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**Book Review: Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers, ed.,
Defining Visual Rhetorics. Mahwah, New Jersey, London:
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, 342 pp., ISBN
1-4106-0997-9**

Defining Visual Rhetorics is a volume of texts on visual rhetoric composed by Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. With the eclectic selection of papers, the authors attempt to define this new discipline, aware of the fact that it is a new area whose boundaries are not clearly drawn: because of *a struggle for dominance between verbal and pictorial discourse*, visual rhetoric is still fighting for its recognition in rhetorical circles. At the same time, in the light of Mitchell's pictorial turn, numerous established disciplines (rhetorics, communicology, art theory, anthropology, psychology, etc) show an increased interest in the study of the visual material produced by contemporary society. Insisting on parallel lines of strictly separate methodologies (rhetoric, semiotics, cultural studies) in the study of similar visual phenomena is basically irrational, urging editors to insist on an interdisciplinary approach to visual rhetoric. Hill and Helmers have therefore invited twelve contributors to offer their perspective on the application of rhetorical analysis to diverse visual communication models – from documentary photography to Victorian interiors. Authors who were invited to contribute their works belong to various disciplines, i.e. “situate themselves at the crossroads of more than one discipline”. *Defining Visual Rhetorics* is intended for a contemporary expert audience interested in visual phenomena whether it is about visual rhetoric, mass communication, cultural studies or visual culture studies.

In fourteen chapters, the invited authors write about their definition of visual rhetoric, and through the analysis of very different visual materials imply their view of contemporary rhetorical methodology. However, regardless of the central topic of interest, all the texts deal with the basic problem of contemporary rhetoric – the relation of the verbal and visual in the formation of meaning. Within rhetorical circles there is still a conflict between the importance attached to verbal over visual (and vice versa). Authors who were invited to collaborate on the proceedings believe that these are two facets of the creation of meaning that must be studied at the same time, emphasizing the dialogic, mutually conditioned relation between image and text.

In the introduction, Helmers and Hill, apart from providing a general overview of the contributions, demonstrate the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to image material (rhetorical and semiotic methodology) with the example of a rhetorical analysis of an iconic documentary photograph (Thomas E. Franklin: *Firefighters at Ground Zero*, 2001). At the same time, through the example of this photograph, they clarify some of the key terms that visual rhetoric uses, such as *intertextuality*, *paragonal* relation between word and image and the changeability of the meaning of Peirce's *interpreter*.

The theme of interdisciplinarity continues through the first chapter of the book (*The Psychology of Rhetorical Images*), in which Charles A. Hill emphasizes the 'assertive' aspect of representational images (i.e. *how images influence beliefs, behaviours, attitudes – and sometimes actions – of those who observe them*). Hill elaborates the psychology of persuasion through the visual via the rhetorical notion of *presence*, and emphasizes the connection of the persuasiveness of photography (versus verbal argument) with its vividness and inherent emotional charge. Hill points out precisely this ability of representational imagery to produce emotional response and its manipulative potential in creating associations and links between images, emotions and values – especially in creating seemingly instinctive relations (i.e. *emotional transfer*) between symbols and abstract values such as nationalism or patriotism.

As mentioned, most of the contributions in the book endeavor to define the area and discipline of visual rhetoric through concrete examples of rhetorical analysis. In doing so, the editors have selected contributions that demonstrate the flexibility of this discipline in explaining contemporary (and less contemporary) visual phenomena. The texts deal with diverse areas – from rhetoric of 'fine arts' (Marguerite Helmers: "Framing the Fine Arts Through Rhetoric"), embroidery (Maureen Daly Goggin: "Visual Rhetoric in Pens of Steel and Inks of Silk: Challenging the Great Visual/Verbal Divide") and film (David Blakesley: "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*"), to early 20th century magazines (Cara A. Finnegan: "Doing Rhetorical History of the Visual: The Photograph and the Archive") and statistic charts (Charles Kostelnick: "Melting-Pot Iseology, Modernist Aesthetics, and the Emergence of Graphical Conventions: The Statistical Atlases of the United States, 1874–1925"). By stretching the applicability of rhetorical analysis even further, two texts deal with the rhetoric of everyday spaces such as health food shops (Greg Dickinson and Casey Malone Maugh: "Placing Visual Rhetoric: Finding Material Comfort in Wild Oats Market") and Victorian homes (Andrea Kaston Tange: "Envisioning Domesticity, Locating Identity: Constructing the Victorian Middle Class Through Images of Home").

A part of the authors' analyses progresses from two unavoidable areas in which the importance of visual rhetoric and its methods of persuasion have been firmly established – politics and marketing. These are areas where the key reason for communicating with the public is to persuade potential customers about the quality of their own product, thus the 'assertive' aspect of visual rhetoric here comes to the fore. The rhetorical analysis of a specific part of the American pre-election campaign

– pre-election films of presidential candidates – is dealt with by J. Cherie Strachan and Kathleen E. Kendall in the sixth chapter of proceedings (“Political Candidates’ Convention Films: Finding the Perfect Image – An Overview of Political Image Making”), whereas Janis L. Edwards (“Echoes of Camelot: How Images Construct Cultural Memory through Rhetorical Framing”) analyzes one of the iconic photographs of American history: a photograph of the last salute of a three-year-old son at Kennedy’s funeral and its later appropriation in the media. On the other hand, in the field of market propaganda, Diane S. Hope in her text “Gendered Environments: Gender and the Natural World in the Rhetoric of Advertising” elaborates on the theme of using a gender-defined environment in advertising.

With Hill’s text on the psychology of rhetorical images, only two other authors – J. Anthony Blair and Sonja K. Foss – elaborate on the general theoretical questions of visual rhetoric (the rest of the texts define this area by applying them to specific topics such as films or magazines). In the second chapter, J. Anthony Blair deals with something that is a constant subject of discussion in rhetorical scientific circles – the question of the validity of visual arguments, and the relation between the image and the verbal component of the argument.

Sonja K. Foss, a theoretician who has been dealing with visual rhetoric for over forty years now, and whose works largely shaped the new discipline, wrote the text for the last chapter and a kind of conclusion to the book (“Framing the Study of Visual Rhetoric: Toward a transformation of Rhetorical Theory”). Hill and Helmers with their introductory essay opened up a number of questions and dilemmas that troubled contemporary rhetoricians and related scholars who, through their work, have entered this discipline. On the other hand, Foss through analysis of previous texts offers a framework for the study of visual rhetoric – from the definition (visual rhetoric as an object and as a perspective) and focus areas (nature of object – function of object – evaluation of function) to methodological approaches (inductive and deductive). Foss also offers the most elaborate definition of the new discipline (i.e. visual rhetoric as a perspective): *it is a critical-analytical tool or access to analysis of visual data that emphasizes the communication dimension of images or objects.*

As Diane S. Hope points out, one of the roles of rhetorical criticisms of Barthes and Burke is the discovery of the power of cultural mythologies. Thus in this paper, potentials of rhetorical analysis are particularly pronounced in the demystification of contents and symbols imposed by elites – such as gender-labeled advertising, or in finding invisible histories and neglected contemporary culture participants, whose voices are not represented in the public, such as women who create undervalued embroidery art. Visual rhetoric provides insight into the ways in which minorities are exploited and in ways the white elite perspective is privileged, for example, in periodicals from the beginning of the century (Finnegan). After all, Barthes already warned about this aspect of popular culture in the pioneering essay about the cover of *Paris Match* magazine in his book *Mythologies*.

However, in this same aspect there is perhaps the most serious objection to the book *Defining Visual Rhetorics*: all fourteen essays refer to Anglo-American culture

and thus (inadvertently?) perpetuate the privileged perspective that, according to some authors, rhetorical criticism should oppose. The value is in the eclectic nature of the topics covered by the authors and the complexity of the findings they offer – there is no single answer to what visual rhetoric is, but numerous contributions offer methodologies through which it is possible to read and interpret the visual materials that surround us – from newspaper ads to film. Therefore, despite the complaint about privileging the Anglo-American perspective, I consider it to be one of the key works in the field of visual rhetoric that brings together a number of relevant authors and complex views on the discipline that is still in the process of seeking its own boundaries.

Translated by Dunja Nekić