If the footage has been shot on the Moon, we should not find inconsistencies
(28)	(Main Claim)	The NASA footage has not been shot on the Moon

Neither of the three expected conclusions or claims seems to hold, which is why we specify in parentheses their unexpected quality. The shift from (17), (22), (24) and (27) to (28) is a simple *modus tollens* inference,[32] whereby the fact that we find inconsistencies leads to assume that the footage did not originate on the Moon. From a rhetorical perspective, each argument seems to be sufficient on its own to refute the claim that the footage has been shot on the Moon, which is why we describe the structure as convergent. However, their quantity makes this overarching argumentative cell qualify as an 'overkill' argument structure (see Herman forth. c.). In this sense, we could also talk about a constraint on the epistemic dimension. There is not just one inconsistency, but three of them, all

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[32] The *modus tollens* is a deductively valid form of inference which is also truth preserving (see footnote 24). Its abstract structure is the following: "If P, then Q. It is not the case that Q. Therefore, it is not the case that P". An illustration of this would be: "If it has rained, then the street is wet. The street is not wet. Therefore, it has not rained".

seemingly grounded on perceptual evidence; we postulate that here quantity is a decisive factor in giving more weight to the overall claim.

Given the above, the excerpt we analysed seems to function as a strategy in both the rhetoric of just asking questions and the rhetoric of scientific inquiry (see Byford 2011). While no definite counter-account is presented in the corpus, the conditions are met for the viewers to need to be given one. The trouble has been generated, as the Official Story is shaken, and thus the need for a resolution arises. While the documentary does not supply a full alternative account, it does point out several times that the footage could have been shot on Earth: there are suspicious warehouses in the Nevada desert, near Area 51, which could be movie sets, and it is also highlighted that the budget that was used to shoot a film on a mission to Mars was ridiculously smaller than the NASA budget, leaving it to the audience to infer that if NASA wanted to fake it, they would have had the material resources to do so. This echoes the slogan-like statement Kaysing utters in the documentary: "if you can't make it, fake it".

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to fulfil three goals: (i) to present a hybrid model of argumentative discourse meant to account for argumentative structure and potential persuasiveness; (ii) to demonstrate that CTs are indeed argumentative objects which deserve close attention; and (iii) to highlight the crucial importance verbal material should be given in the analysis of argumentation.

Regarding the first goal, we have shown how the model of the argumentative cell can be interfaced with the Context Selection Constraint model to fulfil both the descriptive and explanatory purposes of argumentative analysis. In terms of the characterisation of some argumentative features of CTs, we have been able to precisely describe a refutational strategy and the way it manages—or constrains—the representation of inconsistencies in order to cast doubt on an official story. In linguistic terms, we have provided a detailed account of how concessive and adversative relationships can be constructed on the basis of linguistic choices.

A final methodological point should perhaps be highlighted. Throughout the exposition, we have adopted a micro-perspective with the intention of remaining as close to the text as possible, so as to avoid unnecessary over-interpretation risks. Reading too much into a text is one of the—if not the—main risk of doing discourse analysis (see also Oswald forth.); we hope to have shown that a linguistic and pragmatic perspective on argumentative discourse represents a sensible way of reducing those risks by acknowledging the crucial role of linguistic material and pragmatic processes in argumentative processing. While our contribution has specifically tackled argumentative discourse and its specificities (i.e., discourse in which speakers provide reasons in support of their claims) by assessing the relationship between linguistic formulations and how they are likely to be understood, we believe this framework can be extended to account for a range of other discursive practices.

Since every piece of public or private discourse is, in principle, meant to be understood, a focus on *meaning* and the way it is conveyed and received can be illuminating for analytical purposes. We should also note, at this point, that a pragmatic focus on meaning is bound to take into account the fundamental role of context; by this we mean that the situational circumstances bearing on the production and the reception of a given discourse need to be considered in the analysis. In our analysis of the Moon hoax, this has been achieved by recognising the dialectical and argumentative specificities of the corpus as well as by paying attention to the contextual constraints the verbal message may apply to the interpretative procedures of the addressee. As a consequence, we hope to have shown that a linguistic and cognitive pragmatic outlook on discursive material can inform the analysis in a way that does justice to its contextual embedding.

Hence, we believe that the tools discussed in this chapter are available to be used for the analysis of any type of discourse, regardless of its nature, function or structure, as long as it is verbal. This means that a linguistic and cognitive pragmatic framework can constitute a starting point for any discursive analysis across the board of discursive practices, and we can expect it to yield equally interesting insights regardless of the type of discourse under consideration, be it deliberative, persuasive, informative, entertaining, etc. The added value of such a perspective thus resides in its broad applicability, which ensures that the structure, goals and functions of any type of discourse can be assessed and analysed through one and the same linguistically- and pragmatically-inspired framework.

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