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THE NARRATION OF PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE EXAMPLE OF SELECTED FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPHS

ABSTRACT: In the theory of photography we can find several primarily literary or rhetorical categories. These are terms such as: narration, theme, composition, style, as well as some stylistic means such as: metaphor, comparison, symbol, gradation and others. The same categories will be found in many other areas of art, both visual and verbal. In that case both literature and photography are various forms of communication. The common purpose of them is to tell the audience the fascinating story, to delight, to make moved or to amuse them. The article will be an attempt to answer the question: “What history do photographs tell us?” This is also an attempt to transfer the literary category, “narration” into the visual plane. Of course, this is possible with the assumption that literary and “photographic” narrations use different materials, but have a common essence and purpose—to tell a story that will be interesting and credible to the recipient. In the paper will be used methods of visual rhetoric which is evolving now. This discipline just merges the verbal sphere (in antiquity it was the theory of politic and literary prose) and visual. This is the field which analyses the effect of the message—including the photo on the recipient. It will be an attempt to analyse the narration of photographs by famous photographers like Dorothea Lange, Joe Rosenthal, Marc Riboud, Robert Capa, Charles C. Ebbets, and Kevin Carter.

KEYWORDS: Photography, Narration, Visual Rhetoric, Visual Analysis.

This essay is an attempt to tackle the question of what kind of stories photographs tells us. It will be an effort to transfer the literary category of “narration” onto the visual plane. Of course, this is possible if we assume that literary and photographic narration use different materials but have a common essence and purpose—to tell a story that will be interesting and credible to the recipient. In the article I will use methods of visual rhetoric, a discipline which is evolving at the present moment, and merges the verbal sphere (in antiquity it was the theory of politics and literary prose) and the visual one, a field which analyses the effect of the message—both verbal and visual—on the recipient.

Telling and Showing

It may seem surprising, strange, perhaps even absurd, to apply the term “narrative” to the visual sphere. After all, in European culture, the distinction between “telling” and “showing,” two different human actions, is fixed and has a very old tradition. It reaches back to the division made by Plato, who distinguished two types of literary expression: *mimesis* and *diegesis* (as well as a mixed form). *Mimesis* is a kind of direct presentation, referring to reality by its showing, acting, “imitation.” On the other hand, *diegesis* (Latin: *narratio*) is a kind of summary, a narrative of events happening (Herman, Vervaeck 2005, 14). So we have a quite simple classification—telling and narration are related to literature and verbal texts, the visual sphere (to which photography also belongs) was permanently placed in the drawer with the inscription: “showing.”

As far as photography is concerned, its first theorists have spread the belief that it is extremely realistic, true. It was also meant to be transparent in showing reality (Walton 2008, 14). André Bazin believed that the photographic image was identical with the object photographed. Helmut Gernsheim was convinced that “the camera intercepts images, the paintbrush reconstructs them.” Theoreticians of the film also shared this view. Erwin Panofsky, for example, argued that: “the medium of the movies is physical reality as such.” Christian Metz noted that the film is such an art in which: “the signifier is coextensive with the whole of the signified.” The concept of the transparency of photography can also be found in common characterisations of photos as “duplicates,” “doubles,” “reproductions,” “substitutes,” “surrogates” (Walton 2008, 18-19).

The most obvious advocate for this transparency was Roland Barthes (1977). In particular, his famous formula, that photography is a “message without a code,” was analysed and cited by many authors. Barthes thought that: “photograph involves a certain arrangement of the scene (framing, reduction, flattening) but this transition is not a transformation (in the way a coding can be).” Therefore, in his view, to respond to a photograph: “all that is needed is the knowledge bound up with our perception,” and in his opinion this is “almost anthropological knowledge” (36). Thus, many years after the appearance of Barthes’s work we can say that this author in no way compared analysed images to reality. Probably nobody does it! The pictures evoke images of things and people which we carry in our memory, so they appear transparent, real, made “without a code.”

We perfectly understand today that photographs can not only manipulate and deceive. We also know that they are selective, biased, they are a filter and not a simple “showing” of reality. David duChemin (2012),

who is both a practitioner and excellent theoretician of photography, recalls in his work that the “transformation” unnoticed by Barthes is really significant:

That’s a long way of saying that the camera is a profoundly simple—and under-qualified—transliterator. The camera will take the three-dimensional reality from which you want to pluck a rectangular scene, and it will flatten it into two dimensions. It will not ask you what you mean to say, it will not alert you to the way that flattening will push the foreground against the background and in so doing put a telephone pole through someone’s head. It won’t add depth. It will only flatten. It will take the language of reality as we usually see—in three dimensions—and translate it word for word into the language of two dimensions. Much gets lost in translation if we do not intentionally guide our translator. It is not an interpreter. That is our job... The photograph is its own medium, its own reality, and it needs to be—it will be—read that way (20-23).

Pictures should, therefore, be treated according to their mediated nature—just like literature or verbal texts—they are auctorial (relating to an author), subjective, narrative, though realized of course through other materials. In this regard the situation changed in the late 20th century with the so-called “narrative turn” in the humanities. Study of non-literary and non-verbal forms of narrative has extended to “conversational narrative,” film, comic strips, painting, photography, opera, television, dance and music (Ryan 2009, 266).

The Language and the Image

To talk about “narrative of photography” we have to consider another distinction, the relationship between language and image. Considerations on this dichotomy have been going on for centuries. They focus on Horace’s famous formula expressed in *Ars Poetica*: “ut pictura poësis” (as a painting so also a poem): in fact, in the history of European reflection on art and literature, two positions have been competing with each other—Horace’s and Lessing’s. The first one emphasized the interrelation of the arts - verbal and visual. The second, set out by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s thesis, highlighted rather the distinction between what can be expressed by language and the image. The enlightened thinker divided all production into spatial (plastic, painting, visual) and temporal art, which is realized by the word (Halliwell 2002, 118 and next; Sager-Eidt 2008, 10-11; Ryan 2009, 265).

A few decades ago the question whether it is worth to use literary or rhetorical methodology in the analysis of photography would have seemed

absurd. Lessing's views dominated the reflection on language and literature. Now, that attitude is definitely outdated. On the one hand, one looks at language as a system of imaging, showing its figurative and metaphorical, "spatial" character. On the other hand, researches on the perception of images have shown that watching them—like verbal actions—is a sequential and temporal activity, not just a spatial one (Carrasco 2010, 74-78). Thus, what is taking place is a very important rapprochement of two separate research areas, namely language and image.

Nowadays one is perceiving in language not only its vividness, metaphorical nature or figurativeness. At the end of the 20th century another understanding of photography emerged; photography is now also treated as a language, as a way of communication and of making meaning. It is now understood that photographs can perform a narrative function, can tell stories and relate some events. Photos are structured and affected by precise composition.

In this article, I will examine the possibilities offered by rhetoric in relation to the visual sphere. However, the question is whether such tools can be provided by the discipline that for centuries has been centred on the word. How can rhetoric be applied or "adapted" to the analysis of images? The answer is simple, almost banal, but the task is quite difficult, requiring careful study and research. On the basis of analogy (of course, where it is possible) "translation" of rhetorical methods of analysis and description of language structures must be turned into the method of analysis of visual language.

Visual Analysis: New or Classical Rhetoric?

In the book about contemporary perspectives on rhetoric Sonja Foss, Karen Foss and Robert Trapp propose to "define rhetoric broadly as the uniquely human ability to use symbols to communicate with one another" (Foss S., Foss K. Trapp 1985 cited by Blair 2004, 42). It seems a very promising prospect—especially when it comes to using rhetoric for analysis of visual communication.

Sonja Foss, one of the well-known researchers and propagators of visual rhetoric, reminds us that this is a relatively young field of knowledge, because its origins date back to the 1970s, when a conference was organized by the Speech Communication Association, held in the United States. Participants in the debate were asked to extend the scope of rhetorical research. Some serious scholars followed this program believing that rhetoric should not be centred solely on verbal messages. Sonja Foss,

however, also recalled that the demand for inclusion of visual works in the subject of rhetorical research was met with vigorous voices of opposition. In her opinion: “such objections included the concern that rhetoricians lack knowledge about visual images” (Foss 2005, 141-142).

On the other hand, a few theorists have advanced suggestions for extending rhetoric to the visual sphere. Gui Bonsiepe (1972) thinks that only the theory of stylistic figures and tropes can be of any use (156). Roland Barthes too (1977), treats rhetoric only as a sphere of figures and style, as the “signifying aspect of ideology.” He calls these signifiers factors, “connotators” and describes rhetoric as a “set of connotators” and rhetoric of the image as the “classification of its connotators.” In this way rhetoric becomes the “basis of a quite considerable inventory” (49). Sonja Foss’s position (2004) on visual rhetoric is very characteristic; her main reason for studying this discipline is “to develop a rhetorical theory that is more comprehensive and inclusive.” In the article which constitutes a kind of summary of the entire volume of studies, the author defines visual rhetoric in the following ways: in the practical sense it is to be “a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating” and in theory it should focus: “on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication” (304).

What is so characteristic of the research attitude of Sonja Foss and the above theorists? They all rely on the so called “neo-rhetoric” (new rhetoric), a model of rhetoric deprived of its own rationality, which needs some additional step to become scientific. This approach to the discipline has its roots in the sixteenth century, when, as a result of Pierre de la Ramée’s (Petrus Ramus) reform, the system of the seven *artes liberales* had been shattered in the whole of European culture. As a consequence, rhetoric was limited only to “elocutio” (style) and deprived of a cognitive, rational and argumentative character. It has since become a “mistress of forms and ornamentations,” a collection of ready-to-use rules to persuade, delight and motivate the audience. The definitive split between the “sciences” and the “arts” was accomplished in the seventeenth century, relating both to the Cartesian revolution in the theory of knowledge and to the sciences’ getting to lean on mathematical and formal methods. After rhetoric was driven out of the “garden of sciences,” it stayed there and was reduced to merely represent the rhetorical quality of language, a stylistic and artistic feature of verbal creativity. The aesthetics of the nineteenth century ultimately rejected this category (Korolko 1990, 187). The current renaissance of interest in this discipline takes as a starting point rhetoric after Ramus’s reform; thus, we are dealing rather with modern stylistics with its contemporary “overlay.”

In order to use the full range of rhetoric in relation to the visual sphere, it is therefore worthwhile to reach into its classical, integral form. “Integral form” means that rhetoric must contain three intellectual levels: “*inventio*” (invention, content), “*dispositio*” (composition, arrangement) and “*elocutio*” (style). Thanks to that system, classical rhetoric can analyse the text (or the visual work) at all levels—structural, functional, stylistic, pragmatic and semantic.

A Draft of Classical Visual Rhetoric

Let us now try to sketch (of course in the shortest possible way) visual rhetoric in its classical integral form.

Inventio: the content of a picture

In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, we read that: “Invention is devising of matter true or plausible, that would make the case convincing” (cited by Vickers 1989, 62). On the surface of *inventio* we are interested in what photography is about. We can therefore analyse various items: the photo theme; the elements of the photo (“The elements are those things I include in or exclude from the frame” (DuChemin 2012, 15); the “topics” (Latin: *loci*, general, detailed, material, personal topics); the “persuasion” of photographs (*logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*); the “narration” of the photograph (“gesture,” story, photo moment). Probably the most promising perspective for further research on the rhetoric of image is that of the “topics” (*loci*). The rhetorical *topoi* can be understood both in the spirit of Curtius’ motives, and more classically as schemas, thought categories, “places” in memory used for persuasion and argumentation. In the first case, we can analyse the typical (or transformed) visual features of the presented persons. These are the permanent topics present in a culture, such as: woman, mother, child, man, father, etc. One can look at photographic heroes and analyse with what visual attributes they have been equipped, on what background they are shown, or with whom they have been contrasted. It is worth to note here that classical rhetoric has developed a whole range of personal topics, expressed by gender, origin, nationality, social status, age, character, physical condition, etc. For a specific purpose (e.g., to tell a story) each of these personal attributes may be emphasized or transformed in the image. In the second, one can use certain qualities of persons or things (Lausberg 1998, 171 and next), for a specific influence on the recipient. Some types of person (e.g. image of a doctor, a scholar, a

child etc.) can be used here in order to persuade. In the photo or poster one can also rely on objects and give them various functions, such as defining, contrasting, visualising, etc.

Dispositio: the arrangement of a picture

“The *dispositio*—according to Quintilian—is the ordering of thoughts (ideas) invented in *inventio*” (cited by Lausberg 1998, 209). The Latin word *dispono* means to arrange, set, plan, organise; *dispositio* is an arrangement. The idea of order, order in the created work is probably a constant thought in ancient culture. The basic function of *dispositio* was therefore a definite division of a certain whole. Ancient theoreticians saw two possibilities, two goals of such division: “tension” or “completeness.” Underlining the tension led to the construction of the text (or a part of it) from two mutually antithetical elements. Emphasizing completeness led to a minimum of a three-component construction of the work (Lausberg 1998, 209).

As for the way of combining individual parts, theorists of rhetoric saw two further possibilities in the natural order (*ordo naturalis*) or the artistic order (*ordo artificialis*). The first consisted in the “natural,” customary order of text elements. The second was based on “artistic” deviation from *ordo naturalis* (Lausberg 1998, 213-214).

All of the above-mentioned elements of rhetorical composition we can now relate to photography, with a good result. In photography we also deal with linking all elements of the picture in such a way that they may form one closed and logical whole. As Henri Cartier-Bresson remarked: “Composition should be a constant coordination of visual elements” (cited by Zakia and Page 2011, XVI). The rhetorical arrangement corresponds to image composition exactly in this sense. With all the differences of the material (verbal and visual code) there remains the one goal of organising, arranging, composing these messages, creating order; the verbal-intellectual in “traditional” rhetoric and the sensory-perceptual in visual rhetoric. According to Gilian Rose in the compositional structure of the picture “there are two related aspects of this organization to consider: the organization of space within an image, and the way the spatial organization of an image offers a particular viewing position to its spectator” (Rose 2001, 40). In analysing the rhetorical composition of a visual work, we can therefore examine various items: first, natural or artificial order; in photography, the most intuitive is the central (and therefore symmetrical) composition, and the most natural direction is the movement from left to right. In photographic work there has been a tendency to move away from these shots in favor of the artistic order, with

the purpose of dynamising and creatively processing the image. Second, its three-part construction (the rule of “completeness”). Currently, we have two forms of implementing this tripartite construction. First of all, in the photographs that give the illusion of depth, three planes are organized: the first as introducer, the second proper and the third as background. Secondly, the photo rectangle is divided into three levels horizontally and three vertically. The intersection of these planes gives the so-called strong (perceptually) points of the photo, thus creating the position and way of looking at the viewer's image (he can view the work from above, from below, from the right or left side). Third, the contrasting elements present in it (the rule of tension) give way to an interaction of these antithetic parts so as to create an appropriate “visual mass,” i.e. the power to attract the viewer's eyes (duChemin 2012, 4). David duChemin, for example, combines pairs of objects appearing in the image which produce a greater “visual mass” by setting the human figure against the rest, large objects against small ones, bright objects against dark ones, sharp objects against out of focus ones, objects that are easy to recognize against unknown ones, diagonal lines leading toward flat or vertical ones, warm objects against cold ones, elements of emotional significance over those having none at all (duChemin 2012, 5-6). As in the case of rhetorical analysis of the image content, the level of composition (*dispositio*) offers quite a wide field for research.

Elocutio: style and the visual material of an image

“*Elocutio*—as Heinrich Lausberg reminds us—converts into language the ideas found in *inventio* and organized in *dispositio*” (Lausberg 1998, 215). The Latin word *elocutio* stands for articulating, expressing, language, style, and the word *eloquens* for eloquence, fluency in speaking. The ancient theorists believed that the *elocutio* provides the text with a “linguistic garment,” being a materialisation or an “incarnation” of ideas and adapting the right words and sentences to the thoughts expressed (Lausberg 1998, 215). *Elocutio*, an extremely extensive part of rhetoric, was based on a system of four features for a good and effective style: a) correctness, b) clarity, c) ornamentation and d) appropriateness. These features were then developed in great detail and analysed (Lausberg 1998, 215 and next).

Within the stylistic part of the discipline special interest has been devoted to the theory of tropes and figures, which has been and is being extensively explored by upholders of the new rhetoric, and is also supposed to be the main core of the developing visual rhetoric. In order to analyse

the material of the image and its means of visual expression, we can, however, refer to all levels of rhetorical expressions such as: the level of correctness, referring to visual means related to the shooting technique (focal length, depth of field, time of exposure, location of the camera); the level of clarity, involving visual means related to the material (light, color, tone, line, shape, pattern, dynamics); the level of ornamentation, concerning stylistic means (comparison, contrast, antithesis, repetition, metaphor, symbol); the level of appropriateness, regarding the style of the photograph in a holistic sense; the convention and the genre of the photo.

Narration in the Photograph, an Analysis

If we rely on classical rhetoric, narration in photography can be analysed according to three levels: invention, arrangement and style. In looking at a photo, however, it might be better to reckon with the most external, rather than internal, visual experience, and analyse visual narration in the following order: 1) composition (arrangement), 2) style, especially stylistic visual means and 3) story (invention), especially the topics. In this essay I will focus only on the external analysis of photographic narrative, that is, on the compositional surface, and try to think about what makes us feel that something is happening in the photographs, that they tell us a story. Classical rhetoric will help me along.

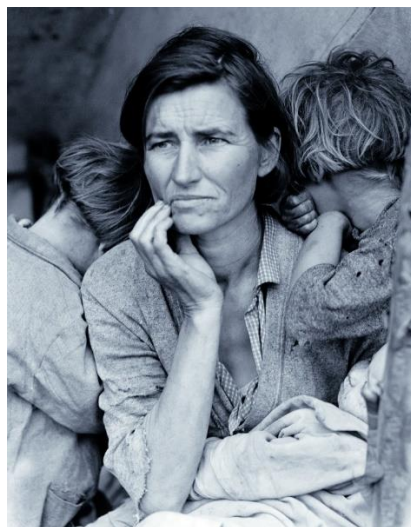


Fig. 1. Migrant Mother by Dorothea Lange (1936). [Public domain of The Library of Congress USA]. https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128_migm.html

Dorothea Lange took this photograph in 1936, while employed by the U.S. government's Farm Security Administration (FSA) program, formed during the

Great Depression to raise awareness of and provide aid to impoverished farmers. In Nipomo, California, Lange came across Florence Owens Thompson and her children in a camp filled with field workers whose livelihoods were devastated by the failure of the pea crops. Recalling her encounter with Thompson years later, she said, 'I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction.' One photograph from that shoot, now known as *Migrant Mother*, was widely circulated to magazines and newspapers and became a symbol of the plight of migrant farm workers during the Great Depression.¹

Analysis of “compositional” narration

One doesn't know when—“at one time”—photographers found that it is better not to place objects in a picture's central position, but in the so-called “strong visual points,” because it makes them more dynamic. And dynamism is what we are looking for at the beginning in the pictures, when we talk about the “action” of photography. It gives the impression that something is happening in the image. We all know that old photos have a rather central composition, like “Migrant Mother” by Dorothea Lange from 1936. At first glance, the picture is not dynamic, it is a rather common portrait photograph with the really fascinating face of a woman who attracts our eyes. And next we see that the head of the woman and her children create a diagonal line that has a large “visual mass”; diagonal lines are also created by the hands and arms, and finally by a small, sleeping child. The movement of our eyes following this “rectangle” of image makes the photograph “work,” move, come to life, so that it also starts to dynamize the viewers.

It was a “perceptual attention” that in classical rhetoric was called the “attentum parare” function. A similar function occurs too, a cognitive attention, which in rhetoric was called “docilem parare.” It means that there is something in the picture - still at the compositional level - that not only stimulates us, but also arouses our curiosity. And of course this woman does. We are interested in what she looks at and what she thinks. And we sense that she is looking at something close (the left side of the rectangle is closer to us)—so that we acquire the conviction that she thinks about her home and wants to go back there.

¹ See https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/dorothea-lange-migrant-mother-nipomo-california-1936.



Fig. 2. The Painter of Eiffel Tower by Marc Riboud (1953). [Thanks to courtesy Office of Marc Riboud]. <http://marcriboud.com/en/portfolio-4/>

Marc Riboud, born in 1923 in Saint-Genis-Laval in Lyon, took his first photographs in 1937 using a small vest pocket Kodak at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. In 1944, he joined the Resistance in the Vercors. From 1945 to 1948 he studied engineering at the École Centrale in Lyon and then started to work in a factory. Three years later he decided to become a photographer. The picture "The Painter on the Eiffel Tower" was his first publication in Life Magazine 1953. Invited by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Capa, he joined Magnum Photos... Marc Riboud was 93 years old when he died in Paris on August 30, 2016.²

Analysis of “compositional” narration

As in “Migrant Mother,” in this photo, the painter is placed in the central position (the rhetorical “ordo naturalis”). However, the picture—at first glance—is perceived as extremely dynamic because the next two rules of rhetorical composition, the principle of “tension” and “completeness,” have been blended here. Why do we all think that the painter descends the stairs (the ladder)? May he be going up, by going backwards, or maybe dancing at this altitude? The impression is made by the diagonal lines of the scaffold and his hands. These lines have a very large “visual mass” (the rule of tension); besides, we also have a first and a middle plane plus the background (the rule of completeness). That’s why (especially when one is looking at that background, the almost mystical Paris), this photo seems so

² Cf. <http://galerie36berlin.com/riboud-marc/>

fascinating. We may also find ourselves in the situation of the author of this photograph, who wrote: “While painting the Eiffel tower, this fellow—nicknamed Zazou—was perfectly relaxed. But I felt dizzy and had to close my eyes every time he leaned over to dip his brush in the paint can...”³ We probably feel the same when we look at this picture.



Fig. 3. The Child and Vulture by Kevin Carter (1993). [Photo by Kevin Carter used here as Fair Use under Section 107 of the U. S. Copyright Act]. <https://www.boredpanda.com/top-100-world-photos-influential-all-time/>

In 1993 photographer Kevin Carter flew to Sudan to photograph the famine racking that land. Exhausted after a day of taking pictures in the village of Ayod, he headed out into the open bush. There he heard someone whimpering and came across an emaciated toddler who had collapsed on the way to a feeding center. As he took the child’s picture, a plump vulture landed nearby. Carter had reportedly been advised not to touch the victims because of disease, so instead of helping, he spent 20 minutes waiting in the hope that the stalking bird would open its wings. It did not. Carter scared the creature away and watched as the child continued toward the center... His image quickly became a wrenching case study in the debate over when photographers should intervene. Subsequent research seemed to reveal that the child did survive yet died 14 years later from malarial fever.⁴

Analysis of “compositional” narration

The context and description of the picture are really shocking, but does the “perceptual attention” which is organized by the picture confirm this? It does not seem so in the first place. Above all, the recipient—if he did not

³ <http://marcriboud.com/en/portfolio-4/>

⁴ Cf. <https://www.boredpanda.com/top-100-world-photos-influential-all-time/>

find out from the context what the subject of the photo is, may not be aware, at first, of the dramatic situation. This is because the compositional dominant of this image is again the rule of completeness with its static effect, which is achieved thanks to the presence of three planes (first, middle and background), giving the illusion of depth. This principle is broken up, but not enough to see the visual tension between a bloodthirsty bird and a little girl; neither of them has enough “visual mass”—they are similar in color and not very clearly (especially the head of the animal) cut off from the background. The little girl is visually larger than the predator, she is situated in the foreground, so she naturally attracts the eye. Perceptually, however, from the perspective of a purely external orientation in photography, we do not realize what is happening with the child. Horror is evoked only by cognitive attention (“docilem parare”)—understanding that we are dealing with a vulture and following its gaze, while we get shocked when we realize that a bird of prey is watching a small, exhausted girl. At this point we reinterpret the picture, grasping that she is at the end of her strength, because she is almost at the end of the picture frame having already covered a certain distance (from left to right). Meanwhile, the vulture (diagonally) is quite close to this child.



Fig. 4. Tank Man by Jeff Widener (1989). [Thanks to courtesy of Jeff Widener].
<http://jeffwidener.com/stories/2016/09/tankman/>

Photographer Jeff Widener tells us how he took this photo: I went out to the balcony and crouched behind the metal railing. There was a long line of tanks approaching from the Square and I thought it might be a nice compression shot. Then suddenly a man in a white long sleeved shirt with two shopping bags, walked into the middle of the Chang’an Boulevard directly in front of the tanks. I complained to Kirk and said “This guy is going to screw up my composition.” Kirk yelled “They are going to kill him!” My head was still in a daze so compared to what I had witnessed over the

previous day, a guy standing in front of a row of tanks seemed normal. The unfolding drama was very far away. I waited for the instant the man would be shot or run over. But nothing happened. He unbelievably crawled up on the tank and I looked back at the bed where my teleconver was. [...] I snapped an image, then a second, then a third. [...] Before I could figure out what happened, the lone man was carried off by bystanders and was never seen again.⁵

Analysis of composition (focalization)

This picture shocks from the first look. It is clearly that *ordo artificialis* is used here. This rule breaks down any visual direction which is received as natural or intuitive. The movement takes place diagonally from the upper right corner to the lower left. The rule of “antithetic tension” (as we use the term following Lausberg) is also dominant. The tanks have a very big “visual mass” and they not only dynamize this photo, but—obviously—immediately draw our eyes to follow the diagonal lines, having the viewer experience the whole horror of the situation. The tanks are visually contrasting with the human figure. This antithesis is extremely powerful—a small man versus a powerful machine, a white shirt against the dark coloured tracks of the tanks, a vertical figure versus diagonal stains of vehicles. The white (eye-catching) lamps set in the foreground, properly going beyond the plane, also dynamize this picture and... build a sense of reality—they give the impression that they are accidental, unnecessary, disturbing elements to the composition, thus creating the effect of a photo taken spontaneously, without planning. There seems to be no way of manipulating this situation, which must give us the most obvious “truth” about the events. The viewer is positioned above the scene and looks at it from a distance. So why is there no hope in this photograph? Because the visual situation is very dynamic, the disproportion in power is immense (the above-mentioned contrast), and finally because the tanks are moving towards the viewer.

This was only a brief outline of the possibilities offered by the rhetorical analysis of photography. To reach deeper, to answer the question of what cultural references these stories convey, what the universal message of these photographs may be, one has to carry out a stylistic analysis and the analysis of content, especially of topics. Thus, it seems that visual rhetoric is still waiting to be discovered in its full dimension.

⁵ Jeff Widener about making this photo. Cf. <http://jeffwidener.com/stories/2016/09/tankman>

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