THESIS SUMMARY

to the Ph.D. dissertation of

Eszter Deli

titled

The Triadic Concept of Visual Rhetoric - Theoretical Framework and Case Studies

Visual Rhetoric in Disaster News Communications

Supervisor:

„Dr. Petra Katalin Aczél Ph.D"
full professor

2018, Budapest

Institute of Behavioural Sciences and Communication Theory

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Contents

1. Background of research, relevance of the topic

Visual rhetoric has come about with the emergence of a relatively new theoretical framework that describes how visual images communicate as opposed to aural, verbal and other messages. Due to its complex and interdisciplinary nature, it is related to various disciplines such as linguistics, semiotics, art history, marketing and communication, or classical rhetoric (CTI Reviews [2016]). But its disciplinary existence is refuted by many prominent thinkers of the field.

The long-established rhetoric enjoyed absolute ideological hegemony, focusing purely linguistic artefacts, while visual symbols were considered insignificant, and indicated as secondary. Because of this discourse-based tradition, rhetoricians do not have the sophisticated understanding needed in order to create meaning by visual components (Foss [2008]). The birth of the present dissertation was inspired by the curiosity to assess the controversies and the dichotomy surrounding visual rhetoric. The choice of my treatise topic was highly motivated by the fact that the visual components of argumentation and persuasion do not get enough attention, despite the fact that most often we refer to the present period as the *"modern era of pictures"* (Tasnádi [2012]) or – based on Mitchell – the *"pictorial turn"* (Mitchell [1995]) and we can say that pictures tower over words as never before.

The present dissertation – going beyond the approach of rhetoric as persuasion and framing – offers a new paradigm. My paper presents a compound, complex rhetoric, the specificity of which is that it is not just about the object, but about how the object is made and how it is being used. For this reason, the theoretical frame of argumentation as product (argumentation as a result or artefact), procedure (argumentation as an operative procedure) and process (argumentation as a communicative process) is considered valid for the images, referring to the triadic concept of visual rhetoric in the title:

1.1. Argumentation as a product (productum)

An argumentative text differs from a descriptive or a narrative one in that it sets out a certain position, which it seeks to justify (Aczél [2005]). The examination of this type of text is based primarily on the principles of formal logic, and with the help of formal logic one can determine the validity and correctness of the proof. The most basic element and organising principle of proof is called syllogism, that is, propositional statements, with distinct premises that lead to the conclusion. If the form of the argumentation is incorrect and the conclusion is

not proven, then the syllogism itself is also invalid. Validity therefore applies to the form and is independent of the content of the argument (al-Musawi [2006]).

Argumentation as a product offers a fairly free view: it does not deal with the creator of the argument, it does not deal with their purpose and nor does it deal with whom the argument was addressed to. It is basically a concept deprived of its contextual elements. The product-oriented view is a structure-centred perspective which neglects or does not primarily deal with communicative aspects.

Visual rhetoric regarded as a product or artefact is no more than an actual picture created by rhetors when they use visual symbols for communication. We can regard it as tangible evidence of creative activities such as paintings, advertisements, or buildings. The artefact-oriented approach therefore reinforces the same concept that the product-type approach offers: a context-independent, result-centred approach that focuses on a product, work of art or object, that is, an artefact.

1.2. Argumentation as a procedure (procedura)

The basis of the argumentation as procedure view is that the argumentation differs from the other means of expressing disagreement by containing certain rules that control the discourse (Aczél [2005]). In recent years, the argumentation as a procedure perspective has been applied to more informal arguments too. The approach called pragma-dialectics was introduced by experts at the University of Amsterdam, led by Eemeren and Grootendorst. The pragma-dialectical perspective of the afore mentioned researchers is based on the speech act theory, however, Douglas Walton's theory of argumentative fallacies is also relevant to the procedural approach (Walton, [1995]).

Within the field of visuality, these controlled processes are equally understood, where a certain visual element is interpreted in relation to another element, examining them in their contexts, interactions and contradictions. The examination of visual elements, therefore, gives an answer to how the possible focuses and perspectives of the images are set by the creator of the image within the logic and the method of catastrophe news images.

1.3. Argumentation as a process (processzus)

The process-based approach focuses on the conflicting and opposing ideas as well as their solutions that arise in everyday communication. In this sense, argumentation can be

interpreted as a type of interaction. This argumentative process sees the validity of argumentation as a functional concept, and thus considers persuasion as an intent or effect.

This pragmatic, effect, intention and rhetoric based perception of argumentation is also valid in the case of visuals. Images are capable of carrying meaning intended by their creators in an evocative, compressed way, thus engaging and interacting with the audience (Aczél [2012] p. 102). Just think of the images of the news, which do not transmit information, but they convey events and values, thus ensuring the possibility of experiencing and expressing opinion. The primary purpose of the process-based approach to visual argumentation is to show a certain topos: based on a picture I may think of a person being a victim and a villain, and this is due to the rhetorical nature of the argumentation.

The purpose of the dissertation is therefore to develop a comprehensive rhetorical theory by demonstrating the validity of visual rhetoric as an autonomous discipline, and by justifying the validity of the product, procedure and process-oriented methodology. As a basis of my empirical research I chose the methodology of *case study*, in order to examine the visual media representation of Hurricane Katrina regarded as a natural catastrophe and the terrorist attack against the Bataclan Theatre regarded as a man-made catastrophe, with a total of 150 images analysed. The aim of my research was also to explore the similarities and differences between the visual representation of a natural and man-made catastrophe, assuming that the case analysis will reveal a number of disparities during the examination of the two cases. Based on these, the assumptions of the present analysis are the following:

1. The area of visual rhetoric can be disciplinarily seized.
2. The field of visual rhetorical argumentation disciplinarily exists.
3. Visual rhetoric satisfies all three notions of argumentation: argumentation as product (argumentation as a result, product or artefact), process (argumentation as a communicative process) and procedure (argumentation as an operative procedure).
4. Visual rhetorical argumentation can be conceived without any linguistic translation, which advocates the creation of a new paradigm in relation to visual rhetoric and argumentation too.
5. Natural disasters and men-made catastrophes are depicted differently within the media regarding both the approach of product, procedure and process.

2. Methodology of the dissertation

2.1. Case study

The method of case study stems from the legal and business sphere but it has frequently been used recently in social sciences too as it is well suited for mapping and understanding complex fields, eliminating the restrictive effects of quantitative methods. The case study method allows the researcher to examine the details of a special context with great depth and a holistic view. The object of observation is usually a contemporary phenomenon, event or condition from real life, which, besides statistical data, also focuses on behavioural patterns and the perspective of the actor, both managing both qualitative and quantitative data (Zainal [2007]).

On the one hand, a case study seeks to comprehensively understand the subject under investigation and, on the other hand, it can elaborate more general theoretical statements about the regularity of the observed phenomena (Fidel [1984]). For this reason, Becker defines the case study method as an analysis of a unique case, which suggests that the knowledge of a whole phenomenon can be obtained by intensive exploration of a single case (Becker [1970]). Case studies are not strictly planned, so when a researcher starts analysing without a predetermined structure, he/she expects that the course of the research may change according to the findings. Flexibility can be considered the most important feature of this method (Becker [1970]).

The present dissertation presents the validity of the triadic (product, procedure and process oriented) concept and method of visual rhetoric through the analysis of two events. My analysis attempts to investigate the visual representation of Hurricane Katrina as a natural disaster and the attack against the Bataclan Theatre as a man-made catastrophe in the media, examining a total of 150 images. Regarding the source of the images, I relied on platforms such as CNN, US News, The New York Times, The Huffingtonpost, Daily Mail or the Nyugat, Origo and Blikk.

While this analysis captures images of specific cases – therefore it could be classified as a content analysis – I still consider my analysis primarily as a case study. The images of the two catastrophes practically condense cases, compressing historical, political and social issues. By using the case-type approach, not only the content, but the context of the images can also be taken into account. My research thus applies a kind of a hybrid method, one input of which is content analysis through the coding of images, and the other, main input is the case analysis in which I examine the context, intent, effect, displayed topoi and perspectives of the images.

Since reliability is a key element of both case and content analysis – which refers to the level of agreement between the two or more encoders – I also performed my analysis with a co-coder. In the encoding I was assisted by Gabriella Németh, a Ph.D. candidate of the Doctoral School of Social Communication of Corvinus University of Budapest. I am confident that the chosen method of analysis and the investigative aspects I propose will provide an appropriate basis for indirect experiences, contributing to the creation of a new visual rhetorical interpretation and the formulation of a new method of analysis.

For the product – procedure – and process-based analysis of the 75-75 images of the selected events, I have chosen the following code system:

1. Regarding the image as a **product** I examined aspects such as: sex, age, black/white, posture/proxemics, clothing, foreground, background, mise en scène (which refers to the framing of the image). Out of the 8 codes, the posture/proxemics code was dropped during the aggregation, since the figures, buildings, etc. had appeared in many different positions, therefore it was not able to provide a basis for comparison. This result or product-type approach of the image, which, by extracting its context, merely examines the elements that are present and constructs the visual element.

2. Considering the image as a **procedure** I have differentiated between the following codes: the point of view of the camera (from the bottom, top, front or back), motion, mimicry, the proxemics of the camera (near or far), special effects (sharp or obscure elements within the image) and time factor. The five codes mentioned above serve to analyse the approach of the creator of the image. Just as he/she sees and portrays the story. This aspect, therefore, looks at the picture in context, and its point of view is definitely a valued, will-controlled one.

3. Regarding the image as a **process**, I defined three codes: the intent, the effect and the topos, or the embodied element of the image (eg suffering, aggression, loss, death, etc.).

The product – procedure – process type of case analysis of the two disasters enables the holistic interpretation of a given visual element, describing the elements present in the image, the process in which they were created, and ultimately the intent and the effect it aspires to exploit, thus validating the triad of logic, dialectic and rhetoric and demonstrating that visual rhetoric is capable of satisfying all three aspects of these.

3. The results of the research

My hypothesis that the visual media representation of Hurricane Katrina regarded as a natural catastrophe and the terrorist attack against the Bataclan Theatre regarded as a man-made catastrophe will show a number of differences has been confirmed based on my examination.

With regards to the **product-oriented** approach I have found 20 more images of the Bataclan attack in which we could see people, than in case of the Hurricane, where natural images, wrecks, flooded homes could often be seen. It is noteworthy that images of Hurricane Katrina mainly show middle-aged black men, while the Bataclan shootings mainly showed young, white people, which is particularly interesting regarding such a multicultural, ethnically diverse capital city. (Out of the 75 photos, a total of two appeared of non-white people, therefore one can conclude that the press showed the terrorist act as a bloody revenge against the European white population as it can be assumed that not only white-skinned, local French were among the victims).

As far as their outfits go, we can find official police clothing on 38 occasions regarding the Bataclan attack, while we only see official people during rescue and help in 13 images regarding Katrina, hence images of the Bataclan shooting show much greater public involvement and co-operation than the pictures of Katrina, where people often come across in a tiny boat, being abandoned in endless water.

In the background of the photographs of Hurricane Katrina 14 people were shown, while in the images of the Bataclan shootings there were 36 humans. In the former case, natural damages caused by the storm are most often in the background, pointing to the struggle and suffering of the people, while the latter show the fear, threat and even a kind of mass chaos of the human population. Regarding the framing of the image (mise en scène), the focus was in the middle 38 times in case of the storm, while in the images of the massacre the focus was centred 66 times, generating a much more focused, direct, and possibly more violent representation.

In the photos of Hurricane Katrina, only 6 of the 75 photographs showed the motif of death – out of these, 2 merely implicitly (in one of the photos (F35), in the cemetery, there are tiny white flags recalling the victims of the hurricane, while the other photo (F55) shows only one handmade crib of a child's size, covered with sheets and bricks) while images of the massacre showed dead people in 11 pictures. Out of these 11 images 4 only implicitly referred to it, eg.: in the photo with the code F72 and F73 at the centre of the picture, a blood vessel appears, surrounded by tiny candles and bouquets. In the other 7 pictures, however, we have a very explicit, detailed depiction of death, a good example is the photo of the Bataclan concert hall, where dozens of bodies are frozen in blood (F8).

In the **procedure-based** approach, I first analysed the point of view of the camera. Most of the press images taken of Hurricane Katrina were either frontal or from above, in almost a completely balanced ratio (35 and 31 images), while in case of the massacre 48 images were taken frontally and only 11 of the above-made photographs were found, highlighting again the more focused and direct representation of the man-made catastrophe. In the case of both disasters, there are also bottom-up photographs, most of them depicting the magnitude, or the almighty power of the police, ambulance services, or symbolic figures (such as the statue of an American President Jefferson Davis or the statue of the Christ the Redeemer in Rio).

With regard to the movements of the figures, in the pictures of the storm, we can observe an active movement in 25 pictures, in 19 we see passive, resigning, hopeless figures, while 3 photos are gentle and 3 show aggressive gestures. This code was incomprehensible in case of 25 images. Regarding the images of the shooting, only 9 photos were not applicable to the motion code. There are also differences in the active movement (eg.: rescue, escape, mourning with wreaths, candle lighting): in the Bataclan analysis I found 44 active actions and only 15 passive, idle movements. Other pictures show aggression and police raids. Regarding the mimicry of the people, the most common characteristics were agony and hopelessness for both cases, but suffering and shock were also frequently presented. The difference, however, was that in the case of Hurricane Katrina, I distinguished two categories that did not show at the Bataclan shootings at all, with the determined (4 photos) and the smiling, optimistic facial expressions (with 6 photos). The images of bloodshed resulting from human wickedness therefore have no sign of hopefulness, firstly because the event could have been avoided, and secondly because of the suddenness of action. Another important factor is that in the case of a natural disaster there is no direct responsibility, so acceptance and resignation more easily develop than in case of a terrorist attack. The next code was the proxemics of the camera, which indicated whether it was a close-up or remote shot. Hurricane Katrina depicted almost the same number of distant images as close-up ones (40 distant and 35 close-ups), while in the case of the shooting the same proportion was slightly larger (56 distant and 19 close ups) as these photos could easily portray the full context, all the happenings and losses of the storm/attack. With regard to the effects codes I have not found special effects, filters or edited images as I analysed photographs of real events. For this reason I chose to explore whether the creator of the photo shows the foreground or background of the image sharply or vaguely, defining the focus of the image.

The general impression of the images of Hurricane Katrina is that they are high quality and professionally taken, and most often from the foreground and background are both sharp (57 images). On the other hand, the pictures of the Bataclan massacre clearly a significant part of them were taken by people in the streets using their phones, since there were almost as many

vague, poor quality pictures sharp ones (21 were vague, 22 were sharp). For both of the disasters, the sharp forefront and blurry background setting was typical, which portrays the events, yet obviously emphasises the focus of the image. When analysing each of the two disasters, it was noticeable that the phenomenon of time appeared in every picture, in a fairly similar way. In the case of both Katrina and Bataclan the display of slow, passive time was overrepresented (in the case of the storm waiting to be rescued, in the case of the massacre slowly recognising the events), and then they were followed by active, rescue or escape images. The shootings portrayed twice as many images of evanescence than the storm.

Finally, in the **process-oriented** approach I separated three codes: the intent of the image, the effect of the image, and the topos displayed by the image. In view of the intentions of the pictures, I have distinguished several categories, the most common of Hurricane Katrina's press photographs were the devastation caused by hurricane, the struggle to survive and the intention of showing hope. The latter, as I have already mentioned, did not appear in any form whatsoever in connection with the Bataclan massacre. Here, the pain of the survivors and their loved ones, the struggle for survival, and the intent of horror and shock could be discovered. In terms of their impact I found many similarities. Although the majority of the codes (eg.: American macho, hopelessness, irony/sarcasm, or the category of solace) did not appear at all in the images of the Bataclan terrorist attack, their most common effects are relatively consistent. In both of these disasters, most of the images were startling and exasperating. Then came the frightening category, and finally, in the case of Hurricane Katrina the third code was the striking one, while in the case of the Bataclan attack disgusting/shocking took the third place. Coming to the end of my analysis, in the light of the storm, loss, suffering and hope were the three most popular categories. The last topos, hope suggests the divine presence of God, who gives a helping hand and encourages us for a better life. The assassination included suffering, loss, and death as its most popular topoi. However, it is worth mentioning – as it falls behind by only one image from the topos of death – that the topos of belonging together was also an important factor regarding the massacre, which did not appear in the case of a hurricane at all.

In all we can conclude that there is a significant difference in the way media presents the cases when Mother Nature overwrites the normal course of human life and when men, the incarnate Evil, turns against himself. In the presentation of the hurricane, in addition to the depiction of destruction caused by the storm, and the display of human, natural and material losses and continuous struggle, the topos of rebirth, redemption and hope for a more beautiful

future appeared, while in the case of the terrorist attack, the presence of terror, suffering and death caused by chaotic conditions dominated, often with shocking and disgusting elements. The examination of the two cases has also revealed that the 3P visual rhetorical method (product, procedure, process) is a suitable means of analysis for a holistic examination of a given case, not merely considering the layout logic of the images, but also regarding their procedures and their induced effect.

4. Summary of conclusions

4.1. Proving the assumptions, summing up the results of the research

My paper has been written as a proof that images are not merely secondary, complementary entities waiting to be made complete by verbal elements, but separate, basic units of reasoning. In my view, visual elements are equally capable of arguing, communicating, criticising, making true statements or creating fake realities just as written or pronounced words do. In support of this, my dissertation set up and responded to five hypotheses and developed a new, comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of images. The present paper provided the examination of a natural and a man-made catastrophe – Hurricane Katrina and the Bataclan Theatre assassination – but the analytical method developed can be applied in case of any image.

My first assumption investigated whether the area of visual rhetoric could be disciplinarily seized. This assumption was inspired by the misleading appellation of visual rhetoric, which forces it into a sub-disciplinary, subordinate position compared to verbal rhetoric and to linguistic codes and rules. Yet – as I explain in my dissertation – rhetoric is not a purely linguistic symbol, and as a result, the dimensions of rhetorical processes cannot be found in discourses alone. They are there in any space-oriented, non-linear, multi-dimensional human experience that cannot be interpreted through discursive symbols, but can easily be decoded through visuality.

My second statement concerned the disciplinary existence of visual rhetorical argumentation and investigated whether visual rhetoric is a disciplinarily legitimate, independent field or it is merely an intersection. According to Nyíri, in the new world of vision and imagery, we are talking about the rebirth of visual rhetoric, while Aczél identifies rhetorical language with the imagistic expression. Justifying the field of visual rhetorical argumentation, my dissertation presented the visual rhetorical approach of Foss relying on the product/artefact and process/visual data, in which the former offers a context-oriented, result-centred approach,

focusing on a product, work of art, object, in short artefact; while the latter refers to the process of visual imaging, data analysis, suggesting a kind of interpretative approach (Foss [2005]). In addition to Foss' two-dimensional paradigm, I have presented Ott and Dickinson's more sensitive and more systematic threefold approach that describes visual rhetoric as a public message, as the founder of everyday reality and as logic, giving a comprehensive understanding to the visual rhetorical argumentation (Ott – Dickinson [2009]). After that, I described the most important counter-arguments about visual rhetoric, which argue that visual communication is, on the one hand, too arbitrary and ambiguous, and on the other hand, it does not include a truth value/proposition, and thus cannot serve as a reasoning. I have shown through three images that visual rhetorical argumentation is possible in a disciplinary way, and the statements made by the images can clearly be understood and interpreted in the true/false dimensions.

My third assumption was that visual rhetoric satisfies the quality of all three (product, procedure, process) notions of argumentation. At the beginning of my dissertation, I first introduced the argumentation as a product-type approach which – thanks to its formal logical attachment – offers a rather free concept: it does not deal with how or for whom and for what purpose the reasoning came about, however, it considers the argument merely as a result. In the approach of visual rhetoric as a product, I have clarified the basic concepts of "presence" and "vividness", which also regard visual rhetoric as a result. The approach of argumentation as a procedure suggests that argumentation is run by dynamics, procedures, regular patterns and operations. In this case, a certain visual element is interpreted in relation to another element, so – as opposed to the previous approach – the focus is on the *how* and not on the *what*. With regard to the visual rhetorical interpretation of the procedural approach, I have introduced the above-mentioned problematisation and counter-arguments about visual rhetoric, which regard rhetorical processes, the question of arbitrariness, the creation of propositions and the creation of pictorial truth or lie as a procedure. Finally, approaching the argument as a process/interpretation has created a kind of pragmatic-, impact-, and intention-based approach, the visual rhetorical aspect of which was interpreted in the light of the media. Concepts such as the multidimensionality of media messages, ideology, interpretation, identification and language, as well as lies within visuality have been elaborated.

My fourth hypothesis was that visual rhetoric is possible without linguistic translation, which claims to be the creation of a new paradigm about visual rhetoric, and about the field of reasoning in particular. In order to answer this hypothesis, I first defined the concept of perceptions that drew me closer to understanding the complexity of elemental sensations and

human thinking. Subsequently, I summoned Lewis E. Walkup's example presented in a study in which he cites a mathematical problem related to a 3x3 cube (exactly like a Rubik cube, consisting of 27 small building-blocks) (Walkup [1965]). Walkup's example clearly demonstrates that in case of a number of tasks we do not need to translate the problem into either language or anything else; we only need the tools of visual thinking, creativity, inventiveness, and visual intelligence.

Finally, my last hypothesis related to the visual representation of natural and man-made disasters within catastrophe news. I assumed that the two different types of disaster would differ in terms of both the product, procedure and the process approach. When analysing the selected 75-75 news images, I separated a number of codes within all the three aspects. In case of the product, or result/logic-based approach, I determined the foreground, gender, age, black/white, pose/proxemics, clothing, background, and mise en scène codes; based on the procedure or dialectics-based approach, the point of view of the camera, gestures, mimics, camera proxemics, effects, and the time factor codes were selected; and last but not least in the process or rhetoric-based approach, I determined the intent, the effect and the topos of the image code. My research showed that the visual representation of the catastrophe caused by Mother Nature and the one caused by human wickedness show a number of differences. While the former presents the triad of destruction, struggle and hope/salvation, the latter shows the motives of terror, suffering and death.

4.2. The scientific usability of the product, procedure, process analysis method

In the present dissertation, I tried to demonstrate that visual rhetoric is capable of all that its verbal pair can do, and sometimes even outweighs it. Images are considered to be the primary foundation of rational and abstract thinking as well as the bearers of information that acquaint, tell, prove and argue in a way that any object becomes more vivid than by the written or spoken word. Since visual artefacts are an important part of the rhetorical environment, ignoring them and focusing only on verbal discourses would mean that we only take up a small part of the stimulus and symbols we receive every day. The rhetorical perspective of visual symbols is also motivated by the recognition that these symbols allow access to a range of human experiences that cannot be accessed through discourses, such as spatial, non-linear, multidimensional or dynamic experiences for which visuality is vital. The product-process-process triadic analysis method allows a holistic interpretation of the visual creations of reality (eg.: catastrophe). The main merit of the dissertation is to illuminate the fact that after the centuries of the dominance of words, the pictorial turn has unquestionably and irrevocably happened, the recognition of which is particularly important for the people of this age.

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6. Publications

6.1. Conference publication

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6.2. Online Journal

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6.4. Publications with a co-writer

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7. Appendix

The dissertation includes a 114-page-long appendix that contains 150 images according to the following subdivision: 75 photos of Hurricane Katrina regarded as a natural disaster and 75 photos of the Bataclan Theatre shooting regarded as a man-made catastrophe. Each image is signed with a code and shows the exact link of source.