

Critical Analysis of Visual Communication



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← NOT ME

3 dangers in theory about and analysis of Visual Communication:

- To consider Visual Com and images as a sort of (inferior, vague, unprecise, non-) **verbal** communication
- To look for **quantifiable** or measurable distinct entities, units, elements (or even “signs” or genres) within images and films
- To consider images and films as basically reproductions, copies or re-presentations of (pre-existing, profilmic) “**reality**”

The duck and the dog – or my hands?
- A joke to be seen – only in class....

Shifting focus

Not just analysis and formal description of abstract “visual objects”:

I want to downscale the scope/importance of certain basic, traditional concepts from art theory, linguistics, and semiotics

I want to move on to contextual analysis and interpretation of visual phenomena in terms of “communicative functions” (inspired by rhetoric, Roman Jakobson, and phenomenology-hermeneutics): seeing the social/cultural use of images/photos/film/video/design.

Going from

- the "Positivism" (or "science" approach) that haunts us: looking for elements, something that can be quantified, measured, calculated, hard distinctions, sharp divisions of types, genres etc.
- And move on to a critical process of understanding and interpreting (visual) communication as situational/contextual: concepts and analytical tools should be seen as case-sensitive and must be used as floating/dynamic (changes with culture and history) – this is the lesson of hermeneutics and dialectics.

Visual (media) phenomena are too often seen (in theory) as mainly re-presentations of something (e.g., photos of some original object or event)

and not as part of a communication process (an interaction) where someone is presenting something to someone in order to influence, to do or express something

- Communication (visual) is not (just, or basically) a sending of distinct information or data packages between sender and receiver
- Communication (visual) is about interacting, and this means that "sender" and "receiver" change/develop in the process and that the "text/visuals" (or "signs" if you insist) involved are indistinct, they are floating and interpreted (experienced).
- Communication is not just about sharing info - don't be naive - it is also about persuading, showing status and fighting for power, love or other benefits! (like re-establishing identity)

Definition by Henrik:

Communication is an interaction between persons

(not just a 'transmission' of data representing the world)

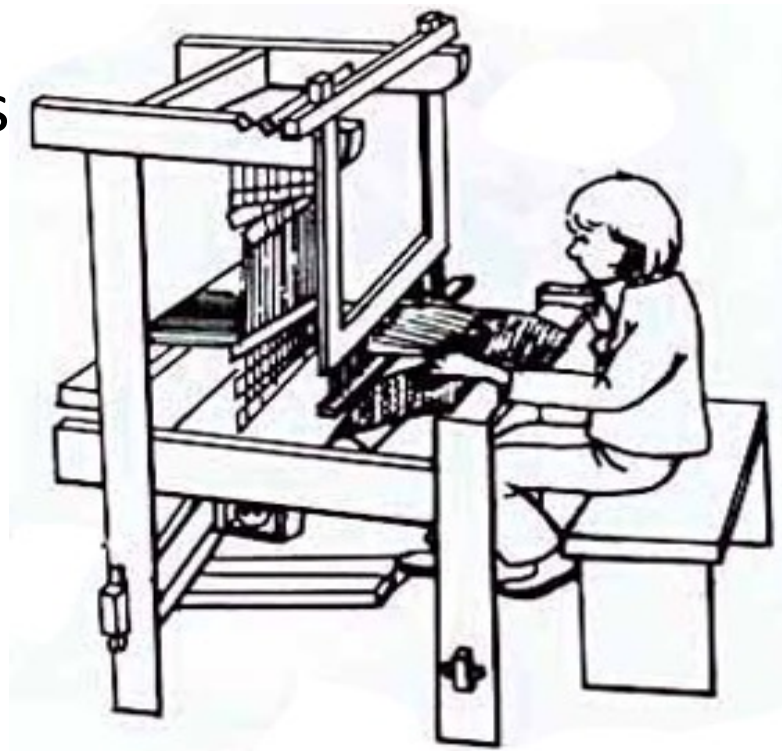
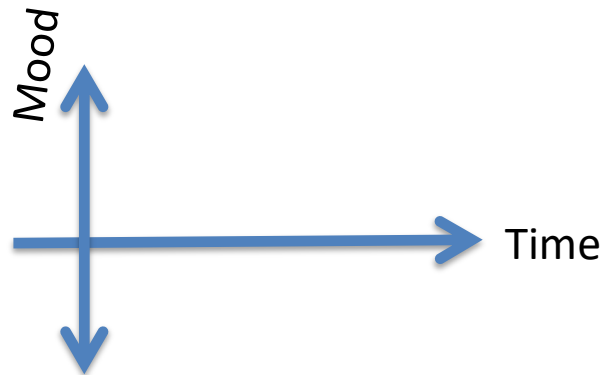
(and machines can exchange data, but they do not as such "communicate" themselves)

This interaction takes place by means of gestures, speech, drawings, signs, symbols, writing, photo, video, sites, etc. – academically often referred to as "texts".

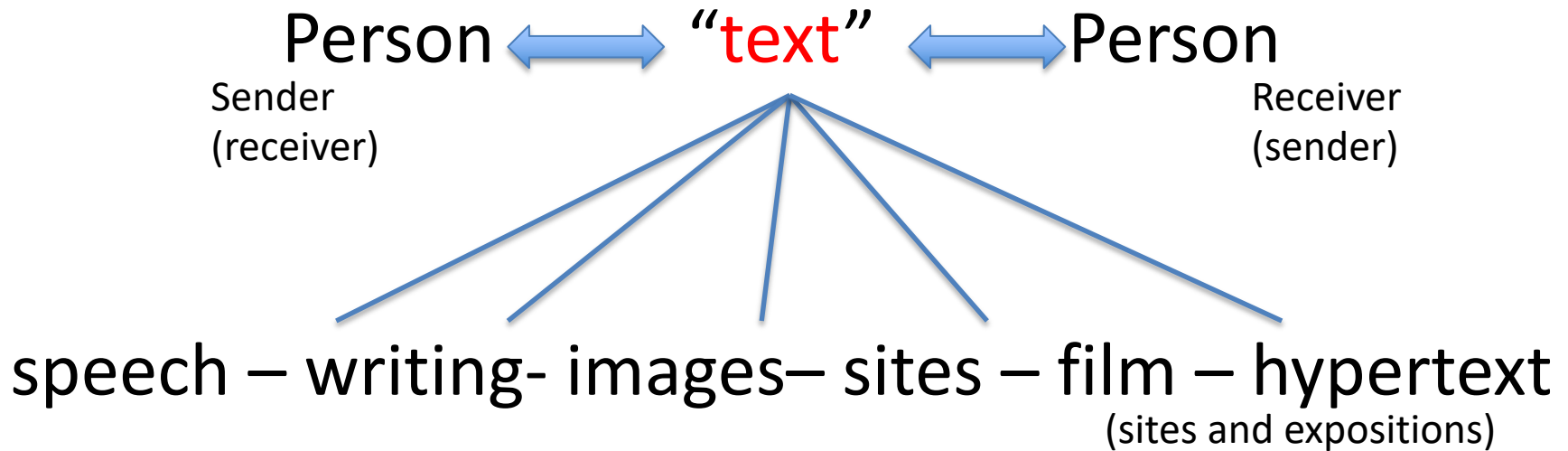
Textus = loom weaving

Just like a woven fabric
a text, a film, a web-site, an exhibition can have:

- many threads and layers
- in many colors
- in two main dimensions



Communication is an interaction by means of “texts”

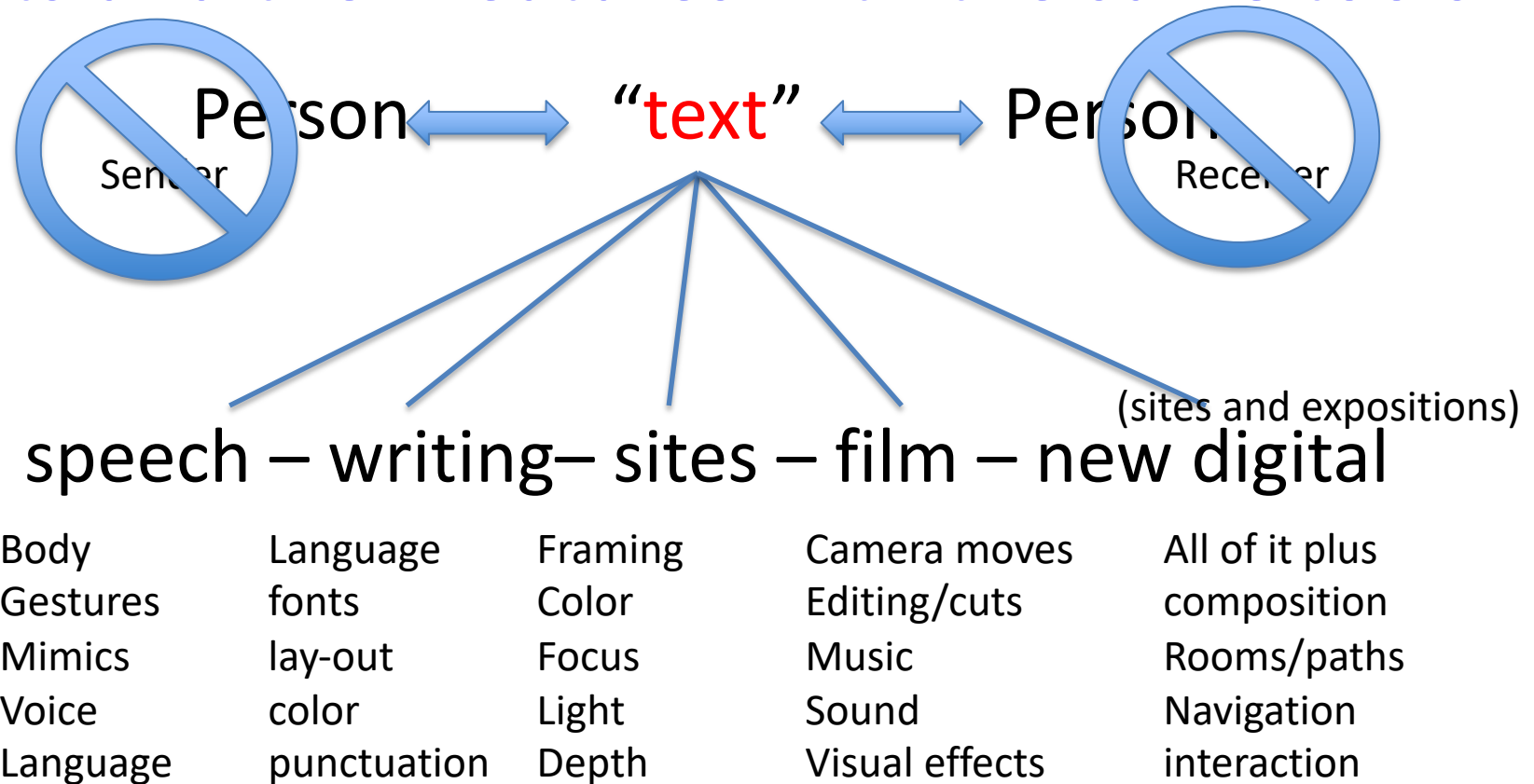


Production analysis

Content analysis (looking at the textual features)

Reception analysis

But can we analyze so many different types of texts and their features with the same tools?



And all of the other new media and their media specific forms and features?

This is where we need Aristotle & Roman Jakobson

General tools for analyzing (visual) communication as interaction:

Type of appeal/persuasion:

logos, ethos, pathos (Aristotle, rhetoric)

What is *suitable/apt* in this situation, this subject, this receiver, this sender? (Cicero)

and what type of communicative function (doing/pointing) is going on:

emotive, referential, conative, phatic, poetic and meta-communicative?

(Roman Jakobson)

Phenomenological “impression” and hermeneutical interpretation

Neither language nor pictures are just copies of reality – but this is the ‘positivism’ that still haunts us!

Perhaps language and pictures are *(re-)constructing* “reality” - and us?

3 kinds of persuasive appeal:

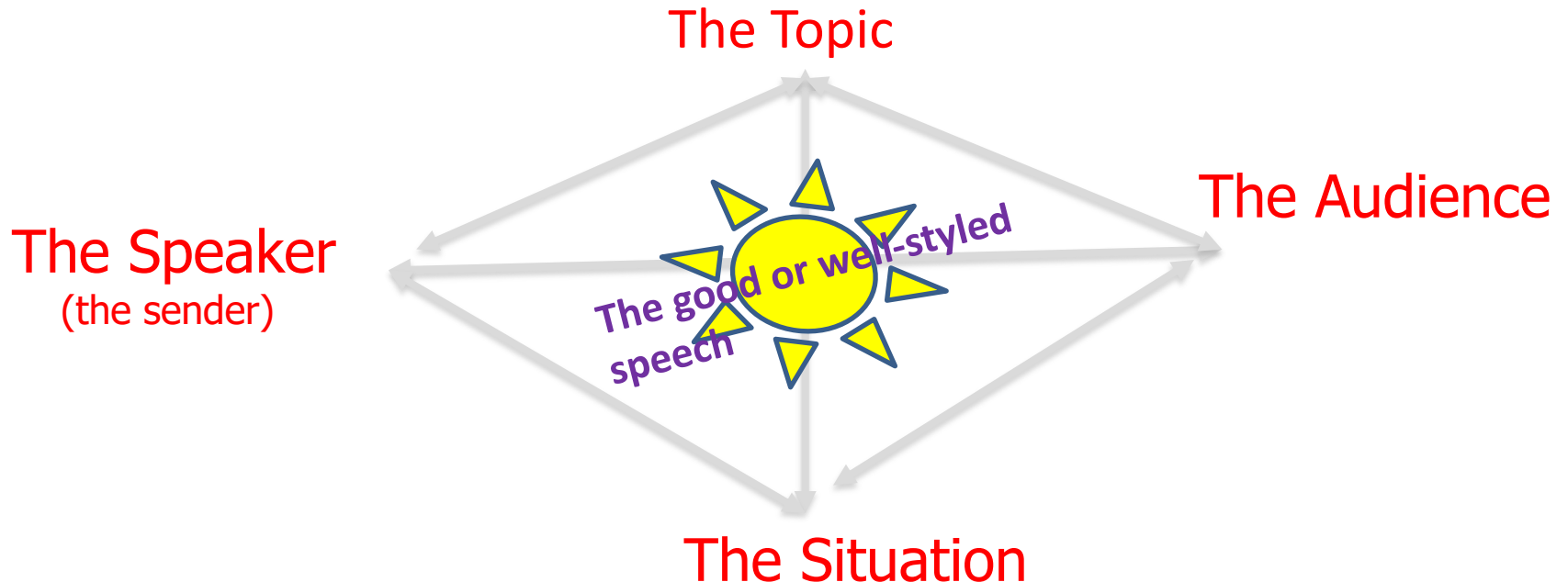
(from Aristotle – and others)

- Ethos (delectare) ~ to **please** and win over
[by means of the personality and status of the speaker]
- Pathos ~ (movere) to catch and to **move**
[by means of the passions in the audience]
- Logos (docere) ~ to instruct and to **prove**
[by means of the nature of the case, the order of things]

Cicero “...quid aptum sit...”?

- what is the most suitable or accomodating way of speaking/communicating?

Consider these correlations when planning/analysing a speech:



Cicero in *De Oratore* III 210-212 is **not** presenting a “pentagon”, but explains that good communication depends on considering and nicely fitting together the above 4 elements

Communication is much more than an exchange of info or facts (from Roman Jakobson)

Whenever we communicate we are in principle doing 6 things:

- We show something about ourselves *emotive function* SYMPTOM
- We are talking about something (topic, the world) *referential* SYMBOL
- We are trying to influence whoever we adress *conative* SIGNAL
- We are showing how we relate to each other *phatic* SOCIAL
- We are toying with language and design options *poetic* SENSUOUS
- We are commenting on the act itself *meta-communicative* SYSTEMIC

The six communicative functions

Referential

SYMBOL

The temperature here is 25°

Conative

SIGNAL

Open the window!

Emotive

SYMPTOM

Gosh, I am feeling hot.

Phatic

SOCIAL

Hello, anyone here?

Poetic

SENSUAL

In Spain the rain falls

Meta-

mainly on the plains

communicative

SYSTEMIC

This is an example of
a comment on the meta-level.

The six communicative functions can be found also in "visuals": pictures, film, tv, and web-sites

Referential

The image deals with a subject, and issue.

Conative

The image is trying to persuade you or making you do something

Emotive

The image is expressive, revealing something about (the mood) of the (implied) sender

Phatic

The image is establishing or maintaining contact between sender and receiver.

Poetic

The image has aesthetic qualities, form and style are predominant.

Meta-comm

The image has meta-comments or references to itself

6 communicative functions – ready at hand

Me: the thumb *emotive*

That: index *referential*

!“@!!”: the long *conative*

Us: the ring *phatic*

Playing: little *poetic*

About it all: the whole hand
meta-communicative



Next: 3 portrait pictures. What do they do more than just re-produce (“copy”) the original live persons?

“Method”

- The analysis is based on your observation and interpretation, but it can be repeated and discussed and refined with colleagues:
- Notice what stands out
- Always look for all functions
- What is most dominant?

Obs: no sharp distinctions/elements.

The context or situation is decisive for the meaning/function and interpretation

(an “isolated” picture of a cat means very little “in itself”-

Actually, we rarely meet an isolated picture – it’s an academic abstraction)

OK, so I also propose a procedure or "method" - a way to structure your findings:

1. **First impressions** (what you immediately experience, observe, feel and think) *phenomenological approach*

1. **Descriptive analysis** of the different parts, elements and forms (the design): *analytical approach*

Note the dominant elements and look also for the "unnoticed" but influential aspects/forms/features: turn up-side down, "alienate", repeat, look for design and marks of intentions and preconceptions, go through the 5 senses, and both the horizontal aspect (development, story) and the vertical aspects (mood, montage). Use concepts from Rhetoric (e.g pathos, logos, ethos) and Jakobsons "communicative functions"

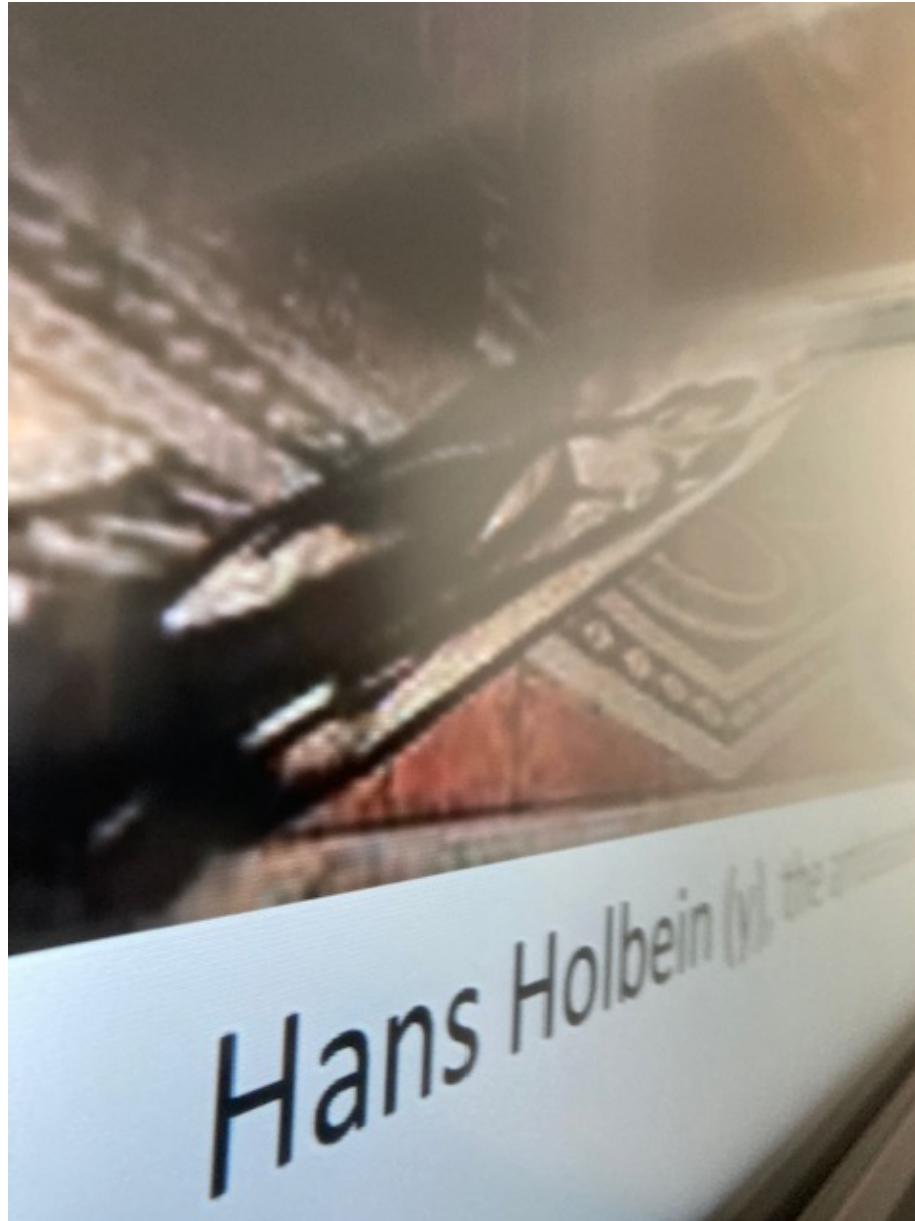
2. **Interpretation** of the visual phenomenon as a whole, its aim and "message". Contextualize, draw in information from "outside" the text/image itself: *hermeneutic, critical, cultural approach*



Why this cave-painting: For educational purposes? Religious? Self-expression of the "artist"? Ceremonial? Magical? Copying reality? Is it communicating? What context?



Hans Holbein (y), the ambassadors, 1533





David, approx. 1801-05







Step 3
(Interpret,
contextualize):

What is the
cultural or
psychological
context and
significance of
images like
this?

Compare with
the other two
photos?



Step 4
(Evaluate,
criticize):

Consider
gender roles,
power/
hegemony,
capitalism in
this?

Compare with
the other two
photos?



Exercise: Explain if this can be considered a visual argument in itself, or can it be a part of an argument/ persuasive practice?

Try to analyze it using the Toulmin model – or other relevant concepts e.g. from rhetoric showing the “persuasiveness”.

Consider different contexts of view, target groups, cultural aspects. Contrast it maybe with another different advertisement.

Critical analysis of visual communication in new media

Don't just look at what is in the picture or in the video.
But ask: who is trying to do what to whom, and how?

1. Look behind the camera (see the camera work, the work on sound, the editing: the production)
2. Look at yourself and your neighbor (in front of the screen: see the audience response - the reception)

1) Look behind the camera to see the (rhetorical) construction (invention, selection, shaping and styling) of the images/video/tv

Next: examples of framing and angle, selection, cutting out, and narrative construction (reaction shots).



(Paris, Jan. 11, 2015 – after ‘Charlie Hebdo’)

World leaders in attendance included Germany's [Angela Merkel](#), Britain's [David Cameron](#), Italy's Matteo Renzi, [Mariano Rajoy](#) of [Spain](#), Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, [Ukraine](#) President [Petro Poroshenko](#), and [European Commission](#) president Jean-Claude Juncker.



Did they have a good time as they walked along? Perhaps this image is not what they wanted to show?

הטרור האסלאמי בראש סדר היום העולמי:

נשיא ארה"ב יוזם מפגש פסגה בינלאומי בוושינגטון שיעסוק בהתמודדות מול הטרור

א-סיסי קורא לרפורמה באסלאם ■ גורמי מודיעין: "הפיגועים בפריז היו רק יריית הפתיחה" ■ קמרון:
"הג'יהאד עוד ילווה אותנו שנים רבות" ■ מתקפות ואיומים על מערכות עיתונים נוספים

תחת יעקב א. לוסינג

התגובה של אובאמה לטרור החסר
שה בכל רחבי העולם: שר המשפטים
האמריקאי, אריק הולדר, הודיע אתמול
כי נשיא ארה"ב ברק אובאמה יארח
בתורש הבא ועידת פסגה בינלאומית,
אלה יוזמנו כל מנהיגי המדינות הידרי
דות של ארה"ב. הועידה תיערך ב-18
לפברואר בווינגטון.

החשש מפני המשך הטרור האסי
לאמי הפך אתמול למוחשי יותר, עם
פרסום דו"חות מודיעיניים שהוברו
לאחר יידוש שיחות והתכתבויות של
בכירים בדאע"ש בימים האחרונים.
מההתכתבויות עולה כי מנהיגי "המי
דינה האסלאמית" מתייחסים לפיגועים
בפריז כאל "יריית הפתיחה" בלבד,
ומציינים כי בימים הקרובים יפתח גל
נוסף של מתקפות טרור בערים אירי
מאיות נוספות, עם דגש על ערים מר-
כויות כדוגמת רומא, כך לפי הדיווחים.
הודגש כי לטרור יידוש ההתכתבויות
והכוננות הכללית, לארגוני המודיעין
אין עדיין מידע ספציפי על כוונה לבי-
צע פיגוע ביעד מסוים באירופה.

בשלב זה עדיין לא ברור איזה אומי



Photo from same event – something has been left out....



התמונה המקורית (צילום: לע"מ)

Politician on TV – and how to be moved by the camera



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VINP_tc3Ww4
Danish Queen's New Years address, 2016

See more on Henrik Juel slides: The Rhetoric of the TV-camera - overview

Point of view and framing – and visual proof and/or deception



Hans Blix, March 7, 2003

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IImVN1dmGuY>



Colin Powell, Feb. 5, 2003

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nt5RZ6ukbNc>

Same place and issue: Weapons of Mass Destruction?
Who is the most trustworthy and persuasive?

See more on the Henrik Juel slides: Visual Weapons of Mass Deception

2) Now look at the audience facing the screen:

What does the audience expect, what norms and pre-understandings/prejudices prevail, what passions are at stake:

- Here below could be a photo or video from a refugee camp...

Is it fake?

Is it beautiful to look at/horrible?

Is it rhetoric/propaganda?

Is it a weapon?

Is it fighting for truth, peace, love?

Was the photographer crying?

Do we want to see more?

Look in front of the screen (i.e. at yourself and your neighbor) to see the use and appreciation, social and emotional response to the images, video, tv, and their functions for us/you/someone (social, expressive, directive, descriptive, entertaining etc).

Communication is interaction between
people

(Visual communication in new media is also
interaction)

Interaction is vital (not a neutral
contact), it is how we live, feel and
breathe with each other, and how we
develop:

Interaction is about power and affection

Critical analysis of (visual) media:

look at the production as rhetorical
(and structurally based) power and
persuasion manifestations,

and look at the reception as (norm
based) emotional and social media
use, consumption and dynamics

Where there is Power there is Rhetoric!

- *Power manifests itself visually, and visual artefacts (images, videos, buildings, clothes, class rooms) are also rhetorical.*

3 main rhetorical genres (situations):

Judging about the past, celebrating norms, values and power today, and pointing politically towards the future



- Facebook/social media – we give away “info” about us: values, norms, emotions, interests, fascinations.
 - It is sold – not to us - but to someone with money
 - Money is power, info is power, info about the audience’s values, emotions and interests are essential to rhetorical persuasion.
-
- What we receive back: Rhetorical persuasion to buy commodities and politicians (same thing?)

(Visual) Communication (within digital culture) is not just a representation (copy/reproduction) of the world/reality

- but if you naively believe so, you will most likely be reproducing the power structures and “values” of this present world...

See more <http://www.henrikjuel.dk/>

