MEMES WAR: THE POLITICAL USE OF PICTURES IN BRAZIL 2019[1]

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Abstract: In order to analyse pictures shared in WhatsApp groups of Jair Bolsonaro supporters, I will explore the idea that the act of sending someone a picture through social media performs a speech act. Thus we can separate the utterance act (of sending the picture to the receiver in a certain context), the locutionary act (what is said through the pictorial content), the illocutionary act (what is done by uttering that pictorial content), and the perlocutionary act (of affecting the receiver). The pictures analysed were collected from January to September 2019, using the WhatsApp Monitor. My main philosophical argument will be in section 3, in which I develop the idea of pictorial speech acts and its conceptual bases. To understand the communicational role of pictures it is necessary to supplement picture theories (visual semantics) with a communicative act theory based on speech act (visual pragmatics). The development of the general outline of visual pragmatics is the main philosophical contribution envisaged in this paper. My last step it to argue that there are at least three forms of naivety that render the receivers prone to the uptake of the illocutionary act performed: aesthetic naivety, communicational naivety, and epistemic naivety.

Keywords: speech act, photographs, pictorial content, WhatsApp.

INTRODUCTION[4]

This paper has the following objectives. In order to analyse pictures shared in WhatsApp groups of Jair Bolsonaro supporters (collected from January to September 2019), I will explore the idea that the act of sending someone a picture through social media is a *speech act* (in John Austin's sense) performed by the *sender* of the picture, having the *receiver* as the audience. This will allow us to separate the utterance act (of *sending* the picture to the receiver in a certain context), the locutionary act (of *saying* something to the receiver; through pictorial content of the picture), the illocutionary act (of *doing* something), and the perlocutionary act (of *affecting* the receiver in a certain way). I will base those ideas on Dominic Lopes' concept of a *suitable observer* and his account of the requirements for someone to grasp the pictorial content of a picture.[5]

Through this analysis, I want to demonstrate that, since the pictures used in pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups are aesthetically amateurish and with low resolution (kitsch),

[5] Cf. Lopes (2004, 2005).

the receivers do not interpret those pictures as a sophisti-
cated form of propaganda designed to manipulate them, by
recruiting strong negative and positive emotions (hatred,
outrage, indignation, nationalism, adoration etc). The emo-
tionally loaded element prevents them from engaging the
pictures in a rational way. As a result, they do not notice
how epistemically flawed is the content conveyed by the
locutionary act performed through those pictures (most of
them are misinformation and disinformation). Those
strong emotions also push the receivers to resend the con-
tent to their contacts, propagating it virally; and this is an
important perlocutionary effect. This amounts to a form of
circularity, in which pictures are used to construct and to
strength a narrative (the internal logic that connects the
shared common beliefs of the group) and this narrative is
then used to justify those pictures – preventing external
facts from having the power of falsifying the beliefs con-
veyed by those pictures.

I will start mapping the pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp
groups and the types of propaganda they distribute. My se-
cond step is to briefly describe the worldview found in
those groups and to give examples of pictures distributed –
aiming to show someone not acquainted to the Brazilian
current situation a general outlook. My main philosophical
argument will be found in section 3, in which I will pro-
pose my approach to the *pictorial speech acts* and the concep-
tual bases of that idea. Section 4 is dedicated to the analyses
of some of the pictures from section 3. My last step it to ar-
gue that there are at least three forms of naivety that render
the receivers of those pictures prone to the uptake of the il-
locutionary act performed and to actively engage them, be-

coming senders - *aesthetic naivety, communicational naivety,* and *epistemic naivety.*

As a result of this analysis, I want to propose that educational initiatives aiming at developing visual literacy can be an important tool to preserve democracies. Understanding the communicational role of pictures and how they can be used to manipulate would allow a more rational and analytical perspective, through which the emotional engagement could be deflated. In other to understand the communicational role of pictures it is important to supplementing picture theories (that can be generally regarded as part of visual semantics) with a communicative act theory based on speech act theory (developing a new branch that could be called visual pragmatics). The development of the general outlook of visual pragmatics is the main philosophical contribution envisaged by this paper.

1. A BASIC TAXONOMY OF PRO-BOLSONARO GROUPS

Researchers in Brazil are starting to grasp the role of social media in Jair Bolsonaro's propaganda machine and its structure. One important research tool is the *WhatsApp Monitor* developed by Fabrício Benevenuto et al. (2019a, 2019b) (from the Federal University of Minas Gerais). Although Twitter, Facebook, and other traditional social medias are extensively used by Bolsonaro supporters, it is behind the curtains of WhatsApp end-to-end encryption that they daily interact and exchange ideas.[6] WhatsApp is

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[6] WhatsApp has placed some restrictions trying to slow the spread of fake news. Groups are limited to 200 participants and resending content is limited to 5 contacts at a time. As a result, Cont.

very popular in Brazil and has more than 120 million active users.[7] The WhatsApp Monitor shows the most shared pictures, videos, audios, messages, URLs in more than 500 WhatsApp public groups.[8] A big portion of those 500 groups are of Bolsonaro supporters.

Using WhatsApp, Bolsonaro supporters see themselves as promoting a revolution in Brazil. According to the worldview present in those groups, by electing Bolsonaro, they promoted a revolution "wearing pyjamas", without the need of guns and violence. The importance of WhatsApp is illustrated by Figure 1.[9]

E assim foi o fim de uma Era

Bolsonaro supporters are migrating to an app called Telegram, in which groups can have up to 200,000 participants. (https://www.newscientist.com/article/2217937-whatsapp-restrictions-slow-the-spread-of-fake-news-but-dont-stop-it/?fbclid=IwAR3gao7u2MAu3ho9TOAVZQQcPfXREmrPLoeK02acGCBJ_EpSx1XPoz2gY7w)

[7] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/25/brazil-president-jair-bolsonaro-whatsapp-fake-news

[8] According to the WhatsApp Monitor website: "Such groups are open groups, accessible through invitation links that are published on well-known sites as well as on various social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. In this way, this system allows a[n] overview of which images, memes and news were most frequent in WhatsApp chats. We hope that this system will make the information shared through cell phones more transparent" (http://www.whatsapp-monitor.dcc.ufmg.br/brazil/index.php).

[9] All the pictures used in this paper were collected using WhatsApp Monitor, from material distributed from January to September 2019.

Figure 1. "And that was how an era ended". The red stars with the letters "PT" on the back of the dinosaurs are the symbol of the Labour Party (*Partido Trabalhista*) and the comet is the WhatsApp symbol, that supposedly eradicated them.[10]

Pictures have a central role in Bolsonaro's propaganda through WhatsApp. According to Fabrício Benevenuto et al., "images represent the most popular media content shared on the monitored groups" (2019a, 4). The great majority of those images are memes based on photographs or photomontages, with texts over it, and photos with a short audio file attached to it.[11]

Throughout the year that preceded the presidential election (2018), David Nemer (from the University of Virginia) monitored 4 pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups, receiving an average of 1,000 messages per group, per day.[12] According to Nemer, three key clusters of members compose those groups: ordinary Brazilians, Bolsonaro's army of supporters (called in Brazil pejoratively "Bolsominions" - an allusion to the Minion cartoon characters), and influencers. The influencers are at the top of this informational ecosystem, creating the content to be distributed. According to Nemer: "[influencers] use sophisticated image and video editing software to create convincing and emotionally engaging digital content. They are smart and know how to

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[10] I will use the quotation to mark the translation of the text present in the picture.

[11] According to Patrick Davidson, quoted by Grundlingh (2018, 148), "[a]n Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission". Grundlingh favours the same line of inquire that I will explore in this paper: "memes are in fact speech acts and that is why we are able to understand them and communicate with each other using them" (2018, 148). Since it is not my intention to propose a definition of meme or retrace its origin to Richard Dawkins' notion of meme, I will set the term aside and focus on the use of *pictures*.

[12] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/25/brazil-president-jair-bolsonaro-whatsapp-fake-news

manipulate content into memes and short texts that go viral".

In this paper, when I describe someone as a "Bolsonaro supporter" I will be referring to the active participants of the groups; encompassing, specially, Bolsonaro's army, influencers, and ordinary Brazilians that frequently resend to other people and groups the content shared by the influencers.

I will use Nemer's categorization and description of the content of the groups as a starting point, adding to it other types of propaganda I encountered using WhatsApp Monitor (my research encompasses the period from January to September 2019).

Government propaganda
1.1 Propaganda in favour of the government;
1.2 Delegitimization of traditional news media;
1.3 Material against universities and dissenting voices;
1.4 News campaign against specific issues contrary to the government.

Insurgency
2.1 Nationalism;
2.2 Anti-democratic material;
2.3 Material in favour of a popular and military uprising against the legislative and the judiciary.

Social supremacy
3.1 Pro gun propaganda;
3.2 Pro white heteropatriarchal propaganda;
3.3 Anti-left-wing politicians and supporters;

3.4 Anti-black;
3.5 Anti-LGBT;
3.6 Anti- northeasterners.[13]

The 13 types of propaganda, divided into 3 categories, have two main aims: (*i*) to foster hatred towards opposition and targeted groups (left-wing politicians and supporters, journalists, LGBTs, blacks, northeasterners etc) and (*ii*) to foster support and adoration for the narrative constructed by the government and its central members (specially, the president himself and his three oldest sons, that are also politicians). Thus, we can divide the propaganda into two large groups:

Negative propaganda:
1.1 Delegitimization of traditional news media;
1.2 Material against universities and dissenting voices;
1.4 News campaign against specific issues contrary to the government.
2.2 Anti-democratic material;
3.2 Anti-left-wing politicians and supporters;
3.3 Anti-black;
3.4 Anti-LGBTQ;
3.5 Anti-northeasterners.

Positive propaganda:
1.1 Propaganda in favour of the government;
2.1 Nationalism;

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[13] The Northeast of Brazil is the only region in which Bolsonaro did not receive the majority of votes in the election.

2.3 Material in favour of a popular and military uprising against the legislative and the judiciary;
3.1 Pro gun propaganda;
3.2 Pro white heteropatriarchal propaganda.

The negative propaganda is aimed to recruit the participants to hate and to channel that hatred towards social groups, institutions (the Supreme Court, Parliament, Federal Universities, traditional media etc.), politicians, and social figures. One way of channelling that hatred is becoming an active member of the groups, resending the content to the other groups and contacts, through WhatsApp and other social medias. (This is part of the perlocutionary effect of the propaganda – as I intend to show later in this paper). The next step in the hierarchical structure of the groups is to become a producer of content, achieving the post of influencer.

The positive propaganda is aimed at promoting white heteropatriarchal ideals, based on religion and the supposedly moral superiority of the military forces. This creates a *feeling of union towards a common ideal* and a deep segregation in Brazilian society: or you are part of the group (and accept those ideas) or you are the enemy to be criticized and destroyed.

A big portion of the Brazilian population is now "addicted" to a ritual that happens many times a day[14]: receiving images, texts, and videos that spark and fuel their hatred and, by resending those contents through social me-

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[14] As previously mentioned, in each group monitored by Nemer, an average of 1,000 messages were sent per day.

dia, turning the hatred in the pleasant feeling of belonging to a group that is fighting for their religion and families, against those they regard as evil. This group mentality can be illustrated by a common picture inside the groups (Figure 2).

Figure 2. "Let's save Brazil. Brazil above everything. God above all".

2. THE WORLDVIEW OF PRO-BOLSONARO GROUPS

In this section, I will briefly describe the worldview found in the pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups that I monitored from January to September 2019 – aiming to give someone not acquainted to the Brazilian current situation a general outlook.

A major element in the worldview shared by the groups is the acceptance of an idealized version of the military dictatorship, that took place in Brazil from 1964 to 1985. In

this rewritten version of the past, the white heteropatriarchal family is placed at the centre of society, in tune with Christian neopentecostal values. The importance of white heteropatriarchal ideals can be illustrated by Figure 3.

Figure 3. "You can cry [complain] as much as you want. The traditional family will always be the base of society. [vertically written] #proudtoberight-wing".[15]

Supporters believe that during the "good old days" of the military regime, law and order were ensured by the military respect of hierarchy and their supposedly moral superiority. Bolsonaro's government aims to reinstate this

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[15] Only in the South and Southeast regions of Brazil the whites are the majority of the population. In the South, for example, 78% is self-declared white. In the North, on the other hand, only 23% are self-declared white and 67% are declared *pardos* – of mixed ethnic ancestries. (https://www.cut.org.br/acao/download/1fcd516c53da22deaee03e41c795da50) (About the Pardo Brazilians: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardo_Brazilians). But no typical Brazilian family looks like a North-American soap opera family from the 50's (portrayed in the picture).

hierarchical structure, placing him as the father-figure of this hierarchy. He is dubbed by his supporters as "The Myth" and "Captain", and to a respectable portion of the Brazilian electorate his role has religious and messianic connotations (ex. Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4. Bolsonaro portrayed as having his hand guided by the hand of Jesus Christ.

Figure 5. Bolsonaro photograph at the day he was knifed, represented as being kissed and

protected by Christ. [16]

According the worldview present in those groups, the idyllic past of the military dictatorship was destroyed by the left-wing ideology. Through the use of what they regard as "cultural Marxism", "feminism", and "gender ideology" the left-wing parties supposedly eroded the traditional Christian family values, in order to create a corrupted government, in which "meritocracy" had no role and minorities were favoured, in detriment of the country.

Against what they regard as "feminism" and "gender ideology", a common type of meme is the "before and after" (ex. Figure 6). The pictures show people (most of the time women) and how they look after being exposed to what they regard as "feminism" and "gender ideology". According to the worldview of Bolsonaro supporters, after having been exposed to "feminism" and "gender ideology", women are "destroyed", since they would not be able to fulfil their submissive roles in a typical Christian patriarchal family.

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[16] Bolsonaro was knifed during the presidential campaign by Adélio Bispo de Oliveira (later acquitted, after a judge ruled him as mentally ill). Some supporters related Bolsonaro's suffering "to save us from communism" to Jesus Christ's suffering. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-48645339

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Figure 6. "Before / After".[17]

Sexual anxiety is also a central element of Bolsonaro's politics. LGBTQs are frequently attacked, because they are perceived as a menace to the traditional Christian family and religious values. Bolsonaro himself is a self-proclaimed "proud homophobe".[18]

Anti-intellectualism is also a central element in Bolsonaro supporters' worldview, and the attacks directed against Universities and research institutions through propaganda and disinformation are an important part of it. Universities are regarded as centres of "left-wing ideology", "cultural Marxism", "feminism", and "gender ideology". Federal Universities are repeatedly portrayed as places with naked people, parties, and frequent drug consumption (ex. Figure 7). Those images are then used as part of campaigns to defund public universities (specially courses related to Humanities – sociology and philosophy) and cut scholarships and research grants.

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[17] The black marking covering the eyes was inserted by me, in order to preserve the identity of the person depicted.
[18] http://news.trust.org/item/20190426213516-ysfvy/

Figure 7. "Federal University of Ceará".[19]

Bolsonaro supporters do not trust the content conveyed by academic research and traditional media (since they perceive the outcome of academic research as disguised left-wing propaganda). They only believe in what they receive from friends and acquaintances through social media (specially WhatsApp), and from the live feed and tweets of Bolsonaro and his sons. The outcome of this epistemic context is that they are prone to accept an unreal description of facts, fuelled by the paranoiac ideas that the communists are trying to regain control of the country.

Universities are also frequently acused of turning young men and women into "homessexuals" (ex. Figure 8 and 9).

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[19] The black markings covering the eyes were inserted by me, in order to preserve their identities.

Figure 8. "UFMG" (Federal University of Minas Gerais).[20]

UFMA orgulho de Universidade, só
produz "Gênios"

Figure 9. "UFMA [Federal University of Maranhão] the pride of the Universities, only produces 'Geniuses'". [21]

The monitored WhatsApp groups segregate the Brazilian society in two categories: those that accept Bolsonaro's worldview and are part of his "crusade" against the "corrupted communists" and those that are the enemy. Anyone that criticises Bolsonaro's government is immediately

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[20] The black markings covering the eyes were inserted by me, in order to preserve their identities.
[21] The black markings covering the eyes were inserted by me, in order to preserve their identities.

flagged as "left-wing" or as a "communist". Death threats and *digital lynching* are now common practices – forcing some opposition to flee the country.[22] They regard as a duty to attack those flagged as enemy and this is done as an expression of love for God and the Brazilian Nation.

Bolsonaro is repeatedly portrayed as a hero (ex. Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 10. "It is time for battle 26/05. A new era against communism is going to start. Come to the streets".[23]

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[22] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/11/brazil-political-exiles-bolsonaro

[23] The 26th of May 2019 was the date of a pro-Bolsonaro rally, that mobilised hundreds of thousands of people, in 300 cities throughout Brazil. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/26/jair-bolsonaro-supporters-rally-brazil

Figure 11. Bolsonaro represented as a soldier carrying Enéas Carneiro, a Brazilian far-right politician that died in 2007.

A common thread that unifies all groups is the hatred towards the politicians from centre-left and left-wing parties and supporters; specially the Labour Party politician Luiz Inácio *Lula* da Silva (the 35th President of Brazil from January 2003 to December 2010, that served time for corruption, in Curitiba (Brazil)) and Labour Party politician Dilma Rousseff (the 36th president of Brazil, held the position from January 2011 until her impeachment on 31 August 2016).[24] The dehumanization of centre-left and left-wing

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[24] The arrest of Lula is part of the investigation dubbed *Operation Car Wash* that prosecuted hundreds of politicians as part of a billionaire bribery scheme. (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35810578). Lula supporters see his arrest as a coup perpetrated by Bolsonaro's current Minister of Justice Sérgio Moro. Moro was the judge that prosecuted Lula. According to *The Intercept Brasil*: "A large trove of documents furnished exclusively to *The Intercept Brasil* reveals serious ethical violations and legally prohibited collaboration between the judge and prosecutors who last year convicted and imprisoned former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on corruption charges — a conviction that resulted in Lula being barred from the 2018 presidential Cont.

party politicians and supporters is a frequent theme of the memes distributed (ex. Figure 12).
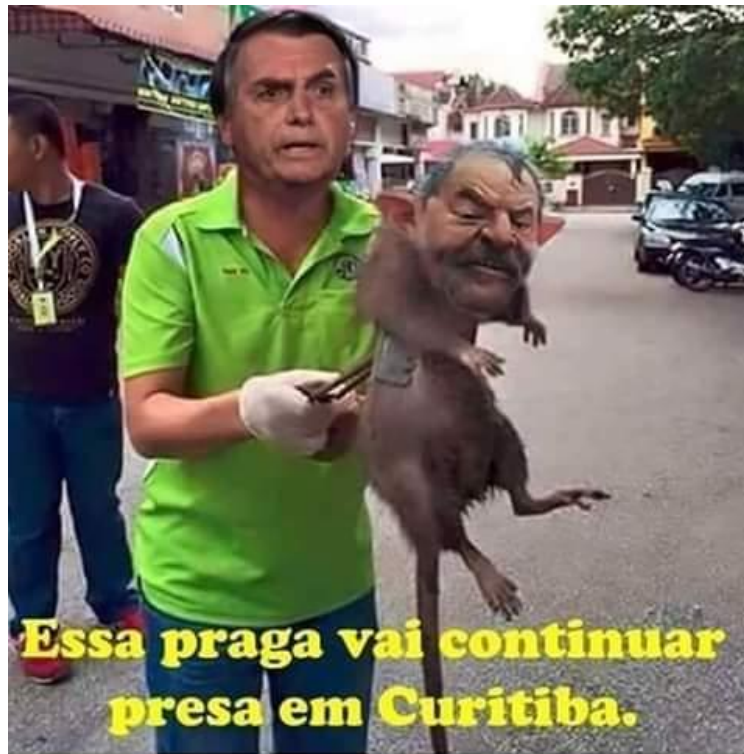
Figure 12. "This pest will continue imprisoned in Curitiba". The former president Lula represented as a rat.

The dehumanization is also commonly used towards people that opposes or criticizes Bolsonaro's government; specially politicians and journalists of traditional news media (ex. Figure 13).

election. These materials also contain evidence that the prosecution had serious doubts about whether there was sufficient evidence to establish Lula's guilt". (https://theintercept.com/2019/06/09/brazil-lula-operation-car-wash-sergio-moro/)

Figure 13. "Now she lives up to her name". The journalist and television presenter Miriam Leitão represented as a pig. (Her surname, in Portuguese, can be translated as "piglet").[25]

The incitement of violence is explicit in numerous memes (ex. Figures 14 and 15).

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[25] Miriam Leitão has strongly criticized Bolsonaro's government. During the military dictatorship, she was arrested in December 1972, for two months, and repeatedly tortured while pregnant. (http://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2014/08/miriam-leitao-relata-torturas-sofridas-durante-ditadura-militar.html)

Figure 14. "National Dream". Lula represented as a man electrocuted in an electric chair.

Figure 15. "I will prescribe the medication: one dose is enough". Bolsonaro portrayed as a doctor holding a bullet.[26]

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[26] The black vertical line on the right was placed by me over the name of the person that created the meme, in order to protect his privacy.

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The justification of the use of violence is partially based on the wrong idea that left-wing ideology and the Labour Party are connected to Nazism (ex. Figures 15 and 16).

Figure 15. "Study history and see the similarities".[27]

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[27] Lula was president from 2003 to 2010 and during that period no action was taken towards the creation of a totalitarian regime, that could justify the parallel between his government and Nazism or Communism.

Figure 16. "To be a Labour Party supporter in Brazil will be one day so shameful and re-
pugnant as to be a Nazi in Germany".

There is plenty of material in favour of a military upris-
ing against the legislative and the judiciary, to reinstate a
military dictatorship (ex: Figure 17 and 18).

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Figure 17. "Intervention is the solution. 70 tons of pure democracy. Here the 10 anti-corruption measures".[28]
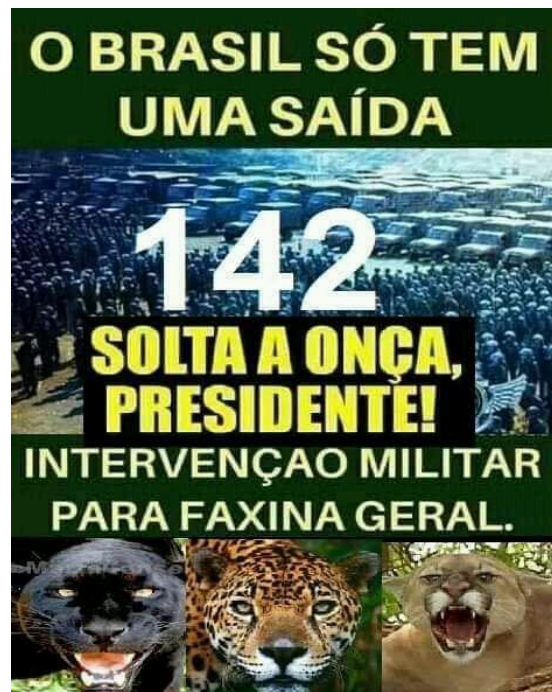

Figure 18. "Brazil has only one solution: [article] 142. Let the jaguar free, President! Military intervention for a complete cleanse".[29]

The endorsement of a military intervention is directly linked to the way Bolsonaro supporters reinterpret the past. In this new interpretation of the past, an inversion of basic human values is at play, in such a way that now torturers became heroes. Colonel Carlos Brilhante Ustra (1932-2015) was the head of the *Department of Information Operations* (DOI-CODI), from 1970 to 1974. During that period,

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[28] The *10 measures against corruption* is a bill created in 2015 by the Federal Prosecutor's Office, that collected over 2 million signatures, to improve the legal system to curb corruption and impunity in Brazil. The Lower House voted a completely disfigured version of the original text as many congressmen are being investigated and may face prosecution if the bill is implemented as initially written.

[29] The jaguars in Figure 15 represent the three branches of the military forces. The article 142 from the Brazilian Federal Constitution from 1988 states that the Armed Forces are intended for the defence of the country. Bolsonaro's supporters want to use the article 142 to reinstate a military regime, closing the supreme court and parliament.

502 cases of torture are known to have occurred.[30] Ustra is commonly referred as "the torturer of Dilma Rousseff" (the Brazilian former president); arrested by the military regime from 1970 to 1973, and repeatedly tortured during that period.[31] Colonel Ustra is portrayed and venerated in many images (ex. Figure 19).

Figure 19. "Brazil did not want communism. Bolsonaro is president".[32]

Rewriting the past is also a common tool used by pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups (ex. Figure 20).

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[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Alberto_Brilhante_Ustra
[31]   https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/10/brazil-president-weeps-report-military-dictatorship-abuses.
[32] The importance of Carlos Brilhante Ustra as a symbol that embodies the project that the new government is implementing in Brazil can attested by a Facebook post of Eduardo Bolsonaro. Eduardo is the third child of Jair Bolsonaro, since 2015 a Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil   (Lower   House). https://www.facebook.com/bolsonaro.enb/photos/a.232896736902958/870070519852240/?type=3&theater

Figure 20. "Militaries are making Lula run since 1964". The head of Lula was digitally inserted in this picture.

The original photograph is by the photojournalist Evandro Teixeira (Figure 21). The photograph was made on 21st of June 1968, in a day known as the Bloody Friday – in which 28 people were killed during a protest against the military regime.[33] The photograph depicts a student of Medicine been beaten by the military police.[34]

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[33] https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexta-feira_sangrenta.

[34] If we follow Jason Stanley's characterization of fascism, in his book *How Fascism Works*, the ideology present in Bolsonaro supporters' groups can be easily described as a form of fascism. According to Stanley: "Fascist politics includes many distinct strategies: the mythic past, propaganda, anti-intellectualism, unreality, hierarchy, victimhood, law and order, sexual anxiety, appeals to the heartland, and a dismantling of public welfare and unity". (2018a: xiv). All those elements are at play in Bolsonaro's politics.

Figure 21. Original photograph by Evandro Teixeira.[35]

3. PICTURES AND SPEECH ACTS

We can understand the act of sending someone a picture or posting it on social media as the performance of a *speech act*. David Novitz (1977) was one of the first authors to explore at length the use of pictures as part of speech acts.[36] According to him, when a picture is used to represent something, a *pictorial illocutionary act* is performed. Although the expression "illocutionary act" coined by John Austin (1962) contains the radical "locution", according to Novitz, Austin would be open to accept nonverbal illocutionary acts. We can, for example, bid in an auction just by raising our hand, without saying words. Novitz argues in favour of the use of pictures as non-verbal speech acts for asserting propositional contents.[37]

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[35] https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/imagem-em-que-lula-mais-novo-e-agredido-por-policiais-e-montagem.shtml

[36] The relation between speech acts and memes is explicitly developed by Grundlingh (2018).

[37] Since nonverbal illocutionary acts are possible and may broadly be called "speech acts", I will use this expression encompassing also nonverbal pictorial cases (the same applies to the core concepts of Austin's speech act theory: locutionary act and perlocutionary act). Although I think Cont.

Speech acts can be analysed as four different types of acts:[38]

Utterance Act: the speaker *utters* and expression from a certain language to the hearer in a certain context.

Locutionary Act: (by performing the utterance act) the speaker *says* something to the hearer.

Illocutionary Act: (by performing the locutionary act) the speaker *does* something in a certain context.

Perlocutionary Act: (by performing the illocutionary act) the speaker *affects* the hearer in a certain way.

The analyses of speech acts, commonly described as part of *pragmatics*, typically focus on the illocutionary acts (what we *do* when we perform certain contextualized locutionary acts). The understanding of how the words used have denotation and meaning is a central topic of *semantics*.

The great contributions from pictorial theories of the last decades can be characterized as *visual semantics*.[39] When we experience a representational picture, the design properties of the picture elicit in us the visual experience of a scene, typically composed of objects with properties arranged in space. How the formal visual properties of pictures (the design marks) are connected to content (the scene elicited) is a matter dealt by *picture theories*. In more precise terms: the role of a picture theory is to specify how *form is mapped*

Novitz's approach is very fruitful, his scope is too narrow since it deals only with cases of *propositional* pictorial illocutionary acts; cases in which pictures are used to state propositions. I use some of his ideas as a starting point, but I will not endorse all elements of his theory.

[38] Cf. Bach and Harnish (1979, 3).

[39] Specially Lopes (2004) and Kulvicki (2006).

on to meaning. On the other hand, we can use a picture that elicit in us a certain scene for different purposes. We can use the same picture to assert, warn, instruct, blackmail, cheer someone up etc. Understanding the contextualized use of pictures can be attributed to *visual pragmatics.*

John Austin (1962) classifies the different types of illocutionary acts as (1) Expositives: the act of stating, denying, accepting, correcting, etc. (2) Exercitives: warning, advising and nominating. (3) Commissives: assuming an obligation or declaring an intention of promising, swearing, betting or planning. (4) Verdictives: exercising judgement by convicting, ruling, valuing, analysing, calculating, etc. (5) Behabitives: apologising, thanking, sympathising, commanding, welcoming, etc.[40]

There are conditions under which each type of speech act may be performed. These are the conditions under which a given speech act is *felicitous.* Cases in which the felicity conditions are not met and as a result the illocutionary act is not performed are called *misfires.* Another type of failure of felicity conditions are the *abuses.* The commissive illocutionary act, for example, of *promising* will not be felicitous if performed by an insincere person - that has no intention of fulfilling the promise. When the felicity conditions are met, the illocutionary act 'takes effect' (in other terms, the 'illocutionary *uptake*' is secured).[41]

In Strawson's (1964) theory of speech acts (used by Novitz as an addition to Austin's theory), there are two types of illocutionary acts - although Strawson recognizes

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[40] Cf. Grundlingh (2018) and Schiffrin (2005).
[41] Cf. Austin (1962, 116) and Searle (1968, 409).

the possibility of intermediate cases. There are speech acts that are *conventional procedures* and speech acts that are *not essentially conventional* (1964, 458-459). Games and courts are typically conventional procedures. There are rules that ensure that the intention expressed by pronouncing a certain expression produces a certain effect. There are rules that secure that a certain locutory act will be a certain illocutionary act, resulting in a certain perlocutionary effect. In the case of a court, for example, a lawyer pronouncing at the appropriate time the phrase "my client pleads 'not guilty'" performs an illocutionary act that has a certain perlocutionary effect. Failure to obtain the expected outcome through the intention expressed in the locutionary act would, in this case, results from a breach of the rules and conventions of that context.

However, in *not essentially conventional* contexts, the intention expressed by performing the locutionary act can be thwarted without breaking rules and conventions. For example, in saying, in ordinary contexts "please", there is no guarantee that the desired effect will be obtained - that the interlocutor will welcome the plea made to her. For Strawson, "in the case of an illocutionary act of a kind not essentially conventional, the act of communication is performed *if* uptake is secured " (1964, 458, italics added).

We can use the schema of the four acts (proposed by Bach and Harnish (1979)) as a starting point, to comprehend the pictorial speech acts. We can adapt the four main elements of the speech acts (speaker, hearer, expression, and context) to the pictorial contexts by substituting the first three elements in the following way:

Speech act	Pictorial speech act
The speaker	The user of the picture (sender)
The hearer	The receiver of the picture
The expression uttered	The picture sent

One important element to notice is that the user of the picture does not need to be its producer. The idea that the *utterance act* in a pictorial context would be the *production* of the picture (or the meme) would be too narrow and would prevent us from analysing cases in which the act is performed by someone that is not the producer. The *use* of the picture in the digital context is the act of sending it to someone (through, for example, WhatsApp) or posting it on social media. Thus, *the user* can also be dubbed as *the sender*. In non-digital contexts, the use of a picture could be taken as the act of directing someone's attention to it (by pointing, displaying, exhibiting, publicizing in a printed form in books etc).[42]

We can formulate the four speech acts in a pictorial framework in the following way:

Utterance Act: the user *sends* a picture to the receiver in a certain context.

Locutionary Act: (by performing the utterance act) the user *says* something to the receiver.

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[42] Although I will focus on the act of sending a picture using WhatsApp, my analysis could be framed in relation to posting it (on any type of social media). I will leave to the reader the task of reframing the ideas here presented in case of preference for the social media context of posting pictures.

Illocutionary Act: (by performing the locutionary act) the user *does* something in the context.

Perlocutionary Act: (by performing the illocutionary act) the user *affects* the receiver in a certain way.

When a picture is sent to someone, the sender typically presupposes that the receiver is a *suitable observer* of that picture; someone able to grasp its *pictorial content*. The pictorial content in the pictorial speech act plays the role of what is *said* (the locutionary act) in verbal contexts.

According to Dominic Lopes' pictorial theory (2004), for a perceiver to grasp the pictorial content, the perceiver must:

Be able to recognize the design marks on the bidimensional surface of the picture as presenting recognizable aspects of a thing;

Be able to recognize those aspects as aspects of a certain subject (the object depicted).

Lopes calls (1) *content recognition* and (2) the *subject recognition*.[43] But, in order to accomplish (1) and move from (1) to (2), it is necessary:

Possess competence regarding the pictorial system used.

The competence regarding the pictorial system is analogous to the competence in relation to the specific language used, in the case of verbal utterance acts. Different pictorial systems present different visual aspects of things and range over different dimensions of variations. Naturalistic Albertian pictures, for example, typically present us the

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[43] The ideas here presented can be found in Lopes (2004, 144-150), section 7.4 *Pictorial Recognition.*

same aspects of things that can be seen of the things them-
selves from a certain perspective. The different ways an ob-
ject can be represented in this system varies similarly to the
ways an object can vary and still be recognizable in ordinary
perception. X-ray pictures, on the other hand, present us
different aspects of things and may vary under dimensions
of variations that are very different from ordinary percep-
tion. The competence regarding which aspects of things a
certain pictorial system present is a necessary condition for
picture perception - the recognition of its content and sub-
ject. Not everyone is competent in content recognition and
subject recognition of X-rays pictures.

One important element of Lopes account of depiction
is the idea that pictorial recognition is, partially, non-
conceptual. We can experience innumerable colours and
forms instantiated as design properties of a picture without
having concepts for those colours and forms. When these
properties are recognized as properties that the picture pre-
sents their subjects as having, we also do not need to pos-
sess the concepts in order to recognize these properties
(2004, 141).[44] The hazy frontier between non-conceptual
and conceptual content must be bridged in the case of rec-
ognizing a property as the property of an object of a certain
kind. In this case, it is required the possession of the con-
cept of that specific kind. I can only recognize in a picture a
cylindrical shape as the shape of a *mug*, if I possess the con-

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[44] For example, it is not necessary to possess the concept of a 'cylinder' to see and recognize one in
a picture. What is required, as Lopes argues based on David Marr's theory of vision (1984), is the
mental representation of the shape relative to a frame of reference based on the shape (2004,
141). The stable shape comprises the aspects under which the object may be recognized.

cept of mug. Similarly, in case of recognition of individual objects, concepts are also required. I can only recognize the picture as of an individual object or person, if I possess the required conceptual resources for that individual content.[45]

Thus, in the case of kind recognition (objects of a certain type recognised as falling under that type) and individual recognition (individual persons and objects), we can add a fourth requirement:

To possess the conceptual resources necessary to that specific kind and individual recognition.

Once a perceiver can fulfil those four conditions, she will be a suitable observer, able to grasp the pictorial content. Pictures that possess suitable perceivers are called by Lopes 'basic pictures' (2004, 152-156). Suitable observers can recognize in pictures properties, kinds, and individuals.

The four requirements found in Lopes are connected to picture perception in general. We can introduce a fifth requirement for *photographic* pictorial contents, allowing the distinction between the general idea of locutionary *pictorial* acts and the specific locutionary *photographic* acts. The fifth requirement can be expressed as follows:

To possess a minimal understanding that the picture perceived is generated by photographic means.

The notion of a suitable observer can also be used to explore the expressive content of pictures. The suitable observer not only can have visual experiences with the kinds of contents that we have when we experience a certain picture, but also will respond to what a picture expresses in

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[45] A point stressed by Lopes is that, although subject recognition requires the possession of that subject concept, the recognition skills that trigger the recognition do not require.

similar ways as us. A sad picture is a picture that a suitable observer could perceive as expressing sadness.[46] The expressive element, according to Lopes (2005), may be connected to figure expression ("an expression that is wholly attributable to a depicted person or persons" (P. 51)), to scene expression ("attributable at least in part to a depicted scene" (P. 52)), and design expression ("an expression that is wholly attributable to a picture's design or surface" (P. 57)).

In sum: when a user sends a picture to a receiver, she presupposes that the receiver will be able to recognize the pictorial content (the scene depicted and its objects/individuals) and respond to it in an appropriated way. The recognized pictorial content is what the user *says* by sending the picture to the perceiver. What the expresses will contribute to the force of the speech act performed and to its perlocutionary effects (as it will explored in the next section).

An important difference between language and pictures is that, in the case of ordinary propositions of the subject-predicate form, syntax specifies which entity is referred to and what is predicated of it. Sentences of the form subject-predicate have a referential and a predicative part, and the position of the terms in the sentence determines which syntactic roles it plays. Languages like German, Greek, and Latin can express the syntactic function of the terms by means declensions. In pictures, on the other hand, there is no clear determination of what is referred to. A picture of a house on a mountain may be used to refer to the house, to

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[46] About the expressive content of pictures, see Lopes' book *Sight and Sensibility* (2005).

the mountain, to features of the house, to the vegetations covering the mountain, etc. This problem is brought to the foreground when we try to express propositionally the content of a picture. The picture of a woman drinking coffee can be expressed propositionally in innumerable ways. Pictures convey a huge amount of visual information, in such a way that the propositional expression of its content may be very difficult to achieve. We would need to describe the position of her body, of each arm, fingers, torso, how she holds the cup, the visual properties of each element etc. Moreover, if we accept that pictures contain non-conceptual information, we may not have the conceptual resources to fully express the pictorial content. According to Gareth Evans: "of course the content of even the simplest photograph [...] will be something that can be specified only with some loss" (1982, 125). The idea that the expression of the pictorial content may bring some loss seems very plausible, and I do not see any harm in accepting it - since the thesis here developed does not hang on it. But even if we restrict our content to three elements "woman", "coffee" and the action of "drinking", the change from passive to active voice may invert the term that occupies the referential position: "a woman drinks coffee" to "a coffee is being drunk by a woman". The difference between active and passive voice does not seem to be of great importance from the point of view of semantics, since those sentences would have the same truth-maker and, consequently, it could be argued that they express the same proposition. But in an actual context of use this difference could be crucial. If a user points to a picture and says "I want that!", the determination of what occupies the referential position, tar-

geted by the demonstrative "that", will be of great importance.

According to Alex Grzankowski: "It might be helpful to think of a picture as similar to book in this regard" (2015, 160). The pictorial content would be equivalent to a huge conjunction of propositions – each stating parts of the pictorial content. Grzankowski main argument, in favour of the idea that picture have propositional contents, is that we can apply to pictures linguistic devices as modal operators and negation. We can, for example, point to a picture depicting a man jumping over a moving car and say "that is possible". Since modal operators (like possible, impossible, necessary, contingent) operate over propositional contents, the pictorial content must be propositional. According to him: "'That' [in the proposition "that is possible"], I suggest, is anaphoric on something like the proposition that the man is jumping over the car, a proposition encoded in the picture" (2015, 161). The same applies to the possibility of negating a picture by saying "that is not what happened".

Although the question whether pictures have a propositional content may constitute a valuable and fruitful line of enquire, this question can be sidestepped through a change in the order of priorities, that is at the centre of the idea explored in this paper. Instead of asking "are pictorial contents propositional?", the question should be: "do we use pictures to express propositions in interlocutory contexts?". In other terms: "are there cases in which a user of a picture uses it to convey to a perceiver a propositional content?" And the answer is "yes". In those cases, the picture is used as part of the expositive illocutionary act of *asserting* something.

Therefore, we do not need to answer the abstract question if pictorial content is propositional. We do use pictures to express propositional contents. A way to account for this use is through Lopes' pictorial theory. A suitable perceiver (that fulfils the requirements (1) to (4)) can recognize in a picture objects, individual, and visual properties attributed to the depicted entities. If those requirements are shared by user and receiver, a user may use the picture to convey to the receiver a propositional content – as part of what she *says* by the act of sending the picture to the receiver. And by performing that locutionary act, the user may *do* something (the illocutionary act) and affect the receiver in a certain way (the perlocutionary act).

We can also use similar change in the order of priorities to sidestep one of the central issues in the debate of philosophy of photography. This issue can be stated as follows: are photographs representations that can be true or false? There is a common or garden saying that answers this question negatively, through the idea that "photographs don't lie" – in other terms: photographs are fictionally incompetent. In this perspective, photographs can be understood as a form of prosthetic visual access to distal objects, that are the causal source of the photographs. Since representations are in principle capable of truth and falsity, photographs are not representation, because they are not apt to falsity. Similar line of inquire was made famous by Roger Scruton (2008) understanding of ideal photographs.

We do not need to deal with the abstract question if photographs (apart of any context of use) are in themselves representations capable of truth and falsity (this would be similar to asking if sentences are capable of truth and falsi-

ty, a part from expressing any specific proposition). In the perspective explored in this paper this question can be reformulated as: "are there cases in which a user of a photograph uses it to convey to a receiver a propositional content, committing herself to the occurrence of the pictorial content conveyed by the photograph (or part of the content), in such a way that we would qualify this use as apt to truth and falsity?" And the answer is, again, clearly "yes". If someone sends a photograph in a context in which it is implicit or explicitly stated that what the pictorial content portraits is what it is happening at a certain time and a suitable observer in this context would recognize the pictorial content in a certain way, this assertive illocutionary act would be apt to truth or falsity.

Another problem faced by pictures and photographs is underdetermination. For example, a photograph of Maria could be indistinguishable (pixel by pixel) of a photograph of her identical twin sister Martha. The pictorial content of a photograph is not sufficient for the determination of the referent, since this visual description (the pictorial content) could be satisfied by innumerable visually indistinguishable objects. Another form of underdetermination is, according to Cohen and Meskin (2004), that photographs are "*spatially agnostic informant*" (and the same could be said of pictures in general). Photographs do not typically convey information about the depicted object location in relation to oneself. In this respect, photographs are also *temporally agnostic informant*, since they do not typically convey information about the temporal location of the object in relation to oneself (apart from determining the photo-

graphed event as past).

But focusing on the speech act performed, the problem posed by those forms of underdeterminations is deflated in at least two ways. In a context of interlocution, in which the receiver is a suitable observer, there are additional contextual information that helps the determination of the pictorial content. Pictures are typically used in connection to verbal elements that are part of the illocutionary act. In the case of memes, a vast portion of those pictures have verbal elements attached to it. Thus, although the general sceptical challenge posed by pictorial underdetermination and spatiotemporal agnosticism may not be here theoretically overcome, in practice, we use pictures and photographs in contexts with additional contextual information that facilitates the determination of the pictorial content. The contextual information is also important for determining which entity is referred to (or entities are referred to) – deflating also the problem posed by the possibility of changing from active to passive voice in the verbal expression of the pictorial content and indistinguishable objects.

It is important to notice that posting pictures on social media and sending them through message apps cannot be regarded as part of *conventional procedures* (according to Strawson's terminology (1964). There are no sets of rules that guarantee that once a certain picture is sent the uptake of the illocutionary act is secured. These contexts are *not essentially conventional*. This fact brings to the foreground the importance of additional contextual information shared by the sender and receiver. Those contextual elements will be crucial for the felicity of pictorial illocutionary acts and the

achievement of the desired perlocutionary effects.

4. THE ANALYSES OF SOME EXAMPLES

In this section, I will apply the conceptual resources of the last section to analyse some of the examples seen in section 3. I do not intend to analyse all the examples, but to give an overview of how the idea of pictorial speech acts can be applied to them.

Let us take as our starting point Figures 7 and 8:

Figure 7. "Federal University of Ceará".

Figure 8. "UFMG" (Federal University of Minas Gerais).[47]

The *utterance act* is the act of sending these pictures to someone or to a group. A suitable observer would recognize the pictorial content of Figure 7 as of young adults wearing underwear, with their arms lifted and hands behind their heads, etc. The written content suggests that this scene takes place at the Federal University of Ceará. A suitable observer would also recognize Figure 8 as of young men and women kissing each other in front of a sign that says "UFMG" (Federal University of Minas Gerais). The recognized pictorial contents and the verbal element attached to it constitute what is *said* by sending someone this picture – the *locutionary* act.

In a Bolsonaro supporter group, the use of this kind of picture can be understood as part of an *exercitive illocutionary act* (in relation to Austin's types of speech acts) of *warning* the receivers of what is happening at Federal Universities. Since Federal Universities are publicly funded, the idea of using federal resources to support acts contrary to Christian values (deemed by them obscene), instead of "proper education", is motive of strong *outrage* and *indignation*. To cause those feelings in the perceiver is part of the *perlocutionary act* aimed by the sender of the picture.

When the uptake of the illocutionary act takes place (receiving that warning as a warning), one perlocutionary effect aimed by the sender is further achieved when outrage and indignation are to a such degree that it turns the receiver into a new sender. The receiver takes as a duty to his

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[47] The black markings covering the eyes were inserted by me, in order to preserve their identities.

country, family, and friends to warn them of what he now believes is happening inside Federal Universities.[48] By sending this picture to other groups, the receiver turns its outrage and anger in to the pleasant feeling of belonging to a group that is fighting for their religion and families, against those they regard as evil. And the process can restart and have a viral cascade effect in other groups with geometrical proportions. Another perlocutionary effect of those pictures is to cause disbelief regarding researches and ideas developed in Federal Universities in general. Pictures with a similar content as Figures 7 and 8 are taken as proofs that those institutions are part of a plot to destroy Christian values and should be defunded and not trusted.

We can use the distinction proposed by Jason Stanley (2018b) between at-issue-content and not-at-issue-content to understand the structure of the pictorial act performed with Figure 8. By sending Figure 8 to a group of Bolsonaro supporters, what is *at-issue* is that federal funds are used to worsen young men and women, proofing that Federal Universities cannot be trusted. But a central element of this pictorial act is the acceptance, as a common ground belief shared by sender and receiver, that there is something negative and wrong in relation to homosexuality. This is not something at-issue, but directly inserted as a ground belief in this context. In Wittgenstein's later terminology (1969), this is a "hinge proposition" in the shared conceptual framework - in Stanley's terminology, it is a *not-at-issue-*

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[48] Although I use the feminine "she" as the gender pronoun throughout this paper, it is my belief that the majority of active Bolsonaro supporters and influencers in the groups are male. For this reason, when referring to Bolsonaro supporters I will use the masculine pronoun.

content (2018b, Chapter 4). The public debate sparkled by the use of pictures with similar content, set in motion by Bolsonaro opposition, focused on showing that Federal Universities as trustworthy and that federal funds are put to good use in those institutions. But the negative view in relation to homosexuality becomes a moot point in the debate caused by those pictures, as a *not-at-issue-content*.

Figure 12 has a different level of complexity, since it is a caricature (a photomontage) that combines expositive and verdictive elements.

Figure 12. "This pest will continue imprisoned in Curitiba".

The pictorial content depicts a scene with Lula represented as a huge rat and Bolsonaro as the one that has captured the rodent. The text also reaffirms the characterization of Lula as a "pest". This constitutes the locutionary act performed by sending this picture to some-

one.

The illocutionary act, in this case, can be interpreted as two folded. It is in part a verdictive illocutionary act of *valuing* Lula as a "pest" – and, consequently, as something that should be eliminated.[49] But it also has the expositive elements of *stating* and *accepting* Bolsonaro as the one responsible for getting rid of the "pest". The perlocutionary act is also two folded. For a typical Bolsonaro supporter, receiving his picture fuel and sparks hatred and contempt towards Lula and what he represents (if Lula is a pest to be eliminated, his supporters and people that accept the worldview defended by Lula also should be object of hatred and contempt). The other side of the two folded perlocutionary effect is the feeling of gratitude and admiration towards Bolsonaro, since he is supposedly the person that is "saving" us from the "pest".

If the hatred and contempt towards Lula and the feeling of gratitude and admiration towards Bolsonaro is sufficiently strong, the receiver of this picture will become a sender, and this would be a further perlocutionary effect achieved by the illocutionary acts performed.

Figure 10 is also a case that can be understood as combining different illocutionary acts.

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[49] According to Jason Stanley: "the well-established link between dehumanizing propaganda and genocide should make all of us wary when a group of our fellow humans is represented as subhuman animals, insects, or vermin. The message of such representation is to legitimate the kind of treatment our society recommends for the relevant kind of animal". (2018b, 150)

Figure 10. "It is time for battle 26/05. A new era against communism is going to start. Come to the streets".[50]

The picture contains Bolsonaro depicted as a medieval crusader holding a sword. The picture also contains a hand on fire (on the right side) and the text: "It is time for battle 26/05. A new era against communism is going to start. Come to the streets". Those elements constitute the locutionary act performed by the utterance act (of sending this picture to someone).

The *expositive* dimension of the illocutionary act performed is the act of *stating* and *accepting* Bolsonaro as someone that fights a "Holy War" (attributing to him the virtues associated with warriors and crusaders). Another important element present in the use of this picture is the

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[50] The 26th of May 2019 was the date of a pro-Bolsonaro manifestation, that mobilised hundreds of thousands of people, in 300 cities throughout Brazil. (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/26/jair-bolsonaro-supporters-rally-brazil)

behabitive aspect of *inviting* the receiver to be part this "Holy War" - "Come to the streets". There is also a commissive element, since, through the use of this meme, the sender *promises* to the receiver that "A new era against communism is going to start!", as an outcome of this new "Holy War".

The perlocutionary effect is also complex. One effect, for Bolsonaro supporters, is the feeling of gratitude and admiration towards Bolsonaro – since he is supposedly the one that commands this "Holy War" against communism. Another perlocutionary effect results from accepting the illocutionary invitation to "come to the streets" and to engage in the "war" as an active member. Another form of engagement is also achieved by the act of resending this picture. The receiver turned into sender also sees himself as part of the "Holy War" and is now flooded with positive feelings of patriotism and love for his family and friends (since they typically regard Bolsonaro's struggle as a fight to defend the Nation and to protect Christian family values against an enemy that wants to destroy them).

In Figure 4, Bolsonaro is portrayed as having his hand guided by the ghostly hand of Jesus Christ.

Figure 4.

The illocutionary act performed by sending this kind of picture to Bolsonaro supporters can be understood in the following way. By sending the picture, the sender is stating that he accepts that Bolsonaro is guided by Christian values and that his decisions are in part "God's will". The sender is also showing that he values and ranks him as a "sacred" person, that should be admired and followed. This speech act also combines commissive and behabitive elements, in the sense that it *invites* and *commands* the receiver to agree to this acceptance and ranking. It is a shared belief of the group and in order to be part of the group the receiver also has to add those ideas to his basic beliefs.

In the cases of commissives and behabitives speech acts, an important felicity condition is related to the authority of the person that performs the act. If a captain gives a command to a subordinate, the uptake of the illocutionary act has a good chance of being secured (the case in which the subordinate would accept that what the captain said is a

command and behave accordingly). The subordinate, on the other hand, typically does not have the authority necessary to perform the illocutionary act of commanding the captain (even if she performs the same locutionary act – uttering the same words). The uptake will probably not be secured.

In the case of the pro-Bolsonaro pictures, the authority at play in fulfilling the felicity condition in commissives and behabitives cases are of at least three types. The opinions of the *influencers* are highly regarded by the members of the groups. The influencer is an authority figure. When the speech act is performed by the influencer, it has an additional force, due to the authoritative role to him attributed. The same applies to Bolsonaro himself, his sons, and government staff, when they post contents on social media. Posts by those authority figures are more prone to having the uptake secured.

But there is a second kind of authority that is more abstract, pervasive and dangerous. When someone that does not occupy an important position inside the groups (as an influencer), but resends contents to his contacts, the one that performs the speech act is speaking *in the name of all Bolsonaro supporters*. There is the abstract idea of the group of all groups of supporters: a *collective* that shares the values and accepts the narrative fostered by Bolsonaro. The authority, in this case, partially comes from this collective.

An additional authoritative element is present in this case due to the fact that anyone that does not accept the values and narrative embraced by the collective is immediately regarded as the enemy. This brings us to the third

form of authoritative roles present in Bolsonaro groups. Using *intimidation* and *sheer violence* some users convey the content and secure the uptake of some illocutionary acts performed. It is a common rhetoric used in those groups verbal expressions of the form: "you are an idiot if you don't believe this", "you have to be really stupid to not believe that", "we have to destroy those *reds* [the opposition generally regarded as communist]", "if those vagabond vermins believe that, they have to be eradicated" etc. The level of verbal violence towards those that do not believe in the narrative and values of the collective is a great incentive for accepting the content conveyed (securing the uptake of the speech acts) and not becoming the "enemy". As mentioned before, death threats are also a common tool used against the "enemy".

As already stated, in the groups monitored by David Nemer, a participant received an average of 1,000 messages per group, per day. Thus, a ritual that would repeat itself hundreds of times a day would be receiving pictures with similar contents as those exemplified in this paper. Once a receiver is repeatedly exposed to contents similar to the ones here presented and comes to accept the ideas asserted by them (that in Federal Universities people behave in the way depicted in the photograph (Figures 7, 8, and 9), that Bolsonaro is the one responsible for getting rid of the "pest" that is Lula (Figure 12), that he fights a "Holy War" against communism guided by the hand of Christ (Figures 4 and 10)), those ideas are added to the ground believes of the receiver. Now he is part of the group and shares their worldview.

The producers of those picture (the influencers) have

the constant intention of designing images that go viral. Once ideas are added to the common ground believes of the group through the use of those pictures, in order to add new ideas they must (*i*) be in line with the common ground believes of the group and (*ii*) be sufficiently emotionally engaging to achieve the perlocutionary effect to go viral. This creates a context in which the new pictures will have to be *stronger* and *emotionally* more engaging than the previous ones. This, in turn, leads to the use of imagery that sparks even more hatred, outrage, and indignation. In a context in which fake news are abundant, there is no limit of how far to go to achieve this aim (ex. Figures 20 and 21).

5. The role of visual illiteracy

There are at least three forms of naivety that render the receivers of those pictures prone to the uptake of the illocutionary act performed and to actively engage them, becoming senders. Since the pictures used in those groups are aesthetically amateurish and with low resolution (kitsch), the receivers do not regard those pictures as a sophisticated form of propaganda designed to manipulate them, by recruiting strong negative and positive emotions (hatred, outrage, indignation, nationalism, adoration, etc). The emotionally loaded element also prevents them from engaging the pictures in a more rational way. As a result, they do not notice how epistemically flawed those pictures are. Those strong emotions also push the receivers to propagate the content virally. We can describe this process as based on three forms of naivety: *aesthetic naivety*, *communica-*

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tional naivety, and *epistemic naivety*. In this final section, I will explore those ideas to argue that educational initiatives aiming at developing the visual literacy can be an important tool to preserve democracies.

According to Rodrigo Cássio Oliveira (from the Federal University of Goiás), the kitsch aesthetics is a recurring tool used by Bolsonaro. The "aesthetic reactionaryism" is a central part of Bolsonaro's propaganda.[51] The kitsch aesthetics is present in the clothes he wears, the way he talks, the "improvised" way he addresses his supporters via live video feeds and tweets, the way he meets politicians and representatives from other countries, etc. This aesthetics helps him to portray himself as *an outsider* – although he has been a professional politician for the last 30 years (skipping, during those years, through more than half a dozen political parties).

The naivety in relation to how kitsch aesthetics is used in politics also plays an important part in the success of the propaganda via pictures in Bolsonaro supporter groups. Receivers do not see those pictures as part of a communicational act designed to manipulate them, by recruiting strong negative and positive emotions. They regard those pictures simply as warnings and information created and distributed by "good citizens", that are trying to protect the shared values of the group. They are regarded as trustworthy as friends, acquaintances, and family members that distribute those pictures. In this regard, the aesthetic naivety leads to a form of *communicational naivety*.

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[51] https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/e-a-imagem-estupido/

By having the perlocutionary effect of causing hatred, outrage, indignation, etc, those pictures also place the receivers in a very precarious epistemic position. Blinded by the strong emotions, the receivers act impulsively, playing an important part in the viral distribution of misinformation and hate speech. They also became indifferent to the epistemic flaws of the pictures. This can be attested even in the cases of memes that use undoctored photographs. As in the example of Figure 7, although the photograph depicts undressed young adults, with their arms lifted and hands behind their heads, and, as a photograph, there is a high probability of representing something that actually happened, there is no guaranty whatsoever that it took place in the Federal University of Ceará – as suggested by the text accompanying the picture. Factchecking websites showed that a large portion of the pictures containing undressed people supposedly in Federal Universities did not take place in universities.[52] But even in cases in which the photographs are of people inside Federal Universities, the pictures are used to convey misinformation. When a sender performs the illocutionary act of *warning* the receivers of what is happening, there is the implicit idea that those scenes are happening nowadays and in such a number that it justifies the uptake of the act as a warning.[53]

But even if those photographs were a correct visual de-

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[52] https://g1.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/noticia/2019/05/20/e-fake-que-foto-mostra-estudantes-nus-em-universidade.ghtml

[53] Some of the photographs used in those memes are from 2004 (not 2019) and are part of a 10 minutes protest made by 20 people (against a private university that expelled a student because of the clothes she was wearing). http://www.e-farsas.com/as-fotos-de-alunos-sem-roupa-em-universidades-publicas-sao-reais.html)

scription of what were frequently happening, the way the receivers engage them emotionally prevent from asking important questions: why the supposedly sexual freedom is regarded as something so dangerous? Why sexual anxiety plays a central role?

Another element that makes receivers prone to accept uncritically the content conveyed by those pictures is the fact that frequently they receive them from friends, acquaintances and family members. The fact that those pictures are sent by someone that they regard as trustworthy lends weight to the truth of the content conveyed – although that person is just a small link in the distribution system of those contents.

A further epistemic problem related to the use of pictures by Bolsonaro supporters is that, once a belief conveyed by the use of the pictures is added as a shared common belief of the group, the revision of that idea in the light of additional information becomes unlikely. Once an idea is added as a shared common belief, it is absorbed and supported by the hole narrative accepted by the group. For example, Bolsonaro supporters believe that all that is negative in Brazil is connected to left-wing ideology and the Labour Party. They also believe that the international support for the preservation of the Amazon Forest is a "coup" to gain access to the minerals and oil in the Amazon region. If the French president Emmanuel Macron is interested in the preservation of the Amazon forest, thus, as corollary of the beliefs accepted by the group, Macron must be connected to left-wing ideology and the Brazilian Labour Party. Figure 22 depicts Macron as angrily saying: "We paid a lot to Lula's Labour Party for the Amazon, and now we want

what is ours".

Figure 22. Emmanuel Macron depicted as saying: "We paid a lot to Lula's Labour Party
for the Amazon, and now we want what is ours".

This picture is used by Bolsonaro supporters as a warning of Macron's "real" intentions and the role of the Labour Part, compelling the receivers to add those beliefs to
their common ground beliefs. The fact that Macron never
said those words and that there is no evidence of his connection to Lula or the Labour Party has no power to remove that idea from the shared common beliefs once it is
added.[54]

The use of picture in pro-Bolsonaro Groups leads to a
vicious circle: pictures are used to add beliefs to the shared
common ground beliefs of the group, but, once these beliefs are added, they are justified by the narrative accepted
by the group (the internal "logic" that connects their shared
common beliefs), and "external" facts have no power falsifying the beliefs conveyed by those pictures. In simpler terms:

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[54] Besides that, the French Guiana is an overseas department and region of France. The Guiana
Amazonian Park covers 41% of French Guiana and is the largest park of a country from the European Union. France would not need to pay Brazil to have access to the Amazon Forest.

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they use pictures to construct and strength a narrative and then they use the narrative to justify those pictures.

Fighting those memes with memes of equal strength but opposing ideology is a futile enterprise. Opposition has used memes to criticize Bolsonaro and his supporters, fuelling animosity and hate in social media. What is futile in this approach is that it only increases the hatred that has divided the country. This memes war has reached a breaking point in which actual violence will be likely the outcome. It is necessary to develop ways of engaging those pictures in a less emotionally loaded way, allowing a better assessment of their epistemic value. In this perspective, educational initiatives aiming at developing the visual literacy of the population can be an important tool. Understanding the communicational role of pictures and how they can be used to manipulate will allow a more analytical and rational perspective, in which the emotional engagement could be deflated.

Resumo: Tendo em vista analisar imagens distribuídas em grupos do WhatsApp de apoiadores de Jair Bolsonaro, explorarei a ideia de que o ato de enviar uma imagem para alguém através de mídias sociais realiza um ato de fala. Poderemos então separar o ato de proferimento (de enviar a imagem para o espectador em um certo contexto), o ato locutório (o que é dito através do conteúdo pictórico), o ato ilocutório (a ação realizada através do proferimento do conteúdo pictórico), e o ato perlocutório (de afetar o espectador). As imagens analisadas foram coletadas de janeiro a setembro de 2019, através do WhatsApp Monitor. Meu argumento filosófico central encontra-se na seção 3, na qual desenvolvo a ideia dos atos de fala pictóricos e a sua base conceitual. Para compreender o papel comunicacional de imagens é necessário suplementar as teorias pictóricas (semântica visual) com uma teoria comunicacional baseada na teoria dos atos de fala (pragmática visual). O desenvolvimento das linhas gerais da pragmática visual é a contribuição filosófica central visada por este artigo. Por fim, argumento que há três formas de ingenuidade que levam o espectador a estar apto à apreensão do ato ilocutório: ingenuidade estética, ingenuidade comunicacional e ingenuidade epistêmica.

Palavras-chave: atos de fala, fotografias, conteúdo pictórico, WhatsApp.

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