

Sculpture as a Code – Rhetorical Devices Used by the Sculptor

Rhetoric, formerly identified with the intentional and beautiful¹ use of words, that is with a verbal code, is also frequently related to an image, that is a visual code². Modern linguistic studies, which in the first place consider the communicative aspect of language, explain not only the ways of formulating a message, but predominantly the mechanisms of its understanding³, letting us treat different codes of transmission analogically. Aleksy Awdiejew and Grażyna Habrajska assume that not only a verbal message may be treated as a text, but also a visual and musical one⁴; therefore, regardless of the code we use, it is subjected to interpretation with the same mechanisms⁵.

A message, if it is intentional, and it always is⁶, must be noticed by the recipient and evoke a visualisation similar to the one intended by its author in order to be understandable and effective, regardless of the code that is being used. Visualisation is understood here in line with the view held by psychologists, who claim that:

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¹ M. Korolko, „Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny”, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw 1982, p. 31.

² G. Bonsiepe, „Retoryka wizualno-werbalna”, transl. M.B. Fedewicz, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1985, No. 3, pp. 303–309; P. Lewiński, „Retoryka reklamy”, 2nd ed., en., rev. ed., Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2008; M. Rusinek, „Retoryka obrazu. Przyczynek do percepcyjnej teorii figur”, Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, Gdansk 2012.

³ A. Awdiejew, G. Habrajska, „Komponowanie sensu w procesie odbioru komunikatów”, Wydawnictwo Primum Verbum, Lodz 2010.

⁴ G. Habrajska, „Wybrane zagadnienia wprowadzające do nauki o komunikowaniu”, Wydawnictwo Primum Verbum, Lodz 2012.

⁵ G. Habrajska, „Kompetencja komunikacyjna a interpretacja obrazu”, in: „Badanie i projektowanie komunikacji 2”, ed. A. Siemes, M. Grech, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2013.

⁶ R. Jakobson, „Poetyka w świetle językoznawstwa”, in: „W poszukiwaniu istoty języka. Wybór pism”, Vol. 2, wybór, ed. nauk. i wstęp M.R. Mayenowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1989.

[v]isualisation is a process of activating sensory (perceptual) and emotional experiences in order to use the accumulated mental resources for future plans and their realization. It works similarly to projecting a film from the past so as to reconstruct predictions concerning the future⁷.

Visualisation enables us to understand the message. Just as a verbal message evokes a visualisation in the recipient, so does a visual one. Włodzimierz Ławniczak approaches this issue in a similar manner, treating the uttered linguistic units in the same way as the units of colour or mass in a work of art, which are seemingly incomparable with them. These forms of expression coexist as “physical representations [...] of an appropriate interpretative factor”⁸. It may therefore be assumed that rhetorical devices employed in a verbal message may also occur in a visual message, even though the creator may not always use them intentionally.

Sculpture is a form of visual message, and as a message it can be analysed from the point of view of its rhetorical devices. I shall attempt to prove this thesis using a few selected devices. My considerations constitute only an identification of the subject, which deserves an extensive study preceded by thorough research. This text is only a proposition for analysing a work of art in terms of communication and rhetoric. Unlike rhetoric, art does not strive to achieve a clear persuasive aim. Persuasion is not its main purpose. Often the creator draws attention to a problem: some do it silently, gently, while others loudly announce their attitude to the world. However, all do so using rhetorical devices.

Zbigniew Władyka's sculpture *Dwoisty (Dual)* from 1990 (Phot. 1) is the subject of my considerations.

⁷ F.J. Paul-Cavalier, „Wizualizacja. Od obrazu do działania”, transl. A. Suchańska, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 1994, p. 62. Podobne ujęcie znajdujemy, znacznie pogłębione, znajdujemy w książkach A. Awdiejewa i G. Habrajskiej, „Wprowadzenie do gramatyki komunikacyjnej”, Vol. 1, Oficyna Wydawnicza Leksem, Łask 2004.

⁸ W. Ławniczak, „O poznawaniu dzieła sztuki plastycznej”, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań 1983, p. 18.

Phot. 1 Zbigniew Władyka, *Dwoisty (Dual)*

Phot. Z.W.Ł.

Władyka said about his work: “Not everyone can, like me, combine the things that are the most noble in a human being: physical effort and intellect”⁹. None of his works were created without a previously designed structure of formal devices and transmission of the idea. Unlike art theorists, he did not separate the form from the content, they existed simultaneously for him. He acted because he had something to say, and his hands conveyed those ideas. He was leaving a trace of them while sculpting, which constituted a notation of the gesture. He would often say: “A sculpture without an idea is a silent reflection of reality”. Was he very far from rhetorical premises of formulating thoughts?

Creativity in sculpture

Mirosław Korolko writes about creativity:

In colloquial understanding, “creativity” is synonymous with concepts such as: “ingenuity”, “inventiveness”, “the gift of inventing”, while in rhetoric it denotes

⁹ Zbigniew Władyka was the father of this text’s author. All his utterances are quoted or cited from his daughter’s memories.

a purely technical ability (knowledge), that is “inventing thoughts”, “selection of news”, “choice of subject”, “finding ways of solving a given problem”, “gathering data” etc.¹⁰

In the case of the sculpture *Dual*, I shall draw attention to its inspirations and the way of presenting the problem. The political event of German reunification (1990) served as an inspiration for the work. For the generation of Poles born shortly before the war, the integration of the post-communist eastern part of Germany with the free, western part was a symbolic and final end to the age of communism, the age of their youth. They knew that the events initiated by the Round Table Talks had been fulfilled. In spite of Władyka’s explicitly negative attitude to communism, this sculpture does not glorify the aforementioned events. The suffering of a human being was essential for the author, shifting the burden of political decisions onto the shoulders of an individual man.

While analysing *Dual*, we observe that the motif of inspiration is not exhibited by the artist. The sculpture does not aspire to convey historical information. We will not find any direct symbols of its genesis as we look at it. The title *Dual* does not help to identify the problem either. Apart from presenting a transformation of two figures into one, it does not include any elements revealing its real origins. The role of the sculpture in question is entirely different – it is meant to inspire, constitute the object (*res*), which directs the viewer into the area of personal reflections. The viewer is supposed to relate to his/her own experiences on the basis of the imposed way of perceiving interpersonal relationships.

Ławniczak observes that a work of art may be comprehended in relative terms, as the equivalent of an experience connected with knowledge or as a point of reference to new knowledge. It is not important for the creator to what extent viewers recognize the reason why the work was created, but what they will “do” with this work, how they will interpret it and what will result from this interpretation for them. It will sometimes remain within artistic discourse, similarly to the interpretation of poetry, another time it will be used in journalistic discourse¹¹.

In order to interpret the message of the sculpture *Dual*, one requires not only the knowledge of the time of its creation and German reunification, but also personal life experience and/or discursive knowledge. The creator eagerly, as Ławniczak claims, refers to cultural rules of interpretation, hoping to contribute to the creation of an “abstract and idealizing” sense¹².

¹⁰ M. Korolko, op. cit., p. 58.

¹¹ A. Awdiejew, G. Habrajska, „Wprowadzenie do gramatyki komunikacyjnej”, Vol. 2, Oficyna Wydawnicza Leksem, Łask 2006; A. Awdiejew, „Struktura dyskursu, relewancja i interpretacja” [in print].

¹² W. Ławniczak, op. cit., p. 5–6.

It is commonly thought that before a sculpture is created, it is necessary to make drawings or sketches, which help to find and select thoughts. In this case, the artist did not need such assistance. “Searching for ways of solving a given issue” was unnecessary¹³ – the master’s virtuosity resulting from years of practice was enough. The structure of formal devices was “in the sculptor’s hands”, the idea was framed by life.

Evoking emotions

Just like a verbal message, which is supposed to affect the recipient, the visual message employs different rhetorical devices to evoke intended emotions in the recipient. Authors of works devoted to rhetoric name the following as the most important effects: “love, hate, desire, hope, joy, dread, despair, sadness, sorrow, bravery, fear, doubt, vengeance, compassion, shame, rivalry and contempt”¹⁴. The sculpture in question, as intended by the author, was supposed to evoke a projection of fear and doubt, but also of certainty and bravery.

According to Erwin Panofsky, the content conveyed by a work of art should be examined at three levels. The first level – pre-iconic, also called primary or natural, directly describes depicted objects. At this level, *Dual* is an arrangement of two overlapping characters with one head and supported by two legs. The second level – iconographic – refers “artistic motifs (of composition)”¹⁵ to subjects and concepts. At this level, we can already talk of a history of two human existences merging into one, mounted on an inorganic material – a stone cube. The third level – iconology – is supposed to deal with works of art, which, from the point of view of principles of iconography, turn out to be impossible to decipher. In the area of iconology, one may attempt to find emotions stuck in the matter, since the artist creates not only to show an object and determine what it symbolizes, but also to make a man realize something more important, something more profound, to evoke experiencing.

The sculpture *Dual* presents two figures, which stand on two legs and have one head. One of these figures is strong, stands firmly, the other is weak, rickety, carried by the former. The figures are interpenetrating. It is difficult to separate and assign individual parts of the body to the appropriate figure at first glance. Skimming through them, we do not always return to the same orientational references. From time to time, lost in tracking the anatomy of the characters, we

¹³ M. Korolko, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁵ E. Panofsky, „*Studia z historii sztuki*”, choice of studies and afterword. J. Białostocki, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1971, p. 13.

have to go back to permanent points of the sculpture, the head or legs, to start the journey anew.

Even though, as I mentioned, there are no explicit “iconographic” references to the historical event of German reunification in the sculpture, according to Panofsky’s instructions, prior to iconological analysis we have to return to inspirations to notice the two artificial national creations – Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic – personified in the sculpture.

Phot. 2



Phot. Z.W.L.

The figure distinguished in photograph 2A is a personification of the FRG, whereas the one in photograph 2B – of the GDR. The head – the symbol of thoughts and responsibility – belongs to the character on firm legs (2A), which allow it to keep balance. Character 2B, on the other hand, is a symbol of weakness. This presentation was necessary for the author to show the tragedy of transformation of power and weakness, interpenetration of fear and doubt, which is brought by symbiosis, that is the unknown, with a strong drive to combine and bravery essential to fight the dangers.

Korolko writes:

Fear is a philosophical variety of dread, which is used by the speaker as an auxiliary means of activating bravery. Rhetoric theoreticians (especially Quintilian) distin-

guished noble fear and egoistic fear (slavish); the first supports, the other weakens positive persuasion¹⁶.

Phot. 3



Phot. Z.W.L.

The transformation is associated with uncertainty, and uncertainty evokes dread (fear). I do not know who I will become, therefore I am afraid. The characters succumb to interpenetration, they do not fight the fear. Looking at the sculpture, we notice the effort, struggle, perhaps even pain. The centripetal composition used in the sculpture distinctly suggests merging, not destruction, we may therefore talk of “noble fear”, one that builds¹⁷.

In the case of doubt, Korolko emphasizes that it is a “quintessence of the attitude of the addressee, a doubting addressee, a depressed one. The orator’s task is to overcome this feeling, mainly by means of evoking feelings of trust and confidence”¹⁸. It does not occur suddenly, but as the result of a process. Before we notice the pursuit of harmony of both characters, their merging into a unity, we must learn this sculpture, follow, according to the author’s intention,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the complexity of the interpenetrating forms, shapes of the human body. Władyka was interested in man. He was fascinated not only by the logicity of human anatomy, but also by the beauty of his ability to be reborn from a fall or failure. As he presented this process of rising, the artist had to be certain that the ideas were right, and brave to struggle with the material in order to display the strength of will in striving to survive the process of merging. Looking at the sculpture, we are witnessing a fracture of lasting action.

When the sculpture was being created, neither the author nor the contemporary recipients of his works could predict future events. They knew the feelings of fear, doubt and bravery very well. Today, a quarter of a century after the sculpture was created, we still do not know the effects of the transformation which began at this time of political changes. As we observe the events in Ukraine, the emotional significance of the sculpture in question is updated. It is not about directing the viewer's attention to particular events. Its persuasive aim is to evoke a solidarity of feelings between the author and the recipients, not to be a lesson in history. Showing one of the acts of the tragedy of combining ideas, any ideas, is important. For Władyka it meant combining strength and weakness, for a modern viewer it might mean combining evil and good, joy and sadness, etc.

Creative amplification in sculpture

In line with Korolko I assume that: "the word «amplification» means «extending», «uplifting», «enriching», «ennobling», and especially «enlarging» and «diminishing» the subject of persuasion"¹⁹. All these elements may also be found in a work of art, which is often not devoid of persuasiveness.

Every composition, both verbal and visual, including sculpture, is subject to the rules of hierarchization, which determines the most essential elements in it and for it, the elements of the background and the complementing details. They are organised in a way that enables the recipient to read the system, according to which the given presentation is structured. In this regard, a visual text does not differ from a verbal text, it only requires different coding.

The first factor determining the perception of a sculpture, just as in the case of a verbal text, is its exposition (ostensy), which should draw and maintain the attention of the recipient. We perceive a sculpture differently when it is presented in front of our eyes, and differently when we look at it from above or below. Perception of the sculpture is made easier by the cube, which constitutes its base and makes it possible to present it from every side.

¹⁹ M. Korolko, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

According to Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's theory, there are "directional tensions" of different force in every shape outlined by the artist, which have an effect in an indicated direction, measured according to the "main axis of a given mass". They result from the character of the work and its details. Their organisation in the compositional structure imposes a sequence in which its elements – the content of the message – are perceived. Appropriately formulated "directional tensions" lead the viewer's sight along the designated linear directions, to the right or the left, up or down the sculpture. They can also keep the sight, creating "directional tensions" understood as "motionless substance"²⁰. An analogy to "leading" the recipient of a verbal text by its author is visible here. Compositional "directional tensions" in sculpture may be treated in the same way as arguments in a verbal message.

Photographs 4A-C show how the dynamics of transmission is governed by "directional tensions" marked with lines. The direction of their effect is indicated by arrows.

Phot. 4



²⁰ S.I. Witkiewicz, „Nowe formy w malarstwie i wynikające stąd nieporozumienia. Szkice estetyczne”, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2002, p. 70.



Phot. Z.W.Ł.

The remaining fragments of the sculpture assume the role of a “motionless substance”, which constitutes the background, a point of reference for “directional tensions”, or is equipped with “directional tensions” of lower force. The role of the latter is to redirect our sight to a new element of the sculpture.

The sculpture *Dual* was created without using any tools. The artist rejected all kinds of spatulas and modelling blocks. Every fragment is Władyka’s hand-print, an effect of pressing, moving the clay. Witkacy’s theory is literally depicted here. “Directional tensions”, which determine the shape of the sculpture, were created by the pressure of a hand; they are a record of the touch and direction of the moving palm. Nothing stands in the way of repeating this motion, touching this place, getting to know the moment of decision, perhaps feeling what the artist felt.

A sculpture must include more than one means of expression. Excessive accumulation of “directional tensions” would blur their readability and introduce communication noise. Visual presentation would be chaotic and flamboyant, or would turn into a silent decorative texture. The clarity of expression requires variability and contrast. In *Dual*, the contrasting function in relation to “directional tensions” is served by spaces which create “motionless substances”, created by soft, gentle touches of the fingers. They speak of fear and doubt, are an expression of pain, which results from transformation, the interpenetration of two organisms.

The tragedy captured in bronze is enacted on a black stone cube, which is structurally alien to it. The base of the cube is smooth, its upper wall is divided by straight lines arranged in a checked pattern. This is intentional and serves the

contrast, the juxtaposition of two worlds: the world of tragedy, and the world of harmony and peace. This order is the reason why the tragedy is taking place.

When the observer faces the sculpture (from the front – Phot. 4A), the strongest argument – directional tension – is the curved arc in its lower part. It is countered by the remaining directions of tensions. This arrangement makes it possible to direct the sight towards the most sensitive part of the human body – the abdomen. The context of feelings – anxiety and doubt on one hand, and certainty and bravery on the other, allows us to grasp the idea of the sculpture’s message. The role of strengthening the arguments of fear and doubt is played by motionless substances, while the directions of tension point to the feelings of certainty and bravery.

The composition becomes calmer as the observer looks at the sculpture from the three-quarter view (Phot. 4B). Main directional tensions occur in only two places. The central role is taken over by the motionless substance. Witkiewicz drew attention to this, when he wrote about how the effects of details depend on the axis of the composition. Linear directions, simultaneously determining the shape, lead the sight in the direction of motionless substance. If we focus on it, trying to put the remaining elements of the sculpture in the background, we will notice the embedded division into directional tensions and motionless substances, that is the strengthening and enlarging arguments. These arguments are not new to the recipient of the sculpture, they extract and emphasize the feelings of fear, doubt, certainty and bravery.

Focusing on a selected fragment enables the viewer to isolate his/her perception of the main compositional structures of the sculpture. It allows the viewer to notice a new arrangement of directional tensions and new instances of motionless substances. Their repeatable character strengthens the arguments, the ability to find echoes in what is already known, going deeper into the essence of the message.

The sculpture observed from the side (Phot. 4C) is a new situation, with brand new factorials of directional tensions in relation to motionless substances. The main directional tension here is the line of the figure’s curve, countered by the vertical arrangement of legs. It is very clear that the transformation takes place in soft tissues – this part of the sculpture is dynamic, legs and the head remain motionless but belong to a firm entity, a transformed one. We have no doubts as to which character is dominant, absorbing, and which is absorbed. This situation constitutes a rhetorical enlargement. Here, motionless substances are the surfaces which complement the space between the strongly marked “directional” lines.

When the observer is placed behind the sculpture (Phot. 5) not much changes in the reception of the composition.

Phot. 5



Phot. Z.W.Ł.

The lower part of the sculpture still constitutes the foundation. Forces and “directional tensions” are arranged in such a way as to maintain the centripetal composition. The content of the sculpture is redefined, it is more important to clearly outline both figures than to combine them into one entity – the process of unification has only just begun.

Examination of the rhetorical devices of creativity, evoking feelings and amplification in the sculpture *Dual* shows that they may be used in this form of artistic message as well. Creativity is represented by the event of German reunification, illustrated by the transformation of two figures into one. The sculpture is supposed to inspire, constitute the object (*res*) which directs the viewer into the area of personal reflections, and evoke a projection of fear and doubt, but also of certainty and bravery. The latter are represented by the strong character, which has a head and firmly stands on its legs. Fear and doubt are represented by the weak character, carried by the first. The centripetal composition used in the sculpture suggests merging, not destruction. The viewer’s sensory perception is steered by directional tensions, which lead the sight along designated linear directions. “Directional tensions” and motionless substance correspond to rhetorical enlargement and diminishing. As we interact with a sculpture, we may additionally touch these devices. Not only visualisation is at work here, as in the case of a verbal message, but also physical experience.

The presented analysis shows that a sculpture may be analysed in a similar way as a verbal message. Obviously, not all verbal devices have their counterparts in a visual message, but their basic contents and emotions may be expressed regardless of the code that is applied.

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Zofia Władyka-Łuczak

Sculpture as a Code – Rhetorical Devices Used by the Sculptor

(Summary)

The aim of the paper is to compare the formal organization of a visual message with the rhetorical devices used in a verbal message. This analysis is carried out based on the example of the sculpture *Dual* by Zbigniew Władyka. The creativity found in the rhetorical devices used in the sculpture *Dual* to trigger and amplify feelings proves that they can be employed even in this form of artistic expression. Creativity in the analysed sculpture is represented by German reunification, reflected in the form of the transformation of two characters into one. The sculpture is meant to inspire, to be an object (*res*) directing the viewer toward personal reflection, and invoking projections of fear and doubt, but also of confidence and courage. Confidence and courage are represented by a strong figure with a head, firmly standing on its feet. Fear and doubt are represented by a weak figure, carried by the first one. The centripetal composition used in the sculpture suggests merger rather than destruction. The sensory perception of the viewer is controlled by directional tensions, which lead the viewer's sight along designated linear directions. As described earlier by Witkiewicz, directional tensions and motionless substance correspond to a rhetorical enlarging and diminishing. By interacting with the sculpture, you can experience these devices. Not only visualization is at work here, as in verbal communication, but also physical experience. The presented analysis shows that a sculptural work of art can be analysed in a similar way to verbal communication. Of course, not all verbal devices have their counterparts in visual communication, but the basic content and emotions can be expressed regardless of the code.

Keywords: visual communication, composition, formal image structure, formal narration, theory of vision and rhetoric, verbal communication, visual.